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Ethical Implications of Unity and the Divine in Nicholas of Cusa

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Preface

George F. McLean

Today we live in a world becoming ever more complex. This reflects both the increasing numbers of peoples with all that this entails, and the increasing intellectual sophistication by which life is implemented and facilitated. Beyond this there is also the fact of the migration of peoples. What once were homogeneous societies are now marked by diversity; and even where this is not a physical fact, it is realized through the communications media. Daily life today is marked by diversity and shared with many different peoples.

How this can be brought together to form an harmonious or even a manageable unity is a major problem for life in our times. Too often this is approached by attempts to suppress the diversity by an exteriorly or interiorly imposed conformism. This violently stifles personal growth and public prosperity; in extreme cases it has extended even to holocausts and ethnic cleansing. What is needed is an extension of vision which will make it possible to see diversity not as opposing, but as composing, unity.

It is significant that in developing a more adequate mode of integrating diversity within unity Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) was the last of the Medievals. Hence, his thought was rooted in the supreme Unity that is God, whose image he sought in all things. It was precisely on this basis that he was able to integrate diversity and complexity. Yet Cusa was also the first of the moderns, holding, before Copernicus and Newton, that the earth revolves on its axis around the sun. More indicative for our purposes here, he was Papal Emissary to the Ottoman Sultan after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, an event which most profoundly shocked all of Christendom. Nevertheless, Nicholas of Cusa was able to integrate this modern reality of cultural and religious diversity within the composit unity of humanity in the image of the supreme and simple Unity proper to God.

Part I of Professor David De Leonardis' study of the thought of Nicholas of Cusa on diversity and unity takes us deeply into the metaphysics of unity. In Part II he applies this to our present encounters with an ever increasing and more challenging diversity. There is much to be done on this issue. His work makes available, insightfully yet clearly, a most important resource, with explicit suggestions which can help turn present problems into opportunities for the new miellnnium.

Introduction

David J. De Leonardis

Recently, Nicholas of Cusa has become the subject of great attention in the political and social sciences, as well as in the humanities and religion. Since the end of the cold war struggle for ideological hegemony, the human search has turned to ways to promote and protect both freedom within community and diversity within a global unity.

At Seton Hall University Professor Francis Cominiti showed me how Cusa, as a Renaissance man, had combined rediscovery of the past with a vibrant spirit of creative innovation. This generated a sense of diversity in unity which might be able to turn conflict into creative cooperation. With Professor George F. McLean at the Catholic Univeristy of America I explored Cusa's ideas on unity, diversity and dynamism in search of new insight regarding person and community and new modes of addressing urgent problems of the contemporary world.

Part I of this text reflects that work. It details the structure of Cusa's metaphysics of unity and its foundation in the divine. He sees creation as able to be fulfilled only through approximating the unity of its Divine source through the development of more ethical relationships of freedom, personhood and community. This, in turn, promises provides principles and insights for developing new approaches to resolving some key conflicts which have plagued modern society.

Part II explores some key practical implications of that theoretical base for life in our times, focusing on three main types of human conflict: religious, economic, and social. These conflicts comoe from the modern tendency to define identity in terms of opposition, rather than of complementarity. As a result, all appears to be mutually exclusive, leading iin the extreme either to suppression or to conflict. In contrast to recent tendentious ideological alternatives, it becomes possible to draw on the spirit and structure of Cusa's thought to understand the diversity of persons in ways which are cognizant of their unity, and the unity of community in ways which are cognizant of the complementarity of its diverse components. From these insights follow concrete new approaches to resolving present conflicts.

This work then is both retrospective, in looking back to the thought of Nichoals of Cusa, and prospective, in pointing out ways to progress in peace into the coming millennium.

Part I
The Nature of Unity and the Divine

The purpose of this Part is to examine the ideas of Nicholas of Cusa in respect to unity and the Divine. It will lay the basic metaphysical groundwork for understanding Cusa's philosophy and will provide the foundation for Part II of this work which will deal with how Cusa's unique metaphysical insight can illuminate some contemporary ethical issues. In order to do this it must first set the historical context of the concept of unity so that one can understand the philosophical circumstances in which Cusa's thought evolved. It will also outline the methodology of this overall work.

Chapter I
The Background of the Concept of Unity in Nicholas of Cusa

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. The first section, from various perspectives, will sketch briefly the development of the concept of unity in history from various perspectives. It will be divided into two sub-sections. The first sub-section will outline the fundamental role of the concept of unity in various world views, while the second sub-section will show that this concept remains relevant for contemporary thought. The next section will outline those ideas which played a formative role in shaping Nicholas of Cusa's idea of unity. The first sub-section will deal with the two main currents of medieval philosophy, namely, Platonism and Aristotelianism; the second sub-section will discuss some of the minor trends which contributed to Cusa's thought, and the last sub-section will deal with Cusa's personal background and how it contributed to his conception of unity. The third section will state the methodology which this work will follow.

The Concept of Unity

The Development of Unity

Before one can examine the ideas of Nicholas of Cusa in reference to unity one must first understand the historical context of the concept of unity, and gain appreciation for the fundamental importance of the role which unity plays in all societies. In pursuit of this goal we will begin by tracing the development of the concept of unity from totemic to mythic, to philosophic thought. We will then comment briefly upon the role unity plays in three philosophic contexts, namely Christian, Jewish, and Islamic.

Unity in the Totemic

Context. The concept of unity plays a fundamental role in nearly all human societies. As the keystone upon which one's view of reality is founded, it shapes one's relationship to both the physical and social world. Long before the development of systematic philosophy, primitive man sought to express this idea of unity through the totem. Such societies regarded the relationship between themselves and their totem as one of simple identity. Because primitive man's thought was dominated by sense-experience of the natural world this unity was not an abstract identity of essence, but one of actual identity between the individual members (of the society) and their totem. Lucien Levy-Bruhl described this as "a mystical community of substance."[1] Thus this unity is not yet dominated by multiplicity. Here the totem is that in which the members of society have their identity, meaning and unity. It is the fullness of reality itself; the totem is appreciated as inexhaustible no matter how many participants find therein their existence. A distinct consciousness of individuality without the totem was as yet undeveloped.[2] Thus totemic societies allow for "thinking of the individual in the collective and the collective in the individual without any difficulty."[3] An unmediated identity is forged between the individual, all the other members of society, and the totem.

In totemic societies all were united in a symbiosis with the totem; social differentiation was less appreciated. In time, however, role-differentiation led to a greater awareness of individual self-identity and complementarity. As the individuals became conscious of themselves as

individuals and explicitly differentiated themselves from others, they also came to appreciate the individuality of other entities.[4] With this development came new awareness, both of the distinctiveness of the plentitude which the totem articulated and of its role as the principle of the relationships between beings. The plentitude which previously had been grasped in a symbiotic unity of all, due to a more distinctive sense of self-consciousness, could then be appreciated not only as immanent in each existing thing, but as transcending all of them. Furthermore, where the totem had been acknowledged simply to be one, the development of an appreciation of a distinctive principle of meaning for all things implied that this could not be less than a knowing and willing, i.e. personal, being. Thus the objective reality which the totem had sought to express was now revealed to be both transcendent and personal, i.e., divine. This was in the form of gods in some sort of hierarchy under one that is supreme.[5]

Unity in the Mythic

Context. This new appreciation of unity became possible through an intellectual developmen t on thepart of human consciousness. Its intellectual framework was no longer limited to the information provided by the senses about the natural world, but could evolve in relation to the presentation and expression of matter in terms of the imagination. Because this stage was dominated by the imagination, the personal divine came to be depicted anthropomorphically and serve as a basis for creating myths. These could articulate a far more complex unity than had been possible in the totemic context.[6] Thus, Hesiod's *Theogony* reveals reality to be not "a random gathering of totally disparate and equally original units",[7] but the relationship between the gods and the various parts of nature in terms of procreation. This enabled them to conceive of multiple and highly differentiated realities, yet relating each reality to every other in a genetic sequence. As this relationship is not dependent on any events or decisions, but is original with the very being of the entity, it is not limited to certain aspects of the universe, but is all-inclusive and co-extensive with being.

Thus, when the *Theogony* speaks in terms of chaos coming to be it is important to note that, etymologically and at a time prior to the stoics, the term chaos did not refer to disorder or confusion, but to a "gap" between heaven and earth.[8] In this way chaos is in no way antithetical to an ordered cosmos. Rather, its differentiating role is something of a precondition for such an order. Also chaos is not the original reality, but itself comes into being.[9] Reality precedes the "gap", whose opening constituted earth and heaven as its boundaries. As these emerge from chaos with the rest of reality, the differentiated universe is derived from an original undifferentiated unity which preceded chaos.[10]

This unity is nameless, since names immediately reflect perceptions which concern contraries, not what is constant and homogeneous. This "lack of differentiation is not a deficiency but a fullness of reality and meaning from which all particulars and contraries are derived."[11] Lacking boundaries or a relationship to another contrary, it transcends the realm of multiplicity and so cannot be assigned a particular name or form. The one is the source from which differentiated beings are born into a real unity, in as much as all trace their origin back to this undifferentiated unity. Hence, "For the Greek mythic mind, beings are more one than many, more related than divided, more complementary than contrasting."[12]

The mythic society's understanding of unity is an advance over that of the totemic society because myths are not only capable of integrating a tribe or group of tribes into the natural world, but also can take into account intentional realities, such as purpose, fidelity, and love. The role

played by the imagination facilitated this advance, but did not allow for the establishment of philosophy. For this there was the need for more precise terminology, that is, properly intellectual rather than imaginative. Once formulated such terms would enable systematic philosophical analysis. It would then be possible rationally to examine the concept of unity with the aid of such intellectual tools as logical inquiry, theory building, et cetera.[13]

Unity in the Philosophical

Context. In the West the Greeks were among the first to engage in philosophical analysis. But because they presupposed the existence of matter, their contributions to the understanding of unity were limited to the pattern of forms. However, when Christian thinkers extended to matter the idea that all is dependent on the One and hence could no longer be presupposed, the basic issue of philosophy changed. It was no longer which of a set of contrary forms was realized or how a change between them took place; rather it became directly the issue of the existence of beings.

This monumentous development in philosophy is linked to the Christian idea of the Incarnation. In order for Christ to be God Incarnate He must fully share in the Divine nature. In short, both God and Christ must be completely of one and the same nature. In contrast, it becomes possible to clarify the formal object of God's act in creating limited beings. The relationship between God and his creation could not be in a unity of nature since that would result in a co-equal divine person, rather than in creatures which are radically dependent for their existence. Hence the question is not simply how things are of a particular kind, but how all are able to be rather than not to be.[14]

The Christian tradition with its new appreciation of existence responded by adopting the Platonic idea of participation and applying it to being. Participating beings are not merely the product of divisions in what had previously been undifferentiated (totemic thought), nor is the relationship like that between family members who remain ever related by virtue of their ancestors (mythic thought). The effect of the causality by undifferentiated being is the creation of differentiated beings participating, not merely as individuals in their species, but as existents in the One. Thus, participation is exercised as long as these beings continue to exist and act.[15]

In this way, all of reality becomes a dynamic expression of the Absolute which Itself is simple. The causality of participation makes the Absolute, in Its very essence, present to each individual being. Indeed, since the essence of such beings are distinct from their existence it is possible to say that the Absolute is more present to them than they are to themselves. Furthermore, because the immanence of the Absolute is not in tension with Its transcendence, but rather in proportion to it, one may say more accurately that individual beings are in the Absolute than that the Absolute is in them.[16]

Hence, participation results in a universe made up of beings which, in acting according to their proper natures, imitate the Absolute each in its own respective way.[17] Because of the limited nature of individual beings, a multitude of diverse beings is fitting since any one being is but an imitation of the Absolute.[18] Thus each entity becomes "a unique existent, a living participation of divine perfection in this world in a manner which had never been realized."[19]

This differs from the vision which the ancient Greeks had. For Plato an individual entity's value was based upon its form whose true reality lay in a separate world, while for Aristotle individuals concentrate upon the continuation of their species in imitation of the permanence of higher entities. In contrast, here the uniqueness of the individual and its participation in the Divine has many important and far-reaching implications. It finds in differentiated beings a far greater

importance than had previously been appreciated. Each individual participates in the Divine in a way which is entirely unique. The potentialities which it could realize in participating in the Divine, if not realized, can be achieved by no other being and are lost forever.[20] Furthermore, participation in Divine being brings each entity into community with all of reality.

Jewish thought also places important emphasis on the concept of unity. The earlier sections of the Old Testament reflect a polytheistic world-view, but in the seventh century B.C. explicit monotheism became increasingly dominant. The unambiguously monotheistic character of later Judaism can be seen by the fact that the phrase "The One" became synonymous with God and that the daily prayers of the Jews began with an expression of the absolute unity of the Divine.[21]This unity of the Divine has serious social connotations. Since there is but one creator the idea of the equality of men becomes linked to Jewish thought and is expressed in such biblical passages as Job 31:15 where Job asserts that both he and his servants were created by the same God and Malachi 2:l0 which makes a similar assertion in regard to men and women.[22] Also isolation from the community, a breaking apart of unity, has important negative connotations expressed in Isaiah 49:21 and Jeremiah 15:17 in which the prophet bemoans his solitary existence.[23] The Old Testament constantly points to unity and wholeness as the origin of history and its future goal in contrast to the contemporary disunity which the Jews were suffering.[24] The prophets continually speak in hopeful terms of one people and one ruler which shall come to pass at some future date.[25] In Jeremiah 32:39 this external unity is matched by an internal unity of "one heart and one way."[26] This unity is extended to all of creation in Isaiah 65:25, where the wolf and the lamb will feed together rather than upon each other, and again in Zechariah l4:7, where the differences between day and night will be ended and there will be nothing but one continuous day.[27]

The concept of unity plays an important role also in Islamic thought. Islamic thinkers formulated the concept of *tawhid*which means "making one" or "asserting oneness" in reference to the unity of Allah. The character of this unity is, however, highly ambiguous. It could refer to the fact that there is no God but Allah, that Allah is a unity in Himself, that Allah is the only being with absolute existence and all other beings are contingent upon Him, or it even could imply the pantheistic assertion that Allah is all. Knowledge of this unity may be attained by systematic theology or religious experience involving either pure contemplation or philosophical speculation.[28] The emphasis on God's oneness and transcendence is expressed in the Koran's giving no proper name to God, since the ability to do so would reduce God to a being which is humanly comprehensible. The intensity of the Islamic understanding of divine unity is reflected in their reservations regarding some fundamental Christian doctrines. They fear the Trinity to be a subtle form of polytheism espousing a triad of gods;[29] while the very idea of God becoming human (the Incarnation) is clearly sacrilegious for Muslims.[30] For Islam the distinction between the respective natures of the human and the Divine is totally irreconcilable and no sense of unity exists between man and God. Islam is so sensitive on this point that the representation of human beings is officially banned, not only in mosques but in the secular arts as well, for fear that they will become associated with the Divine.[31]

Unity and Contemporary Thought

Thus far we have examined the early history of the concept of unity and the fundamental role which it has played in the various cultures. Now we shall turn to the essential role the concept of unity plays in some characteristic themes of modern philosophy. In Part I, this will be related to

such issues as the freedom of the individual in society as a whole with a view to sharpening the questions which arise today regarding the implications of Cusa's notion of unity for his ethics.

In contemporary times the idea of unity no longer enjoys the preeminence and centrality it once did. Jeffrey Burton Russell points out that the predominant view of Western Civilization until the end of the Seventeenth Century was one of an essentially unified and coherent cosmos in which meaning, value and truth were inherent and integrated. In the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, however, this view began to be supplanted by a far more materialistic and mechanistic one. Philosophers adopted the restrictions of scope proper to natural science, and though the isolation of the material world proved a revolutionary success for science, it led to such exclusive and reductionist philosophical doctrines as positivism. Thus, the once "living cosmos became a dead universe whose separated parts could be isolated and intensively analyzed but without reference to the whole."[32] In a world where nothing is moored to anything else, all inherent meaning and value are quickly lost until the person becomes just another atom floating in a void and moral action is reduced to nothing more than an exercise of personal affirmation.

This neglect of the concept of unity has proven to be something of a double-edged sword. On the positive side more attention was given to single entities; thus, the question of unity has been reconstituted in a far more problematic manner since in simply assuming the singular diversity of all realities as absolutes it lacks principles for their unity. This greater sense of the singularity of entities, though essentially a product of nominalism, allowed for the dramatic development of attention to the individual and the scientific revolution. However, these advances have not been without cost. The discovery of the value of the individual is quite rightly regarded as one of the central achievements of the modern age, but because the heirs of nominalism gave little attention to society one now frequently hears regrets at the loss of community in the modern era.[33] On the other hand, attempts to attend to community without adequate attention to the individual person reinforced by attempts to develop the universal and necessary notions of science led both from left and right to a massification of social life in which there was no place for the person.

Thus, the present search for understanding as we move beyond the modern ideologies focuses upon finding a proper balance between individual freedom and social cohesion. As Aristotle points out, humans are by their very nature social creatures whose fulfillment and very survival is dependent upon their fellows. All social groups, however, require some order to keep conflicts between members at a minimum and resolve those which inevitably arise. For society to prosper it must recognize the individuality of its members and allow them the maximum amount of free creativity within the parameters required to maintain order. The modern search for unity is for a basis upon which the relation between the individual and society is not a contradiction, but a creative tension in which the person is able to realize his or her full potential in society with others, while society realizes its potential by recognizing and encouraging the diversity of its individual members. As W. Widick Schroeder writes, "In the political sphere the imposition of too much order to suppress dynamic components results in tyranny; the parts are inordinately suppressed for the sake of unity. Conversely, too much freedom results in anarchy; the parts are accentuated inordinately for the sake of diversity."[34] Schroeder correctly points out that the harmony of the whole can be attained only by integrating the interests of the whole with those of the individual.

Perhaps nowhere is the consequences of the loss of unity more clearly exhibited than in the work of the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, whose philosophy is fundamentally one of alienation.[35] For Sartre human freedom inevitably expresses itself in futile attempts to achieve a synthesis between being-in-itself (non-conscious being) and being-for-itself (consciousness conceived as a lack of being). Thus one is alienated not only from one's fellow human beings but

even from oneself. This self-alienation dramatically alters the nature of moral action. One's various attempts to unify being-in-itself with being-for-itself brings value into existence. Sartre urges man to abandon the belief which "considers values as transcendent givens independent of human subjectivity".[36] He writes that the moral agent is "the being by whom values exist" and "the unique source of values."[37]

The divisiveness of this sort of relativism should not be underestimated. One's values are no longer the product of rational insight into some objective being open to all, but becomes instead merely the expression of one's personal nature and so results in isolation. This, severely hampers rational discourse. Though Sartre clearly sees the importance of the individual, each with his or her own unique perspective on things, he fails to integrate this with an understanding that subjective consciousness requires objective reality, without which no true knowledge is possible. Sartre's relativism will not result in a stagnant and monolithic society, but neither will it engender the interactive and complementary community which encourages the free exchange of ideas. It can result only in hostile factionalism.

The question of unity applies not only to how the individual relates to his social and intellectual world, but also to how humankind relates to the natural world. The scientific and industrial revolutions enabled people to gain rapid understanding and control of the natural world. This resulted in many benefits which cannot be denied. However, the demystification of the natural world also resulted in its being divested of its aura of mystery and the corresponding reverence. The scientific revolution had the ultimate effect of making the natural world into an object to be isolated, broken down and understood, while the industrial revolution reduced it to a collection of natural resources to be exploited. In the earlier more unified sense of the cosmos, with less rigorous scientific understanding, beings of the natural world were not simply objects of study or resources for industry, but had an inherent value and nature and were to be respected as such.

Recent events have shown that careless action on the part of humankind which profoundly alters the natural world can result even in the annihilation of humanity.[38] A clearer understanding of the concept of unity certainly is needed in order to improve humankind's relation to the natural world. "The notion that humans are called to subdue, master and change nature needs to be balanced by the notion that humans are called to appropriate, appreciate, and receive nature."[39] Paradoxically humanity's mastery of nature ultimately has lowered the status of humankind itself to that of another natural entity without special characteristics. Even reason, which had enabled humankind to uncover the secrets of the natural world, has not escaped challenge by the fields of psychology and sociology. The analytic method shifts all emphasis to the scientific breakdown of an entity into ever smaller component parts without relating them to the entity as a whole or to its relation to the universe as a whole.

When the universe is understood not as a unity but as an aggregate of disparate objects void of any fundamental relationship, it is thereby disfigured and devalued in that entities are deprived of their inherent relationships.[40] The repercussions of this development have serious consequences for the social order. Among the most destructive of these are the loss of the inherent value of human life and the trampling of social values in a mad rush for individual fulfillment. Self-awareness is distorted by selfishness expressed in domestic, social and even international violence.

These effects of the neglect of unity can be traced to the late medieval nominalist epistemology. This began with the rejection of forms in terms of which knowledge of the true natures of things could be attained. At the dawn of the modern era this idea of inability to know the true nature of things was coupled with a Cartesian desire for certainty in terms that are clear and distinct to the human mind. This seriously undermines the possibility of metaphysics since

such clarity becomes the goal of all inquiry at the very point at which the ability to achieve certainty is denied. This position is constantly reinforced throughout the development of modern thought. Examples of it can be seen in Kant's division of reality into knowable phenomena and unknowable noumena, or the positivist rejection of all truth which was not grounded in the positive sciences. Once one rejects the person's ability to understand the true nature of reality, or the very idea of their being such natures, all possibility of a viable metaphysics is lost.

Without metaphysics, however, the mind turns quite naturally to the only thing left for it to know, and that is the physical world. One contents oneself with this superficial knowledge since it is believed that any deeper inquiry into the nature of things is pointless. All relationships between entities becomes purely products of external juxtaposition, rather than of the innate nature of the entities. Not surprisingly, this results in the atomization of reality, for each individual entity is regarded as something of a universe unto itself with no necessary internal relationship to anything else. These problems of modern philosophy can be seen as natural consequences of the undermining of metaphysics, which neglect of the concept of unity had initiated.

The work of Nicholas of Cusa in which the concept of unity plays so fundamental a role will be investigated here in search of insight needed for resolving these modern and contemporary challenges. Cusa's use of finite concepts outside a finite frame of reference may enable him to provide an alternative to the modern strongly rationalistic view. In this fashion, Cusa may be able to suggest insights denied to others. Cusa's interest in science may provide a framework for integrating many strengths of the modern view, and this in turn with his desire to situate all this in relationship to the Absolute. Cusa's thought may provide thereby a basis for a true pluralism of being in relation to an Absolute of which each individual is a partial and diversified expression.

The Formation of the Thought of Nicholas of Cusa

Medieval Platonism and Aristotelianism

Having sketched the broader context of the problem of unity in the proceeding section, we will move on to examine the major forces in medieval thought which contributed proximately to shaping Cusa's thought. Later there will be a more focused discussion of these issues, but here we will attend to the two dominant currents of medieval philosophy, namely, Platonism and Aristotelianism.

Cusa's thought is drawn for the most part from the Neo-Platonic tradition, which was about to emerge with new force during the Renaissance, and to a lesser extent from the Scholastic-Aristotelian tradition. Though the Aristotelian and Platonic traditions are frequently depicted as being diametrically opposed, this assertion requires some qualification. From the very outset there has always been a great deal of cross-fertilization between these two schools of thought.

As Arthur Little points out, Aristotle was himself something of a Platonist. Though Aristotle rejects the central Platonic doctrine of a separated realm of forms, the philosophy he develops is consistent with the bulk of Plato's thought. In fact, Little asserts that Aristotle's work should not be seen as setting aside Platonic thought but as its correction and expansion.[41]

Thomas Aquinas, regarded as central to the Scholastic-Aristotelian tradition, had as the key to his system the Platonic idea of participation and draws extensively upon both St. Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius.[42] In fact, the doctrine of participation is indispensable to Thomistic philosophy.[43] Thomistic philosophy is not essentially an Aristotelian doctrine with a few Platonic elements added here and there. The centrality of the doctrine of participation in Thomism clearly

makes Aquinas an Aristotelian who recognized and even intensified fundamental Platonic doctrines within his system.[44]

The contents of Cusa's personal library show him to have been thoroughly acquainted with both traditions. It contains over 300 manuscripts[45] not counting those which have disappeared over the years, which most scholars believe to have been considerable in number for many works mentioned in his letters have never been located.[46] The existing manuscripts include several collections of Aristotle and many commentaries upon them, as well as copies of Aquinas' *Summa*.[47] They also contain works of Pseudo-Dionysius and various commentaries upon them, including one by Aquinas' teacher, Albert the Great.[48]

Cusa sees an essential agreement between Platonic philosophy and Christian theology.[49] The Platonic orientation of his thought is exemplified by such key ideas as the *via negativa* and the absolute transcendence of the divine.[50] Also, Cusa often seems to sound more like a poet than a philosopher, using language to spur the imagination as a means to clarify the understanding -- this is characteristic of the Platonic tradition. An example of this is Plato's frequent use of myths to clarify his teachings. Platonism divided reality into sensible and intelligible realms. One begins with sense data derived from the sensible world, but by use of the intellect ascends to the intelligible world where one achieves true knowledge. Both the sensible and intelligible realms are subordinate to, and derived from, the One which is beyond all form and knowledge. Union with this is the pinnacle of human achievement. The universe is nothing other than an eternal and necessary order which emanates from the One according to a hierarchical order.[51]

Cusa's philosophy fits well within the broad framework of Platonism. Some scholars, however, feel that it would be more accurate to describe Cusa's thought as predominately Aristotelian. W. H. Hay characterizes Cusa's thought as a few Platonic strands woven onto an Aristotelian tapestry.[52] In support of this view Hay demonstrates how it is possible to deduce the coincidence of opposites from Scholastic- Aristotelian principles. He claims that for the Scholastic each thing in nature is matter participating in each of a number of pairs of contrary forms. For any form there is something that possesses it to the maximum and there can only be one maximum. If anything possessed the maximum degree of any quality (i.e. heat) it would also need to possess the minimum of the contrary quality (i.e. cold). Since there is only one infinite form (God), It must possess both the maximum of heat and the minimum of cold. God would also have to possess the minimum of heat and the maximum of cold due to His infinite nature. Thus, Hay's concludes that God in the scholastic tradition would have to possess the maximum and minimum of every quality, all coinciding within Him.[53]

Though it would be a mistake to claim that Cusa is entirely oblivious of the Aristotelian tradition, Hay seems to credit it with too great an influence upon Cusa's thought. It may be possible to deduce the coincidence of opposites from Aristotelian principles, but such a deduction is hardly characteristic of that tradition.

Though Cusa seeks to divert philosophy from the Scholastic path it had been following and to give it a more Neo-Platonic orientation, he does not totally jettison the Aristotelian tradition. For example, although both Cusa and Anselm see God as supreme, Anselm frames this supremacy in terms of an idea, whereas Cusa shifts the emphasis to being. Also, Cusa does not see infinity as a negative idea signifying nothing more than the absence of limitation as did various Neo-Platonists, but as a positive fullness of being which lacks nothing.[54] Cusa also follows the Aristotelians in seeing the natural world as a more or less intelligible order that need not be referred to a separated world of forms, the existence of which he rejected. In fact, Cusa adopts many such Aristotelian concepts as universal ideas, matter and form, and substance and accident.

Minor Influences on Cusa's Thought

Some of the lesser medieval trends which influenced Cusa are nominalism, mysticism and humanism, all of which played formative roles in shaping Cusa's thought. Though these lesser trends never developed as broad a framework for interpreting reality as had Platonism and Aristotelianism, they are, nonetheless, important in that they reveal the more particular intellectual concerns amidst which Cusa developed his thought.

One question fundamental to understanding Cusa's work is whether he should be read as a medieval Renaissance thinker. Cusa is a notoriously difficult figure to classify historically. Some medieval characteristics found in Cusa's thought are the manner in which his entire philosophy is focused upon the relationship between God and the world, as well as the Christo-centric nature of his thought. Others, however, point to some of the more characteristically modern elements of Cusa's thought and would classify him as an essentially modern philosopher. An example of such modern elements would be Cusa's description of the Absolute as the coincidence of opposites from which all reality unfolds. While Cusa's thought is, in fact, considerably influenced by his medieval predecessors, it is true also that he sees himself as breaking away from many important tenets of medieval philosophy, such as the Scholastic-Aristotelian epistemology. This is due, at least partially, to the fact that Cusa lived during something of a historical cusp. In the early Fifteenth Century the medieval world was beginning to wither away, while the Renaissance was only just being born. Thus, the intellectual currents which influenced Cusa's thought are partially medieval, as in the case of nominalism and mysticism, and partially Renaissance, as in the case of humanism.

The Renaissance aspect of Cusa's thought gives his works a somewhat modern appearance and is open to many modern concerns, but the medieval influence saves it from some of the more typical excesses of the Renaissance.[55] Nicholas of Cusa and Renaissance thinkers in general remind one that there is a continuity in history with no sharp breaks or abrupt transitions. One of the best description of Cusa's thought was provided by Copleston who asserted that Cusa's mind was steeped in the new ideas of the Renaissance, but retained the fundamentally religious perspective of the Middle Ages.[56]Essentially, Nicholas of Cusa is a man with a foot in both the medieval and the Renaissance world, who is entirely at home in neither.[57]

Religious

Mysticism. The fundamentally religious context of Cusa's ideas means that rather than reacti ng against thereligious climate of the Middle Ages, he in fact is inspired by it. Christianity sets the goal and context for all of Cusa's philosophical speculation.[58] Ernst Cassirer writes that Cusa's "discovery of nature and of man was accomplished from the very heart of religion, where he sought to base and to anchor that discovery."[59] Any attempt to remove the religious elements from Cusa's philosophy in order to make him appear more modern would necessarily result in distortion. Cassirer goes on to point out that in Cusa's philosophy Christ is not merely "an arbitrary 'theological' appendix rooted in a purely dogmatic interest," but an important and necessary element of Cusa's thought which cannot be taken out without changing the entire character of that thought.[60] Cusa makes no effort to impose a rigid separation of faith and reason; rather, it is his faith which prods his reason to its greatest heights.

The term mysticism is applied to a vast variety of states of mind. Perhaps the best definition was provided by Jean Gerson: "Mystical Theology is knowledge of God by experience, arrived at through the embrace of unifying love."[61] Thus, mysticism may be distinguished from natural

theology in that it is not based upon natural reasoning and differs from dogmatic theology in that it is not based upon revelation. Mysticism provides a knowledge which is grounded not in a process of intellectual reasoning, but in direct experience. This experience is implied by the reference to "unifying love" in Gerson's definition through which the mystic comes to know God.[62] In coming to this the mystic overcomes the sense of otherness so evident in reality, and becomes aware that in some fashion all reality is one.[63]

Mystical works were particularly prevalent in medieval Germany and would have had an obvious appeal to Cusa[64] in his effort to reconcile the distinctions of finite reality within the absolute unity of God, which he saw as transcending the limits of man's reason. One mystic who greatly influenced Cusa's thought was Meister Eckhart who propounded what is often described as a "rational mysticism."[65] Eckhart was possibly a student of Albert the Great and certainly one of his followers as is indicated by the frequent citations of Albert in Eckhart's work.[66] Eckhart draws some of the Neo-Platonic elements from Albert's philosophy, such as the emanation of the universe from the Divine and expands upon them.[67] Ultimately, Eckhart's approach ends up being far more Neo-Platonic and mystical than anything in Albert.[68]

The rational flavor of Eckhart's mysticism is seen in the fact that nowhere in his works is there any description of the Divine rapture which he may or may not have experienced; likewise, there is no regimen of ascetic practices which puts one on the path to the Divine.[69] Eckhart's mysticism is directed entirely at expressing an intellectual understanding of the Divine rather than a mystical encounter; it is in that respect that he greatly influences Cusa's philosophy. Both Eckhart and Cusa seek to make mysticism's great truth regarding the unity of all reality rationally accessible, while maintaining the distinction between finite and infinite reality. Because of this, both are acutely aware of the tensions and polarities of the person's own relationship to God. The mystic is both entirely alienated from God in that his mystical encounter makes him keenly aware of the limitations of finite reality; yet, the Divine is simultaneously closer to one than one's own breath or hands due to the unifying love of the Divine.[70] Cusa's use of paradox is an attempt to offer a public and accessible mysticism, rather than an esoteric one which would require heroic efforts and so be possible for only a small fraction of humanity.[71] Finally, the rational emphasis in Cusa's mysticism can be seen in his warning against false states of rapture which result in fantastic visions that have only a semblance of truth but, in fact, are false.[72]

Nominalism. This medieval influence profoundly effected Cusa's thought. The rise of nominalism in the Fourteenth Century helped weaken the dominance of Scholasticism and thereby contributed to the emergence of divergent views during the Renaissance.[73] The influence of nominalism was strong in Germany where it was a considerable force in many of the major universities including those attended by Cusa (Heidelberg and Cologne).[74] The nominalists asserted that universals were not names of real entities (i.e. essences, natures, species, et cetera) but merely single terms determined entirely by convention and applied to various individual things. Thus, the idea of "man" is not really a universal idea, but a particular, albeit confused, idea indiscriminately applied to various individuals without regard to their actual uniqueness.[75]

One key to the nominalist conception of the universe lies in its emphasis upon the freedom of the Divine. Heiko Oberman's examination of the work of Gabriel Biel, a nominalist contemporary to Cusa, makes this clear. Biel, like Duns Scotus and Ockham before him, distinguished God's absolute power from His ordained power.[76] God's ordained power decrees the laws which actually govern the universe and He may choose to do things in accordance with those laws. However, God is capable of doing anything which does not imply a contradiction, regardless of whether or not it

is consistent with the laws of the universe. There is much which God can do that He has not chosen to do; this is what is meant by God's absolute power.[77] Thus, God is in no way constrained to create things in one way rather than another, and this provides the basis for the nominalist's rejection of the universals.[78]

Because God's actions are not necessitated, human reason is incapable of deducing anything about God's absolute nature by examining the effects of his ordained power.[79] In short, the state of the world as it actually exists tells man nothing about the inherent nature of the Divine.[80] In fact, for nominalists like Biel, human reason is capable of acquiring only the sparest knowledge of the Divine, essentially limited to the fact that God exists; that His existence is personal, and that He is wise. In fact, even God's oneness is regarded as being only probable according to both Ockham and Biel.[81]

Cusa's own thought partially incorporates some of the concerns of the nominalists. Though he rejects the idea of a separated world of forms he does not adopt the extreme nominalist position which denies their existence entirely. Cusa presupposes an awareness of certain absolute universal ideas, such as straightness, truth, goodness, et cetera, and asserts that all existing individual entities do in fact possess forms of their own.[82] These forms are derived from the Absolute and are images of the Absolute. It should be emphasized, however, that they are only images of the Absolute and cannot be equated with the Absolute Itself. Because of this it is possible for the human knowledge to formulate, in a certain limited sense, a concept of the Divine. Hence, even though one's knowledge of the Divine is always imperfect (keeping one ignorant), one can know why it is imperfect (making that ignorance to be learned). Therefore, one's knowledge is always capable of improvement.[83]Because of the approximate nature of human knowledge, Cusa agrees with the nominalists in their rejection of the validity of a deductive theology. For both Cusa and the nominalists human intellectual abilities cannot comprehend the Absolute; therefore, theologians must ultimately base their assertions about the Divine on a few revealed texts.[84]

The rejection of the real existence of forms has several consequences upon the development of the history of thought. The positive elements of the nominalist's rejection of universals and the new sensibilities which were developed because of it played a fundamental role in shaping the Renaissance. One of the most formative ideas of the Renaissance is the emphasis upon the individual which was greatly facilitated by the nominalist's rejection of the forms. This is because once the forms have been removed a thing is no longer representative of a certain kind, but is itself a singular entity which shares no real common species with any other thing. It is this focus upon the individual which no doubt contributes to Cusa's interest in diversity and his enthusiasm for humanism. The nominalist's rejection of forms and emphasis upon the individual gave impetus not only to Cusa's personal interest in humanism, but also to that of the Renaissance as a whole. Nominalism's rejection of deductive theology also directed philosophy toward a more exclusive and hence rigorous examination of the human by taking away the basis upon which the God-centered thought of the Middle Ages was built. This contrasted to the Platonic conception of reality where all entities possessed their fundamental reality through their forms. These entities were images of the ideas which were the real objects of knowledge and in turn participated in the One which provided the source and archetype of all being.

Humanism. This was one of the most pervasive characteristics of the Renaissance and greatly influenced Cusa's thought. It reflected a broad concern with the study and imitation of classical culture. Its adherents were, strictly speaking, either teachers or students of the curriculum of *studia humanitatas*, i.e. grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and moral philosophy.[85]This

movement inspired the study of classical Latin and, to a lesser extent, Greek. Although it remained chiefly a scholarly, educational and literary movement, nonetheless, it affected Renaissance philosophy by transmitting to it many ancient ideas. If by philosophy one confines oneself to the systematic and technical realms of the various subjects as defined by the ancient, medieval and modern traditions, then humanism made significant contributions in the areas of ethics, politics, and to some extent even in logic. If, however, the influence of philosophy is taken into account in less systematic, yet more popular thinking, such as jurisprudence and the arts, then the influence of humanism is even greater.[86]

The humanist revival of Greek and Roman literature had its greatest effect in reinvigorating Platonism or, more properly Neo-Platonism.[87] The influence of Renaissance Platonism resided in its stimulating and providing a framework for Renaissance philosophers to express their belief about the full development of man's highest potentialities and of the natural world as an expression of the Divine. In doing this, however, they did not, as a rule, separate one from one's fellow humans or God; thereby they avoided the alienation that comes from excessive individualism or irreligion.[88] The substance of Cusa's philosophy clearly puts him in the humanist camp, though he is well aware of its pitfalls. In one of his sermons he warns that although the humanist's knowledge of the past is valuable, it must be adapted in the light of contemporary experience.[89] This sentiment is echoed in the *Idiota de Mente* where the layman lectures not only the scholastic philosopher, but also the humanist orator for failing to take an inclusive enough approach to the Absolute. Cusa also sees humanism as compatible with disciplines outside the *studia humanitatas* such as mathematics and the natural sciences; as has been shown, he was far less hostile to Aristotle than other humanists, such as Petrarch.[90]

The glorification of man which characterized Renaissance humanism stands in fundamental contrast to the non-theistic or restrictive humanism of the modern era. For the Renaissance humanist, humans were created directly by God in order to rule over the rest of creation in accord with the spiritual and rational powers with which God had endowed him. The human's unique and privileged status is derived from the immortality of the human soul, the Incarnation, and one's beatification and ultimate resurrection, all of which contribute to giving one a dignity which surpasses even that of the angels. Though the Renaissance humanists balanced this optimism with a deep awareness of human flaws, they, nonetheless, formulated what is perhaps the most affirmative view of human nature in the history of thought.[91]

Since the human person is created in the image and likeness of God, it is not surprising that he or she shares in God's power, though in a significantly limited manner.[92] This means that one's action upon the natural world must be in accord with natural law on both the physical and moral planes. One must act in a way befitting a being made in God's image, but not act as if one were God. This would deprive the person of his or her dignity since it would involve treating one's fellow humans, who equally are God's creations, as inferior beings and, in doing so, diminish one's own being.[93] This principle can also be extended to the rest of creation as well since it too is a reflection of the Divine, though one which is much less perfect. In this fashion, one would deny the unity which he or she shares with both one's fellow humans and the natural world. By and large, the Renaissance humanists refused to deify nature despite their reverence for it.[94]

The Life of Cusa

Having dealt with the historical forces which shaped Cusa's thought, we will tighten the focus even more and show how his personal background contributed to his thought. This will enable us

to see how Cusa was able to make direct contact with the previously discussed trends. By knowing the ideas which were circulating at the time and the way in which Cusa contacted them, one can gain a better understanding of Cusa's own writing.

Nicholas of Cusa was born in 1401 in the city of Cues (now merged with Bernhastel).[95] His father, named Krebs, was a rather prosperous barge operator on the Moselle River.[96] Havelock Ellis describes the Moselle as one of the regions in Europe which combines the Germanic character with Latin dynamism and the Gallic tendency toward a cosmopolitanism which transcends national boundaries. It thereby creates a spirit which gave birth to such geniuses as Albert the Great Kepler, Schiller, Schelling and Hegel. These areas also have proven particularly successful at reconciling national differences as in Alsatia and Switzerland.[97] Because Cusa came from an area where many different types of people had to live together and to accommodate their differences Cusa's concern for a unity which retains plurality was to some degree the product of his "*Lebenswelt*."[98] For him unity is not the suppression of differences, but a harmonious synthesis where individual identity is not obliterated.

Another interesting parallel between Cusa's personal character and that of his philosophy is its active character. Cusa's life was not one of monastic contemplation, but that of a man heavily involved in the affairs of the world. It is also worth noting that Cusa was the son not of a noble house, but of a successful merchant and, therefore, more a product of the emerging and dynamic mercantile culture than of its relatively stagnant feudal predecessor. This economic development would create philosophical problems with which scholars trained only in biblical exegesis, the *Sentences* of Peter the Lombard, and the various *summas* could not adequately deal.[99] Cusa's thought reflects this dynamism by focusing less upon the pure essences of substances and more upon the relationship between those substances.[100]

Cusa's formal education played an important role in his intellectual development. He first attended the University of Heidelberg and then enrolled in the University of Padua, where he remained until 1423.[101] While at Padua, Cusa received a degree in Canon Law, but also studied mathematics and physics. It was his contact with the Italian humanists, however, which most influenced Cusa while he was at Padua.[102] Ernst Cassirer claims that Cusa's arrival in Italy at the age of seventeen had the most profound effect upon his thought.[103] This is supported by the fact that Cusa, who grew up in the Conciliarist Northern Europe and had originally supported its claims of authority over the Pope at Basel, quickly adopted the humanist and papalist policies of Italy.[104] Lastly, Cusa enrolled in the University of Cologne in 1425, where he came under the influence of Heimeric de Campo and, through him, encountered the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius.[105]

In 1426, as a practicing attorney, Cusa came to the attention of Cardinal Giordano Orsini. Orsini appointed Cusa his personal secretary, and thereby ushered the young man into the forefront of Italian humanism. These circles were impressed by Cusa's reputation as a manuscript hunter with access to the essentially unknown monastic libraries of Germany, and Cusa was not reluctant to help procure these manuscripts for them. In 1429 Cusa's fame as a manuscript hunter was sealed by his discovery of twelve previously unknown comedies of Plautus.[106] He was sent to the Council of Basel in 1432 to plead the case of Ulrich von Manderscheid, who sought to become the new Archbishop of Trier. Upon arriving, he was appointed to one of the four principal delegations (*de fide*) and played an active role in the council's deliberations. In 1434, Cusa wrote a work entitled *De Concordantia Catholica*, a long and wide-ranging proposal for church and state reform, which was to become the major theoretical work of the Conciliarists at Basel.[107] In March of that year the Council ruled against Cusa in the case of Ulrich von Manderscheid. Cusa spent the

next year with the de fide deputation arranging a financial settlement for his client. It is also at this time that the anti-papal atmosphere at Basel made Cusa increasingly disenchanted with the Conciliarist position. Between 1435 and 1436, Cusa received two benefices and had them confirmed by both the Council and the Papacy; throughout the year he worked to strengthen his ties to the Papal party. Cusa was firmly aligned with the Papal faction by 1437, when he was named as one of three delegates to go to Constantinople to work on reunification with the Orthodox Church.[108]

James Biechler claims that Cusa's preoccupation with unity is an attempt to find symbolic justification for his abandonment of the Conciliarist cause at Basel.[109] It is more likely, however, that Cusa's concern for unity is what had, in fact, initiated his change of heart. As early as 1433, Cusa exhibited a deep concern for religious unity when he wrote a work, entitled *Epistolae ad Bohemos*, which dealt with the Hussite heresy. It is likely that for someone of Cusa's northern European background, Conciliarism would appear to be the only viable method for governing the Church and, therefore, of attaining a unified Christendom.[110] Cusa, however, as Biechler also points out, was a firsthand witness to the chaos of Conciliarism at Basel; this called the very viability of Conciliarism into question.[111]

Cusa's contemplative life also reflects an overwhelming concern for unity. This was directed toward reconciling finite oppositions within the unity of the Absolute, just as his active life sought to reconcile religious oppositions within the unity of the Church. A concern which so permeated Cusa's life would seem to have required much deeper roots than the need for symbolic justification of a political change of heart.

As Bishop and Cardinal, Cusa continued to encourage Church reforms. He campaigned vigorously against such practices as simony and concubinage in an attempt to eradicate them. He also denounced relic worship and urged the learning of Christian doctrine so people would not be subject to irrationality and emotional superstition. Two of the most revealing reforms to receive Cusa's support were his discouragement of religious confraternities on the grounds that, instead of fostering spiritual unity, they tended to isolate their members from the larger Christian community, and his attempt to regularize the liturgy in order to encourage the ideal of the universal church that transcended local distinctions.[112] Both of these cases reveal Cusa's concern for maintaining the unity of the Church. Cusa strictly enforced his reforms and punished all transgressions severely, though his success in these endeavors was rather mixed.[113]

It is odd that though Cusa's ideas were known by many who came after his precise doctrinal positions seem to have had little formative influence on the major thinkers of his era. Pico della Mirandola was aware of Cusa, but Ernst Cassirer's attempts to link Cusa with the various members of Florence's Platonic Academy have proven unconvincing.[114] Kepler also refers to the "divine Cusanus," but Cusa's ideas hardly anticipated those of Kepler.[115] Copernicus was aware of at least the second book of *De Docta Ignorantia*, but again those ideas do not serve as principles for constructing a mathematical model of the universe, nor are they the products of such a model.[116] Another major thinker who was aware of Cusa was Descartes, but he likewise did not shape his thoughts along Cusan lines. Perhaps the best way to view Cusa's relationship to his philosophical heirs is as someone who contributes not particular conclusions, but a spirit, and with it certain impulses and tendencies. This should not be underestimated.

In his work entitled *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer defines style as those undiscussed assumptions upon which historical consciousness is based. He points out that different modes of thinking and speaking about reality are appropriate to particular purposes and suited to meet particular demands.[117] He applies this idea of style to political history as well as to all other

actions.[118] This notion of style promises to be helpful here regarding the act of thinking and intellectual history.

The first section of this chapter outlined the evolution of the understanding of the concept of unity. There, one saw that each step in the understanding of unity was accompanied by a new style of thought. As humankind moved from the totemic understanding of unity to the mythic, its thinking was freed from the sensible and became more imaginative. Likewise, the move from the mythic conception of unity to the philosophical required a change in thinking from that based on the imagination to one which was more ordered and rational. Such changes in the style of thinking result in opening up new vistas upon reality and thereby uncovering previously hidden truths.

Cusa's philosophy is an explicit attempt to create a new style of thinking in reference to the Absolute. For Cusa, one cannot use discursive reason to inquire into the nature of the Absolute, but by intellect and imagination one can develop an appreciation of the all-encompassing nature of the Divine. In doing this, one gains new insight into the nature of reality itself, particularly, as a pattern of relationships.

Cusa encourages a new style of thinking also in reference to the finite world and this has profound implications for the development of modern science, seeing the natural world as an image of the Absolute endows its study with enhanced importance and dignity. Cusa also emphasizes the importance of measurement for understanding the natural world, as well as the tenuous nature of rational conclusions in that regard; both of these are indispensable for the development of the modern scientific enterprise.

Because Cusa comes at the end of the medieval era and the beginning of the modern one he addresses many of the concerns of the modern era, yet is not a part of it; hence he maintains something of an alternate perspective. Thus, though Cusa contributes no particular scientific doctrines his influence upon the development of science is far more pervasive in that it provides new objectives for thought and a new way of thinking.[119] The same is true regarding the contribution of this new way of thinking to the broader culture as a whole where it opens new ways of understanding social relations and of grasping the meaning of all in God. Because Cusa has been so overlooked by his philosophical successors, it will be of particular interest to examine his thought; since this is, indeed, the road not taken, it invites scholars to seek out where it will lead and what new insights it has yet to provide.

The Method of This Work

Since the previous sections have dealt with the major purposes of this chapter, this final section will deal with the minor purpose of explaining the methodology to be used in this work. Its central issue is to examine the role which unity plays in the metaphysics of Nicholas of Cusa and to uncover what ethical implications this might have. Cusa abandons the precise terminology of the Scholastics and is inclined toward the mystical; he seeks to give an account of something he himself claims to be beyond rational analysis, linguistic expression and human comprehension. Hence, it is better to examine a number of Cusa's works in order to obtain a clear view of his thought than to concentrate on just one. This is possible because Cusa's work exhibits a high degree of continuity throughout much of his life. *De Docta Ignorantia* is universally regarded as Cusa's masterpiece and serves as the point of departure for Cusa's most serious thought. The work comes to him as an illumination on a voyage to Constantinople as part of the papal delegation which was to meet with the Byzantine Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople.[120] Ernst Cassirer asserts that all of Cusa's subsequent works are merely extensions of this work.[121] Jasper Hopkins concurs,

claiming that Cusa never veers from the fundamental positions outlined in *De Docta Ignorantia*, but simply expands upon them in a variety of ways.[122]

Cusa's *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae* is an indispensable aid for understanding *De Docta Ignorantia*. He wrote this work in response to an attack upon *De Docta Ignorantia* by Johannes Wenck. Wenck was a respected theologian from the University of Heidelberg who accused Cusa of holding heretical opinions. Cusa dismisses Wenck as a man who "understands nothing at all"[123] and goes on to clarify what he had said in *De Docta Ignorantia*. Other works which will be examined in this work are, *De Possest, De Dato Patris Luminum, De Li Non Aliud, De Visione Dei*, and *De Pace Fidei*. In *De Possest* and *De Li Non Aliud*, Cusa inquires into the nature of the infinite and attempts, as he would describe it, to name the unnameable. The importance of *De Visione Dei* lies in its clear revelation of the personal and loving nature of the Divine. In *De Dato Patris Luminium* Cusa attempts to give an account of how an imperfect world can be the product of a perfect creator and does so in a manner which emphasizes the dynamic relationship between God and the world. Cusa's major work on religious tolerance is *De Pace Fidei*. This discusses not merely how men with differing visions of the Divine can live together in peace, but how their very diversity contributes to a more complete understanding of the Divine and, in practice, facilitates peace.

Format of This Work

This first chapter has examined the historical background of the concept of unity with particular attention to those forces which most contributed to the formation of Cusa's thought. Chapter II will now proceed to inquire into the dynamic nature of Cusa's metaphysics, particularly, as regards to his notion of being and unity. The third chapter will discuss Cusa's conception of the Divine as absolute unity. It will examine the principle of the coincidence of opposites and what this principle entails, as well as its implication for enabling one, through the use of metaphor and paradox, to gain insight into a being which exists without distinction. The fourth chapter will discuss the dynamic unfolding of reality from the Divine unity and how reality participates in the Divine. The fifth chapter will focus upon the ethical implications of the unfolding from the Divine, relating Cusa's metaphysical principles to the realm of human action. In Part II the focus will shift from explicating Cusa's ideas on unity and the Divine to articulating how Cusa's unique insights can provide a new perspective on a variety of contemporary ethical issues. Chapter VI, VII, and VIII will suggest possible approaches in the spirit of Cusa to issues of religious, social and economic unity, respectively. The concluding chapter will focus on how the tradition's idea of unity shaped Cusa's thought and how Cusa's concept of unity enriched the tradition. It will discuss also the ethical implications of these for both the public and private realms.

Part I of this work will be based primarily upon an analysis of Cusa's own texts attempting to interpret them in the light of their proper Renaissance setting. This will provide us with insight into the character of being within Cusa's thought, which reflects the cultural transition from the medieval to the modern world. From Cusa's new vision of being we will then attempt to draw implications for the ethical world. It is hoped that in this fashion this work will be able to shed new light on understanding the writings of Cusa and how his understanding can address some characteristic difficulties of the present era.

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Chapter II
The Dynamism of Being and Unity

The previous chapter outlined the concept of unity. It highlighted the intellectual trends which most contributed to Cusa's thought and discussed the manner in which this work would proceed in investigating the nature of his thought regarding unity and its implications for ethics. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the fundamental principles upon which Cusa's philosophy is built. It will study the two most characteristic elements of Cusa's metaphysics, namely, his dynamic conception of being and his understanding of unity as pervasive in reality. It will consider as well the relationship between them with a view toward how these effect one's understanding of ethics.

The basic issue with which this work is primarily concerned is the relationship between the one and the many. Without understanding this relationship, it is not possible to comprehend the nature of unity in the world. This problem has vexed philosophers throughout the ages; too often they have resolved it by compromising either unity or multiplicity. Classically Parmenides is an example of one who emphasized unity at the expense of multiplicity, seeing the unity of reality as being so cohesive as to exclude all multiplicity and change. At the opposite end of the spectrum is Heraclitus, who sees change and multiplicity as being the fundamental principles of the universe and leaves inadequate place for unity in his system. Cusa's approach attempts to reconcile the opposition between multiplicity and unity, and to integrate both within his metaphysical system. By conceiving of unity as an harmonious diversity, Cusa resolves the competing demands of individuality and unity without compromising either. The way in which Cusa achieves this synthesis may best be analyzed by studying it in terms of five issues, namely: the structure of being, the nature of causality, the nature of unity, the relationship of entities, and knowledge. An overview of how Cusa does this can be found in the accompanying diagram.

This is the rationale for the structure of this chapter which in five sections will seek to resolve the apparent mutual exclusion of unity and individuality. The first two sections will examine the interactive nature of being. In the first section the distinction and relation between actuality and potentiality in being will be examined; while in the second section implications of formal causality for being will be discussed. The third section will examine the nature of unity for Cusa's dynamic conception of being. The fourth section will examine the implications of this conception of unity for the hierarchy of being and the specific contribution which Cusa makes to the traditional understanding of hierarchy. The final section will examine reflectively Cusa's epistemology by discussing how Cusa understood his ability to achieve these insights regarding the nature of being and unity.

The Structure of Being for Cusa

The nature of being within Cusa's thought is essentially dynamic. This is because as we will see, to be, for Cusa, is to be active, that is, to interact with other beings by influencing their being as well as being influenced by them. Also, the dynamic interaction of beings creates a unity of being as a whole, since each being reflects the whole of being. This chapter will begin by discussing the relationship between actuality and potentiality. As the two fundamental components which together comprise being, they provide insight into three crucial points in the thought of Cusa. The first is what it means for an entity to exist; the second is the unity of individual entities, as well as being in itself; the third is the dynamic nature of reality for Cusa. Only by understanding

the metaphysical principles of individual entities can one come to know the developmental capacities of being. This is required in order to understand how individual entities can retain their own unique natures and still relate to each other on an ontological level.

Act and Potency in Cusa's Thought

At first glance Cusa's understanding of the two metaphysical principles of act and potency appears little different from the views articulated by such traditional philosophers as Thomas Aquinas. In fact, in an essay entitled *"Il Possest del Cusano e Le Dottrine Aristotelico-Tomistiche dell'atto e Potenza e dell Essenza ed Esistenza"* Carlo Giacon goes so far as to assert that, on this particular point, most of the differences between Cusa and the majority of his medieval predecessors are purely verbal and result from Cusa's inclination to use language in order to strike the imagination rather than to inform the intellect.[1] For both, actuality refers to the real existence of an entity (e.g. the existence of water) and potentiality refers to the possibility of an entity to exist in a manner other than it does (e.g. cold water becoming hot).[2]

In *De Possest*, Cusa asserts that being requires a union of actuality and potentiality. He points out that if existence were not possible then nothing could exist, and if existence were only possible and not actual then nothing would exist.[3] In *De Docta Ignorantia*, actuality and potentiality mutually define each other in reference to being. Here potentiality is seen to be limited by act, and the existence of pure possibility which is devoid of act is an impossibility. Likewise, act is itself limited by potency. Thus, for Cusa act "has no absolute existence save in potency, whilst possibility can have no absolute existence save when it is limited by act."[4]

Though actuality and potentiality are two distinct principles of being, there is, nonetheless, an inherently complementary unity between them in respect to being. Giacon points out that it is possible to say that even potentiality precedes actuality, at least in respect to limited being. This is because no limited being could possess actual existence unless the possibility for this existence was prior to the entities' actual physical existence.[5] Thus, one can say that potentiality precedes actuality only in respect to finite being, and then only in reference to the entity's potentiality within the Absolute, as the source and totality of being.

The interrelationship between actuality and potentiality has important implications for Cusa's understanding of the nature of being. Perhaps the most important of these is the dynamic character it imparts to reality. For Cusa being is not indifferent with respect to actuality and potentiality, but tends toward act. This tendency reveals the role which final cause plays for Cusa's metaphysics in that being naturally tries to fulfill its potentialities. Another important implication is the role which potency and act play for the integration of individual beings into the unity of being as a whole. In terms of act, each being is related to every other being in that for Cusa every individual is a contraction of the whole. However, in terms of potency, each being can reflect this whole only in a manner which is consistent with its individual nature.

Matter and Form in Cusa's Thought. Cusa's ideas on potentiality are intimately connected to his concept of matter, which is one of the most difficult points in his entire philosophy. He identifies matter with potentiality, and asserts that absolute matter does not and cannot exist since absolute matter could be nothing other than pure potentiality.[6] Because pure potentiality would entirely lack the actuality required to bring it into existence, it is an impossibility. Thus, in reference to matter, among all possibles pure possibility is the least capable of actually existing.[7]

In *De Possest,* Cusa's discussion of the three types of theoretical investigation would seem to support this view. He ranks three types of investigation, from the lowest to the highest, in reference to the degree in which each must deal with matter. The lowest type of investigation is physics, which studies nature by examining forms which inhere in matter and are, therefore, subject to change. The highest type of investigation is theology, which studies abstract but forms that are divine and nothing other than themselves. As entirely devoid of the potency of matter, they are eternal and immutable. Between these two extremes lies the middle realm of mathematics which studies stable forms which are free from corporeal matter, but not from intelligible matter. For Cusa the more the existence of a being is linked to matter the less perfect it is.[8]

From this one can see that Cusa clearly identifies matter with potentiality and form with actuality. We will first examine Cusa's understanding of form in *De Dato Patris Luminum*. Cusa asserts that though it is common for philosophers to say that form gives being to things this manner of speaking lacks precision. Cusa has no desire to identify form with being and claims that form gives being to a thing only in the sense that in every existing thing it is the form that makes that thing what it is and actualizes its potential for existence.[9] This mutual dependence of form and matter is also expressed in *De Visione Dei* where Cusa claims that the form of human nature cannot exist outside of particular men and cannot be disassociated from individuated being. This is because for Cusa it is the form which enables a being to exist, but no specific form can exist apart from individuated being.[10]

Thus, though Cusa rejects the possibility of a separated realm of forms, he does not follow the Nominalists by rejecting the existence of the forms entirely. Forms remain for Cusa a necessary component of being which actualize existence only in concert with the potency of the individuated being in which they inhere. They can never achieve this independently of potency. Thus for Cusa, though forms are distinct in the order of essence they have in themselves no distinct existence.[11] He confirms this view in *De Docta Ignorantia* where he points out that forms do not have any actual existence in the order of being but only in the order of nature. In other words, though forms have no being of their own, they define the nature of the being in which they inhere and within that being are real.

Only by being actualized in an individual entity can form move beyond the order of nature (e.g. species, genera, etc.) to that of reality; just as a line can attain actual reality only within a solid.[12] By defining the nature of an individual being, the forms define the limitations of potentiality which allow beings to be actualized. They are not simply beings of reason since there are circumstances under which they do obtain real existence, though this is not something of which they are capable in and of themselves. Thus, for Cusa the form can achieve actuality only as a contraction of being itself. It is through contraction of being as a whole that form is related to every other being.

This idea of individual forms as contractions of being has lead some scholars to interpret Cusa's metaphysics in a manner which denies that individual beings possess any positive being of their own so that they differ from each other only in a purely accidental fashion.[13] These commentators have supported their claims by citing Cusa's rejection of the existence of plural positive essences, extrinsic to real entities, and Cusa's assertion that the Absolute is the one true Essence of all reality.

In an article entitled "Nicholas of Cusa's Theory of Science and Its Metaphysical Background", Thomas McTighe asserted that the quiddity of a thing is nothing other than unity itself. Hence, by virtue of its positive content, the sun differs not at all from the moon or any other particular thing.[14] The diversity which is exhibited by the natural world is merely the product of

accidental differences; no object possesses any specific form which interposes itself between a particular existing thing and the source of their being e.g. the Absolute.[15] All individual entities are nothing more than differing contractions of the whole devoid of any being of their own.

These interpretations seem directly to contradict some of the most basic principles of Cusa's philosophy as well as Cusa's own words. Cusa clearly believes that both the sun and the moon have forms or essences of their own and, therefore, must likewise possess their own positive being. Thus, the differentiation of limited entities must be founded upon something other than the purely accidental.[16] This creates a true diversity of being, rather than an essentially sham diversity based solely upon accidental differences which would result in nothing more than a multiplicity of variations in mode upon a single consistent being. Cusa writes that "the restricted quiddity of the sun is distinct from the restricted quiddity of the moon, because the restricted quiddity of a thing is the thing itself."[17] For Cusa, these essences are bound up in the very being of the entity in which they inhere and, as such, are distinct from all other entities. Thus one can see clearly that according to Cusa it is not the individual beings themselves which are contractions of the whole, but only the forms, and the forms themselves are not sufficient for being. Hence, the differentiation exhibited by individual being is based upon real distinctions of positive being.

When Cusa asserts that the earth is the earth because it is nothing other than the earth he is indicating the intimate link between an object's own individual form and its being. He singles out this link as the principle of the object's existence and identity. Should he attempt to account for the earth's identity by appealing to something other than itself, such as the form of earthiness, then he would have to identify the principle of that form and, thereby, become ensnared in an infinite regress. This can only be escaped by identifying some principle which appeals to nothing outside of itself for its existence. What is required, in short, is something which is what it is because it cannot be anything else.[18]

This by no means implies that Cusa is espousing some sort of nominalist singularism where each creature is itself and has no internal relationship with any other creature. Though the forms can exist only in individuals this does not necessarily mean that each individual has a form all its own. This may well be true for such singular entities as the earth, the sun, the moon, etc., but for entities which are members of a class of beings, this is not the case. Each person or each horse does not possess a unique form which is essentially different from that of every other being of its type. Each one does, however, possess a form entirely its own which is expressed in a unique fashion, but these particular distinctions are of secondary significance.

The Contraction of Being

Cusa's philosophy, however, is even less singularist than this because each individual being relates to all being in that each is a contraction (*contractio*) of the whole. In *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusa defines the term contraction as the restriction of Being itself to some particular thing.

Thus the whole Being exists in a restricted fashion in each particular being.[19] In this sense, each existing creature, reflects not merely every other creature, but also the entirety of being. Through contraction each being becomes ontologically linked to every other being since all entities derive their existence from a common source. It is important to note, however, that this presence of all Being in each being is by no means an actual presence in which every individual contains the totality of being as that totality is in itself. By restricting itself, Being becomes in each actually existing thing what that individual thing actually is.[20] No actual presence of anything other than the thing itself is possible because it would destroy the actual unity of potency and act in the

individual entity by making it be something other than itself and, thereby, make its existence impossible.[21] In this manner Cusa retains the uniqueness and individuality of all existing entities.

These points are intimately related to Cusa's dynamic and unified conception of reality because each individual is not singular entity inherently isolated, but a contraction of the totality of being. Thus, all beings are united in that each is a contraction of the same whole. However, because each contraction is unique each being is simultaneously distinct from every other. This allows for a dynamic interaction between beings.

The forms play a key role in understanding what it means to be. For Cusa the forms communicate being in that they actualize existence. They are also responsible for the distribution of being in that they account for the multiplicity of beings as well as the diversity which these beings express. Furthermore, the forms also have an indispensable role to play in terms of participation. They do not merely provide essences as had been the case for the ancient Greeks, but account also for the multiplicity of beings as well. This ontological multiplicity is distinctively Christian and allows for a true dynamism not merely of interaction, but of creation itself.

Matter also plays an indispensable role for being in that it determines the way in which each being is individuated from every other being. By being equated with potency matter determines the possibilities which are open to each particular being, thereby establishing the uniqueness of each individual being. Hence, though the potency of matter resides in all being it is different in each being, since each being can be only itself with its own possibilities.

The Principles of Community and Individuality. This idea of being as contractable gives Cusa's conception of reality a unique quality. For the Platonists, being meant possessing a certain form. With the Thomistic revolution the focus shifts from participating in one of a series of forms to participating in the existence of the Absolute. Cusa's idea of contraction, however, takes this idea of participation a bit further and brings two fundamental principles of being into operation.

The idea of contraction means that in order to be anything an entity must also be everything in a restricted (non-actual) manner. This relation of each being to the totality of being on an ontological level will be referred to as the principle of community. This principle is based upon the fact that each being is a contraction of being itself and, therefore, all beings are linked through their common source. It is imperative to note that the principle of community does not eliminate the uniqueness of the individual. For Cusa, each individual entity contracts being in a manner of which no other being is capable. It is the uniqueness of these individual contractions that makes each being itself and will be referred to as the principle of individuality. Thus, each entity has an inherent value which is unique to it alone (the principle of individuality).

Yet, simultaneously each entity is just as inherently related to the totality of being and through it to every other existing being (the principle of community). Cusa thereby establishes a metaphysics which allows for a harmonious diversity that permits each individual being to remain distinct from the whole, possessing a value which is uniquely its own; yet, Cusa's metaphysics also unites these separate beings on an ontological level in that each being is a contracted reflection of the whole.

The Implications of Formal Causality

This section on the dynamic nature of reality which flows from Cusa's conception of being will focus upon the interaction of being in terms of causality and some of its implications. One should also note that final causality will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter IV. The purpose

here is to show how the structure of being makes reality inherently interactive and dynamic, and that this dynamism is the product of the harmonious diversity of reality.

For Cusa, formal, efficient, and final causality are the three types of causality whose operation have prime importance for being. In *De Possest* Cusa claims that the Divine is the formal, efficient, and final cause of all. This is derived from the fact that God is the form of all things.[22] As the source of the forms of all beings, the Divine serves as their formal cause. Since the Divine creates both the form and the matter of which all beings are made It also serves as the efficient cause. It is worth noting that Cusa does not associate material causality with the Divine and this is further proof that it would be incorrect to interpret his thought in a pantheistic manner.

Finally, as the fulfillment of the potentiality of all beings the Divine serves also as the final cause of reality. Though formal cause is relatively static, since it creates its effect merely by its presence, efficient and final causality play a far more dynamic role. Final causality actively diffuses goodness and efficient causality communicates existence to its effect.[23]

Kenneth L. Schmitz points out in his work entitled: *The Gift: Creation* that the condition for a dynamic plurality of beings to exist is that they receive from others.[24] For Cusa, this dynamism is not solely the product of the Divine but extends to all of being. In *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusa asserts that by the mingling of elements new entities are constantly created.[25] This recombination of elements is not solely the work of formal causality, since in creating new entities that combine elements in new ways efficient causality is also operative. The dynamism of reality, however, is hardly limited to a mere recombination of elements. Each entity has inherent in its being an activity which in functioning contributes to the perfection of the whole in that it actualizes possibilities which would not otherwise be brought into existence.[26] As Jasper Hopkins points out, each existing thing in its functioning is of use to every other existing thing, even though it may not intentionally try to be so.[27]

An example of this can be seen in *De Dato Patris Luminum* where Cusa points out that the power of a seed to create a tree cannot be actualized without the light of the sun.[28] This example expresses two of the most fundamental principles of Cusa's dynamic conception of reality. The first principle is the interaction between beings. The seed cannot actualize its potential without the sun's action. The second principle is the creative capacity of being. In fulfilling its potential, the seed brings a new being into existence, which being in turn is itself creative. Furthermore, in fulfilling its potential the seed has contributed to the perfection of the whole. In this manner, the tree which the seed produces is the effect of the final causality operative in the universe. Thus one can see that, for Cusa, individual beings continue both to communicate existence and to diffuse goodness in a fashion similar to that by which their existence was initiated.

It is the principle of individuality which is most closely related to efficient and material causality. Material causality depends upon the potency of matter and like formal causality operates in a relatively passive manner in that a form is imposed upon it. Efficient causality requires individual beings; it would be impossible for it to operate without an agent to initiate its action and a patient for it to act upon. Final causality, however, is more related to the principle of community in that it is produced by the tendency toward act which exists in all beings based upon their achieving their end of approximating the Absolute. Formal causality is also linked to act and establishes bridges between individual beings by determining the appropriate manner for them to relate to one another. It achieves this effect by establishing the natures of these beings.

The Unity of Being

In order for beings to interact with and reflect one another they must share some fundamental relationship. This section will examine the unity of reality which Cusa's conception of being makes possible as a response to the perennial philosophical problem of the one and the many. In order to elaborate Cusa's understanding of the harmonious diversity of reality it will distinguish four interrelated types of unity which exist within Cusa's metaphysics. The first type is the singular unity which exists between act and potency within the individual and allows it to exist. The second is based upon the contractibility of being which allows for the whole of being to exist within each individual entity. The third is the total being of the universe. The fourth is the absolute unity of uncontracted being in which all distinctions coincide. Each type of unity will be treated in turn in order to illumine this central element of Cusa's metaphysical thought.

It is perhaps best to begin by noting that not all of Cusa's interpreters see him as having a fundamentally unified view of reality. Pauline Moffitt Watts, for example, concentrates upon some isolated elements within Cusa's thought and concludes that he finds the universe to be a place of fundamental discontinuity and estrangement in which man is a stranger condemned to exist in a state of metaphysical disjunction.[29] Watts does not seem to take account of the fact that the disjunctive elements within Cusa's thought exist within an overarching framework of unity. Much of Cusa's philosophy is based upon the Neo-Platonic idea that unity is a fundamental characteristic of being. In fact, in *De Docta Ignorantia,* Cusa plainly states that being and unity are essentially convertible terms.[30]

The Four Kinds of Unity in Cusa's Thought

Individual Unity. The first type of unity in Cusa's metaphysics is the individual unity of each particular existing being. This is in accord with the principle of identity. As Thomas McTighe points out, Cusa subscribes to the classical position that "A thing has being to the extent that it is one."[31] For Cusa, in order to exist, every being must be itself and, thereby, exclude every other being. This inherent individual unity seems to create a fundamental opposition between the various entities within reality.

Contracted Unity. Cusa resolves this opposition with the second type of unity expressed in his metaphysics and referred to here as contracted unity. This type of unity is in accord with the principle of community in which Cusa sees each individual being as a contraction of the totality of being. By the term contraction, Cusa means that each individual entity is a restricted image of the whole of being. Hence, Cusa creates a universal relationality between all entities in that by virtue of their ontological structure each entity is in itself a unique reflection of the same reality. Cusa thus forges an inherent existential bond between all entities and overcomes the opposition which the individual unity of each being seemingly created.

It is to this contracted unity that Cusa refers when he asserts that all beings exist within each thing.[32] In fact, as noted above, Cusa is quick to point out that he is not referring to any actual presence, since this would destroy the individual unity which he sees as a necessary precondition for all being.[33] Hence, individual unity does not inhibit the unity of the whole. In fact, since each individual is inherently structured to contain the whole, the individual can only be itself by being, in a sense, all reality. Because of this, the individual does not exist in diametric opposition to the whole, but as its singular expression. In fact, through contracted unity the unity of the individual

enhances the unity of the whole in that the former is structured in such a way as to express the latter. In this way Cusa lays the groundwork for seeing unity as an harmonious expression of diversity.

The Unity of the Universe. The third type of unity is the unity of all being within the universe. It would be a grievous error to regard the unity of the universe as a whole to be nothing more than a simple aggregate with no internal relationship between its constituent elements, as in the case of a pile of stones. *De Docta Ignorantia* asserts that the relationship between the universe and its parts is analogous to that of universal humanity to a particular person in that the actual existence of the universal can exist only as contracted in the individual.[34] Likewise, the universe can exist only as it is contracted in its component parts. The universe for Cusa serves as something of a super-genus which cannot exist independently of its constituent elements, yet, through those elements the universe obtains real existence. It is not a randomly assembled conglomerate, but a unified whole expressive of the reality of the Absolute from which it derives its being.

Absolute Unity. For Cusa the unity of the Absolute is, and can be, only absolute unity which is devoid of all distinction and all plurality. Cusa makes this point clearly in *De Docta Ignorantia* where he asserts that the nature of the Absolute is such that it excludes all greater of lesser degrees.[35] This is because the Absolute is actually all that it can possibly be and, therefore, its being cannot be added to or diminished.[36] Because the Absolute is the source of all being in the finite world, the distinctions of the finite world do not apply within it. It is to this that Cusa is referring when he writes in *De Visione Dei*that "Nothing exists outside of God but in God these things are not other than God."[37] This is because for Cusa "otherness in unity is without otherness because it is unity."[38] Thus one can see that the nature of unity for the Absolute is significantly different than that in the finite realm. Whereas unity in the finite world requires diversity in order, more accurately to proclaim the whole, diversity in the Absolute would be both superfluous and impossible.[39] The unity of the Absolute is a pure and simple unity where all the distinctions of the finite world coincide.

For Cusa, the absolute oneness of the Divine precedes all the oppositions of finite being and, by doing so, unites them as the source from which each derives its existence. The Absolute exists in a transcendent and undifferentiated manner; thereby it unites all opposition ontologically by being the ultimate cause of their existence. The oppositions of finite beings can conflict only on the individual level.

In this fashion, Cusa resolves the tension between the inherent unity of individuals which provides the basis for the principle of individuality and the inherent unity of Being as a whole which is the foundation of the principle of community. This resolution is possible only because Cusa sees unity as being enhanced by diversity, rather than destroyed by it. This derives from Cusa's understanding of the nature of being as cohesive and unified, yet made up of a variety of distinct individuals. Each individual is a contraction of the whole; though all are interrelated, each remains distinct by expressing the whole in its own unique fashion. Thus, a diverse variety of particular expressions more perfectly reflect the nature of the whole than could any single expression or uniform series of expressions, since variety is more comprehensive than uniformity.

Unity and the Hierarchy of Being

These same principles have additional metaphysical meaning for unity in relation to the hierarchy of being. According to Arthur O. Lovejoy, Cusa sees the order of being as existing in a single, perfect, continuous chain where the highest species of one genus is neatly linked to the lowest species of the next genus.[40] This type of hierarchy creates a unity which is entirely extrinsic. Each species is directly related only to those species which are directly above and directly below it, but shares no immediate relationship with the remainder of the species upon the chain. Unity of this sort, however, can be recognized only from the outside.

Other interpreters of Cusa's thought claim that he rejects the hierarchical structure of universe entirely. Each individual being is equal to every other being, and none is any more perfect than the other.[41] Cusa's view of reality, though innately cohesive, is hardly so egalitarian as to eliminate entirely the ranking of the various types of being. Cusa's writings leave absolutely no doubt that he accepted the traditional hierarchical order of being, running from the highest and most complete form of being to the lowest. In a work entitled *Idiota de Mente*, Cusa makes this point completely clear. He asserts here that rational creatures are more perfect than non-rational ones, that animal existents are more perfect than vegetative ones, and vegetative ones more perfect than non-animate ones.[42] Cusa reiterates this view in *De Dato Patris Luminum* where he asserts that corporeal being is fulfilled by animate being, animate being by intellectual being, and intellectual being by truth.[43]

This hierarchy of being sheds a good deal of light upon various issues in Cusa's thought. Cusa's gradation of being descends to the degree that an entity has its existence rooted in matter and is, thereby, made more passive.[44] The more perfect the entity, the more actual and active its existence. Cusa's gradation of being also provides evidence that the distinctions between individuals cannot be solely the product of accidental differences. A stone is not merely different from a man, but decidedly inferior to him inasmuch as the stone exists in a more passive manner.

The concept of a hierarchy of being provides a secure foundation upon which can be erected various concepts of natural order.[45] The conceptualization of hierarchy in the Christian world was primarily the work of Pseudo-Dionysius and St. Augustine.[46] Pseudo-Dionysius is of particular importance since it was he who first incorporated Hellenistic speculation into the Christian doctrine of salvation. By adopting Greek philosophy, Pseudo-Dionysius gains a basis for the hierarchical structure of reality in which the sensible and intelligible realms are regarded as separate and somewhat antithetic. Pseudo-Dionysius bridges this gap with the nine orders of angels and has all things in both the sensible and intelligible realms emanating from the Divine, and then returning thereto.[47] Cusa does not rearrange the sequential order of the hierarchy, but his understanding of being enables him to interpret the relationship of individuals within it in a profoundly different way.

Human Nature and the Hierarchy of Being

Cusa's most obvious alteration in the hierarchy is to see humanity, not a series of angelic orders, binding the intelligible to the sensible realm. Because Cusa equates unity with being, his ranking of man as the pinnacle of the natural world has important implications for his understanding of the meaning of unity. One can see clearly that the term unity does not refer to a simple uniformity when applied to finite being. Inanimate corporeal being, which is the most uniform type of being, is placed at the very lowest level of the hierarchy. Corporeal being, because of the exclusive singularity of its nature, exists in opposition to every other being. This exclusive

singularity means that corporeal being embraces only itself and cannot contain the perfections of animate and rational being. Thus, unity for Cusa is epitomized by the harmonious diversity of which human nature is representative.

Human nature embraces the entire spectrum of finite reality from the rational to the corporeal. It possesses an even greater unity than that of the universe, not because of what it unifies, but because of the way in which this unity exists. Humanity does not simply contain diverse types of being as does the universe, but more adequately reconciles these distinctions into a single cohesive nature. This is because, as previously has been stated the universe functions as something of a super-genus which contains a variety of individuals, each possessed of its own particular form. The human being, however, reconciles all the diversity of the universe under the single form of human nature within each individual which possesses that form. In short, the unity of man is no more inclusive than the unity of the universe, but its distinctions are far less pronounced. Within the universe, the different natures contained exist in a somewhat divided manner, which is not the case for human nature.

This relates to the far more subtle and profound analysis Cusa makes in his interpretation of the hierarchy of being. As traditionally articulated, the hierarchy ranks the beings of the universe in a divisive manner where each being is exclusively itself and shares no internal relationship with any of the other beings in the chain. Cusa accepts the hierarchy as quite compatible with his understanding of the individual unity of existing things in accord with the principle of individuality as discussed in the previous sub-section. In short, each being is itself and thereby may be graded in relation to other beings.

However, for Cusa the principle of individuality is based upon each entity being a unique contraction of the whole and, therefore, implies the principle of community which relates all entities as being contractions of the same whole. In this manner one can see clearly that each entity possesses not merely individual unity but also a contracted unity through which it is related to all other beings. It is this inter-relatedness of all being which is Cusa's most profound contribution to the understanding of the hierarchy of being. For Cusa, each being not only is itself, but, as itself, is ontologically related to every other being.

The principle of community is far more enhanced in the human than in a stone. By virtue of the diversity of the human's nature one possesses a greater potentiality and is, therefore, more ontologically related to the totality of being. In respect to the principle of identity, however, human nature is not superior to that of the stone since either type of being is just as much an individual as any other.

Thus it would be misleading to depict Cusa's view of reality as a straight hierarchical chain. Though he does accept the hierarchy of being he stresses a complex and dynamic interrelationship of all reality.[48] The hierarchy requires distinct individual beings which can be ranked in respect to their natures. However, if one seeks to emphasize the dynamic relationship between these beings one must find a way to transcend the hierarchical distinctions of the universe. This is possible for Cusa precisely because he integrates the principle of individuality, which allows for a hierarchical gradation of being, with the principle of community, which relates all being to each being.

Cusa's Interpretation of the Chain of Being

In a characteristically paradoxical manner Cusa's attempt to reorient philosophy in a more Platonic direction entails a rejection of the doctrine of the separate realm of forms to serve as external archetypes for individual realities; this had been perhaps the single most formative

concept of Platonism.[49] For Cusa, the existence of a plurality of external exemplars would be an absurdity since each object which emulated that form would have this as its infinitely true exemplar. That would result in creating a plurality of infinitely true exemplars, but infinite truth can be only singular in nature and multiple exemplars are both unnecessary and impossible. In the *Idiota de Mente,* Cusa writes that,

> the infinite form is only one and utterly simple. It is reflected in every single thing which can be subject to form as its perfectly apt paradigm. In this sense precisely, it will be correct that there are not many separate exemplars and ideas of things.[50]

Because of this relationship between the infinite form and finite reality, the physical universe can no longer be depicted as a straightforward series of stages; but becomes a much more complex arrangement based upon constant existential interrelations. Thus one can see that for Cusa the universe is a place "which exists only in manyness and in which each particular thing contracts the universe to be that thing."[51] The only reason this is possible is because the principle of community allows Cusa's view of finite unity as enhanced rather than destroyed by diversity; thus, distinctions need not necessarily result in fragmentation. In this manner, Cusa is able to construct a universe where each thing retains its own exclusive identity and, yet, is inherently linked to the rest of the universe. The principle of individuality does not contradict the principle of community, but is its consistent expression.

This provides the basis for Cusa's uncompromising insistence on the presence of unity as pervasive throughout reality upon an individual level, as well as for being as a whole. Cusa's dynamic conception of being which sees all existents as inherently active is closely related to his ideas on unity. This is because this unity is premised upon the dynamic nature of being, and only within such a unity would this type of dynamism be operative. This view of reality is fundamentally incompatible with the traditional medieval chain-of-being.

Other commentators are inclined to ascribe to Cusa a view of reality which is far more egalitarian. According to them, Cusa sees the universe as being analogous to a mosaic in which each individual entity contributes equally to the beauty and complexity of the whole.

The fundamental drawback to both the mosaic and the chain-of-being metaphors is that both are static and do not address the interactive nature of reality. For both of these metaphors, each component shares no internal relationship and has no direct effect upon the other components. The relationship between individuals is reduced to simple external juxtaposition. In failing to address this interactive nature, both of these metaphors point to an extrinsic unity where each individual is merely a component of the whole, rather than a reflection of it.

What is called for is a metaphor which binds the individual entities within reality in an internal manner. In this manner, all existing entities are ontologically linked and, therefore, influence the mode of existence of each separate entity. This reality has an inherent and cohesive unity, and through this unity each entity engages in the dynamic action of shaping the nature of existence.

The Trinity as a Paradigm for Cusa's Interpretation of Being. A more appropriate metaphor for Cusa's understanding of the relation between the one and the many in reference to being is that of the Trinity. It should be noted that this is not an attempt to shift the focus to a more theological realm. One must recognize, however, that Cusa himself would not accept the sharp separation of theology from philosophy characteristic of more modern thinkers. In examining Cusa's philosophy one must be sensitive to hermeneutic considerations and try to place it within the cultural context

in which it was written. Thus one may legitimately use the theological concepts which Cusa accepted in order to elaborate the philosophical system which he saw as being entirely compatible and to some extent, expressive.

Just as the Trinity unifies the three distinct divine persons into a single God, the diverse multiplicity of entities is united within the whole of being. The three persons of the Trinity are consubstantial in nature in that each is equally God, yet, at the same time each person retains something peculiar to itself. Such distinctions are derived not from the opposition, but from the unique way in which each relates to the other. In respect to finite entities, each participates in the one source of all being in accord with the principle of community: in this sense they may be said to be consubstantial with each other. However, in accordance with the principle of individuality, each individual being participates in Being as a whole in its own unique way. Though the distinctions of individual entities are not simply distinctions in relation, but distinctions of being, these are based upon the way in which each individual relates to Being as a whole and to every other individual being as well.

The way in which individual beings interact with each other is in some sense analogous to the way in which the Trinity is active within itself, with the Son proceeding from the Father, and the Spirit proceeding from both the Father and the Son. In both cases, each constituent being partially defines the nature of the others and also creates new beings. Also, since the Father precedes the Son and both the Father and the Son precede the Spirit, one may in this sense speak of the Father as having a certain priority over the Son, and the Son as having a certain priority over the Spirit. This is reflected in the hierarchial ranking Cusa sees within being. But, whereas the distinctions within the Trinity are purely relational, those within being are based upon differences in being. Because of this, the hierarchy of being is based not upon relational priority but on a far more ontological basis, namely, the existential nature of the entities involved.

The persons of the Trinity may be interpreted as an expression of the principle of individuality. Each person of the Trinity is relationally distinct from the others and is, therefore, unique. Because of these relational distinctions one can organize the persons of the Trinity in a fashion which in some sense is hierarchical. One must bear in mind, however, that the principle of community is also in effect and this binds the persons of the Trinity into the unity of the Godhead of which each is uniquely reflective.

The relationship of the persons within the Trinity suggests many implications for the relationship of act and potency in reference to finite being. The persons of the Trinity express the infinite according to the nature of that particular person. The Trinity as a whole, however, can be viewed as actuality in that it unites the persons of the Trinity within the Godhead. It is within the Trinity that the component persons realize their existence, and through the individual persons of the Trinity that the Godhead realizes its existence. Within the Trinity each person is an expression of the Godhead, and within each person the Trinity is expressive of that person. In this sense, each person of the Trinity is unique and distinct from the other two, but at the same time all three persons are related in the unity of the Godhead that each expresses in its own manner.

The unity of the Trinity manages to overcome the isolationist imagery of both a mosaic and a chain-of-being, where each entity is essentially separated from the others. It does not do this at the expense of individual identity, in that each remains easily and genuinely distinguishable from the whole. The main advantage of the Trinitarian over the mosaic and the chain-of-being metaphors is that within the Trinity unity is not an extrinsic quality which can be recognized only when viewed from the outside and examined as a whole. From an internal perspective, each particular tile in the mosaic or link in the chain is self-contained and does not see itself as the whole since

nothing within it points to the great complexity to which it serves merely as a contributor. In the Trinity, however, unity is an intrinsic characteristic since the distinctiveness of each person is based upon its real relation to the others so that each individual within the Trinity inevitably is reflective of the whole.

The Nature of Knowledge for Cusa

The purpose of this section is to examine the manner in which one comes to know being according to Cusa, with particular attention to the way in which one is able to understand the concept of unity. It will lay the groundwork for understanding human insight, not only into the nature of being which has been discussed in this chapter, but also into the Divine, which will be the topic of Chapter III. This section will concern also how one can know individual entities and how, from this, one can then gain some degree of insight into the nature of being as a whole.

Discursive Reasoning

Cusa sees two different types of knowledge. He calls the first discursive reasoning, this is the lower form of knowledge and is based upon comparison. When the mind encounters something which it does not know it compares that with the things it does know and notes the differences and similarities. While in this manner the unknown becomes known, this knowledge is always approximate[52] for, "our [human] intellect which is not the truth, never grasps the truth with such precision that it could not be comprehended with infinitely greater precision."[53] For Cusa, humans having a decidedly finite mind, cannot know even the most inconsequential grain of sand in an absolute sense. No matter how accurate the ideas in such a mind, they fall short of the absolute truth; hence, a more accurate idea always is possible. Cusa notes that the comparisons of discursive reasoning are grounded in empirical sensation, pointing out that knowledge cannot completely disregard the material conditions of things since without them the mind could form no image of reality whatsoever. However, the mind cannot rest content with knowing these material conditions; the more the mind abstracts from them the more reliable its knowledge.[54]

Intellection

The second, higher, type of knowledge is called intellection. In respect to the infinite, one cannot make comparisons;[55] there is no proportion between the finite and the Absolute, there is no known thing with which one can compare the unknown Absolute. Cusa compares human attempts to know the Absolute "to owls trying to look into the sun."[56] The human mind, like the owl's eye is suited by nature to operate in the murky world of finite reality. Like the daylight, the overwhelming brilliance of the Absolute is beyond the mind's capacity to comprehend; like the owl's eye is rendered insensate by such brilliance. However, the mind's natural desire to know the Absolute cannot be frustrated. Therefore, when it fails to grasp the Absolute, the mind turns upon itself and, in coming to know its own limits, enters a state of learned ignorance.[57] In *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusa asserts that the better a person knows his or her ignorance the greater his or her learning.[58] Cusa reaffirms this point in *De Possest*, where he asserts that the more the mind understands its inability to conceive the Absolute, the greater the mind: the learned man is the man who knows he does not know.[59]

Thus, though discursive reason fails to comprehend the Absolute, one has another mental faculty more suited to dealing with the Absolute. This faculty may be referred to as intellection and is an intuitive capacity by which one can formulate symbols and metaphors to explicate the Divine. Eugene Rice describes the distinction between discursive reasoning and intellection in his article entitled "Nicholas of Cusa's Idea of Wisdom." He points out that for Cusa the discursive reason is analogous to a traveller walking down a road, who can only see the sights the road offers one at a time or in succession as one moves along. The intellect, however, is like a person atop a mountain tower whose vision can encompass the entire valley at once.[60] Though the latter does not have the particular knowledge of the one on the road, he or she does have a broad understanding of the valley as a whole. Thus, the process of intellection can give no particular knowledge of the Absolute, but recognizes that there is something which lies beyond the finite and is not subject to distinction. In short, the process of intellection is the use of imaginative human powers to reveal what the Absolute is like, once one knows that it is beyond the reach of discursive reason.

Cusa's understanding of human knowledge reflects the principles of individuality and community. Discursive reason, as comparative, operates in accord with the principle of individuality. It examines separate individual entities, and by noting the differences and similarities between them provides one with knowledge. Intellection, however, is related to the principle of community in that it does not compare entities but seeks to give insight into being as a whole.

Whereas discursive reason is analytic in character and gives knowledge of the component parts of being, intellection is something else entirely. For Cusa, intellection is the only truly authentic mode of knowing because it provides one not merely with knowledge of the various parts of reality, but with a vision of reality as a whole. Intellection, for Cusa, is not merely a type of synthetic knowledge but much more for it knows not merely how things fit together, but all the multifarious possibilities which are open to being. In short, intellection depends not upon the number of things which are known, but upon the imaginative thrust of the mind. Therefore, it is not a matter of possessing any particular knowledge, but an awareness of the nature of reality as a whole. Intellection thereby provides persons with insight into unity and, hence, a clearer understanding of the nature of being. In this manner, Cusa sees intellection as completing the partial knowledge of discursive reasoning by unifying it into a cohesive world view.

Strictly speaking, the human intellect can never attain precise knowledge of the Absolute, but only a certain rather attenuated awareness. Cusa describes this relationship between the human mind and the truth, either absolute or finite, as analogous to that which exists between a circle and a polygon inscribed within it. The more angles the polygon possesses the more closely it will approximate the shape of the circle. However, regardless of the number of angles the polygon may possess, it can never match exactly the shape of the circle. Thus one can see that for Cusa all knowledge is essentially conjectural. This is particularly the case for discursive thought which, because it is essentially comparative, can never produce exact knowledge since no two beings are exactly alike.

This does not mean that Cusa reduces the status of human knowledge to that of an arbitrary guess or random hypothesis. For Cusa, human knowledge consists in a rough conformation of an idea to the reality it represents. No finite mind is capable of formulating an idea which is so precise that it precludes the possibility of the existence of another idea which is more exact. Thus, one is denied final knowledge even of finite entities. On the other hand, though the human mind can never attain absolute knowledge, it can attain knowledge which, though partial and incomplete, nonetheless is valid.[61] Hence, human knowledge of the finite realm is relatively reliable, but is

always capable of improvement. In respect to the Absolute human knowledge not only is capable of being improved upon, but is basically unreliable since there is nothing with which it can make appropriate comparisons.

Notes

1. *Nicolo Cusano Agli Inizi del Mondo Moderno* (Florence, Italy: 1970), p. 5.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 378.
3. Nicholas of Cusa, "Trialogus De Possest" in *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*, Jasper Hopkins, ed. (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, l986), p. 125.
4. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, Germain Heron, trans. (London: Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1954), p. 95.
5. *Nicolo Cusano Agli Inizi del Mondo Moderno*, p. 378.
6. Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (New York: Scribner's, 1937), p. 539.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Nicholas of Cusa, "Trialogus De Possest" in *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* p. 147.
9. Nicholas of Cusa, "De Dato Patris Luminum" in *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysic of Contraction*, Jasper Hopkins, ed. (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, l983), p. 118.
10. Nicholas of Cusa, *The Vision of God*, Emma Gurney Salter, trans. (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1960), p. 40.
11. Armand A. Maurer, *Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 320.
12. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, p. 88.
13. Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysic of Contraction* (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, l983), p. 103.
14. *Nicolo Cusano Agli Inizi del Mondo Moderno*, p. 326.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 327.
16. Hopkins, p. 104.
17. Nicholas of Cusa, p. 81.
18. Karsten Harries, "Cusanus and the Platonic Idea", *New Scholasticism*, 37 (1963), 197.
19. Nicholas of Cusa, p. 82.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
22. Nicholas of Cusa, "Trialogus De Possest" in *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*, p. 81.
23. Theodore J. Kondoleon, "Exemplary Causality in the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas" (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Philosophical Studies, No. 229, 1967), p. 151.
24. Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982), p. 80.
25. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, p. 119.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
27. Hopkins, 80.
28. Nicholas of Cusa, "De Dato Patris Luminum" in *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysic of Contraction*, p. 116.

29. Pauline Moffitt Watts, *Nicholas Cusanus: A Fifteenth Century Vision of Man* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982), p. 25.

30. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, p. 90.

31. Thomas P. McTighe, "The Meaning of the Couple, `Complicatio-Explicatio' in the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa," *The Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 32 (1958), 209.

32. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, p. 88.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

35. *Ibid.*, p. l2.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

37. Nicholas of Cusa, *The Vision of God*, p. 66.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

39. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, p. 15.

40. Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 80.

41. Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner, eds., *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1988), p. 552.

42. Nicholas of Cusa, *De Idiota de Mente: The Layman About Mind*, Clyde Lee Miller, trans. (New York: Alaris Books, l979), p. 51.

43. Nicholas of Cusa, "De Dato Patris Luminum" in *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysic of Contraction*, p. 127.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Marion Leathers Kuntz and Paul Grimly Kuntz,eds., *Jacobs Ladder and the Tree of Life: Concepts of Hierarchy and the Great Chain of Being* (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, l988), p. 52.

46. Lovejoy, p. 65.

47. Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963), p. 9.

48. Schmitt and Skinner, p. 585.

49. Dorothy Koeningsberger, *Renaissance Man and Creative Thinking* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, l979), p. 105.

50. Nicholas of Cusa, *De Idiota de Mente: The Layman About Mind*, Clyde Lee Miller, trans. (New York: Alaris Books, 1979), p. 47.

51, *Nicolo Cusano Agli Inizi del Mondo Moderno*, p. 84.

52. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, p. 7.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

59. Nicholas of Cusa, "Trialogus De Possest" in *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*, p. 115.

60. Eugene Rice, "Nicholas of Cusa's Idea of Wisdom", *Traditio*, 13 (1957) 358.

61. Henry Bett, *Nicholas of Cusa* (London: Meuthen and Company Ltd., 1932), p. 180.

Chapter III
The Nature of the Divine

Where the previous chapter concentrated upon unity with regard to being as such, this chapter shifts the focus to the Absolute. It will be divided into three sections. The first section will discuss absolute unity in reference to the coincidence of opposites. The second section will examine in what sense it is possible to have insight into this type of unity. The final section will examine the various metaphors and paradoxes which Cusa uses to explicate the Divine. As we shall see, the principles of individuality and community play a fundamental role for understanding the nature of the Absolute and how it creates the harmonious diversity of reality. An overview of this may be seen in the accompanying diagram.

Absolute Unity and the Coincidence of Opposites

Here we will first discuss the nature of the Absolute unity of the Divine, then outline the way in which the maximum and the minimum coincide within the Absolute, and end by discussing the various options available for interpreting what Cusa means by the phrase "coincidence of opposites". As the coincidence of opposites is perhaps the single most characteristic concept in all of Cusa's philosophy, its clear understanding is indispensable for any inquiry into the nature of the Absolute in his thought. Furthermore, since Cusa's vision of the Absolute is the focal point of his metaphysics and conditions everything else he has to say about reality, this section clearly has special importance for understanding his thought.

The Nature of Absolute Unity

In order to understand the nature of the Absolute one must first understand Its unambiguously unified and infinite nature. The Absolute for Cusa is all that it possibly can be; therefore, it exists without any distinction between actuality and potentiality.[1] It is this ability to be all that it is capable of being that separates the Absolute from the rest of reality and makes it entirely unique, in that it alone is infinite. Cusa makes this clear in several places in *De Visione Dei*. He writes that "in infinite being, the potential being of all things is infinite being itself."[2] This is because "the infinite is not liable to limitation but abideth absolute; if aught could be limited in infinity it would not be infinite."[3] Cusa elaborates upon this distinction between the finite and the infinite when he writes, "a line ceaseth to be a line when it hath no quantity or end. An infinite line is not a line, but a line at infinity is infinity" and "the infinite cannot be limited unto anything so as to become aught other than infinite. Infinite goodness is not goodness but infinity."[4] Clearly for Cusa there is a sharp distinction between the finite and the Absolute.

The Coincidence of the Maximum and the Minimum

For Cusa, the oneness of the Absolute precedes all the opposition and differentiation of finite being. One can see the way in which this coincidence of opposites works in Chapter IV of *De Docta Ignorantia* where Cusa discusses the coincidence of the maximum and the minimum within the Absolute. Cusa writes that because the Absolute is all that it can be it is simultaneously both as great and as small as it can be. Because neither the minimum nor the maximum can be less than

it is (i.e. each is all that it can be), Cusa asserts that the two are identical within the Absolute.[5] Cusa sees this as becoming even clearer when one confines oneself strictly to the realm of quantity. The maximum quantity is infinitely great while the minimum quantity is infinitely small. If one then removes the notion of quantity leaving only the maximum and the minimum, both are revealed to be the same in that both are superlatives. Because all finite opposition is transcended within the Absolute Cusa writes "the absolute maximum, in consequence, is all things and, whilst being all, is none of them; in other words it is at once the maximum and minimum of being."[6]

It is admittedly somewhat contradictory for Cusa to confine himself to quantity and then abstract from quantity, but this does not diminish his fundamental point that the Absolute embracing both the maximum and the minimum reconciles the distinctions between them. Henry Bett seems to miss this point when he criticizes Cusa's argument for the coincidence of the maximum and the minimum within the Absolute on the grounds that it requires one to dismiss quantity as irrelevant and without quantity the terms "maximum" and "minimum" become meaningless.[7] As Julie C. Norman points out, Cusa has no desire to imply that the maximum and the minimum are equivalent in terms of quantity.[8] What Cusa is trying to express is that both terms are absolutes in that they cannot be added to or subtracted from. To add to the maximum would mean that it was not originally maximum, i.e. all that it could be, while to subtract from it would mean that it was no longer the maximum.

A similar argument can be made for the minimum. For Cusa the absolute minimum and absolute maximum coincide in that both are ultimates on a continuum beyond which it is not possible to go. Cusa's own words at the end of Chapter IV support this view. There Cusa freely admits that he is not using the terms maximum or minimum in reference to any quantity of mass or force. Cusa speaks of the maximum and the minimum as "an absolutely transcendent value embracing all things in their absolute simplicity."[9]

The absolute maximum and absolute minimum represent not merely individual entities which serve as terminating points in a series, but expressions of being which cannot properly be placed within the order of magnitude. In short, the absolute maximum and absolute minimum cannot be increased or decreased because they represent the very concept of magnitude.[10]Absolute maximum and absolute minimum is that by which all relative quantities receive their magnitude. Cusa accounts for the Absolute's resolution of all the oppositions of finite reality by making the Absolute the very source from which all such opposition is derived.

Interpreting the Coincidence of Opposites

In his essay on Nicholas of Cusa, Ewert Cousins describes three ways of interpreting the concept of the coincidence of opposites, each of which has very different implications with respect to unity.

The first interpretation is monistic and emphasizes unity. Here all distinctions are dismissed as mere illusions with no genuine reality of their own. All opposition is eliminated leaving nothing but a single undifferentiated unity. Strictly speaking, referring to this view as a coincidence of opposites is a bit misleading since it entirely eliminates all opposition, leaving nothing but a complete coincidence.[11]

The second interpretation of the coincidence of opposites is one of juxtaposition. This retains the opposition within reality, but does so at the expense of true unity. In this view, the coincidence is nothing more than an external juxtaposition creating a very attenuated unity which is similar to

that espoused by such ancient Atomists as Democritus. Thus, the basic components of the universe exist as fundamentally separate and discrete units with no internal relationship.[12]

The third interpretation of the coincidence of opposites is the most genuine in that it simultaneously retains both its unity and its opposition. The opposites truly do coincide and yet, nonetheless, continue to exist in a separate manner. This interpretation not only refuses to obliterate the distinctions within reality but, in fact, intensifies them in "a coincidence of mutually affirming complementarity."[13] In this view, the opposites complement each other in a union which mutually intensifies the individuality of each. An example of this perspective can most clearly be seen in the Taoist concept of Ying-Yang or, in a Western context, in the Incarnation where Christ is a hypostatic union of both God and man. According to Cousins, Cusa's conception of the coincidence of opposites is a hybrid of the monistic and complementary interpretations.[14]

It is difficult to determine precisely to which interpretation Cusa would subscribe. His monistic tendency is exhibited in his assertion that the undifferentiated unity of the Absolute transcends and reconciles the polarities of the finite world.[15] On the other hand, the complementary interpretation of the coincidence of opposites often seems most accurately to fit Cusa's thought when he is discussing the relationship between the Absolute and the finite, particularly, in respect to their union in Christ.[16] Since Cusa's Christological thought plays such a central role in his philosophy one might be tempted to affirm that Cusa's idea of the coincidence of opposites is best interpreted as a coincidence of complementarity.

Perhaps the best argument for a purely complementary interpretation of the coincidence of opposites is grounded upon Cusa's use of the not-other as a principle of identity. According to this view, finite reality can exist only by being itself, i.e. by being finite as opposed to being infinite. This assertion, however, is valid only provided one regards finite being as the antithesis of Absolute being, rather than as something both unfolded from the Absolute and also reflective thereof. Likewise, the purely monistic view also is found wanting since Cusa continually affirms the clear separation between the Absolute and the finite throughout his writings. Cusa affirms that the finite world possesses its own genuine reality, although that reality is dependent upon the Absolute.

Ultimately, Cousin's interpretation of Cusa's coincidence of opposites as a hybrid between the monistic and complementary views seems to be the most valid since Cusa's view of reality requires both a principle of individuality as well as one of community. The principle of community is in accord with the monistic element in Cusa's thought in that all reality is a contraction of the Absolute and possesses nothing which was not derived from the Absolute. The principle of individuality, however, is in accord with Cusa's understanding of the complementary. This is because the principle of individuality allows for a diversity where each being is unique and through its uniqueness is an indispensable contributor to the whole. Because Cusa retains both the principle of individuality and the principle of community he can construct a vision of reality that allows for a harmonious diversity where each being is possessed of an inherent value, yet, all of these beings are ontologically related to each other.

Within Cusa's metaphysics the Absolute permeates all finite being and provides the ground for its existence. The finite cannot be said truly to complement the Absolute in that the finite can contain nothing which was not derived from the Absolute. On the other hand, Cusa gives the finite world a genuine existence which though dependent upon the Absolute can hardly be properly incorporated into it.

This has important implications for the topics of dynamism and unity. If one interpreted Cusa's coincidence in purely monistic terms there would be little room for any dynamic activity. Within

a monistic structure, the only action of which the one is capable is self-modification. Since there is nothing other than the one, it cannot act in a truly creative fashion by creating beings other than itself. In terms of unity, the monistic structure of reality permits only uniformity, since there is only one being in existence. The only diversity is on the level of the modifications of the one and can never achieve an ontological status.

Likewise, the solely complementary interpretation of the coincidence of opposites would create a reality faced with similar problems. In terms of dynamism there is plenty of interaction between beings; however, the idea of creative activity is precluded on the grounds that creative action requires one entity to impart being to another. One must bear in mind that this is true not only for creation but for all causal action. In order for this to occur, the caused entity cannot possess anything with which the causal entity did not endow it. To the extent that one entity complements another, one must be independent of the other and possess qualities the other lacks. With regard to unity, the complementary structure of reality creates a true diversity of individual beings, but the unity is merely an aggregate of the sum total of these diverse beings. There is no true sense of wholeness where, if a particular element were missing, its absence would be noticeable.

Only by interpreting the coincidence of opposites in a way which is partially monistic and partially complementary can one make sense of Cusa's philosophy as a whole. By combining these two interpretations one can create a structure of reality where truly dynamic action is possible. The One is capable of creating a diverse plurality of beings, each of which is inherently different from Itself. This view is not entirely complementary in that the created entities are not independent of the One and can possess their perfections only by participating in its perfection. On the other hand, it is not entirely monistic in that the One creates real beings which are other than Itself, rather than mere modifications of Itself.

The integration of the monistic and complementary interpretations have similar consequences in respect to unity. Cusa's concept of unity is built upon principles both of individuality and of community and, therefore, sees diversity as an enhancing rather than an inhibiting factor. In accord with the principle of individuality, each separate entity is regarded by Cusa as a particular contraction of the whole. A diverse plurality of such contractions can more perfectly express that whole than possibly could any series of beings. Cusa's thought manages to synthesize the diversity inherent in the complementary view through the principle of individuality with the unity which dominates the monistic perspective through the principle of community. Cusa does this by making all reality a contraction of the Absolute which creates a unity of all being through a common source and archetype. However, Cusa maintains also that each individual contraction takes place in a manner which is unique to it, whereby it is made indispensable to the whole. Thus, though a plurality of individual beings exist which is consistent with the complementary view, these beings are derived from and are reflective of the One which is consistent with the monistic view.

Human Knowledge of the Divine

Since we have already discussed the absolute unity of the Divine, the purpose of this section is to show to what extent the finite mind may be said to know such an entity. This section will deal with that question in two steps. The first step will discuss the degree to which the human mind can attain knowledge of the Absolute. The second step will examine two of the names which Cusa applies to the Divine and why he does so. The importance of this section lies in the fact that as Cusa's philosophy is, in essence, an attempt to express the Absolute, its understanding must focus upon interpreting correctly what is said about the Absolute.

The Limitations of Human Knowledge of the Divine

For Cusa the ability of the human mind to grasp the unity of the Absolute is extremely limited. This is because the human mind operates essentially according to principles of discursive reasoning and can, therefore, gain knowledge only by comparing the known to the unknown. Since the human mind knows nothing which can adequately be compared to the Absolute it can never know absolute unity as it exists in itself. This, however, does not terminate man's ability to inquire into the nature of absolute unity.

One should bear in mind that Cusa is not an early existentialist, but a Neo-Platonist with mystical inclinations. His response to man's inability to comprehend the Absolute is, therefore, not one of "existential liberation, romantic longing and heroic resignation" but the pursuit of a mystical vision which can be attained by devout religious belief.[17] It is through this mystical vision that one can gain a certain awareness of the Absolute and the unity which it possesses. One must also note that Cusa never doubts the fact that the Absolute is intelligible, but merely asserts the human inability to comprehend its nature. Therefore, Cusa does not simply doubt what can be said about the Absolute, but formulates a rule concerning what cannot be said about it.[18] Thus, man need not abandon his attempt to comprehend absolute unity. In fact, Cusa encourages this attempt so long as in doing so one realizes that this attempt can yield only approximations of the Absolute and in no manner reveal its true nature.[19]

This ability to approximate the nature of the Absolute has profound implications upon one's inner nature. In respect to the Absolute, one remains always in a state of relative ignorance, but his situation never degenerates into one of total despair. This is because it would be impossible for one to desire what is entirely unknown, as Cusa himself points out.[20]

Luis Martinez-Gomez correctly asserts that "to renounce the goal [knowledge of the divine] because it is unattainable would be to renounce the most profound impulse of our [humankind's] living spirit. Here is the source of our interior desire (*principium mentalis desiderii*) which every mind seeks and it is also its crown and end."[21] It is simply not possible for one to desire anything other than this or settle for less.

Many important epistemological considerations also must be taken into account. Cusa's position on the reliability of human knowledge of the Absolute is perhaps best summed up by Ernst Cassirer who writes that, "If human knowledge can reach non-knowledge [i.e. approximation] of the Absolute it thereby gains knowledge of knowledge itself. It does not grasp absolute unity in its pure `whatness' but it does grasp itself as something different from the unity; that is to say, it does grasp itself in its 'complete otherness'."[22] Cassirer then goes on to point out that this consciousness of the difference between finite and absolute implies some sort of mediation of that difference, but this does not place the infinite in proportion to the finite. Only the Incarnation can completely bridge the chasm between these two types of reality.[23] Thus, in knowing that God is undifferentiated being in no way informs one of what God is any more than knowing that a horse is differentiated being informs one as to what it is. The difference is that one has considerable experience with finite being and can have a much more accurate picture of it than is the case for Absolute Being. In the words of Jasper Hopkins,

> to know that God is being itself is not tantamount to knowing what God is. Similarly, to conceive of God as inconceivable is, in an important sense, not to conceive of God. For though we conceive that God is inconceivable we do not

rightly conceive of what the inconceivable God either is or is like.[24]

In other words, though humans cannot know God, they know why they cannot know God.

The difficulty in conceiving the Absolute is easily understandable. To conceive of the Absolute as "X" is to restrict its being so much as to make this conception false and risk reducing the Absolute to some finite thing.[25] On the other hand, to conceive of the Absolute as "not X" is true but empty, in that it provides no positive information about the Divine and communicates nothing about Its nature. Even to conceive of the Absolute as being beyond "X," though true, is vague and imprecise.[26] Hence, for Cusa, conceiving the Absolute becomes important not because it will result in some specific knowledge about the Absolute, but because of the understanding of the limits of knowledge which such an effort produces. L. Martinez-Gomez compares the attempt to speak about the Absolute to a road which leads to a city: although the road upon which one travels is never the same as the city to which one travels, one can gain a glimpse of the city while following the road.[27]

Cusa's Appraisal of Traditional Theological Approaches

Frederick Copleston's opinion supports that of Martinez-Gomez. Copleston writes that "to apply definitive predicates to God is to liken Him to [finite] things and to bring Him into a relation of similarity with them."[28] This is what Cusa sees as the fundamental flaw of affirmative theology which, in attributing some qualities to the Divine, results in denying their contraries, therefore, it cannot adequately deal with a being whose unity is such that It exists without distinction. Cusa finds negative theology preferable to affirmative theology since by pointing out what the Absolute is not, it is less restrictive of God's being. Through negative theology one is enabled to gain some insight into the nature of absolute unity. Thus, though the human mind is incapable of discovering precisely what the absolute is like, it can know what the Absolute is not, i.e. that It is not subject to the distinctions of finite reality. Through this knowledge one can, to some degree, clarify one's notion of the Absolute through a process of elimination. Negative theology, however, is not in itself adequate for dealing with the human quest for knowledge of the Absolute.

This is why Cusa is unwilling entirely to abandon affirmative theology. To support this, Copleston correctly points out that God exists without distinction, transcends the realm of numbers, and cannot be called "one" in the sense of individual finite things. Nonetheless, as the Absolute is singular and the source of all the multiplicity of the finite world, it is not entirely inaccurate to refer to Him as the infinite One. In fact, it is, in a sense, more appropriate to refer to the Absolute as One than to do so with regard to any finite thing. This is because all finite things contain component parts (such as essence and existence) whereas in the Absolute all distinctions coincide. Human beings cannot, however, have any positive understanding of just what this infinite oneness entails. People quite naturally make positive assertions about the Divine and are justified in doing so as long as they realize that no positive statement can be made about the infinite which does not require a negative qualification. In other words, one can describe the Absolute as love so long as in making this assertion one realizes that the love of the Absolute is in no way like human love.

Thus, one can see that Cusa prefers negative theology to positive theology, but superior to both is what is referred to as copulative theology. Copulative theology combines both negative and positive theologies and conceives of God, in accord with the coincidence of opposites, as a being which is no particular thing.[29] Copulative theology, in its negative aspect, denies that any finite

quality can be predicated of the Absolute, while in its affirmative aspect it proclaims that the Absolute cannot be entirely distinct from any existing thing. Copulative theology is geared toward conceiving the Absolute as a coincidence of opposites since it refuses to equate the Divine with any particular thing and, yet, simultaneously relates It to each individual being.

In this way, the Absolute resolves the opposition which exists within finite being. One cannot point to any particular being and assert that this is God as opposed to every other being. At the same time, however, one also cannot assert that some particular being is excluded from and, therefore, independent of the Absolute. In other words, one should conceive of the Absolute as love, but only as infinite love which cannot be equated with the love that exists within the finite realm.

The principles of individuality and community which allow for an harmonious diversity provide the basis for Cusa's views on the various types of theology. The principle of individuality is in accord with negative theology in that in being itself each entity is unique and can be no other entity. Hence, no being can appropriately be compared to the Divine and, therefore, one can know only that God is none of them. Cusa bases affirmative theology upon the principle of community. This is because in accord with the principle of community each being is related to every other being in that all share a common source. In this sense, God is all things since nothing exists which does not come from and reflect His being.

Hence, it is not altogether inappropriate to make affirmations about the Divine since in knowing His creation one may come to know Him. Because Cusa links the principles of community and individuality, through the contraction of the Absolute he seeks to combine the strengths of negative and affirmative theology in copulative theology. Thus, in accordance with the sense of community which all being shares, one may make certain affirmative statements about the Divine and gain a certain awareness of the nature of the Absolute. On the other hand, in making these affirmative statements man must realize that, in accord with the principle of individuality, the Absolute is like no other being and, therefore, one never can come to know its nature with precision.

Cusa clearly confirms this view in *De Docta Ignorantia*. He asserts that negative theology is an indispensable aid to affirmative theology since without it God would be adored only as a creature rather than as the source of creation, thereby, dragging humankind into idolatry.[30] Negative theology allows one to approach the Absolute by a process of elimination, i.e. by articulating what the Absolute is not, one can gain a better glimpse of what it is.[31] Cusa also believes that some negative statements about the Absolute are better than others. Cusa writes that "It is truer . . . to deny that God is a stone than to deny that He is life."[32] Even negative statements, however, require at least some level of positive knowledge of the Absolute, such as its existence.[33] Cusa is quite cognizant of the fact that religion requires some affirmative theology with which one can assign positive attributes to the Divine. It would not be possible for one to worship a reality of which one knew only what it is not. Cusa favors negative theology over affirmative theology, but he is not willing entirely to dispense with the latter in favor of the former. He finds the positive predication of divine attributes to be primarily, but not exclusively, related to creatures. Were this type of predication to be related exclusively to creatures, one could know nothing whatsoever about the Divine. In that case, even Cusa's idea of the coincidence of opposites would be without foundation.[34]

It is important to note that Cusa is not here espousing any doctrine of analogy. As H. Laurence Bond points out, "For Cusa analogy is legitimate only in a very general sense as a way of speaking about God subject to certain guidelines but not as the means of knowing God or as a logical device

for the theological method."[35] Because of the absolutely unified nature of the Divine (as seen in the third section of the previous chapter) Cusa sees speech about God as more poetic than philosophical in that its goal is to communicate a certain sense of the absolute transcendence of the Divine rather than provide specific knowledge of it.

Naming the Absolute

The human inability to comprehend absolute unity is why Cusa asserts that one cannot name the Divine. The process of naming can occur only after reason identifies a being and distinguishes it from other beings.[36] For the Absolute, however, no such distinction is possible. In *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusa approvingly cites Parmenides' description of the Divine as "the Being in whom being anything means being everything."[37] Cusa also points out that it is the individual essence of a thing which makes it distinct from all other things and from which it receives its name. However, "Where there is absolutely no distinction, then there can be no proper name."[38]

This all embracing unity of the Absolute is also expressed in *De Visione Dei*. Here Cusa writes that God is beyond even the distinction of creator and created. The Absolute shares Its being among all creatures and is responsible for their existence. Thus, the Absolute is all in all and, yet, not identical to all since a cause cannot be identical with its effect.[39] Cusa also writes that the Divine is apart from nothing; It moves with all mobile things and is at rest with every stationary thing. In this manner the unity of the Absolute resolves all the apparent oppositions finite reality.[40]

He claims that the Absolute lies beyond the coincidence of opposites which he describes as the wall of paradise; one can pass beyond this wall only by vanquishing the proud spirit of reason which guards the gate.[41] Since the unity of the Absolute transcends human reason, Cusa suggests that his readers set aside strict Aristotelian reasoning.[42] He then refers to Socratic ignorance and claims that it benefits humans by making them aware of their shortcomings, rather than encouraging them to continue, confident that they understand when, in fact, they do not.[43]

This is the reason why Cusa asserts that any attempt to articulate a true name for the Absolute is an entirely anthropomorphic endeavor which will reveal only the nature of the one who names but virtually nothing about that which one seeks to name.[44] Despite this, Cusa, nonetheless, attempts to find a name which to some degree is applicable to the Absolute. The reason Cusa does this is because the attempt to name God, though vain, is beneficial in that it stretches the mind. Though giving no direct knowledge of the Absolute, it does allow one more accurately to approximate its nature. Therefore, it assists one in transcending the limits of discursive thinking and provides insight into the nature of absolute unity. There are two "names" for God about which Cusa writes extensively and which should be discussed here. The first to be discussed is that of "Actualized-Possibility" (*Possest*) which Cusa coins in a work entitled *De Possest*. Cusa claims that this is a sufficiently approximate name for the Absolute according to man's finite conception of Him, "For it is equally the name of each and every name and of no name."[45] Thus, ontologically speaking, the Absolute is excluded from no finite thing and also is not limited to any particular thing.

Possest. The term *"Possest"* is a conjunction of the latin terms *"Posse"* (possibility) and *"est"* (actuality); it reflects the Absolute overcoming of the distinction between these two principles. Cusa justifies the term "Actualized-Possibility" by presupposing that anything which does, in fact, exist can possibly exist. If something can exist then possibility itself must be able to exist. For Cusa everything which exists does so in terms of "Actualized-Possibility" which is the

actual existence of absolute possibility. Even this, however, is only an approximation of the actual nature of the Absolute. However, it enjoys the distinction of being the nearest approximation of the absolute of which human beings are capable. "Actualized-Possibility" is a sufficiently approximate name for the Absolute in that it refers to a being in whom all possible existents are actually enfolded.[46] In the Absolute, actuality and potentiality must necessarily coincide. If potentiality had priority, God would actualize it as the supreme actuality of all being; and hence, God would exist before He existed. On the other hand, if actuality had priority then God would not be possible and so "He would be contradictory and could not be actuality."[47]

It is important to remember that what Cusa means by "Actualized-Possibility" is not what more traditional medieval thinkers meant when they spoke of pure act. The more traditional thinkers sought to point to an entity which was "an actuality that excludes all potency, an existential necessity and an essential fullness."[48] Cusa wants to say much more than this. For Cusa, "Actualized-Possibility" "means simply that God is that which He can be without restriction, that is, that He is now and forever all that He can be."[49] Since God is all that He can be, He must be also everything which can be at all, at the very least.[50] The naming of God, although impossible, still retains a certain importance by being indicative of the fundamental relationship between what God is and how humans view Him.[51]

Not-other. Later in his career, Cusa articulates another name which he finds to be sufficiently approximate for describing the absolute nature of the Divine. In a work entitled *De Li Non Aliud*, Cusa coins the phrase "Not-other" (*non aliud*) to refer to the Absolute. This is not, however, a merely tautological term. When Cusa says that the Absolute is not-other than the sun, he is by no means attempting to identify It with the physical sun. To say that the Absolute is the sun in a sense which excludes It from the perfection of the moon, or any other finite thing is to limit It. The being of the Absolute includes all things before they were in any way opposed to each other. In fact, within the Absolute, and only within the Absolute, a particular entity being itself is not opposed to being another, due to the unity of the Absolute.[52] As Peter Kampits points out, the term "not-other" should not be regarded in the strictest sense as a name for the Absolute, but represents something of a transliteration of the unnameable and unknowable name of God. Thus, the Absolute can remain infinitely distinct from all particular beings and, yet, at the same time retain an extremely close relationship with them.[53] One can see here both the clear distinction between the finite and the infinite, and the unity of this pair. This is because "the not-other is in each being that which it actually is but not identical with it."[54] Hence, finite beings can achieve actualization only through participation in the absolute unity of the Divine, but at no time can one identify finite being with the Divine, or even with a part of the Divine.

Within the finite realm the identity of an individual thing is determined by the fact that it excludes what is opposed to it. For the Absolute, however, this principle does not hold true. In respect to the Absolute, the term "not-other" is inclusive of even the other (non-identity). Kampits explains this by asserting that "The identity of the other is an identity in the exclusion of difference; the identity of the not-other is an identity of identity and non-identity, of identity and difference."[55] Thus, for Cusa, the Absolute contains no juxtaposition between identity and non-identity and, therefore, within the Absolute all distinctions coincide.

Because not-other is a term which defines everything, Cusa seeks to apply it to the Absolute. If someone asks "What is X?" then one need only respond "Not-other than X." In fact, this term even defines itself since it is not-other than itself.[56] For Cusa the term "not-other" preceded

anything else which can be said. Even the term "the One" is less adequately applied to God "since one is nothing other than one [and therefore] it is other than not-other."[57]

Thus, Cusa sees "not-other" as a term which is simpler and, therefore, more adequately applied to the Divine than the term: "One". He writes that everything which is true can be seen as truth only to the extent that it is not-other than the truth, just as everything which has being does so only to the extent that it is not-other than itself (i.e. to the extent that it has unity). Thus, anything which is known or exists is able to do so only because of the not-other.[58] One can, therefore, see that the identity of the Absolute is based upon its not being other than any existing thing. Likewise, the uniqueness of the Absolute which distinguishes it from every other existing thing is this identity with the rest of reality. In short, the "not-other" both identifies the Absolute with the whole of finite reality (i.e. the principle of community), and by this unique relationship (i.e. the principle of individuality), makes it distinct from that reality. Cusa writes that this term "defines itself, and, hence, all nameable things."[59] Ultimately, however, Cusa feels that the Divine is unnameable and, therefore, even a term as all embracing as "not-other" can only roughly approximate the infinite nature of the Divine.

Metaphors and Paradoxes of the Divine

Cusa's attempt to name the Divine is, as has been said, not so much an attempt to communicate specific knowledge of the Divine as to communicate its all-embracing nature. An examination of the metaphors and paradoxes which Cusa uses to express the Divine will make this point more clearly because Cusa's metaphors more dramatically emphasize the inability of human reason to comprehend the Absolute than do the names which he applies to It.

The Importance of Metaphors

In *De Li Non Aliud*, Cusa expresses a hope that he will someday see the Absolute without symbols, but that this is not a possibility in this life.[60] During this life man is forced to use symbols and metaphors, particularly those of a paradoxical nature, in order to approximate the nature of the Absolute. Werner Beirwaltes in his article entitled "Image and Counterimage? Reflections on Neoplatonic Thought With Respect to Its Place Today" points out that paradox attempts to unify affirmative and negative statements about the same thing in order to indicate its absolute otherness. He defines metaphor as an affirmative image of something which the mind cannot adequately conceive.[61] Thus, one can easily see the appeal that paradox would have for Cusa. He seeks to combine the strengths of negative and affirmative theology knowing that no affirmative statement could be complete and no negative statement religiously satisfying.

Cusa rejects the application of the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction to the Absolute. For Cusa, man's natural knowledge is not merely incomplete on a quantitative level with gaps that will be filled in by continuing study but is fundamentally and radically limited by its very nature. This is epitomized by the paradoxes which exist in knowledge's most secure realm, mathematics.[62] In his article entitled "The Infinite Sphere: Comments on the History of Metaphor" Karsten Harries supports this view. He asserts that metaphors are required to help humankind transcend the limits of a finite intellect in an attempt to grasp the infinite.[63] Harries also points out that mathematics is the field from which Cusa draws his most important metaphors and paradoxes for explicating the Divine. This is because he feels that the multiplicity of numbers is produced by an unfolding of unity, just as the multiplicity of creation is produced by the unfolding of the One.[64]

It is important to keep in mind Cusa's ideas on metaphor and paradox when one reads him in *De Li Non Aliud* urging Ferdinand to reject anything which his reason does not compel him to accept. Cusa does not mean the same thing by reason as did the Scholastics, nor should anyone read into this any Cartesian implications. For Cusa reason means anything which renders a particular solution more plausible. Therefore, analogies, paradoxes, metaphors and symbols would all be included along with much else.[65] In *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusa asserts that the study of mathematics prepares the mind for knowledge of the Absolute by accustoming it to dealing with the abstract. He also cites the fact that Pythagoras, Boethius, and Augustine all used mathematics to approach the divine.[66]

Metaphors for the Absolute

The Infinite Line. Perhaps the most illustrative metaphor Cusa employs for the Divine is that of the infinite line. Cusa recognizes that Anselm was the first to compare the Divine to an infinite line, but Cusa pushes this metaphor much further than had Anselm. For Cusa, the infinite line is not merely infinitely long or infinitely straight, but encompasses every possible line simultaneously. It must be not only a straight line but also a triangle, a circle, a sphere, etc. Likewise, the infinite triangle, infinite circle, and infinite sphere must also encompass all these other options. Cusa points out also that the infinite circle must have an arc and a tangent which coincide because as the size of a circle increases one lessens the curve of the arc.[67] A finite line is potentially all these configurations and the infinite line must actualize all of these possibilities.[68]Cusa goes on to make similar arguments regarding, as well, the infinite circle, infinite triangle, and infinite sphere.[69]

The Infinite Triangle. In De Docta Ignorantia, Cusa further elaborates on the nature of the absolute by comparing the Trinity to an infinite triangle. He claims that the infinite triangle can possess only one infinite angle because no finite angle could possibly exist outside of it, just as no particular number can exist apart from finite number. Cusa asserts that the finite triangle has three angles, each distinct from the other, which form a unity of composition.[70] The infinite triangle, however, has but one angle which is three without being numerically multiplied. Cusa quotes Augustine that "From the moment you begin to count the Trinity, you depart from the truth."[71] and claims that for the Absolute distinction and non-distinction cannot be regarded as contradictory. Thus, unity and Trinity (multiplicity) are completely reconcilable and there is no difficulty in having a plurality of persons and a unity of essence.[72]

The Unity of the Circle. Later in *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusa claims that the circle is the symbol of perfect unity.[73] He goes on to say that he has already shown that the circle and the triangle coincide within the infinite line, therefore, the unity of the circle coincides with the plurality of the triangle. Cusa also cites the circle as a symbol of eternity in that it has no beginning point and no end point.[74] He draws an analogy between the infinite straightness of the infinite curve and the simple infinite essence of the maximum which encompasses all other essences.[75] As Dorothy Koenigsberger points out, the greatest circle, that which has the largest diameter, must have the smallest possible curvature. Thus, the infinite circle must have no curvature whatsoever causing the circle and the straight line to coincide.[76]

The Omnivoyant. In *De Visione Dei*, Cusa gives a non-mathematical metaphor for the Divine. This metaphor is a portrait which Cusa describes as an omnivoyant. It appears to be looking directly at everyone who looks upon it, regardless of the perspective they view it from, and even follows someone as they move. Cusa writes that such pictures are not unusual and he even sends one along with a copy of his treatise.[77] Cusa finds this portrait to be an apt metaphor for the Absolute because of its gaze. Although the eyes of the portrait do not move, they appear to be constantly trained on the viewer, even when he himself is moving. Similarly, the infinite nature of the Absolute is such that its gaze can embrace each particular thing and the entirety of the whole simultaneously.[78]

The Top Spinning at Infinite Velocity. Another metaphor which Cusa uses in *De Possest* is that of a top which is spinning at infinite velocity. Cusa claims that if a top were spinning at infinite velocity then its center would be perfectly at rest while its circumference would be moving at optimum speed. Thus within the infinite velocity of the top, maximum and minimum motion coincide.[79]

Interpreting Cusa's Metaphors

Cusa claims that because there is no division in the Absolute one can reconcile contradictory statements about it.[80] The characteristically unique feature of the Divine is its absolute nature, and this is what sets it off from the rest of reality. Because the Absolute is the source of finite reality it, naturally, reconciles the opposition it contains and cannot be entirely divorced from any particular aspect of it. This absoluteness serves as the driving engine of Cusa's philosophy and that to which he conforms his thought.

It is important to note that all of Cusa's metaphors are self-consciously contradictory in order to require the mind to abandon discursive reason. Only by operating in such an alien fashion can the mind ever hope to reach beyond its finite limitations and ascend to a place where it can gain some limited insight into the Absolute. The mind must conceive of a being which is, simultaneously, absolutely straight and absolutely curved, absolutely at rest and absolutely in motion. Looking one place and looking every place. This is the great truth which Cusa seeks to reveal about the all-embracing nature of the Absolute with his metaphors.

Cusa's use of self-contradictory metaphors are his attempt to express a reality which embraces both the principle of individuality and the principle of community, simultaneously. To the degree that Cusa's metaphors embrace all possible options they reflect the principle of community by articulating the immanence of the Divine. The inherently contradictory nature of Cusa's metaphors articulate the fact that no finite reality can ever appropriately articulate the absolutely transcendent nature of the Divine in a clear and concise manner. Thus, Cusa seeks to articulate a reality which both transcends all finite reality and also is immanent in the very ontological structure of each existing individual being.

Notes

1. *Nicolo Cusano Agli Inizi del Mondo Moderno* (Florence, Italy: Sansoni, 1970), p. 78.
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3. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

5. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, p. 12.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

7. Henry Bett, *Nicholas of Cusa* (London: Meuthen and Co., Ltd., 1932), p. 129.

8. Julie C. Norman, "Nicholas of Cusa, Apostolate of Unity," *Downside Review*, 99 (1981), 63.

9. Nicholas of Cusa, p. l4.

10. Luis Martinez-Gomez, "From the Names of God to the Name of God: Nicholas of Cusa," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 5 (1960), 87.

11. Romano Stephen Almagno and Conrad L. Haskins, eds., *Studies Honoring Ignatius Charles Brady Friar Minor* (St. Bonaventure, New York: The Franciscian Institute, 1976), p. 178.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

16. *Ibid.*, p. l96.

17. Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-Other* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Arthur J. Banning Press, l987), p. 27.

18. M. L. Fuehrer, "The Principle of Contractio in Nicholas of Cusa Philosophical View of Man," *Downside Review*, 93 (1975), 296.

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20. Nicholas of Cusa, *De Idiota de Mente: The Layman About Mind*, Clyde Lee Miller, trans. (New York: Alaris Books, 1979), p. 87.

21. Martinez-Gomez, p. 102.

22. Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963), p. 39.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

24. Hopkins, p. 6.

25. Martinez-Gomez, p. 82.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

28. Frederick Copleston, *The History of Philosophy, Vol. III, Ockham to Suarez* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1953), p. 235.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

30. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, p. 59.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 61

33. Norman, p. 71.

34. Germain Heron, "Forward" in *Of Learned Ignorance* Nicholas of Cusa (London, England: Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1954), p. XX.

35. George Shriver, ed., *Contemporary Reflections on the Medieval Christian Tradition: Essays in Honor of Ray C. Petry*(Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1974), p. 85.

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37. Nicholas of Cusa, p. 51.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

39. Nicholas of Cusa, *The Vision of God*, p. 57.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

42. Nicholas of Cusa, "Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae" in *Nicholas of Cusa's Debate With John Wenck*, Jasper Hopkins, ed. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Arthur J. Banning Press, l988), p. 43.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

44. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, p. 56.

45. Nicholas of Cusa, "Trialogus de Possest" in *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*, Jasper Hopkins, ed. (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1986), p. 83.

46. Peter Casarella, "Nicholas of Cusa and the Power of the Possible", p. 20.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Martinez-Gomez, p. 90.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

51. Donald F. Duclow, "Pseudo-Dionysius, John Scotus Eriugena, Nicholas of Cusa: An approach to the Divine Names,"*International Philosophical Quarterly* 12 (June 1972), 262.

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53. Peter Kampits, "Substanz und Relation bei Nicolaus Cusanus," *Zeitschrift Fur Philosophische Forschung*, 30 (1976), 15.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

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56. Nicholas of Cusa, "De Li Non Aliud" in *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-Other, Jasper Hopkins*, ed. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Arthur J. Banning Press, l987), p. 35.

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65. Herbert Matsen, "Jasper Hopkins on Nicholas of Cusa," *International Studies in Philosophy*, 14 (1982), 80.

66. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, p. 26.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

76. Dorothy Koenigsberger, *Renaissance Man and Creative Thinking* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979), p. 125.

77. Nicholas of Cusa, *The Vision of God*, p. 3.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

79. Nicholas of Cusa, "Trialogus de Possest" in *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*, Jasper Hopkins, ed.(Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1986), p. 89.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

Chapter IV
The Unfolding from Divine Unity

The purpose of the chapter is to examine, specifically, the manner in which all finite being is related to and reflective of the Divine. In order to fulfill this purpose, the following chapter has been divided into three sections. The first section will discuss the way in which being is said to emanate from the Absolute. The second section will examine the way in which finite being directs itself toward the Absolute. In the final section, the way in which the diversity of finite being proclaims the Divine through the interaction of its parts will be examined. This is of fundamental importance for the harmonious diversity which Cusa sees in reality in that it establishes the genuine being of the finite realm with all of its multiplicity and, yet, unites this multiplicity through a common source and a common end. Again the principles of individuality and community play a fundamental role. The principal of individuality allows for multiplicity within reality in that it provides the framework of a number of separate entities each with its own unique element. The principle of community allows for these diverse entities in that all share a common source of which they are reflective, and a common end, toward which they tend. The important implications which these twin principles of Cusa's metaphysics have in reference to the unfolding of the Absolute may be viewed in the accompanying diagram.

Being as Dynamic Emanation from the Divine

This section, as stated above, will discuss the emanation of finite being from the Divine. It will, therefore, help to clarify the relationship between the Absolute and Its creation. Unless one understands this point one cannot give Cusa's philosophy the serious examination it deserves. In fact, the lack of such an understanding is likely to result in transforming Cusa's metaphysics into pantheism or manichean dualism. In either case, one would not be able to appreciate the complexity and strength of Cusa's thought since reality would lose the unique sense of unity as a harmonious diversity which is so distinctively Cusan.

The Nature of Creation

For Cusa, all things emanate from the Absolute in a manner which is consistent with creation *ex nihilo*. Before creation the particular entities of finite reality existed in God qua God without distinction.[1] In *De Possest*, Cusa asserts that it is the Absolute which gives being to all things.[2] In a work entitled *The Gift: Creation*, Kenneth L. Schmitz outlines a view of divine creativity which can greatly enhance one's understanding of Cusa's philosophy.

Schmitz asserts that it is impossible for one to give to oneself, since to receive what is within one's power is not to receive a gift in any true sense of the term.[3] It is also necessary, according to Schmitz, that a gift be received in the spirit in which it is given. Schmitz writes that, "It [a gift] is a free endowment upon another who received it freely; so that the first mark of a gift is its gratuity."[4] He further goes on to point out that reciprocity on the part of the receiver, though not obliged, is certainly appropriate. This reciprocity is not, however, the return of another gift but the completion of the gift which has been given. This completion is achieved by the gift's proper reception. What is called for, according to Schmitz's analysis, is not a passive reception along the

lines of the reception of an imprint by wax, which is characteristic of the reception of form by matter. Schmitz asserts that what is called for is attentive receptivity.[5]

This attentive receptivity entails a free acknowledgment of gratuity and the free appropriation of the gift as gratuitous on the part of the receiver. Thus, Schmitz correctly claims that "Endowment, then, does not alone realize the gift; gratitude is also called for."[6] He also points out that for various reasons straightforward reciprocal relations are impossible.[7] One of the reasons why such straightforward reciprocity is impossible is because of a difference in the ontological status of the giver and the recipient. For example, a son cannot reciprocate his father's love with patriarchal love. The son can only respond with a filial love for the giver, but he may someday reciprocate with patriarchal love for his own son.[8]

One can clearly see that for Schmitz a gift binds the giver and the receiver together.[9] By giving the giver is able to impart what is his, and in doing so commends himself. Schmitz writes that, "The thing given, then, is not simply a detachable item, an independent thing in its own right; nor is it to be understood as an external substitute for the giver. It is a token of him, that is, it is not only his: it is he."[10]

It is along these lines that one must interpret Cusa's assertion in *De Dato Patris Luminum*, that the relationship between the Absolute and finite being as one in which the Absolute is both the giver and the gift, making every creature in an extremely limited way the Absolute. This is because the absolutely unified nature of the Divine makes it impossible for Him to give anything but the absolute maximum which is Himself. "Thus it seems to be that God and creation are the same thing . . . . Accordingly there would [seem to] be only one thing and it would receive different names in accordance with different modes."[11] Though Cusa freely admits that this manner of speaking lacks precision, some commentators have used this and other passages like it to support their claim that limited beings have no essence other than the Absolute.

The Problem of Pantheism

As Jasper Hopkins points out, to understand Nicholas of Cusa's ideas on the emanation of finite reality from the Divine one must reconcile two propositions. The first is that God gives Himself to creation in a pure and undiminished capacity and in some sense is always present within it. The second proposition is that the Divine is unity, eternity, and truth in an absolute sense, while finite reality is multiple, temporal, and a likeness.[12]

Hopkins also sketches out a common way in which scholars have attempted to reconcile these two propositions. According to this view, God is in one sense identical with the created world, yet, in another sense different from it. Thus reality has a unitary existence which possesses both finite and infinite aspects. These two aspects are related because the infinite is said to serve as the Essence of all finite reality making the created world, and each individual thing it contains, a contraction of the Absolute. If the Divine serves as the Essence of each thing then these things contain no essence of their own, only that of the Absolute. Hence, finite entities would have no positive being of their own and would, therefore, be distinguished from each other in a purely accidental manner. In this scheme creatures become theophanies or manifestations of the Absolute in its finite mode of existence. To put it most succinctly "Considered contractedly, God is the world; considered absolutely the world is God."[13]

From this perspective God becomes present in all things and conversely all things are present in God. The difference is that in God there is nothing but the Divine devoid of all distinction, while with respect to finite being the Divine is whatever that particular thing is. Thus, all things are

present in each thing since God as the divine essence of all things is wholly and immediately present in each thing. This interpretation, however, brings Cusa to the very threshold of pantheism. The reason for this is that though no particular finite entity is itself identified with the infinite divine, if one could in someway remove all of the finite determinations of some particular thing, one would then arrive at the absolute essence of being (i.e. God).[14]

This view seems to be identical with Vincent Martin's interpretation of Cusa's philosophy expressed in his article entitled "The Dialectical Process in the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa." Martin claims that Cusa confuses the Absolute being of God with the formally universal idea of being.[15] He asserts that for Cusa the Divine is the real limit of finite beings and, therefore, it would have to possess the same nature as these creatures. Thus God has His being degraded from absolute being to become equivalent to the being of the ultimate creature, or what Martin calls an "infinitized creature."[16] According to Martin, Cusa asserts that "the very being of God is the intrinsic being of the creature."[17] Martin writes that

> To conceive of God as the ultimate limit towards which all things converge . . . and to hold that the divine essence is essentially the fulfilled limit of creation, even when it is held to be such from all eternity, is a recondite way of asserting the reality of the impossible and of denying the absolute transcendence of God.[18]

He claims that for Cusa the difference between the Divine and His creation is the result not of differences in essence, but merely of the manner in which this essence is received.[19] Martin's criticisms of conceiving God as an infinitized creature are in themselves entirely accurate and well-founded. However, his claim that Cusa does this is mistaken. Cusa constantly asserts that there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite. Never does he assert that finite reality is nothing more than a modification of the Absolute.

Martin claims that Cusa sees finite being as a mere privation of the Absolute and, therefore, that there is no positive difference between the Absolute and limited being. For Martin, the distinction which Cusa draws between the Absolute and finite reality is quantitative rather than qualitative. This makes it possible to reach the Absolute by simply expanding the limits of finite being.[20] Hopkins is quite correct in asserting that Martin's interpretation of Cusa's thought brings Cusa to the very threshold of pantheism.[21] This is because Martin clearly sets up a proportion between the finite and the Absolute, which is quite clearly contrary to the entire spirit of Cusa's philosophy. For Martin, Cusa sees an individual entity as being nothing other than a contracted species, just as a species is a contraction of genus, genus a contraction of the universe, and the universe a contraction of the Absolute.[22] Because Martin sees Cusa as equating the universe's contraction of the Absolute with the individual's contraction of its species, he sees the Absolute being reduced to something very like a creature, though it is permitted the distinction of being the highest creature from which all other creatures derive their existence.

Martin fails to take into account the true nature of the distinction that separates the finite from the infinite within Cusa's thought. For Cusa it is clear that the difference between the finite and the Absolute is one not merely of quantity, but of kind. The restricted natures of finite beings inherently limit the perfections and potentialities of which they are capable; because of this, finite being cannot possibly be compared to the unlimited and unrestricted perfection of the Absolute. For Cusa it is inherently impossible to restrict the being of the Absolute to some limited entity. Likewise, it is impossible to expand the limits of some finite being to the point where ultimately it could equal the Absolute any more than one can increase the number one to equal the color yellow.

In order to achieve such an equality, at least one of the entities involved would have to alter the very nature of its being so drastically that it would become something other than what it actually is. Removing the limits of finite being would result not in revealing the Absolute but only in reducing that being to nothingness by eliminating that which makes its existence possible. On the other hand, to impose limits upon the Absolute would destroy the infinite nature of its being, reducing it to just another finite entity. The Absolute is much more than a mere expansion, regardless of the magnitude of the limitations of the universe in the sense that the universe is an expansion of genera. It is possible for one to add up the number of genera until one reaches the total number which are included in the universe. One cannot, however, multiply the universe or potential universes, even if such a thing were possible, to the point where one can place it in proportion to the Absolute. The universe is not a contraction of the Absolute in the sense that a teaspoon of sea water is a contraction of the ocean, but in the sense of a mirror's reflection being a contraction of a face. The distinction here is that the teaspoon of sea water is part of the ocean and is a minute diminution of the ocean's being, while the reflection in no way is part of the face and, therefore, in no way diminishes the face's being. When Cusa refers to finite being as a contraction of the Absolute he does not mean the being of the Absolute is restricted into a particular being, but rather that this particular being is a disproportionate image in that one cannot multiply the perfections of this being to equal the total perfection of the Absolute. What is contracted is not the being of the Absolute, but the expression of that reality which finite being reflects. The Absolute and the finite, even as represented in the universe, are two fundamentally different orders of reality. Though diametrically opposed due to the very nature of their respective being, nonetheless, they are related in that the latter is derived from the former. Each, however, can be only itself and can never become the other.

Hopkins is quite correct in his assertion that all interpretations which see Cusa as equating Absolute being with finite being are fundamentally flawed. He claims correctly that for Cusa the Absolute in no sense is ever identified with the finite. Each individual entity has its own being and is, therefore, essentially rather than accidentally differentiated from all other things. Although the Absolute remains present for all things this is not an actual presence or even a partial actual presence. The Divine does not serve as the essence of each finite thing. This is because finite entities can possess only contracted essences whereas the Absolute itself cannot be contracted. Thus, the world cannot be regarded as the Divine in a limited and finite state. The finite and the infinite are not two sides of one reality, but two different realities, though the second is entirely dependent upon the first. The world is nothing more than a reflection of Divine being. As a reflection, it cannot be equated with the essence of its source regardless of whether or not this essence is contracted. The Absolute never becomes mingled with the finite, but remains always its simple and restricted self.[23] Thus, the Absolute nature of the Divine enables Cusa to repudiate both those who would depict God as the ultimate creature and those who would depict finite reality as the Absolute.

In *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusa clearly draws a distinction between finite and Absolute being. He writes that,

> No distinction can be made between the absolute quiddity of the sun and the moon, for it is God Himself Who is the absolute entity and quiddity of all. But the restricted quiddity of the sun is distinct from the restricted quiddity of the moon, because the restricted quiddity of a thing is the thing itself, whereas the absolute quiddity is God not the thing itself.[24]

One can see that for Cusa each finite thing has a form which is entirely its own, and makes it distinct not only from all other finite things, but also from the Absolute as well. Thus, the Absolute cannot be described accurately as the proper form of any existing finite thing; which, in respect to its own individual form, no finite thing is the Absolute.[25]

The Relationship Between the Finite and the Infinite

This, however, by no means implies that finite being is independent of, or unrelated to, Absolute being. In fact, only through participation in the Absolute is finite being capable of possessing its own respective form; apart from this participation, it would have no existence at all. In a manner of speaking, it is possible to say that Absolute being is the only being in the sense that everything else is dependent upon the Absolute for its original and continued existence. However, just as God being the cause of all things does not preclude the existence of secondary causes, so, likewise, if the Absolute is the Essence of all things this does not preclude the possibility of secondary essences.[26] This is especially relevant when one bears in mind the fact that Cusa himself refers to the Absolute as the form of all forms.[27]

For Cusa, the Absolute clearly is the cause which brings finite being into existence and, although such being undoubtedly is contingent it remains, nonetheless, the individual creature's own contingent being. Cusa would not agree that the sun and a tree are both merely modifications of the same being, but would assert that they are two different entities with two different potencies, both of which, however, remain entirely dependent on the Absolute. In the *Apologia*, Cusa writes that,

For no one was ever so foolish as to maintain that God, who forms all things, is anything other than that than which a greater cannot be conceived. Accordingly, God is not this or that -- not the sky or the earth. Rather, He is the Bestower of being upon all things -- so that He is, properly speaking, the Form of every form. And any given form -- since it is not God -- is not, properly speaking, form; for it is formed by the uncontracted and absolute Form. Therefore, no being can be absent from the most absolute, the most perfect, and most simple Form, since this Form bestows all being. And since all being is from this Form and cannot be outside it, all being is in this Form. However, in this Form all being can be nothing other than this Form.[28]

Clearly, Cusa sees God as the Absolute and can, therefore, be no particular finite thing. Rather, the Absolute is the source of all being and gives each entity its own individual form. Hence, all entities are present to the Absolute and their very being is dependent upon and derived from this presence. However, since the Absolute can be no finite thing this presence is not an actual one, but is based upon the Absolute as the source of all being. Thus, the reality of the finite is present in the Absolute not as their differentiated selves, but as the Absolute Itself. Because of this Cusa writes,

> Clearly, then, God ought in no respect to be conceived to have being in the manner in which something singular -- which is different and distinct -- is conceived to be. Nor [ought He to be conceived to have being] in the manner in which a universal or genus or a species is conceived to be. Rather [He ought to be thought to exist], beyond the coincidence of the singular and the universal, as the most absolute Form of all things generic, specific, and singular, and of all forms which can be conceived and spoken of.[29]

It is important to note that when Cusa asserts that God is all possible things he means "that God is

actually everything which anything can possibly be."[30] He does not mean that God is everything that can be expressed by completing the phrase "It is possible that . . . ." Hence the Divine is not the possibility that it will rain tomorrow afternoon, but it is everything which any individual entity is possibly able to be.[31] The Divine, however, remains distinct from the entity in the sense that it is everything which can possibly be, whereas finite entities have possibilities which have never been, and will never be, actualized.[32] Thus, Cusa writes in *De Possest* that "as enfolded-in-God [*complicatio*] all these things [of the finite world] are God: similarly, as-unfolded-in-the-created-world [*explicatio*] they are the world."[33] In short, the finite entities which men encounter in their everyday experience are nothing other than those existences which are unfolded from the Absolute. However, as enfolded in the Absolute these entities can be nothing but the Absolute. As such they are devoid of finite distinctions and, therefore, are all that they can possibly be and all that can be.

For Cusa all actually existing finite entities are present in the Divine and the Divine is present in all actually existing finite things.[34] Each reality, however, is not present in itself, but only as the entity in which it inheres.[35] Thus, in the raindrop the Divine is not its Absolute self while in the Divine the raindrop is not its finite self. Within the Divine, creatures are identical with the Absolute in which they are enfolded, rather than their unfolded finite existences.[36] Finite being which of itself is actualized and unfolds from the Absolute cannot be equated with the Divine.[37] William Hay points out that for Cusa the world is the unfolding of the Divine, just as number is the unfolding of unity. Hay writes that "just as number arises from our mind, because we understand many things one by one, concerning one common thing; so the plurality of things arises from the divine mind, in which are many things without plurality because they are the enfolding unity."[38] In this fashion plurality unfolds from unity without destroying that unity, since they are separate beings.

Hence, Cusa sees the Divine as being not the Essence of all things but rather as the Essence of the essence of each thing. For example, the Divine is not the contracted essence of the raindrop, but that which the raindrops essence is derived from, participates in and is modeled upon. The existence of the raindrop is entirely dependent upon the Divine, but is equivalent neither to the Divine nor to a part of the Divine. Thus, although God may be said to be the Essence of a raindrop this ultimate Essence cannot in any way be equated with the finite essence with which man is in some sense acquainted. In this way, the Divine is present to all things only in the sense that an original object is present in its mirror image. However, just as the original itself is not actually present in its mirror image, the Divine is not itself present in the individual finite things which are its images.[39]

In the *Apologia*, Cusa makes clear this relationship between the Divine and its finite creation. Cusa flatly denies that finite reality is equivalent to the Divine or that it is nothing at all.[40] Cusa affirms the existence of all individual finite things each through its own form. He writes that, "He [God] gives being even though the form of earth gives being to earth, and the form of fire [gives being] to fire. Yet, the Form which gives being is God, who forms every form."[41] The Absolute imparts being to all finite reality, however, their individual forms, which also are derived from the Absolute, give them their particular natures. Finite being is entirely dependent upon Absolute being; however, it can never be reduced to a mere pantheistic modification of the Absolute. Cusa reiterates this dependence of the finite upon the Divine in *De Pace Fidei*where he writes that "For He from whom come all things embraces all things and is all in all, because He is the former of all; Therefore He is form of forms. The form of forms has within Himself all formable forms."[42] Also *De Li Non Aluid*, which quotes quite extensively from Pseudo-Dionysius, supports this position with various citations from the Areopagite. For instance Cusa approvingly quotes *The*

Divine Names where Dionysius says "He [God] is not in any existing thing nor is He any of these things."[43] Thus, Cusa cannot be charged with ignoring the distinction between finite and absolute reality.

Peter Kampits asserts that the movement from the Absolute to finite reality in respect to creation is not emanation in the classic Neo-Platonic sense. Kampits describes the unfolding from the Absolute as an evolution based on acquisition. The original unity of the Absolute develops a multiplicity without losing its own unity. The distinctions which emerge due to the explication of the Divine are not a contradiction of the absolute unity.[44] Kampits' claim, however, requires some explanation. To begin with the term evolution implies that the multiplicity of the finite world is not merely derivative of the Absolute, but in some sense an improvement upon it. The process of unfolding may be depicted more accurately as a process by which an original produces more or less accurate copies of itself in a manner which neither increases nor diminishes the original entity. Furthermore, Kampits' assertion that the process of unfolding is based upon acquisition also must be rather carefully qualified. The unfolding of the Divine does not add anything to its own reality. However, by unfolding, the Divine does create more beings. These beings are not divine beings nor even semi-divine beings but finite non-divine beings which only reflect the Divine as a mirror reflects a face. Strictly speaking, multiplicity is not so much a development of the Divine as it is a development from the Divine. The Divine serves as the source of this development and thereby governs the manner in which it takes place, but Itself is unaltered by this development.

Cusa's writings confirm such an interpretation in many places. In *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusa again cites with approval Pseudo- Dionysius' characterization of the Divine as "the one complete cause of all, unable to be limited in any form; He is so infinitely above all and independent of all that the suppression of all things would leave His preeminence unaffected."[45]Cusa also plainly states that a contraction of the maximum cannot be the Divine since God's absolute nature requires that He be unlimited.[46] Further he states that the maximum cannot mingle with matter nor inform it. In short for man to attribute to the Divine anything which is limited is merely an exercise in self-deception.[47] In *De Li Non Aluid* this position is also confirmed when Cusa asserts that God is all things even though He Himself is none of these things. He writes that "God though unnameable, names all things; though infinite, defines all things; though limitless, delimits all things."[48] In *De Visione Dei*, on the distinction between the finite and the Absolute, Cusa writes that otherness in reference to the Absolute cannot have any existence, nor can it make one creature differ from another even though one being is not another. The reason for this is that otherness is not a positive principle but derives its meaning from non-being.[49] The reason, however, that one being is not another is that particular beings are not infinite and so cannot encompass all of the possibilities of reality with their limited potentialities. Cusa uses Socrates as an example to make this point. He writes that

> The being of Socrates is the individual unity of all those things that are in Socrates, in such a way that in that one being [Socrates] is enfolded the being of all those things which are in Socrates. . . . But in that same single being all things which have the Socratic being exist and are unfolded and outside it they neither exist nor can exist.[50]

Likewise, finite being is unfolded from the Absolute and, just as Socrates' hand is not equivalent to Socratic being, so finite reality is not equivalent to the Divine. Cusa recognizes that finite being is entirely contingent upon the Divine, but the Divine is not itself diminished by any diminution in

finite being. He writes, "I am because Thou [God] dost look at me, and if Thou didst turn thy glance from me I should cease to be."[51] The Divine Itself, however, would in no way be affected since finite being is not synonymous with Divine being.

In the *Apologia*, Cusa confirms this view: "from the fact that all things are in God as things caused are in their cause, it does not follow that the caused is the cause - although in the cause they are only the cause."[52] Cusa then cites St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Contra Gentiles* where Aquinas claims that based on the words of Pseudo-Dionysius, some were led to believe that God is all things.[53] Cusa feels compelled to clarify this misunderstanding of Dionysius' work and asserts that for Dionysius "God is the Being of all things in such a way that He is not any of these things, since what is caused can never be raised unto equality with its cause."[54] For both, Cusa and Dionysius the Divine is omnipresent, but only in a non-spatial way, just as He is at every time in a non-temporal way and is, likewise, every existent thing non-existentially.[55] This is because the Absolute nature of the Divine does not allow it to be separated in a finite fashion.

As has been shown, Cusa sees finite being as unfolded from the Absolute and enfolded into the Absolute. In *De Possest*, Cusa writes that "He [the Divine] creates not from any other but from Himself; For He is everything which is possible to be."[56] This is why Cusa asserts that understanding finite things can provide one with an approximate understanding of the invisible truths of the Divine. For Cusa the created world is eternally present in the Divine's creative power from which it emanated; every creatable thing must exist within that creative power.[57] Thus, as Germain Heron points out, while Cusa rejects the idea that forms possess an existence independent of the individuals in which they inhere, he does assert that the material existence of a thing is ontologically inferior and logically posterior to these forms. This makes the Divine, which is the Form of all forms, the primary reality of the existence of an individual thing.[58] Cusa sees the Divine as the Absolute entity and ultimate quiddity of all reality. Finite things are contracted quiddities of the Absolute but by their contraction they are clearly distinct from the Absolute. Nonetheless, finite being can possess nothing which is not derived from the Absolute.[59]

Finite being can exist only through the unfolding of the Absolute. Again, however, this does not mean that finite being is a mere modification of the Absolute. Though the Absolute cannot give any sort of being other than absolute being, once given this can exist only in a limited manner. Cusa writes that "since such a receiving falls short of the One who is imparting Himself [the Absolute], it turns toward a likeness and an image, so that it is not the truth of the Giver but a likeness of the Giver."[60] In short, within finite reality the Absolute is not actually present and cannot exist as it did in itself. Finite reality does, however, mimic the Absolute to the fullest extent that its limited potentiality allows. In *De Possest*, Cusa points out that "as enfolded-in-God all these things [finite entities] are God; similarly as-unfolded-in-the-created-world they are the world."[61] Thus, one can see that, though there is a clear and undeniable distinction between the finite and the Absolute this distinction is not divisive.

Furthermore, although it is impossible to predicate anything of Absolute being, which is applicable to finite being, given the proper understanding of the relationship between these two orders of reality, one can receive a glimpse of the Absolute by careful examination of its finite image. Cusa writes that all finite beauty bears

> only a certain disproportionate likeness to that Beauty [of the Absolute] (1) which is actually the possibility of the existence of all beauty and (2) which is not able to exist otherwise than it does, since it is what it is able to be.[62]

This is, however, in reference not just to beauty, but for all qualities of being.

The reason that the Absolute functions as the source of being is because every finite being derives its existence from It. Cusa describes the Absolute as the Form of forms and that which enfolds all forms. He writes that,

> unless Being itself were to impart forming being to all forms, forms would not at all have forming being. Therefore, Divine Being, which is Absolute Being itself is present in all things, giving to all of them such being as they have.[63]

The Absolute is the source of finite reality, at least in part, by being its archetype. Cusa makes this point most clearly when he asserts that the Absolute is all things which may possibly be and consequently its the truest formal cause of finite reality. "It is necessary that the Creator have within Himself the Concept and Rational Ground of all formable things."[64]

Cusa's heavy emphasis upon the formal aspect of finite realities unfolding from the Absolute betrays his fundamentally Neo-Platonic orientation. However, it would be a mistake to assume that formal causality is in and of itself sufficient to account for the Divine unfolding. As has been shown, finite beings for Cusa are not merely forms but forms which must inhere in matter in order to exist. Though Cusa sees matter as being fundamentally inferior to form he is no Manichean and does not see matter as being anti-thetical to the Divine. The Absolute not merely imposes forms upon matter but creates beings which are a unity of form and matter; therefore, He is not simply the formal cause of reality, but the efficient cause as well. The Absolute is responsible for unfolding not merely the forms of finite reality, but also the material potentialities in which those forms must inhere. This is because the Absolute is not pure act, but an entity which, in being all that can be, exists beyond the distinction between actuality and potentiality.

The emanation of being is the process which establishes the principles of individuality and community. By emanation the Absolute creates the individual entities of finite reality in contracting itself in a unique fashion for each individual being. In this manner, Cusa provides the basis for the principle of individuality. However, since each individual is a contraction of the same whole and therefore reflects the whole, each individual is inherently related to every other one on an ontological basis. This inherent ontological relationship which unites all being by giving it a common archetype and source is the foundation upon which the principle of community rests.

The Orientation of Being Toward the Divine

Having discussed the way in which finite being is unfolded from, while remaining distinct from, Absolute being, we can now discuss the manner in which finite being is directed toward the Divine and how each individual being tends toward a common goal. This section is imperative for understanding the inherently dynamic character Cusa gives reality.

Because the Absolute is the archetype from which all finite reality derives its being, it is not surprising that Cusa seeks to have finite being return to the Absolute. In *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusa writes that "the visible universe is a faithful reflection of the invisible, and that from creatures we can rise to a knowledge of the creator."[65] This attempt to rise toward the Divine is not confined to rational creatures, though they come closest to it. For Cusa, "God has implanted in all things a natural desire to exist with the fullest measure of existence that is compatible with their particular nature."[66] To this end the Absolute has endowed them with suitable faculties and activities to reach

its fulfillment.[67] Thus, for Cusa, the Absolute is not only the source of reality, but also the goal toward which reality moves.

Once the Absolute bestows being upon the finite the finite itself becomes active and strives to preserve and develop those perfections it now possesses.[68] Thus, as Peter Kampits points out, individual beings imitate in a finite manner not merely external exemplars, but the Absolute Itself.[69] This brings individual beings into a direct and immediate relationship to the Absolute. This is a very strong proclamation of the dynamic nature of reality for it means not only a dynamic Absolute, but a dynamic Absolute who creates something which itself is active and continually strives to mirror its creator.

The dynamic activity of being is closely linked to the unity of reality. Because all finite reality is unfolded from the Absolute, then as enfolded in the Absolute all finite beings are united within it. Furthermore, since finite being is both derived from, and seeks to return to, the Absolute, the real distinctions which exist within the universe are to some degree mitigated. The concept that all reality is in some sense within the Absolute and conversely that the Absolute is in all things relating each being to every other is not uncommon particularly in medieval Christianity. It is Cusa's articulation of this principle, however, which is distinctive. In *De Docta Ignorantia* he describes the unity of reality as analogous to the unity between a face and its images as reflected in a number of varying mirrors. The face is present in each image since all of the mirrors reflect the same face. Each image is uniquely reflective of the same original object, therefore, placing these unique images within a basic unity. This does not mean, however, that the Absolute is in any way limited to its finite expressions since that would be tantamount to saying that the face is nothing other than its reflected images. Though the mirrors can reproduce many more or less accurate images of the face it can never hope to produce the full and original reality of the face in an undiminished manner. Because the Absolute is both the source of all finite beings and a simple unity entirely devoid of otherness, in a very particular and limited sense the Absolute may be described as the ultimate essence of all things.[70]

Because of this, finite entities are in a certain sense transcendental by virtue of their relation to absolute being. The universe becomes a place where "the essence of everything [God] is immediately present to all things,"[71] though never identical to them. This is because, though all things are enfolded in the Absolute, precisely as unfolded from the Absolute and brought into existence they are themselves rather than the Absolute.

The Universe's Return to the Divine

Just as the infinite contains the entirety of the universe in a unified way, the unity of the universe contains the various entities which make it up. This is pointed out by Armand Maurer who claims further that just as absolute unity reconciles all opposition, the universe with its unity reconciles the opposition which exists within it.[72] This, however, is not entirely accurate, since it ignores the fundamental difference between the Absolute and the universe which, though it is the totality of all limited beings, is, nonetheless, itself a limited entity. Because absolute unity is that from which limited being derives its existence, it cannot fail completely to reconcile all the opposition of finite beings since that is the very definition of absolute unity. The universe, however, is a limited unity. This means that, strictly speaking, the universe is incapable of reconciling the opposition within it, but can merely contain it. Within absolute unity there is only oneness and all distinctions and oppositions are annihilated; within the limited unity of the

universe, however, the existence of opposition remains in effect though it is confined to the various component parts of the universe and not extended to the universe as a whole.

In *De Docta Ignorantia* Cusa supports this view when he describes the universe as a privative infinity. This is because matter lacks the power to extend beyond itself, and since matter is incapable of infinite extension the universe can be greater only if the Absolute ordained it to be so. Thus, though the universe is infinite in the sense that it is all that it can be, this infinity is a privative one in that, though it does include all finite being, it does not contain the Absolute and therefore is not all that can be. In short, the universe remains a limited entity which owes its existence to the Absolute.[73] The universe is a particular individual entity and not merely a collection of all entities. Therefore, it has in itself an immediate contact with the Absolute apart from the individual entities which constitute it. Nonetheless, it can only contain rather than reconcile the opposition of finite being because, apart from the Absolute, all things must necessarily differ from one another.[74]

Jasper Hopkins outlines the implications of this,

> The universe, then, is an oneness of many substances, each of which has its own essence, or quiddity. This oneness-in-plurality is such that the oneness precedes the plurality, though the way in which the universe precedes its parts is different from the way in which God precedes the universe, for the universe is not undifferentiated being itself.[75]

In *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusa writes that,

> All the beings which form parts of the universe must have come into being together with the universe, for without them it would be impossible for the universe in its limited nature to be one. . . . In the artist's mind, the whole is conceived before the part, for example the house, before a wall; and so it was with the mind of God to Whose will all things owe their being. First, then, to be produced was the universe and, as a consequence, all that the existence of the universe and its perfection necessarily demanded.[76]

Thus, one can see that for Cusa, God created all of the parts of the universe simultaneously so that the universe does not temporally precede its constituent parts nor does any one part precede any other. However, just as God ontologically precedes the universe, the universe ontologically precedes its constituent parts. This is because the universe is the product of God's design and in this sense may be considered ontologically to precede its constituent parts just as the architect's plans for an entire house precede the various parts of that house.[77]

Cusa elaborates the nature of these constituent parts of the universe in *De Dato Patris Luminum*. "Every creature is a disclosing of the Father and participates diversely and contractually 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."[78] As previously shown, Cusa ranks these manifestations according to the degree in which each requires matter in order to exist. He asserts in the *Idiota de Mente* that "creatures without mind are unfoldings of the divine simplicity rather than its images even though in unfolding they share in different ways in the image, in accord with the way the image of mind is reflected."[79]

Man as Microcosm

Due to their rational nature, humans occupy the preeminent place in the hierarchy of finite beings. Because Cusa asserts that unity is essentially synonymous with being his ranking of man as the highest of all finite beings has important implications for his understanding of the meaning of unity. One can see clearly that the term unity does not refer to a simple uniformity when applied to finite being. Inanimate corporeal being which Cusa describes as an unfolding of divine simplicity not only fails to achieve primacy within the hierarchy of being, but is placed at the very lowest level. Thus, unity for Cusa is epitomized by the harmonious diversity which human nature represents. Because of its singular nature, corporeal nature exists in opposition to every other nature.

Human nature, however, embraces the entire spectrum of finite nature, from the rational to the corporeal. It possesses an even greater unity than that of the universe, not because of what it unifies, but rather because of the way in which this unity exists. Humanity does not simply contain diverse types of being as does the universe, but it more adequately reconciles their distinctions into a single cohesive nature. The human unity is no more inclusive than the unity of the universe, but its distinctions are far less pronounced. Whereas the different natures within the universe exist in a somewhat divided manner, this is not the case for humans. Their rational nature brings them into proximity with the Absolute because their minds enable them to study God's creation and, thereby, to gain a glimpse of God's nature. Rational human nature also approximates the creative power of the Divine in that it can create a notional world in a somewhat similar manner to the real world created by the Absolute. Just as the Absolute unfolds to create a finite world, the human mind unfolds to create a world of ideas containing geometrical theorems, symbols, metaphors, *et cetera*. The existence of these ideas is dependent entirely upon rational human nature. The unfolding of this nature is limited to rational entities, but this is hardly insignificant. For Cusa, entities whose being is not dependent upon corporeal matter are superior to those which do. In short, the human ability to create rational entities is far superior to the ability to produce beings of corporeal matter. Humanity for Cusa represents a microcosm of the universe because of which the Incarnation plays a fundamental role in Cusa's metaphysics.

The Role of the Incarnation

Through the Incarnation the Absolute becomes finite in the person of Jesus Christ. This process gives Christ a dual though unified nature which is both wholly Divine and wholly human. In Christ, human nature reaches its ultimate perfection in that it is united with the Absolute. In this fashion humanity loses its limitedness and the Absolute is revealed in its concreteness, simultaneously with the absoluteness of the concrete.[80] Therefore, one can see that, strictly speaking, Christ should not really be viewed as a mediator shuttling back and forth between the Absolute and the limited but genuinely belonging to neither. More accurately Christ is the union of the Absolute and finite reality binding them together by belonging quite properly to both.[81]

For Cusa, Christ enjoys a sort of metaphysical dual citizenship making Him entirely at home with either the Absolute or the finite in a manner possible for no other being. Thus, Christ should be viewed not as the bridge between the finite and absolute realms, but as the perfect microcosm who, "In his human nature is the supreme limit of the active tendency of the species to its perfection and in his divine nature he is the perfect image of the Father."[82] Christ is the union of God and man but this "is not a union of opposites nor a union of what was before separate, nor a union of

parts into a whole, for the nature of God has no parts, it is God as Creator and creature without confusion and without composition."[83]

Since, as has already been pointed out, humanity serves as a microcosm for the entire universe it can be said that Christ's redemption of mankind in a certain limited sense redeems the rest of creation through human nature.[84] This is why Cusa describes Christ as the culmination of creation who fulfilled all things and whose coming all creation has awaited from the beginning.[85] Thus, Cusa stresses Christ as being "ever present and individual in each person as well as in the universe rather than an historical fact accomplished once and for all, Cusa impresses the personal reality of Christianity as a vital and organic force through all ages."[86]

In the light of Cusa's teaching on the Incarnation one can interpret his statement in *De Docta Ignorantia* that "human nature it is that is raised above all works of God and made a little lower than the angels."[87] This is by no means to assert that angels are uncreated, yet, if they are superior to mankind, which he describes as God's greatest creation, how can they also be a work of God? For Cusa, angels are indeed finite created entities completely dependent on the Absolute. Humanity is exceeded by angelic nature because humanity requires physical matter in order to exist, which, for Cusa, is a mark of inferiority. This would seem to have serious implications for the concept of finite unity as an harmonious diversity since the simplicity of the angels seems to be superior to the diverse nature of humans.

The Incarnation, however, changes all of this. Because the human is a microcosm of the universe conjoining both the physical and rational aspects of reality he or she is peculiarly suited for unification with the Absolute.[88] The angelic nature, however, is of a purely rational nature and would fail to unite the Absolute with the corporeal were it the subject of the Incarnation. Thus, though created ontologically inferior to the angels, humanity is by virtue of the Incarnation raised beyond the angels and united to the Absolute.[89] Because human nature is united with the Absolute due to its diverse, though ontologically inferior, nature, while angelic nature is excluded from this singular honor on the grounds of its simplicity the preeminence of the harmonious diversity of finite unity is preserved.

It is important to remember that though Christ was a particular man who lived at a particular historical time, the unification He represents, and all of its far reaching implications are, nonetheless, eternal and necessarily so due to the nature of the Absolute. Christ's unification of humanity with the Absolute makes it impossible for human nature, and through it the rest of reality, to perfect itself apart from the Divine.

Though Cusa firmly believes in the dignity of man based upon this relation to the Absolute, at no point does his thought run the risk of deifying humankind. The human remains a finite creature with thoroughly limited capacities. One's sense knowledge is particular and, therefore, temporal and corrupt. One's intellectual knowledge, though able to transcend the particular and because of this most capable of approximating the Absolute, remains ever incapable of comprehending the Absolute as It is in Itself.[90] While the human intellect is potentially all things, the absolute intellect is actually so.

Pauline Moffitt Watts quite correctly points out that "no matter how much the human intellect reduces the element of possibility or contingency in its process of abstraction it is still unable to attain the actuality of the maximal intellect."[91] One should note, however, that the difference between the finite and the absolute intellect is not merely one of degree. The human mind for Cusa is not absolute potentiality which is only partially actualized, while the divine mind is completely actualized. Man's mind is inherently limited and is capable of only partially actualizing even this limited potential since no individual being is capable of completely fulfilling its potential. The

Absolute, on the other hand, is the source of all being and as such possesses unlimited potentiality which it completely actualizes.

Hence, not only are all created things derived from the Absolute, they also are endowed with special faculties which allow them to bring themselves into closer approximation with the Divine. This is particularly the case with respect to human nature. Cusa clearly makes this point in *De Visione Dei* where he writes that

> Thou [God] hast given me my being, of such a nature that it can make itself continuously more able to receive Thy grace and goodness and this power, which I have of Thee, wherein I possess a living image of Thine almighty power, is freewill.[92]

Thus, finite reality not only is unfolded from the Divine, but is capable of utilizing its God-given abilities to approximate the Divine even more closely. The fact that the human is a microcosm of the universe brings corporeal and animate being closer in relationship to the Divine than either would have been able to achieve separately.

The return of being to the Absolute helps to reveal the ways in which the principles of individuality and community operate within the universe. In accord with the principle of individuality, each particular being within the finite realm seeks to image the Divine to the greatest degree its limited nature allows. This is possible because each individual being, as a contraction of the Absolute, is partially reflective of the Absolute's being. The principle of community plays an even larger role with respect to the return of being to the Absolute. This is because in embracing a variety of individuals the community is not limited to any single nature. Thus, the community can image the Absolute in a more accurate manner, since it is not limited to a single expression of Its infinite nature.

The Diversity of Finite Being and Its Proclamation of the Divine

This section will discuss the way in which finite reality reflects the Divine and how this requires a diversity of being in order to proclaim its source through the interaction of its parts. This should cast light upon both the value of the individual in itself and the way in which each is related to the whole in an harmonious manner. More importantly, however, it will reveal why the unfolding of the Absolute takes place as it does. It is imperative that this point be understood before inquiring further into the way in which each individual finite being is related to the whole in terms of the good.

Because all finite reality seeks its fulfillment in the Absolute one can see clearly how divine reality serves as the final cause of being. For Cusa, all finite reality tries to mirror the Absolute to the greatest degree allowed by its limited being. Since the Absolute is conceived by Cusa to be fundamentally dynamic, the reality produced by this dynamism must itself exist in a fundamentally dynamic manner. Thus, finite reality in itself is productive; the epitomy of this productivity of the finite is human intellectual creativity.

In the *Apologia*, Cusa writes that "God shines forth in creatures as truth shines forth in an image."[93] For Cusa every creature is an image of God and every perfection it possesses is derived from that of which it is an image. The Divine, however, is not comprehensible on the basis of any created thing since all images necessarily fall short of their exemplar.[94] Once one realizes this fact,

however, one may move beyond these finite images and turn oneself "incomprehensibly to the incomprehensible truth" of the Divine.[95]

In a work entitled *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, Etienne Gilson warns that when piety inundates philosophy the usual result is that in order to better "extol the glory of God, pious minded theologians proceed joyfully to annihilate God's own creation":[96] The Creator is great and almighty, while creation is insignificant and base; God is everything but his creation is nothing.[97] The careful balance in Cusa's thought between the mystical and the rational, however, prevents this from occurring. Luis Martinez-Gomez points out that Cusa differs from most other medieval mystics in that for him the finite world serves not merely as a point of departure from which one embarks upon the journey toward union with God, but as a mirror in which the Divine itself is reflected. As a man of the Renaissance, Cusa is not willing to degrade physical reality and encourages man to know it in the most accurate manner humanly possible.[98] Hence, the Divine is not something to which one can move only by abandoning finite reality, but something which one must learn how to recognize through finite reality. In short, the finite world serves Cusa not merely as a point of departure, but also as the pathway through which human can approach the Divine. Hence, the Divine is not something which is alien to and removed from finite reality, but is both necessary to it and inherent in it. Finite reality is not a contradiction of the Divine, but entirely consistent with it.

Cusa has an essentially Theophanic view of finite reality which depicts individual entities as images of the Divine; only in this sense may they be said to be manifestations of the Divine. From the Divine, individual beings receive their own being which is not equivalent to the Divine. For Cusa finite being represents the Absolute as received in a limited manner rather than as given in Itself. Thus, even though God gives Himself only in an absolute manner, the finite can exist only in a limited capacity: the Absolute can be received only in a contracted fashion. Though this reception falls short of the truth of the Divine, nonetheless, it remains a likeness thereof.[99]

This view is most clearly expressed in *De Dato Patris Luminium*:

> The Best [God], 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. . . . it [the Best] 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.[100]

Cusa compares this relationship to that of a mirror which receives the image of a face, but is incapable of ever receiving the face as it is in itself. This is because "it will have to be received in something other [than itself] in a manner other [than as it is in itself]."[101]

Cusa reiterates this view in the *Apologia* where he flatly asserts that an image cannot coincide with its exemplar just as an effect cannot coincide with its cause. In fact, Cusa is so adamant on this point, and finds it so self-evident, he claims that any man who denies it is not merely mistaken but simply stupid.[102] Cusa has even harsher words for John Wenck's assertion that for Cusa the image and the exemplar are of a single nature: "This [Wenck's assertion] is the detestable outrage of a shameless falsifier."[103]

Cusa sums up his position on this matter quite succinctly in the *Apologia*: "all things are in God as things caused are in their cause, it does not follow that the caused is the cause - although in the cause they are only the cause."[104] In short, the unfolding from the Divine results in the creation of a being which is other than the Divine; as enfolded in the Divine, however, finite reality exists within the Divine but only as the Divine.

For Cusa there can be no comparative relation between the Divine and its creaturely manifestations. In the *Apologia* he asserts that no created thing can possess a beauty through which the Absolute may be attained. However, from the greatness of creation, humans can be elevated to the infinite and incomprehensible beauty of the Divine. This occurs in the same way a work of art refers to the artist, though the work bears no comparative relation to the artist.[105] In *De Li Non Aluid*, Cusa quotes Psuedo-Dionysius, which is perhaps the best way to summarize Cusa's understanding of the relationship between the Divine and Its creation:

> Theology itself says that, as something other than all things, He [God] is unlike all things and is free from all things; and -- what is surely more marvelous -- it denies that anything is like unto [Him]. And, assuredly, this point is not opposed to the [doctrine of the] likeness -- to -- God. Indeed, the same things are both similar and dissimilar to God - similar because, as much as they can they imitate Him who cannot possibly be imitated clearly.[106]

Thus one can clearly understand the key distinction Jasper Hopkin's draws between participating in the Divine and signifying such a participation. Speaking in the strictest sense a finite thing cannot actually participate in the undifferentiated unity of the Divine as its actual limited self. Nonetheless, it remains possible to signify participation of the Divine. When one refers to the Divine as omnipotent one is signifying that the Divine bears some resemblance - however dim - to the finite power which one experiences through the entities of the created world. Thus, when some created thing is called powerful it signifies that this thing participates in the absolute power of the Divine (i.e. powerfulness as such). The Divine in Itself, however, cannot be equated with powerfulness as such because Its absolute nature places It beyond the distinction of the powerful and the powerless.[107] It is clear that Cusa does not view the world as a modification of the Divine in the same sense that color is a modification of light. In short, though the world is unfolded from the Divine it is not the unfolding of the Divine Itself, since the existence of the Divine is in no way contingent on the existence of the universe.[108] Because the Divine is the ultimate being of all things this does not mean that any given thing in its being is God. Similarly, to say that God is the ultimate essence of all things does not mean that any thing or even the sum total of all things are in their essence Divine. Since all finite reality is inherently differentiated while the Absolute is not, the Absolute can never be equated with finite being or even the sum total of finite being.[109] Cusa rejects the idea that the Divine can be mingled with finite reality. Finite reality descends from the Divine but remains always it image, and as such can never be equated with the reality of the Absolute Itself.[110]

Clyde Lee Miller asserts that finite reality is the "immediate presence of God's infinite unity in attenuated and contingent form."[111] Hence, the Divine is so directly present to finite reality that each entity within reality is an image of Divine unity. In short, the universe is a diverse and plural expression of absolute unity. Humans cannot comprehend completely even the finite things of the universe because at their unitary core these things reflect the unity of the Absolute which in even this attenuated form still transcends the approximations which man's mind can make.[112] For Cusa,

creatures are appearances of the Divine and, as such, possess no independent being of their own. Thus, their entire reality is dependent upon, and derived from, the Divine of which they are manifestations. Even accidents which cannot exist apart from the substance in which they inhere do confer something upon their substance. Creatures, however, contribute nothing to the Divine who already is the Absolute. In this manner, finite being may be said to possess less reality than accidents. One should bear in mind, however, that this does not mean that God does not endow creatures with positive being, only that this positive being is relative to the Absolute which it reflects. This is analogous to a variety of mirrors all of which reflect a single face, except that in the case of the Divine unfolding there are no mirrors but only the Absolute and its images. All of these reflect absolute being, but none contain that being or any part of it.[113] Cusa expresses this in *De Li Non Aluid* with another quote from Pseudo-Dionysius: "Created things must be said to be like unto God and formed according to the image and likeness of God. However, God must not be said to be like unto created things; for not even a man is similar to his own image."[114]

Peter Kampits points out that Cusa's philosophy does not result in a suspension of the uniqueness of the particular in favor of the totality because the whole possesses its mode of being through the existence of the particulars.[115] Julie C. Norman notes that the emanation of reality from the Divine occurs in a process of descending levels of unity. The source of all unity is, of course, the Divine whose existence is entirely devoid of any distinction. From this absolute unity comes a secondary unity of the universe as a singular entity made up of a multiplicity of finite beings. This contracted unity of the universe itself contracts into a third level of unity made up of the various genera. Each of the multiple genera contract to themselves creating the next level of unity which is constituted of various species. This emanation terminates in the contraction of the species into finite individuals.[116] Here emanated reality is at last actualized into genuine existence.

Thus the universe as unfolded from the Divine is the contracted maximum. Likewise, each finite thing which makes up the universe is, through its contraction, a particularization of the entire universe. Just as humanity is not synonymous with Socrates or Plato, but is Socrates in Socrates, and Plato in Plato, the universe is not synonymous with its particular constituent elements but in each individual thing it is that particular thing.[117] Hence, finite realities are not so much the contracted being of the Divine, but a contracted reflection of divine being.[118] Ernst Cassirer correctly points out that more than a mere reflection of divine being, a finite reality is a book written by God's own hand.[119] Cassirer is trying to point out here that finite reality is not a random by-product of the Divine, but a willed act of self-revelation. In this manner, Cusa preserves the freedom and charity of the Divine's creative act.

In order to understand the way in which finite being reflects the Divine, three points are imperative. The first is that the Absolute is the primary reality and no being whatsoever can exist that is not derived therefrom. Despite the orientation toward the Divine had by all finite being, one must constantly bear in mind that though finite being is dependent upon the Divine it is also distinct from It. Secondly, each finite being is indispensable in that it contributes something which is entirely unique to the proclamation of the Divine. Thirdly, each individual entity serves as an image of the Divine. As such each actively seeks to fulfill its limited potential and thereby to mirror the Divine to the greatest possible degree.

Finite being's attempt to mirror the Divine which makes diversity such an important element in Cusa's philosophy. For Cusa diversity as man understands it cannot exist in the Divine.[120] In the finite world, however, diversity is not only possible but beneficial. In *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusa claims that the universe as a whole is a restricted form of the Absolute which derives its being from the Absolute and tries to reproduce it to the most accurate possible degree.[121] Each individual

being which makes up the universe is itself a contraction of the universe and, likewise, tries to reproduce the Absolute to the greatest possible degree. Since all finite being possesses a limited potentiality one can easily see that a diverse plurality of such beings will more accurately depict the Absolute than could any individual finite entity. This is why Ernst Cassirer claims that no part of the universe is dispensable: each possesses its own incomparable worth.[122] Maurice De Gandillac echoes this point when he asserts that each individual plays it own distinct role in the total economy of reality.[123]

For Cusa, finite being seeks to image the Absolute to the greatest degree allowed by its nature: "every creature, through its perfection and as closely as the condition of its nature permits may ascend unto deification."[124] Although all being can flow back to the Absolute, Cusa preserves the distinction between the Absolute and the finite by asserting that these beings inevitably fall short of fulfilling even their limited specific perfection.[125] Cusa himself says that the all embracing nature of the Absolute can be properly manifested only through a diversity of finite being.[126] This is for the rather obvious reason that finite beings have only a limited potentiality and, therefore, only a diverse multiplicity of such limited beings could properly, though not perfectly, image the Absolute. In this manner, no individual entity is capable of achieving its end or completion apart from the Divine.

The principles of individuality and community also have important implications for the finite being's proclamation of the Divine. In accord with the principle of individuality every being is indispensable to the proclamation, since each being proclaims the Divine an entirely unique way; no other being is capable of making this proclamation. However, it can proclaim the Absolute only in a manner consistent with its own limited nature and, to this extent, it is inadequate. The principle of community manages to overcome this drawback.

It allows for the integration of the various individuals of finite reality into a whole, so the community can proclaim the Absolute more accurately than any one of its constituent members. This is because where the individual is capable of proclaiming the Divine in a manner consistent only with its own nature, the community does so in a manner consistent with a diverse variety of individuals. Hence, what one individual lacks another will possess, and where one is silent, another shall speak. One must bear in mind, however, that even the community, which is ultimately finite in nature, can never completely reflect the nature of the Absolute which is infinite.

Notes

1. Jasper Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Arthur J. Banning Press, l988), P. 28.

2. Nicholas of Cusa, "Trialogus de Possest" in *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*, p. 153.

3. Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982), p. 43.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

11. Nicholas of Cusa, "De Dato Patris Luminum" in *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysic of Contraction*, Jasper Hopkins, ed. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Arthur J. Banning Press, l983), p. 117.

l2. Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysic of Contraction,* p. 35.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

15. Vincent Martin, "The Dialectical Process in the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa," *Laval Theologique et Philosophique*, 5 (1949), 239.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 234.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 266.

20. Martin, p. 257.

21. Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Debate With John Wenck* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, Arthur J. Banning Press, 1988), p. 12.

22. Martin, p. 108.

23. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysic of Contraction,* p. 98.

24. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, Germain Heron, trans. (London: Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1954), p. 81.

25. Hopkins, p. 41.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

27. Nicholas of Cusa, *The Vision of God* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1960), p. 71.

28. Nicholas of Cusa, "Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae" in *Nicholas of Cusa's Debate With John Wenck ,* p. 48.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Jasper Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*, p. 29.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

33. Nicholas of Cusa, "Trialogus de Possest" in *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*, p. 75.

34. Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysics of Contraction*, p. 93.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

36. Clyde Lee Miller, "Aristotelian Nature and Nicholas of Cusa," *Downside Review,* 76 (l978), 156.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

38. W. H. Hay, "Nicolaus Cusanus: The Structure of His Philosophy," *Philosophical Review*, 61 (Jan 1952), 23.

39. Hopkins, p. 91.

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Chapter V
The Ethical Implications of the Unfolding from the Divine Unity

This chapter will examine some ethical implications of Cusa's understanding of unity. To this end it is divided into five sections. The first section will discuss the link between the concept of unity and ethical thought. Specifically, it will examine the implications of Cusa's distinct understanding of unity for understanding human relationships. The second section will discuss the role the human plays within the natural world. In the third section the relationships between humans will be discussed, focusing upon the interaction between individuality and social cohesion. The fourth section will then move on to discuss the related issue of determining the proper limits of freedom and compulsion. The fifth section will examine the status of evil within Cusa's metaphysics. Once again the principles of individuality and community play fundamental roles in understanding the nature of relationships within reality. The principle of individuality differentiates one being from another and allows each to have its own particular value and autonomy. The principle of community unites these individuals into an order which assigns each its proper place in relation to all other entities. The relationship of the principles of individuality and community in reference to their ethical implications for Cusa's thought are sketched in the accompanying diagram.

The Relationship of Unity and Ethics

One's metaphysical understanding of the concept of unity has a profound effect upon one's understanding of both human nature and society. This section will discuss the concept of unity from the relativist, idealist and Aristotelian perspectives, and then show how this relates to their conceptions of human nature and their implications for structuring society. It will then discuss how Cusa fits into this scheme with his concept of unity as an harmonious diversity.

The Relativist Perspective

The relativist rejects the idea that there is an objective reality or that any one truth can be binding for all.[1] Hence, unity is regarded as nothing more than a chimera. It makes no sense to speak of human nature since each individual possesses a nature which is entirely that person's own with no necessary relationship with anything outside of the self. The relativist's vision of society is likely to be decidedly anarchic since it entirely ignores the principle of community and is based exclusively on the principle of individuality. Any attempt to construct even the most tenuous form of order or to restrain the individual in even the slightest way is likely to be regarded as a fascist attempt to impose conformity upon society. Anarchy, however, is not necessarily the final outcome for a relativistic society because if each has his or her own unique conception of reality which is as true as any other conception the relativist can object to no one. The law-abiding citizen, the bomb throwing anarchist, and the liberty crushing dictator are all equally correct in their actions. In short, since the principles of the relativism assert that all views must be tolerated, then it must tolerate the many intolerant views which exist.[2]

The doctrine of relativism can end only in a society epitomized by Hobbes state of nature where the only law is that of the jungle and justice is the advantage of the stronger. The individual becomes engaged in a war of each against all with no prospect of any sort of social development.

The only respite from this struggle is for some individual to become strong enough to impose order through sheer force, which will last only as long as the strong person can maintain his or her position. Furthermore, the order imposed by the strong person is no true order since it is dependent on the whim of a single person or group and will collapse the moment that power is lost.

The Classical Greek Perspective

The ancient Greeks, however, saw the individual in a far less isolated manner. For the Greeks, one could not achieve anything great if one lacked self-respect. Society can, likewise, achieve nothing great so long as it fails to secure self-respect for its members. This self-respect is fostered by one's relationship with others, particularly, those whom one loves. Martha C. Nussbaum's article entitled, "Shame, Separateness and Political Unity: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato" is highly enlightening in respect to the relationship between social unity and ethics. Nussbaum points out that "it [self-respect] is, nonetheless, the sort of thing that properly belongs to each 'man who is going to live well' not to all in some collective way but to men one by one as separate choosers of their own activities."[3] Thus, in *The Symposium*, Plato advocates an army of lovers rather than a traditional one, because such an army would have each of its members engaged in a common cause as separate individuals, and each aware of him or herself as choosing to display certain excellences. The presence of the lover serves to make the beloved more sensitive to any individual failures or deficiencies he or she might possess and inspire him or her to remedy them.[4]

According to Nussbaum's analysis, the individual is respected and respects oneself not as a part of something larger, but as oneself being the seat of something excellent and as one who has freely chosen to pursue this excellence. What matters to such an individual is not merely the general outcome of the enterprise in which one's group is involved, but what one does and is (i.e. that one acquit oneself honorably). For the Greeks, it is self-aware and independent individuals which create strong societies. Thus one can see the fundamental connection between self-respect and political unity, and the relation of both to individuality. In order to distribute the good of self-respect effectively, society cannot give it to the citizenry as a whole, but to each individual member of the society.[5]

Nussbaum points out that the way in which self-respect is distributed is part of what separates the two great giants of Greek Philosophy, Plato and Aristotle. These two men have such divergent views in reference to self-respect because of their different conceptions of unity. Aristotle asserts that the social unity of Plato is neither feasible nor desirable. He claims that the Platonic contention, that the more unity a society possesses the better it is, is erroneous. This is because, as Aristotle points out, a society is by its very nature a plurality and, therefore, an excess of unity is inevitably destructive to it.[6]

The Platonic View. Nussbaum asserts that Plato's ideas on social unity are grounded upon a rather unesteemable view of human nature and the physical realm in general. From the Platonic perspective, the vast majority of men are hopelessly enslaved to the whims of the appetitive part of their soul. Thus, such a person can live in accordance with the divine reason only by being enslaved to one of the few men who are capable of restraining the appetitive part of their souls with their reason.[7] This can be done only by suppressing the individual wills and individuality of those who cannot control their own appetitive natures. From this perspective there is no room for democracy and individual rights; even the distinction between the public and the private is

erased.[8] For Plato, the principle of community is emphasized, but only at the expense of the principle of individuality.

The Platonic scheme ignores the importance of individuality and rejects the democratic notion that a person's self-respect is derived from one's own individual action. The rule of reason is imposed upon the ruled from without. One's entire value is derived from one's link to this external source; only in relation to something outside of oneself does one receive one's alleged self-respect. This line of thought is derived from Plato's soul-based theory of individual identity. The body is reduced to a mere appearance within which resides the true man struggling for control. Therefore, providing a man whose reason is weak with external assistance does not necessarily violate his individuality and personal integrity.[9] Since most men have no control over their appetitive natures, they must be placed under the control of those who can give them some aid in order to fulfill their own nature.[10] Thus, only in terms of the community is the individual capable of achieving any value and all sense of individual uniqueness is lost.

Plato's ideas of social unity clearly are derived from his metaphysics, in which emphasis is placed upon the forms. Hence, Plato places importance upon the form of human nature rather than upon the particular individuals that represent that form. It is not surprising then that Plato has no qualms about making self-respect something which the community, as a whole, can maintain only by restraining nearly all of the individual members of that society from pursuing their own particular ends. For Plato, individuals can achieve self-respect only by following the dictates of the community, just as individual entities can achieve reality only by participating in the form. In both cases, the particular individuals are of secondary importance, while the nature in which they participate is emphasized.

The Aristotelian View. Aristotle, however, took a somewhat different view, as Nussbaum points out. For Aristotle, human living requires political associations which respect individual autonomy. This is because it is impossible for man to have self-respect unless he is ruled by human practical reason. However, even this is not enough for Aristotle. One not only must be free from coercion but also must have a full share of political rights in governing his society.[11] For Aristotle all practical matters are by their very nature indefinite, and thus, when inquiring into them one should not seek to follow the vision of a single expert, but the reflective consensus of all the wise. Hence, he regards Plato's ideas of social unity not merely as impossible, but also as undesirable. Plato emphasizes control and order, while Aristotle is willing to tolerate some disorder for the sake of individual autonomy. The individual in Aristotle possesses a much greater importance than had been the case for Plato. This is because for Aristotle the form can exist only by inhering in an individual and not in some separated realm. For Aristotle the individual is not merely a shadow of being but itself is truly a being. Therefore, Aristotle regards all human beings as possessing a natural capacity for reason and this capacity must have the opportunity to be exercised. Any circumstances which frustrate the development of this capacity do not allow for true human fulfillment. Plato, on the other hand, claims that one requires the rule of reason in order to get his soul into a state of harmony. However, how this ruling is done, or more specifically who does the ruling, is of little consequence since Plato sees the individual as far less important than the whole.[12] Thus, whether a man rules himself or is ruled by another makes little difference to Plato.

The Cusan Perspective

It is clear that Cusa's concept of society is founded more upon the Aristotelian view than the Platonic and is an unambiguous rejection of relativism. Cusa believes that in the finite realm diversity is not only possible, in that it is not destructive to unity, but is required to reflect more accurately the being of the Absolute. Hence, he is respectful of both the individual and individual freedom. However, because diversity is oriented toward reflecting the being of the Absolute (i.e. absolute unity) it does not become a goal in itself. Thus, Cusa's concern for the individual does not exaggerate to the point where social cohesion is destroyed, while relativism flourishes. Thus, Cusa's understanding of unity requires that social cohesion be preserved, and to this extent, personal freedom must be integrated within the needs of society as a whole. For Cusa freedom is a condition for the good society, but not its goal.

The essential concept of Cusa's philosophy is that of unity and his distinctive insight into unity is that diversity is not inimical to it, but an expression of it. This is based upon the relationship between the principle of community and that of individuality. As previously stated, the principle of community asserts that each existing being is a contraction of the whole of being, while the principle of individuality asserts that each contraction is itself unique. These two necessary component principles of being result in relating each entity to every other in accord with the principle of community. Yet, each being is indispensable to the whole due to its uniqueness, in accord with the principle of individuality. Thus, for Cusa the being of the individual is integrated into the structure of the whole of being. It is both inherently reflective of this whole and indispensable to it. For this reason, Cusa does not see diversity as destructive of unity but as testament to its greatness.

This metaphysical insight is what conditions all of Cusa's thinking on the relationship between the individual and the whole in which it exists and upon which it depends. Thus, for Cusa human nature serves as a microcosm of the universe and is reflective of the diversity of the various types of being within the universe. Likewise, a particular person reflects the diversity of human nature, though this nature is contracted here in an entirely unique way. The ethical implications of this relationship are outlined in *De Pace Fidei* where Cusa encourages diversity, but recognizes that without the existence of an overarching unity no diversity would be possible. In short, for there to be a number of variations on a theme, one must first establish a single unified theme.

The ethical implications of Cusa's concept of unity do not apply only to one's relation with one's fellows. The idea that a diversity of individual beings proclaims the unity of the Absolute applies to all finite reality. Thus, for Cusa, the human person must respect the nature of each finite thing. This does not mean that one is forbidden from tampering with finite being, in fact, it is quite the contrary. One's nature is to utilize one's gifts to study nature in order to unlock its secrets and create inventions which can assist one in interacting with it. By interacting with the rest of finite reality, one can proclaim more accurately the Divine and even go so far as to create symbols which approximate the Divine. Nature is not something which one may dispose of in any way one chooses but, along with the human person it is one of the components which make up the unity of the universe. By properly relating to it, one may more accurately approximate the Divine. This issue will be more closely examined in the next section.

The Human Person and the Natural World

This section will examine one's relationship to the natural world. It will focus upon the way in which, as a microcosm of the universe and the most perfect image of the Divine, one relates to the natural world which is an unfolding from the Divine. It will enable one to see the way in which one fits into the scheme of physical reality both as a unique individual and as a part of the whole.

As has been shown in the previous chapters, Nicholas of Cusa's understanding of the universe is considerably different from that of his medieval predecessors. It is not yet, however, the infinite universe of modern thought, but a world-view animated by the spirit of the Renaissance.[13] As such, although he retains the basic hierarchical structure of the medieval cosmos it is far more dynamic than could be expected of the Middle Ages. Likewise, Cusa's universe lacks many of the most fundamental concepts of modernity, such as naturalism and the idea of the universe as a true infinity. As Henry Bett points out, Christian philosophy is constantly faced with the dilemma of emphasizing divine transcendence at the expense of divine immanence or immanence at the expense of transcendence.[14] Cusa resolves this apparent conflict by his understanding of the unfolding of finite reality from the Divine. By unfolding the Divine reproduces Itself not just as It is in Itself, but merely as a finite image. Thus, the Divine is immanent in creation in that every finite thing is only an image of the Divine and, therefore, can exist only in a fashion which reflects the nature of the Divine and can in no way contradict it. At the same time, however, the Divine is absolute and, therefore, all finite images inevitably must fall short of their absolute exemplar.

The Unfolding of the Divine and the Creative Capacity of Human Rationality

The idea of the world as an unfolding of the Divine has profound implications for the development of Cusa's metaphysics. This is particularly the case because, as Cusa makes abundantly clear, the human person is the most accurate image of the Divine inasmuch as one's intellect allows one to create a notional world as well as comprehend the physical one. Thus, it is through knowledge of the images of the physical world that one can gain insight into their divine exemplar. Because of this, the study of nature does not result in a preoccupation with the concerns of this world, causing one to ignore the Divine. In fact, the study of nature receives enhanced importance because only thereby can one gain insight into the Divine. This has its greatest effect, not upon Cusa himself, but upon his successors and contributes greatly to the development of modern science.[15] Nonetheless, as Ivor Leclerc points out, "It says a great deal for the philosophical perspicacity and power of Cusanus' mind that he elaborated some implications many generations before they begin to dawn upon others."[16] This is particularly the case for Cusa's assertions in reference to the mathematical structure of the universe. One must bear in mind, however, that Cusa's claims are based upon metaphysical and epistemological considerations, rather than upon a strictly scientific mathematics.[17]

F. Edward Cranz claims that in Cusa's metaphysics dualism is overcome and Christian optimism triumphs over Christian pessimism. Cusa achieves this feat by stepping beyond the limits of strict Platonism which places all truth in the forms and denigrates the status of the natural world.[18] For the dualist the natural world is seen as being in conflict with, and in some sense even contradicting, the Absolute. For Cusa, however, finite reality is an expression of the Divine. The difference between these two perspectives is as clear as it is important. The dualist sees the infinite as light and the finite as darkness. Cusa, however, sees the Absolute as light and the finite as a limited reflection of the absolute light. This considerably enhances the status of the finite world.

In fact, the study of the natural world becomes not merely permissible, but desirable for, as Cranz points out, "The more he [the Christian] knows about the course of the stars, the more Christian he will become, for God created the world that He might reveal Himself through it."[19]

Nature came to be regarded in the Renaissance as an almost infinite collection of phenomena which, due to the limitations of human knowledge, could never be decoded by any single person, as Aristotle had done for previous generations. This goal could only be achieved through the collaborative effort of many individual researchers.[20] During the Renaissance study of the natural world becomes more rational and empirical. The idea that the study of nature should be done in an independent manner as free as possible from any metaphysical presupposition begins to emerge only as the Renaissance develops.[21] Even for a figure as modern as Galileo, scientific discovery converged with revelation and scientific truth was seen as an expression of the divine will.[22] Cusa's thought suggests many of these characteristically Renaissance concerns. In regard to the limits of the universe, Cusa describes the universe as a relative infinity. As far as man's ability to know the universe is concerned he believes that because of its inherent limitations the human mind is incapable of possessing complete knowledge. In *De Pace Fidei*, Cusa argues that a diverse variety of opinions can more closely approximate the truth than any single opinion. On the other hand, he has no desire to separate science from a metaphysical context.

Cusa asserts that the human person is a microcosm of the universe because human nature comprises all the different levels of reality. Therefore, the human serves as the central link of reality which binds together the highest order of being and the lowest. Thus, humanity unites the intellectual with the sensible world. One's intellectual capacity endows one with the ability to create a rational world and because of this the person may be described as a "human" or a "second god." For Cusa, just as the creative capacity of the Divine brings forth the existing entities and natural forms of the created world, the human mind, in imaging the divine mind, can bring forth rational entities and artificial forms (i.e. tools, mathematical concepts, and most importantly, symbols which explicate the Divine). The difference is that whereas the Divine can actually bring forth that which it understands, the human can only understand what the Divine has already brought forth. In short, one's mind cannot create physical entities ex nihilo as does God's, but can only represent and appropriate for oneself those things which God already has created.[23] Thus, Cassirer's assertion that without human nature there would be no value, since there would then be no principle for evaluating greater or lesser degrees of perfection, must be interpreted rather carefully. As far as Cusa is concerned, God is unequivocally the principle by which the degrees of perfection are evaluated since He is the source of all value. Cassirer fails to emphasize this when he writes that "God is, of course the Master who strikes the coins; but the human mind determines how much they are worth."[24] It would be more accurate to say that, for Cusa, God strikes the coins and, in doing so, determines their value, while the human is merely the inquirer who seeks to evaluate this currency properly and determine the worth which the Absolute has imparted to them. In short, the human is not the principle for evaluating degrees of perfection, but merely the agent who does the evaluating.[25]

Creativity and Responsibility. One should not, however, assume that Cusa sees the human role as nothing more than that of a spectator. For Cusa one must study nature and utilize it as a resource in order to fulfill the divinely appointed end for which one was created. By using one's mind in such a fashion, one is capable of imaging the Divine more accurately than any other finite creature. However, one should not conclude that the natural world is nothing but a mass of raw material upon which the human mind is to work. For Cusa, all finite being is unfolded from the Divine and

is, therefore, also an image of the Divine. Though none of these things are as accurate an image of the Divine as is the human being, they are, nonetheless, worthy of respect in themselves and should never be regarded in a manner which disregards their own unique individual natures. With this in mind one should point out that when one carves a tree into a statue one is not distorting the tree's nature, but is fulfilling some of the latent potential with which the Divine has endowed it. Each one will, due to one's own individual nature, create a being which no other being is capable of realizing. The process of carving does not terminate the object's participation in the Divine, nor stop it from imaging the Divine. One has altered merely the way in which this imaging takes place and in doing so further contributed to the diversity of being which proclaims the Divine. Thereby, one enhances that proclamation by adding to it a heretofore unarticulated expression of the Absolute. In fact, one may even go so far as to say that each particular expression is one which no other person is capable of realizing, since it reflects the unique perspective of its maker's being.

The human's relationship to the physical world is not that of a master to a slave, where the latter exists solely to fulfill the former's whim. It is more analogous to that of gardeners to their gardens. Gardeners do not seek so much to impose their will upon their gardens without regard to the good of that for which they care. Rather they seek to make what has been entrusted to them fulfill its greatest potentialities and in doing so fulfill their own. Furthermore, each individual gardener will create a garden which reflects his or her own unique nature. In fact, each individual plant in each garden will reflect the unique relationship between itself and its gardener. Thus, the garden not only fulfills the individual nature of its gardener, but the nature of each of the individual plants. The natural world is for Cusa an image of the Divine and, in order for one properly to orient oneself toward it, one must recognize and respect this. Nevertheless, one must never idolize nature and make it an end in itself.

The relationship which Cusa sees between humanity and the natural world is an expression of the principles of individuality and community. In accord with the principle of individuality the person, due to the rational aspect of human nature, is placed above all other creatures of the natural world and given dominion over it. However, just as the person is a contraction of the whole, so is the natural world. Hence, one must integrate oneself into the natural world, which is how the principle of community comes into play. Thus, one is not to impose one's will upon the natural world as if it had no value or nature of its own, nor is one to regard nature as equal to the human. The principle of individuality allows for humanity to be placed at the top of the hierarchy of created beings and so ensures human superiority over nature. However, following the principle of community, one is not merely superior to it but, due to this superiority in combination with the inherent relationship between humans and nature, one is also responsible for it. Thus, one must act in a way which is both reflective of one's superiority to the natural world as well as his or her commonality with it. The human person is the pinnacle of the natural world in that he or she completes it. Therefore, one must treat the natural world as a setting or home in which one is to conducts one's life.

Individuality and Social Cohesion

The preceding section discussed the person's relationship to the physical world, this section will discuss one's relationship to one's social world. It will do this by examining the way in which one can integrate the apparently irreconcilable differences between the competing demands of respecting individuality and protecting social cohesion through proper understanding of the relationship between the principles of individuality and community. It will, therefore, attempt to

integrate Cusa's ideas of human nature, which were discussed previously with his ideas on the nature of society.

The Advantages of Diversity

The beneficial effects of social diversity can be seen in Cusa's opinions on the subject which is closest to his heart: that is, religious unity. His views on this in relation to religious unity are most clearly expressed in a work entitled *De Pace Fidei*. Cusa wrote this work as a response to the atrocities which occurred after the fall of Constantinople which he saw as stemming from a difference in religious rites. He wrote this work in bitter remembrance of the time which he spent in the region, where after much prayer and weeping he claims to have received a vision resolving the problem of religious pluralism.[26] Cusa asserts that religious differences arise inevitably due to the great multitude of men. These differences are exaggerated by the fact that such a great percentage of people live a life of misery and servility and so have not the opportunity to seek out the Divine themselves.[27] Because of this, God has appointed certain persons to act as His vicars and legates. These people formulate laws and cults and instruct the uneducated in their meaning and practice. Unfortunately, these regulations come to be regarded as directly from God, rather than from His spokesmen. With the passage of time people place their belief in their own particular customs, rather than in the Divine which these customs were meant to express.

Cusa goes on to inform his readers of the price of eliminating all this diversity. He writes that "No one really wants as his way of worship something that is common practice for all. To want what everyone else wants is imitation."[28] Thus, Cusa recognizes that enforcing religious uniformity will not benefit religious worship, but further divert attention from the object of worship to the form which it takes. Furthermore, to force people to adopt practices in which they do not believe will not enhance their faith, but merely cause them to engage in the performance of rites in which they do not believe. This would be to abandon true worship in favor of meaningless mimicry.

Cusa, however, goes further to insist that not only would religious uniformity have its costs, but that diversity in itself has its positive aspects. One of the positive aspects of diversity is that the distinctiveness of each particular religion is likely to make its adherents pay more careful attention to what they regard to be the best way of worshiping the Divine.[29] Therefore, stifling diversity will only result in a less vibrant religious life for which people will have less concern. Cusa reiterates this point at the end of the work where he has St. Paul claim that religious diversity brings about an increase of devotion. This is because it fosters a spirit of competition among the various groups and each endeavors to make its own practice the most splendid.[30]

It should be noted here that Cusa is no modern day ecumenist, and when he speaks of religious diversity it is not in a Twentieth Century context. For Cusa, the truth is one and every free mind is capable of understanding it. Therefore, the vast plurality of religions can be reduced to a single orthodox faith.[31] It is this single faith which all other religions presuppose. There can be no doubt that for Cusa this faith is most perfectly revealed in the person of Jesus Christ as interpreted by the Roman Catholic Church.[32] What Cusa means by religious diversity is allowing a variety of rites so long as they do not compromise the eternal salvation of the faithful. Cusa, however, urges that a great deal of latitude be granted since "Any endeavor to impose exact conformity in everything is bound to disturb the peace." He recommends that "Church authorities should be governed by expediency in complying with local conditions. Provided that the faith is preserved, a diversity of rites will not mitigate against a common law."[33] Cusa has no objection to diversity in the way in

which one might choose to express the faith so long as they do not alter the substance of what they are expressing.[34] Thus when St. Paul praises religious diversity it is with the proviso that the peace and the faith are preserved.[35]

The Nature of Tolerance in Cusa's Thought

Cusa's idea of religious tolerance may seem rather narrow to the modern reader, but for the Fifteenth Century it was very broad-minded indeed. Ernst Cassirer asserts that as far as Cusa is concerned the opponents of the faith do not need to fear violence, but will be converted peacefully through dialogue. Failing that, however, they will be amiably tolerated. This is because for Cusa all religions, each in its own limited way, worship the Divine. Cusa emphasizes the fact that God is worshipped and places far less importance on the manner in which this worship takes place.[36]

It should be pointed out here that Cassirer's assertion that peace is Cusa's prime concern is something of an overstatement. Cusa constantly links peace to retaining the integrity of the faith, and as a Renaissance man of profound religious convictions, it is likely that Cusa would, if no other option was viable, choose the faith over peace if no reconciliation of the two were possible. However, since Cusa describes the difference between the Turkish Muslims and the Greek Orthodox Christians as a difference in religious rites, it is likely that his definition of the faith is broad enough to accommodate most religious perspectives. He sees religion to be as unified as human nature in that it is a common possession which all share and is as natural to humanity as sensation or reason. Religion for Cusa is a common and universal endeavor sharing a common and universal object (i.e. the Divine). Thus, whatever form particular religions adopt all are in pursuit of the same goal the world over.[37]

The concordance which Cusa sees as existing between all religious perspectives is indicated by the fact that in *De Pace Fidei* Cusa describes several men representing a multitude of religious perspectives as coming to an agreement with startling ease. There can be no doubt that this was in direct contrast with Cusa's rather extensive personal experience in these matters. Cusa is not simply naive here. In *De Pace Fidei*, Cusa points out that Jews often accept death rather than abandon their faith.[38] He also makes a similar assertion in the *Apologia*, where he claims that custom places a strong grip upon the human mind and that many would prefer to surrender their lives rather than their traditions.[39] The fact that Cusa has the participants of the discussion in De Pace Fidei reach such an easy agreement reflects the fundamental unity which Cusa perceived in all religions.[40] For Cusa this single universal truth is synonymous with Christian doctrine as expressed by the Roman Catholic Church and is accessible to all men who seek it with an open mind. The ease with which men of differing religious backgrounds reach agreement about the truth of Christianity is ample testimony to the fact that it is "utterly convincing in its rational simplicity."[41] Thus, the characters which Cusa creates in *De Pace Fidei* being both wise men and free from prejudice are quickly brought around to his way of thinking.

With Cusa, religious diversity is reduced to different approaches to the Divine. Dorothy Koenigsberger points out that Cusa sees no religion as being entirely removed from the Divine. All of them contain at least some insight into the truth of the Absolute, though none of them are as complete as that of Roman Catholicism: for Cusa, Catholicism embraces all of the partial truths of other religions. Because of this, other religions should not be depicted as essentially evil or as adversaries, but merely partial views which are in need of completion.[42] In this manner Cusa brings all other religions into relation with Christianity and opens up at least the possibility of dialogue between them. Thus, although Cusa's ideas on religious tolerance are not exactly the product of

open-minded objectivity, neither are they condescending. Muslim and Christian have mutually exclusive ideas regarding the Incarnation which reflect radically different conceptions of the Divine. Cusa takes these other religions seriously enough to know that they are not asserting Catholic Doctrines with different words. Yet, he does admit that they are also doing their best to discover the Divine and will accept the true faith once it is properly explained to them.

In *De Pace Fidei*, Cusa claims that the Jews do not accept the Trinity because they think it is a plurality of gods, but once they properly understand it they will certainly accept its truth.[43] Of all religions, Cusa claims that Judaism presents the greatest challenge because, despite the fact that their scriptures contain all the necessary relevant information regarding the Incarnation, they refuse to look beyond its letter and, therefore, reject Christ.[44] Cusa does not embrace religious diversity out of any spirit of indifference. The multiplicity of religious perspectives is not merely tolerated as an empirical fact, but is speculatively demanded. For Cusa, all religious institutions and customs serve as sensible signs of the truth and, while these signs are subject to change, that which they signify is not.[45]

Thus plurality, whether in respect to religious or physical reality, is the product of an unfolding of unity. Furthermore, this plurality is something which comes to proclaim the Divine. For the objective realities of the finite world this is because they are limited reflections of the Absolute from which they are derived. Therefore, a multiplicity of diverse realities is required, each highlighting the Absolute in a different manner. By so doing they make the whole a more accurate reflection of the Divine than any singular entity. For religions, however, Cusa sees each one as directing man toward the Absolute; their distinctiveness inspires each religion to perfect itself as much as possible. Thus, where finite objects are limited unfoldings of the Absolute the various religions represent partial views of it. The one exception to this is the Roman Catholic faith which is based upon God's own revelation through the Incarnation and, therefore, is as complete a view of the Absolute as is possible.

According to many scholars *De Pace Fidei* is the finest expression of religious tolerance in the Fifteenth Century. Spiritual unity was a major concern for Renaissance humanists, but tolerance meant nothing more than a reduction of religious differences by reconciliation.[46] Some scholars such as Ernst Cassirer see Cusa as heralding a new religious age of syncretism where all religions and philosophies contain some element of truth. Others argue that Cusa's outlook is more medieval. They point out that the concept of tolerance as such does not become important until after the disintegration of Christendom in the Sixteenth Century at the time of the Protestant Reformation.[47]

One should point out, however, that although Cusa did not experience the Reformation he is quite aware of the serious nature of the conflicts which can be caused by religious differences. Cusa writes *De Pace Fidei* in response to the capture of Christian Constantinople by the Islamic Turks, which profoundly shocked all of Europe. He also saw the beginning of the break-up of the Holy Roman Empire into separate nation states, which also had a religious element. Cusa also had direct experience of the Counciliar movement which had its ultimate origins in the Great Schism of 1378, and the chaos it caused.[48] Thus, Cusa was exceedingly aware of the acrimony, disorder, and violence which religious conflicts could engender. In *De Pace Fidei* Cusa warns against the breakdown of social order because he is no doubt aware of the disastrous consequences that inevitably would follow. However, Cusa also points out that if in the pursuit of order the authorities attempt to impose strict uniformity it shall, likewise, result in disaster.

Morimichi Watanabe points out, that though Cusa's writing on the surface seems to be rather friendly and open-minded, upon closer examination it is revealed to be somewhat different. When

Cusa speaks of a variety of forms of worship being permitted it is only as long as they do not violate the integrity of the faith and, thereby, break the very religious unity which Cusa sought to maintain.[49] Watanabe asserts that Cusa values tolerance not so much as a principle in itself, but as a means of preserving unity.[50]

Cusa never places other religions on an equal footing with Christianity.[51] Toleration for Cusa is directed at rites rather than belief, and even this diversity of rites is permissible only so long as the public peace is maintained and the faith is not endangered.[52] Therese-Anne Druart correctly points out that "True respect for each other [diverse religions] will require acknowledging the truth of our differences as well as trying to understand them."[53] Cusa sees quite clearly the distinctions between religions, but he seeks to understand them only to the extent that this is required in order to fulfill them by bringing them around to Christianity. Cusa realizes that religions differ profoundly on fundamental issues, but despite these differences all point toward the one truth of Christianity and are, therefore, naturally reconcilable to it.

The Social Implications of Cusa's Understanding of Tolerance. The ideas Cusa expresses in *De Pace Fidei* are not confined merely to the Church but can be expanded to the whole of the social order. In the Fifteenth Century there was no sharp separation between Church and State. Also, as Watanabe points out, *De Pace Fidei* sought to maintain unity not only for the Church, but for the whole of the Christian commonwealth.[54] Cusa is fully aware of the intimate link between the individual and society. In *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusa writes that "humanity has no real existence except in the limited existence in the individual."[55] For Cusa, man as the most perfect image of the Absolute achieves reality only within the individual. Therefore, one cannot trample down the individual in order to improve the lot of an abstract and non-existential humanity.

Nevertheless, Cusa does not give the individual unrestricted freedom. He knows quite well that the number of men make conflict inevitable. He also knows that the individual can achieve his full potential only among other men, thus making a society necessary. Furthermore, the diversity of a multitude of men can more approximately image the Divine then could any individual possibly. For Cusa, each thing within the finite realm is influenced by every other thing, and this principle applies also to humankind.[56] Each individual person is at least partially indebted to one's fellows for being shaped by them.

While for Cusa the individual requires a society in which to flourish, as he makes clear in *De Pace Fidei* this society must be well-ordered. This ordering of society is not merely a matter of balancing competing claims which result in compromising both the nature of the individual and society. What is called for is a successful integration of the two which allows both to fulfill their true potential. Should society begin to compromise the individual and seek to impose uniformity upon its members it will succeed only in frustrating its diversity. As a result not only will society impoverish itself, but quite likely it will end up provoking the very disorder it sought to prevent. On the other hand, if one ignores one's duties and obligations to society, one weakens that by which one is nourished and, which facilitates the development of one's own particular strengths. Society can no more prosper by inflicting injury upon its own members than can the individual prosper by weakening the society on which one depends. Cusa suggests that the two be integrated by allowing each individual to maximize one's own unique potential within a well-ordered society. In so doing, the society strengthens itself by not limiting the potentials of those who comprise it, and the individual is rewarded in that, by not being forced into a narrow mold, one is free to pursue those endeavors to which one finds oneself most suited. Outside of society each one would be forced to procure all the necessities of life oneself. Thus, one's opportunity to pursue other interests or self-

perfection would be decidedly limited, and human diversity would be lessened. One also would be deprived of the company of other men as well as of their influence, and this would limit one's potential.

Cusa's understanding of religious tolerance is a product of his understanding of the relationship between the principles of individuality and community. In accord with the principle of community, Cusa sees all religions as related in that each attempts to articulate the nature of the Divine to the greatest degree possible. Since all religions are engaged in the same enterprise, Cusa sees them as being fundamentally related to each other,which provides the basis for his ideas on tolerance. However, the principle of individuality makes it impossible for Cusa to set up an equivalence between all religions. In this manner, religious tolerance is not transformed into mere religious indifference. For Cusa, each religion articulates the Divine in a distinctive manner, and some religions approximate the truth of the Divine more accurately than others. Cusa sees the Roman Catholic faith as the best expression of the Divine and, though he is willing to place all other religions in relation to it, none are equivalent to it. The following part will discuss the implications of Cusa's ideas of tolerance for society as a whole.

Freedom and Compulsion

The challenge of integrating the individual and society implies the determination of the limits of personal freedom. This is of fundamental importance in that it determines the manner in which a social unity will be maintained as a true community. Without its proper resolution, society will tilt toward the anarchy of excessive individualism or the repressive uniformity of totalitarian dictatorship. Cusa realizes that individual freedom can fulfill its promise only if it is properly regulated for otherwise it would end in self-destruction.

Armand Maurer correctly points out that, for Cusa, unity in the finite realm did not at all mean the elimination of all differences, nor was it a means for attaining absolutism for either the Church or the state.[57] In *De Pace Fidei*, Cusa asserts that unless the public peace or the integrity of the one true faith is threatened, Church authorities should not try to impose any uniformity upon its members. Cusa even asserts that diversity is in itself a positive principle in that it enables each person to choose the form of worship one finds the most appropriate. The distinctiveness of each group should foster a spirit of competition which would be beneficial in that each would strive to perfect itself to the greatest possible degree.

This principle is equally applicable for the secular realm. Just as not enforcing uniformity of religious worship would promote both the public peace and individual striving for perfection, the same can be said for the secular arena. By allowing this diversity to exist the secular authorities would reap the benefits of competition and have citizens with sincere belief in the effectiveness of what they are doing. Thus, the state is clearly better off permitting diversity than imposing uniformity which would only lessen competition and force people to adopt practices which they do not genuinely feel are the most effective.

Human Freedom

As Ernst Cassirer points out, the view of human freedom developed during the Renaissance is a far cry from that which was characteristic of the Middle Ages.[58] The medieval view as epitomized by Boethius who saw Fortune as a wheel which dragged men up by the heels and then dashed them down in accord with her own will and regardless of the individual's wishes or

actions.[59] During the Renaissance Fortune came to be viewed in a far less omnipotent manner. An example characteristic of the Renaissance understanding of Fortune is in Machiavelli, who compares it to a violent river over which one can gain at least partial control by properly constructing dams and dykes.[60] The fundamental difference between these two views is that from the medieval perspective humans are essentially passive in respect to their earthly fate and can do little to alter it, whereas from a Renaissance perspective one has a degree of control over what happens to oneself in this life. It should be noted also, however, that for virtually all Christian thinkers in either the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, one retained control over what was most central to one's fate, namely, one's eternal destiny, i.e. the salvation or damnation of one's soul.

Clearly Cusa sees humans in the Renaissance context, for by the proper use of one's will and reason one can liberate oneself rather than blindly and helplessly falling prey to the forces of the universe. Hence, though one cannot control the universe since it is not subject to one's will, nevertheless one can mitigate the effect which it can have upon one.[61] Reason enables one to create things which, to a limited extent, enable one to gain control over the forces of nature.[62] Thus, reason permits one to correct one's own defects, heal illnesses, and educate both oneself and others. This last ability is the most important because it makes one capable of "driving out ignorance; . . . [one] becomes the explorer of divine things."[63] In short, the person's rational nature enables one to improve not only one's physical but also one's spiritual condition because by exercising one's rational nature one increases one's likeness to the Divine.

The Social Implications of Human Freedom

For Cusa, freedom for the individual, however, is imperative not only for that individual but also for society as a whole. There is no fundamental conflict between the two, since each contributes to the good of the other and neither can prosper without recognizing this fact. Because of this interrelationship individual freedom cannot be the sole priority for the just society. In fact, if such freedom were the only priority no society would be possible, since all groups must be able to regulate their members to some extent in order to maintain their existence as a group. Thus, Cusa recognizes that under certain circumstances the individual can be compelled to do something he or she otherwise would not. These two circumstances are to preserve the public peace and to protect the integrity of the faith. This is done not only for the good of society as a whole, but also, as far as Cusa is concerned, for the individual's own good. Should one use one's freedom in a manner which is destructive to the faith, in so doing, one would attain eternal damnation for one's soul and contribute to others receiving the same fate. Likewise, should the individual disturb the public peace and, in so doing, threaten the society in which one lives one brings harm to everyone else within the society as well as to oneself. Cusa believes that individual freedom is necessary for society to exist and, at times, this freedom must be protected by prohibiting those actions which would destroy it. For Cusa, laws are intended not to frustrate individual freedom, but to safeguard and complement it.

Cusa's understanding of the relationship between individual freedom and social order is also a consequence of the relationship Cusa forges between the principle of individuality and that of community. In respect to the principle of individuality, Cusa urges that every individual be given freedom to follow his or her own will and, in doing so, express one's own unique nature. Because Cusa recognizes the principle of community, as well as the principle of individuality, freedom for the individual is not the sole concern. Cusa is well aware that the actions which individuals take unavoidably impact upon others. In accordance with the principle of community, Cusa sees each

individual as related to every other. Thus, Cusa sees quite clearly that individual freedom can be secured only within an ordered society. In this fashion, Cusa integrates the concerns of personal liberty with that of social order, just as the principle of individuality is integrated with the principle of community.

The Status of Evil

Perhaps the most important question in relating Cusa's metaphysics to his ethics is that of the status of evil. Essentially, this question boils down to how evil relates to the Absolute which, as the source of all reality, transcends all finite distinctions. Some scholars feel that Cusa's metaphysics require him to jettison the traditional Thomistic-Augustinian understanding of evil as the lack of a due perfection and come up with a new alternative. The fact that Cusa refuses to do so is, they believe, a serious flaw in his thinking.

Jasper Hopkins asserts that although Cusa believes that God could not have made this universe more perfect than it actually is, He could have made a universe more perfect than this particular one.[64] Cusa claims that all components of the universe are as perfect as they can be, apart from their being injured or damaged.[65] In *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusa points out that creation can contain no defect and that inherently each individual creature approaches the maximum to the greatest degree that is possible for it.[66] However, Cusa is also quick to point out that no creature can exhaust the potential of the maximum and, therefore, no creature is so perfect that God could not have created it at a still more perfect level.[67]

Cusa clearly does not see the universe as the best of all possible worlds. This is because if one were to make such an assertion it would mean that God's power and goodness were limited, since it would not be possible for Him to improve upon the universe which actually exists. Undeniably, this is contrary to the entire spirit of Cusa's philosophy which seeks to safeguard the infinite and absolute nature of divine being. For Cusa, God could have made an endless variety of universes, some better and some worse than this particular one. However, each particular universe would be as perfect as it is capable of being, since the Absolute can create nothing which is not the best that it can be.

Thus, just as a man is more perfect than a stone, it is possible for God to create a universe more perfect than this one. However, in the same way that every individual being images the Divine to the greatest degree possible for it, so each universe which God could create would, likewise, image the Divine in the most accurate way possible for it and in this sense is perfect. Also, just as no individual being can fulfill all of the potential which is open to its species, likewise, no universe could fulfill all the potential which is open to it, since this would make it equal to the Absolute. Thus, though each individual being and the universe itself image the Divine to the greatest extent that their finite natures allow, the possibility of development is always left open since no being is all that it can be. For Cusa, one clearly can see that goodness is indeed synonymous with being; yet, no finite being is so complete that it cannot be better than it is.

Thomas P. McTighe is quite correct when he points out that Cusa's view of reality is essentially optimistic. Cusa admits that undeniably humans experience evil in everyday life, but this is because the human can view the entities which make up reality only in isolation due to the finite nature of his or her mind. Once such things can be seen from a perspective which integrates them with the rest of the universal order its harmony would then be made manifest, and its beautiful and good nature would be revealed.[68] God sees the world in the manner of the omnivoyant icon Cusa described in *De Visione Dei*, not as do humans. The difference is, that the finite mind can

comprehend only one thing at a time and, therefore, in focusing upon that which it seeks to comprehend it must ignore everything else. In contrast the absolute mind in its infinite unity is capable of embracing everything at once. Hence, what appears to be evil from a finite perspective is not so from an infinite one.[69]

Cusa and the Traditional Concept of Evil

The few places where Cusa's works specifically discuss the question of evil show that there is no fundamental conflict between the traditional concept of evil, as expressed by Aquinas or Augustine, and his understanding of the nature of reality. In *De Dato Patris Luminum* Cusa affirms that God is not the cause of evil.[70] For Cusa evil is caused by a finite thing's inability to fulfill its own potential.[71] This is essentially compatible with the Thomistic-Augustinian idea of privation which sees evil as the lack of a due perfection. Cusa writes that all things which exist are able to do so only insofar as they are true, and that which is false (i.e. lacking in truth) does not exist.[72] Julie C. Norman points out that Cusa equates reality with goodness. He sees the essential nature of every existing thing as good because it is derived from the Absolute.[73] Evil then is devoid of reality and can exist only through a parasitic dependence on the good. Evil is nothing more than a privation of a due perfection which originates primarily in the self-will of the devil and secondarily in human freedom and Adam's sin.[74]*De Dato Patris Luminum* explicitly supports this view by attributing all sins to the presumption first of Lucifer and then humankind.[75] Thus, although evil is existentially real, it remains essentially unreal, lacking in both form and positive being.[76]

Henry Bett finds Cusa's thought incompatible with the traditional concept of evil. He asks how Cusa can assert that God does not know things because they exist, but that they exist because he knows them, and then reconcile this with the idea that God is not the cause of evil.[77] This is because Cusa claims that God knows both good and evil, just as the eyes know both light and dark. Therefore, how can the Divine know something without causing it to exist? Bett also asserts that Cusa sees evil as a lapse from reality, just as multiplicity is a lapse from unity, and a curve is a lapse from straightness.[78]According to Bett, therefore, it should follow that evil is implicit in goodness.[79] For Bett, the startlingly casual ease with which Cusa adopts the traditional concept of evil reveals that the only philosophical problems are those derived from relating the Absolute to the finite, while that of moral evil is essentially inconsequential.[80] Bett claims that Cusa admits that not all things are good in themselves, though they, nonetheless, contribute to the ultimate good.[81] Other commentators, however, read Cusa's assertion about the Divine as being the coincidence of opposites to mean that the Divine must itself include both good and evil.[82]

On the whole, however, these criticisms are unfounded. Cusa refuses to incorporate evil into the Divine. He asserts that evil is a failure to seek the Absolute which is the proper end of all things. Thus, it remains a privation and a necessary consequence of God limiting Himself in creation.[83] Cusa believes that God can know evil, yet not be responsible for its existence because evil as a privation of being has no existence. The Divine as the source and archetype of all being, naturally, knows how individual beings fall short of their forms. Likewise, Bett's assertion that if evil is a lapse from goodness it is, therefore, implicit in goodness, seems inaccurate. Evil is not implicit in goodness because evil is a failure of a being to fulfill its potential. Only the Absolute, which is all that It can be, is entirely devoid of evil. Evil is not an approximation of goodness in the sense that a curve approximates a straight line, but is an outright contradiction of goodness and being. Hence, for Cusa, evil is implicit not in goodness, but in finitude.

Also, though Bett is correct in pointing out that Cusa's philosophy is concerned primarily with relating the finite to the Absolute it is not correct to say that Cusa adopts his position on moral evil because he feels it to be an inconsequential problem not worthy of his attention. Cusa's life as a serious reformer shows that he was quite concerned with moral evil, however, his metaphysics creates no fundamental conflicts with the traditional medieval understanding of evil. Whenever one examines the problem of evil in Cusa's thought one must always bear in mind the non-essential nature of evil. Absolute being, since It is all that It can be, can no more contain evil than It can contain any finite thing. The difference is that whereas the Divine is the source and archetype of finite being this is not the case for evil. Because evil is a privation it has neither a source nor an archetype.

Bett's assertion that Cusa affirms that some things are not good in themselves is entirely unfounded. In the *Apologia*, Cusa points out that when one views a poisonous animal one sees it in terms of its separate parts and, therefore, it seems to possess no beauty or goodness. However, when related to the whole their beauty and goodness are revealed. Cusa writes that "the whole which is wholly beautiful, is composed of a beautiful harmony of the parts."[84] For Cusa, what is apparently evil is actually good once it can be seen from the perspective of the universal order. Thus apparent evil in relating to being as a whole produces good effects and is transformed thereby into good. This transformation reveals the operation of Cusa's coincidence of opposites within the moral realm. Within the Absolute, the opposition between good and evil is reconciled leaving nothing but the infinite goodness of the Divine. One should not, however, assume that Cusa asserts that reality is devoid of all evil. Just as within the finite realm a line may be either straight or curved, something may also be either good or evil. Likewise, as the distinctions between the straight and the curved are transcended by the Absolute, the same can be said in reference to good and evil.

Here again one can see the effects of the principle of individuality and community. The principle of individuality is what makes some beings appear to be evil. However, once these particular beings are seen as particular contractions of the whole, and as such are expressive of its being, they may then be viewed from the perspective of the whole of being. From this perspective particular evils can be seen as partial expressions of the transcendent good of the whole. Thus, evil retains its own non-essential reality in the finite realm as it inheres in a particular individual, but in reference to the whole of being, of which each individual is a contraction, no evil is possible since the Absolute as all which It can be, lacks nothing.

Notes

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5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*; Also see Aristotle, *Politics* 1261a 16-25.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 408; Also see Plato, *Republic* 590cd.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 409; Also see Plato, *Republic* Book V.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 410; Also see Plato, *Laws* 739cd.

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28. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

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34. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

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43. Nicholas of Cusa, "De Pace Fidei" in *Unity and Reform*, p. 210.

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45. Cassirer, p. 30.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
47. *Nicolo' Cusano Agli Inizi del Mondo Moderno*, (Florence: Sansoni, 1970), p. 409.
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62. Pauline Moffitt Watts, *Nicholas Cusanus: A Fifteenth Century Vision of Man* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1982), p. 103.
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67. Nicholas of Cusa, p. 134.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
69. Thomas P. McTighe, "Nicholas of Cusa and Liebniz's Principle of Indiscernibility," *Modern Schoolman*, 42 (Nov 1964), 35.
70. Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and His Predecessors* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknapp Press, (1969), p. 58.
71. Nicholas of Cusa, "De Dato Patris Luminum" in *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysic of Contraction* Jasper Hopkins, ed. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1986), p. 116.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 115
73. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
74. Julie C. Norman, "Nicholas of Cusa, Apostolate of Unity," *Downside Review*, 99 (1981), 69.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
76. Nicholas of Cusa, p. 116.
77. Bett, p. 152.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

82. Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 281.

83. *Ibid.*

84. Nicholas of Cusa, "Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae" in Nicholas of *Cusa's Debate With John Wenck*, p. 53.

Part II
A Cusan Approach to Some Contemporary Issues

Part II of this work will examine a number of contemporary issues in the light of Nicholas of Cusa's understanding of unity. The subtle insights he developed promise to make important contributions in helping resolve the complex problems facing our pluralistic culture. It is of course impossible to state with certainty precisely what a thinker of Cusa's complexity and originality would say regarding issues which arise several centuries after his death. What this part intends to do, however, is to draw upon his insights and make the author's own application. Cusa's ideas on unity can illumine contemporary issues and, hopefully, provide new perspectives which can contribute to their resolution.

Outline of Part II

Within each of the following chapters the role of the principles of individuality and community will be examined. These chapters will discuss how the inherent interrelation between these two principles creates a vision of unity consistent with both diversity and dynamism, the distinctive elements which must be articulated by any truly Cusan interpretation of unity. For Cusa the term dynamism refers not merely to action but to interaction. The difference between these concepts would be analogous to the difference between a single actor performance and a play with a more conventional cast. In the first case one is free to perform without regard to anyone else. In the latter one must be aware of the rest of the cast and engage with them in the performance.

For Cusa the term diversity refers not merely to difference, but to variety. The distinction between these two concepts is analogous to that between two translations of one book and that between two distinct literary works. In the first case the distinction is based upon a simple lack of identity (i.e. one is not the other), while in the second case the distinction is based upon the separate truths articulated by each work. One can see easily that Cusa's understanding of diversity is in accord the principle of community which allows for a multiplicity of entities in order to better proclaim the Divine, while his understanding of dynamism is in accord with the principle of individuality which allows for the interaction of existing entities. Likewise, the relationship between dynamism and diversity is analogous to that between the principles of community and individuality: without diversity no dynamism is possible, while dynamism itself contributes to the enrichment of diversity through the new possibilities produced by interaction.

Three main sources of division within the human community are religious differences, differences in what broadly may be defined as cultural background (i.e. ethnic conflicts, gender disputes, etc.), and differences in economic status. The purpose of this part of the work is to show how Cusa's understanding of a unity consistent with diversity can help us deal with these differences in a way which alleviates the tension they create, yet, does not impoverish the diversity of the community. The first chapter of this part will deal with religious unity. Since this issue was closest to Cusa's heart, and the one he directly addressed, it provides the clearest access to Cusa's views on the matter. Furthermore, because Cusa's understanding of unity is anchored in his vision of the Divine, its application to the new challenges to contemporary society presented by religious diversity can open new possibilities for understanding one's relationship to God.

The second chapter of this part will examine the consequences of a Cusan conception of unity within the broad social context and discuss how a variety of social groups can coexist

harmoniously within a cohesive unit. It is impossible to deny that social harmony has become a particularly vexing problem in modern life. The increasing cultural interaction made possible in the modern world only adds to the importance of this issue. Because Cusa's vision of religious unity had obvious implications for social harmony, which he in fact recognized, his understanding of unity can again be productively applied so that the benefits of cultural diversity may be reaped while its destabilizing elements may be neutralized. Thus one can enjoy full participation in the greater social organism without sacrificing those distinct cultural elements from which one may in some manner derive one's identity.

A third chapter will examine the economic implications of Cusa's ideas on unity. Another source of contemporary divisiveness is the economic sphere where the gap between rich and poor often has put people of differing classes at odds with tragic consequences. Though much Marxist thought has fallen into disrepute, it would be foolish to assume that all of the conditions which called it into existence and made it so appealing to so many for so long have, likewise, passed away. The divisions which exist between economic classes remain a serious obstacle to the creation of the harmonious community. Though Cusa does not specifically address this issue, nonetheless, because his philosophy attempts to articulate the nature of unity itself and is applied by him in the context of the human community one can examine how this concept of unity might be applied productively to resolving many of the divisions within the social organism, including those that were fully recognized only centuries after Cusa's death.

The Role of Love in Cusa's Thought

Cusa's distinctive notion of unity as consistent with diversity illumines a new understanding of love which enables the resolution of the divisions within society. Broadly speaking, love may be defined as an affective union with what is in some way regarded as good. This definition is admittedly excessively general, however, it expresses the dynamic and relational character of love. From a Christian perspective love must be founded on an openness to, and an appreciation for, being which directs itself toward the continual enhancement of the finite in the light of the infinite.[1]

Christianity sees God's substance as a living community of three divine persons. God the Father creates the world out of love, and out of love sends God the Son to redeem humankind. The Son is love incarnate and calls humans made in God's image, to share His life. Thus, one's vocation is to promote God's Kingdom on earth, and personal happiness can authentically be obtained only through devotion to God.[2]

This creates something of a problem with respect to disinterested love. If genuinely disinterested love is not possible then human selfishness becomes infinite, since God Himself is reduced to being a mere means to human happiness. If disinterested love is possible, then the question becomes, how can one ever begin to understand it since it seems to imply that a being can seek union with something with which it is in no way connected. Some mystics have sought to preserve selfless love by doing away with the self. This is an inadequate response since, as has been said, love is by its very nature relational, thereby requiring a lover and a beloved. On the other hand, if the self is made primary and has no ground beyond itself then all love again becomes a transference of the love of the self.[3]

One can easily see how profoundly Cusa's philosophy speaks to these issues. Cusa sees reality as a unified whole which unfolds into a diverse variety of individual beings, each of which expresses this whole in a unique way and attempts to return to its source. Because of this there is no separation between self-realization and genuine devotion to the Absolute through the service

of others. One need not, and in fact cannot, sacrifice others to personal fulfillment or personal fulfillment to the service of others. This is because personal fulfillment is identified with generous service through which the individual can more closely approximate and proclaim the Divine which is the very purpose of existence.

From the Cusan perspective any notion of self-realization which regards the beloved as a mere means is mistaken. Such a notion requires that the self be conceived apart from being as a whole in order to use the beloved to one's own advantage. But for Cusa the self can only exist in relationship to being itself; apart from this relationship it is nothing at all. Thus, Cusa's metaphysical insights provide a framework in which the problematic distinction between love of self and love of neighbor can be overcome.

This resolution enables one to see that love is a responsiveness to the excellence of being, which calls one to promote that excellence in others, and through doing so to promote it in oneself. This insight allows for a new interpretation of the various divisions within society, permitting them to integrate into a mutually beneficial and harmonious union of a variety of beings, each possessing a unique identity.

Notes

1. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8, p. 1039.
2. *Ibid.*, 1040.
3. *Ibid.*, 1042.

Chapter VI
A Cusan Approach to Religious Unity

The problem of religious conflict is historically familiar, having been expressed in a variety of catastrophic ways including torture, execution and religious wars. In *De Pace Fidei* Cusa himself speaks of these religious wars and how people have been forced either to reject their faith or to lose their lives.[1] Furthermore, one need not look long to find contemporary examples of this sort of conflict. Though the aforementioned examples might be the most dramatic and tragic consequences of a misconception of religious unity, they are by no means the only ones. In fact one might argue that it was the very horrors of such religious conflict, where religious unity was conceived in terms of a universal adherence to one particular faith, which led so many to embrace an alternative view which henceforth will be referred to as religious consolidationism. From this perspective the great variety of religious faiths can be accounted for on the basis of the existence of irrelevant differences in the methods in which they choose to express themselves. Thus all faiths are seen as marginally different attempts to express the same reality. The idea that these faiths are articulating unique visions of the very nature of that reality is rejected.

This chapter will begin by showing how a Cusan perspective can give new insight regarding the nature of religious unity which can enable one to avoid the twin pitfalls of religious antagonism and religious indifference. One can then draw upon this concept of religious unity in order more productively to interpret the great diversity of religious faiths and to understand how they relate one to another. The relationship between the principles of individuality and community play a key role in one's understanding of religious unity and this has far-reaching consequences for such fundamental contemporary questions as one's approach to ecumenism and evangelization. In short, properly to understand the relationships between the faiths, and the desire to propagate a particular faith, there is need first for an understanding of the very nature of religious unity itself.

A Cusan perspective will reveal that ecumenism and evangelization are not antithetical, but complementary concepts. In fact, authentic ecumenism will recognize the importance of authentic evangelization and *vice versa*. The second section will focus upon the implications of this understanding of religious unity for ecumenism. It will seek to show how a Cusan understanding of unity could help to resolve many of the tensions of the modern ecumenical movement and allow it to realize its full potential.

The third section will seek to do the same with regard to evangelization and thereby reveal it to be not some form of low intensity religious conflict or the product of an intolerant attitude, but a healthy expression of a vibrant religious faith. The following diagram outlines the basic structure of this chapter.

Interpreting the Diversity of Religious Faiths

Six Responses to Religious Diversity

In an article entitled "God, Commitment and Other Faiths", Joseph Runzo outlines six possible ways of responding to the diversity of faiths in the world.[2] This outline provides a framework in which one can gain a clearer insight into the relative strengths and weaknesses of the various options as well as the positive possibilities of a Cusan perspective. The first response is atheism which asserts that all religions are false. This position is epitomized by the work of Ludwig

Feuerbach who regarded God as nothing more than a projection of the human mind. Feuerbach argues that `Divine Being' is nothing else than the nature of Man, i.e., human nature purified, freed from the imperfections of the human individual,

> Supremacism Coalitionism Consolidationism Emphasizes Integrates Emphasizes prinprinciple principlesciple of community of individ- of individ- at the expense of uality at uality and the principle of the expense community. individuality. of community.

The second response is religious exclusivism which asserts that one religion is true while all of the others are false. Runzo associates this position with Karl Barth's defense of Christianity as the uniquely true faith. In his work entitled *Church Dogmatics* Barth writes that "the Christian religion is true, because it has pleased God, who alone can be the judge in this matter, to affirm it to be the true religion. What is truth, if not this divine affirmation."[4] Once this perspective is embraced any attempt to integrate a diverse variety of religious faiths into a harmonious community quickly encounters a unique and exceedingly complex difficulty. Immediately one must confront the fact that from an exclusivist perspective religious faith requires an absolute commitment from its adherents which is unlike any other personal commitment. This is because this commitment is founded upon the inherent nature of what it means to be human, which gives it a character which is both ultimate and universal.

Thus the exclusivist perspective has a tendency to produce religious tensions between different religious communities. These tensions are the result not merely of historical accidents or human stupidity, but of a particular vision of the nature of religious commitment. It should also be noted, however, that though the modern day ecumenist is likely to take a particularly dim view of religious exclusivism, the inherent cohesiveness and vitality of the faith it fosters should not be dismissed.

Both atheism and religious exclusivism may be described as supremacist positions since they claim that only one view is true while all others must be false. The supremacist perspective exaggerates the principle of individuality and in so doing neglects the principle of community. From this perspective the truth is embodied in a single view, while all other views by virtue of their differences are considered false. All shared elements between that faith and any other are seen to be irrelevant. Supremacism regards one view as possessing singular truth, and is not likely to be willing to relate that view to any other within the community of faiths, which it tends to view as a corrupting influence.

The third type of response which Runzo articulates is that of religious inclusivism, he cites Karl Rahner's notion of the anonymous Christian as representative of this view.[5] Rahner states that those who have not yet received the gospel through no fault of their own may still attain eternal salvation.[6] Anonymous Christians are those who can be called Christian in a meaningful sense, though they cannot and/or would not describe themselves as such.[7]

Religious inclusivism asserts that one religion is fully true while other religions only partially reveal some element of this truth. This approach will be referred to as coalitionism since it sees all faiths as being related, yet preserves the distinctions between them. The coalitionist position attempts to integrate the principles of individuality and community. It does this by recognizing the validity of the attempts made by those who possess differing views to articulate the truth as they see it. Therefore, it is willing to place each faith in dialogue with all those with which it does not agree, so that all may mutually benefit from rational discourse.

This preserves the principle of community in that it establishes a community in which the various faiths can interact. At the same time, coalitionism does not abandon the unique value of each individual faith, but, in fact, offers a deeper understanding of, and appreciation for, these faiths and thus also preserves the principle of individuality.

The fourth way to view the great diversity of religious faiths is referred to as religious subjectivism. This sees each religion as correct insofar as it is best for the individual who adheres to it. Here religious truth is as varied as the individuals who profess it.[8] Religion thus becomes a matter of purely personal perspective. This perspective is not frequently encountered among serious theoreticians, but it should be mentioned for the sake of completeness. It should also be noted, however, that this perspective often is sincerely expressed by many students and seems to possess considerable popular appeal.

Religious pluralism is the fifth perspective Runzo offers to account for the variety of religious viewpoints. This view sees all religions as true in that each offers a different, but valid path to salvation. Each gives a partial perspective upon ultimate reality, but one is no better than any other. Because the differences between religious faiths are essentially inconsequential, the value of belonging to a particular religious community is lessened considerably. Runzo cites John Hick's theories as being representative of this tendency.[9] Hick writes

> Pluralism . . . is the view that the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness is taking place in different ways within the context of all the great religious traditions. There is not merely one way, but a plurality of ways of salvation or liberation.[10]

The final perspective which Runzo identifies and which he himself embraces as being the most representative of reality is that of religious relativism. This view asserts that every religion is true in relation to its own community of adherents.

Collectively these last views of religious unity may be described as consolidationism since they see the distinctions between faiths as irrelevant. The tendencies of the consolidationist perspective are considerably different from those of the supremacist perspective. It emphasizes the principle of community, but does so at the expense of the principle of individuality. All religious faiths are seen as equally valid, but, because of this, the unique value of any particular view is lost. This perspective links all religious views together in that each attains the end which all of them seek. Unfortunately, because the distinctiveness of each view is lost, there is no reason to prefer one to another.

Diversity and Tolerance

Consoliditionism tends to hold that the virtue of tolerance requires that all religious propositions be seen as of equal truth-value. This view is not only mistaken, but, as Jay Newman points out in his article, "The Idea of Religious Tolerance," it is somewhat insulting to the adherents of all religious faiths.[11] This is because it asserts that the teachings of these faiths are not nearly as important as their adherents believe them to be. In fact, if differences between religious beliefs are insignificant, can the vitality of those beliefs long endure.

As Newman points out, "Every act of tolerance involves an underlying wish that things were different."[12] In short, one can only tolerate those things which one finds disagreeable. When the atheist tolerates the Christian's belief in the Incarnation he in no way alters his belief that the

Incarnation is false. Tolerance involves not a half hearted acceptance of any particular belief, but a willingness to respect those individuals who hold that belief.[13]

As has been shown already Cusa's views are essentially in accord with the coalitionist perspective. This perspective allows Cusa to assert the value and superiority of the Roman Catholic Faith, and yet consider it open to dialogue with every other faith. Cusa's thought was revolutionary in its day and only recently has come to be embraced by his Church. However, it is possible to use the fundamental principles operative in Cusa's thought to arrive at conclusions which Cusa did not and--bearing in mind the historical and social circumstances of his day--could not himself have articulated. This will have important consequences for the many problems of religious diversity which arise repeatedly in our day.

Within the Cusan framework the principle of individuality allows for the preservation of the distinctiveness of each particular religion; in other words, its unique value must be recognized. At the same time, the principle of community demands that the great variety of faiths recognize what in fact they share and enter into relationships with each other. Because the supremacist perspective relies upon the principle of individuality it seeks to subjugate all other faiths to some particular one. Conversely, the consoliditionist approach is grounded in the principle of community and so sacrifices the unique identity of each in order to establish a community. A Cusan response, however, would be that the separation between each particular faith and the community of faiths be overcome so that no faith can be conceived of apart from the overall community: likewise, the community itself must recognize each faith as it actually exists. Thus the loving response of the person of faith acknowledges each faith's vision of itself; only through such an acknowledgement can one's own faith reach its full realization.

A Cusan Approach to Diversity

This analysis will begin by applying Cusa's ideas on the principle of community to the diversity of faiths. In doing this one gains a new perspective on the nature of the community of faiths which will open up new possibilities for understanding the relationships between members of that community. In short, all faiths will be seen as attempts to express the truth about the ultimate nature of reality as fully as they can.

With respect to the principle of individuality, one must admit the uniqueness of particular religions based upon the genuine differences between them. This is especially the case if one is to take ecumenism seriously. To have faith is to believe that one's own beliefs are true. However, one might conclude that by the iron laws of logic any beliefs which contradict them are not true. Each religion would have its own understanding of ultimate reality; if any is right this might be seen as necessarily entailing that others are to some extent wrong. This could lead one to conclude that Cusa sees all other religions as more or less failed attempts to arrive at the truth of Christianity. Such an interpretation, however, does not give due respect to other religions, nor does it give the principle of individuality the full consideration it deserves. It would be analogous to regarding the created world as nothing more than incomplete human beings with no value inherent in being what they themselves are.

A far better way to view the diversity of faiths, and one which is much more consistent with the Cusan principle of individuality, is to conceive of this diversity along the same lines as Cusa conceives of the diversity of the created world. This position will henceforth be referred to as religious interactionism. This perspective uses Cusa's insights into the nature of reality to take the inclusivist position one step further. While inclusivism recognizes the value of other religions as

being partially true and thus places all of them in dialogue with each other, interactionism goes beyond this to claim that each faith can only have its true meaning revealed in light of an accurate understanding of the other faiths. The uniqueness of each faith is not only preserved, but becomes an indispensable element through which one can gain access to the deepest meaning of one's own faith. Though inclusivism opens up the possibility of dialogue, interactionism makes it a mandatory component for discerning the nature of one's own faith. Also the participants in the dialogue are bound by ties of mutual concern in that all contribute to each others well-being in a conscious manner.

Interactionism enables one to realize that each faith possesses an inherent value and contributes to the greatness of the whole. In *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusa asserts that "no individual of a given species can be so completely perfect as to make any higher perfection impossible, nor so utterly imperfect as to exclude the possibility of further imperfections."[14] When this concept is applied to individual religions, one can see that no religion should be regarded as being entirely without value, and similarly no religion can be regarded as being so complete that it could not be made still more complete. After all, in a sense the diverse religious perspectives one encounters represent attempts by finite minds to articulate the nature of reality. Even if these views are regarded as being the product of divine revelation one must still admit that this revelation is received and interpreted by human beings.

In the end, though one faith may be superior to the others these others still possess an inherent and unique value of their own. Just as Cusa believes that the more one knows about the stars the better one will understand God, likewise the more one knows about other religions the more one will know also about one's own religion and God as well.

This is not necessarily because one might originally hold a false position and through dialogue discover that error. Even if Christianity were the maximal faith (which Cusa in fact believes)[15] the Christian would still deepen his or her own understanding of that faith through religious dialogue. For example, by studying the way in which Islam, Judaism and Buddhism all deal with the issue of transcendence one may not only come to know what makes the Christian position distinctive, but will have an enriched understanding of what that position entails.

Thus Cusa's own mission to Constantinople and his discussions with the leaders of the Orthodox Church led him to the insights of *De Docta Ignorantia*. Likewise, the study of Islam can illuminate one's understanding of Christianity, and this holds true for all religions. Also such an exchange of ideas would allow all, even the adherents of the maximal faith, the opportunity to achieve an ever greater perfection. Cusa believes there is no faith which does not have some truth to speak and no faith which does not have some truth which it is in need of hearing. In *De Pace Fidei*, he has St. Peter say that, "no man is, according to human nature, so wise that he cannot be wiser, for between received wisdom, that is human wisdom, and wisdom-per-se, which is divine and the greatest and infinite, there is always infinite distance."[16]

It is worthwhile to recount here Cusa's version of how it is that such a great diversity of faiths came to exist. He claims that God sent a variety of prophets into the world in order to reveal Himself to humanity. To achieve this goal these prophets created a variety of cults, the customs of which have, over time, come to be regarded as immutable truths founded not by prophets, but by God.[17]

Since the human person has free will, and because over time opinions, languages and interpretations undergo change, humanity needs a number of visitations to eliminate the religious errors which inevitably develop.[18] In this manner Cusa gives such figures as Buddha and even

Mohammed a similar status to that of prophets of the God of Israel whose teachings over time have been distorted.

For Cusa every free mind can see that all religions can be reduced to a single orthodox faith.[19] Even polytheists, Cusa asserts, presuppose the existence of a divinity in which other gods participate.[20] If properly informed, Cusa believes that the polytheist would recognize this divinity as the true God and also realize what he or she had previously regarded as gods were, in fact, something akin to interceding saints.[21] In short, there is but one religion, but a diversity of religious rites.[22]

Because of this Cusa does not think that religious diversity need be a source of conflict.

> If, perchance, this diversity cannot be done away with, or its reduction would not be advisable, since in many cases a particular religion would actually be more vigilant in guarding what it considers to be the noblest way of manifesting its devotion to you as its king, at least just as you are God alone, so also let there be in the same manner one religion and one cult of divine worship.[23]

For Cusa, since the diversity of rites are merely different ways of articulating the same underlying truth, there is no real basis for mutual attacks over these differences.

Cusa goes still further when he suggests that "No one really wants as his way of worship something that is common practice for all. To want what everyone else wants is imitation."[24] Since such imitation is not true religious worship one may, therefore, conclude that he believes the elimination of diversity would not necessarily be a change for the better.

Cusa sees a variety of ways in which differing religious groups can relate peacefully to each other. One possible option is to have all of the groups abdicate their own faith and together adopt the faith of one particular group. A second option is one of interchange in which unity is established by each faith abandoning some of its own practices and adopting those of other groups, with the understanding that each of these other groups will abandon some of their practices and adopt its rites. Cusa acknowledges that these options create considerable practical difficulties. Therefore he proposes a third option which he feels will be the most viable. He asserts that "It will suffice that there be unanimity in the matter of belief and the law of charity, and that toleration in the matter of ritual be allowed."[25]

In respect to the key issues of dynamism and diversity the consequences of the supremacist, coalitionist, and consolidationist positions are quite clear. The supremacist perspective tends to recognize diversity (though it regards this as negative) and sees dynamic interaction as a source of contamination and something to be avoided. However, in being isolated from its natural community a faith sacrifices the means through which it can discover its own unique identity, as well as the vitality such a sense of identity can foster. The consolidationist position, on the other hand, tends to see diversity as being merely superficial and therefore the need for interaction becomes somewhat superfluous. By concentrating upon those elements which bind the community of faiths together, to the exclusion of the distinctive elements of its constituent members, that community diminishes its own resources in failing to nourish the full potential of the individuals which comprise it. Thus any approach which acknowledges either the principle of individuality or that of community alone and in isolation inevitably results in a failure to properly articulate the true nature of reality in which both principles are interrelated in a complementary fashion. Hence such an approach will necessarily be inadequate. The coalitionist perspective, however, preserves the value of both diversity and dynamism. Diversity is preserved through the affirmation of the

unique value of every individual faith, while dynamism is preserved by stressing the interrelationships between the faiths and the indispensable importance of exploring these interrelationships. In this fashion, individuals are integrated into a vital and developing community which will nourish their full potential and to which they can contribute actively.

Religious Unity and Ecumenism

It is time now to examine ecumenism from each of these perspectives (supremacist, coalitionist and consolidationist) in order to show how each approaches the ecumenical movement in a way which is conditioned by their respective expressions of the relationship between the principles of individuality and community.

Possible Approaches to Ecumenism

The importance of one's view of religious unity for ecumenism is clear. All too often ecumenical policies reflect one of two extreme positions depending upon whether they are conceived in accordance with either supremacist or consolidationist tendencies. A consolidationist perspective would tend to view all religions as merely different ways to articulate the same truth, all of which are equally valid. The real differences among religious views are dismissed as insignificant. The fact that the Buddhist and the Christian have radically different conceptions of the nature of ultimate reality would be disregarded; both would be interpreted in a manner which neither would regard as accurate.

The supremacist position advocates that other religions admit the error of their ways and make what amounts to an unconditional surrender to what is seen as the one true faith. This brand of ecumenism requires the Buddhist, for example, to admit that it is the Christian whose faith is, in fact, true, while his or her's is not. In effect the Buddhist must cease being a Buddhist.

The Cusan approach represents the coalitionist perspective and provides the best foundation upon which to base any genuine ecumenical movement. This is so because it allows individuals to retain the distinctiveness of their own faith as well as the vitality associated with that distinctiveness. On the other hand, dialogue between these faiths is not only possible but, in fact, required in order for each faith to come to a full understanding of itself.

As has been shown in the previous section, Cusa's principles can be used to extend the notion of religious inclusivism to one of religious interactionism where all religions are seen as shedding light upon each other and each plays an indispensable role in illuminating the Divine. Religious interactionism not only allows each faith to assert its unique understanding of reality, but points out that this can be understood properly only when viewed in relation to all other faiths. Thus, these other faiths are not seen as paths which mislead their true believers. Rather they are seen as sign posts which, if properly interpreted, can lead one to a richer understanding of one's own faith. In this view faiths stand in relation to one another not as enemies, but as valued friends, each contributing to the other's well-being. In fact, even though Cusa sees Christianity as the maximal faith it is by no means complete in its understanding of the Absolute. Just as no individual thing is so perfect that it cannot be improved upon, the same can be said of individual religious views. Thus, even Christianity can profit through interaction with other faiths in that a deeper discernment of the meaning of that faith is made possible.

The differences between the various approaches to ecumenism can be traced to differences in their particular understanding of the relationship between the principles of individuality and

community. Since supremacism recognizes only the principle of individuality it quite naturally sees no value in any view other than the one it regards as true. Therefore, any religious unity pursued involves the adherents of other religions converting to this faith.

Consolidationism takes an entirely different view. Recognizing only the principle of community it tends to see any efforts toward ecumenism as a matter of resolving differences which are rather superficial. Since consolidationism regards the distinctions between religions as being essentially based on modes of expression it is not likely invest ecumenism with much vitality.

Interactionism and Ecumenism. The view of religious interactionism, however, is much more complex since it seeks to retain both the principle of individuality and that of community. In accord with the principle of individuality, interactionism recognizes the real distinctions between the various religious views and their logical implications. On the other hand, with the principle of community, all religions are linked in the common enterprise of explicating the Divine. Therefore, rational dialogue between the various groups is both beneficial and necessary.

The goal of such a dialogue from the interactionist perspective is not the triumph of one particular view and the surrender of the others, as had been the case for the supremacist position. What interactionism seeks is a dialogue in which all views maintain their unique identity, but at the same time gain a richer understanding of themselves, their partners and above all of the truth which they all seek to articulate. Thus, interactionism views ecumenism in a way which reflects fundamental interest in preserving both diversity and dynamism.

The supremacist perspective clearly sees the unique value of the faith it regards as true, but tends to neglect the value of any other. Because of this no true diversity is possible, nor is any true dynamism. Consolidationism sees all faiths as being of equal validity, with each trying to articulate the same truth. Once again, all diversity and dynamism is lost. Both perspectives engender a kind of religious monism which supremacism achieves through a policy of religious imperialism, while consolidationism opts for a policy of homogenization. Only religious interactionism protects the uniqueness of every individual faith, yet places them within a community in which they are called to interact with each other.

In fact, an ecumenism which seeks to promote authentic unity must do so without subjugating one faith to another or neglecting the uniqueness of each faith. An ecumenism motivated by love must recognize that no faith can be isolated from the community of faiths without having its vitality diminished. However, if this vitality is to be maintained each faith must retain its distinctive nature. In this manner, each faith has its vitality enhanced through its interaction with other faiths. No conflict exists between genuine distinctiveness and authentic unity.

Religious Unity and Evangelization

At this point it should be no surprise to discover that the differences in the way in which supremacism, coalitionism and consolidationism relate to the issue of evangelization also result from differences in their understanding of the relationship between the principles of individuality and community. In this section the term evangelization will be used to refer to rational or emotional appeals to convince people to adopt a particular religious view.

Possible Approaches to Evangelization

Supermacism is likely to regard all evangelization of its view as a religious duty, while all evangelization in favor of other views would be seen as something akin to spiritual poaching. In short, since supremacism sees one view as exclusively true and all other views as threats to that truth, it is willing to look kindly only upon the propagation of the view which it accepts. The propagation of differing views, however, is quite another matter. These, supremacism will be inclined to claim, should be actively or at least tacitly discouraged.

The view of consolidationism in respect to evangelization is somewhat different than that of supremacism. From the consolidationist perspective all attempts at evangelization, regardless of what direction they take are at best superfluous and at worst harmful. This is because consolidationism believes that each religion is geared uniquely toward the circumstances of the lives of its adherents. Therefore any alteration in that faith may well have a detrimental effect. Furthermore, since all faiths are of equal truth value, changing one's faith would bring one no closer to the truth.

A Cusan Approach to Evangelization

Interactionism offers a view which is a good deal different from either of these perspectives and is far more representative of the thought of Nicholas of Cusa. This perspective will be inclined to regard evangelization as a duty of men of all faiths. This is not exclusively because it is the duty of all men to propagate what they feel to be the truth, for interactionism is well aware that, to some extent, some of these propagated views must be false. The duty of evangelization for interactionism is derived rather from the obligation of the faithful to engage in religious dialogue for the mutual benefit of all concerned.

As has been stated previously the various perspectives on evangelization stem from differences in understanding the relationship between the principles of individuality and of community. For supremacism only the principle of individuality is genuinely valid. Therefore, evangelization is a beneficial endeavor only so long as it spreads the view it regards as true. The spread of any other view is seen as the spreading of falsehood and therefore succeeds only in leading people astray without providing any positive possibilities.

On the other hand, since consolidationism recognizes only the principle of community, the distinctions between the faiths are held to be irrelevant; thus all faiths already exist in as unified a state as is possible. Attempts at evangelization will result not in a healthy cross-fertilization, but only in a corruption of religious traditions since each religion is appropriate for its own adherents.

Once again one can see that neither supremacism nor consolidationism can provide any foundation for diversity or dynamism. This is because both fail to recognize the natural relationship between the principles of individuality and community, which is the key insight of Cusa's philosophy and provides the basis for the unique advantages it offers. Because the attempt to preserve only one of these principles inevitably results in the weakening of both, neither a true diversity nor a true dynamism can be established.

Evangelization is seen as not contrary to ecumenism, but in fact, as indispensable thereto. It promotes the very invigorating interaction which each faith requires and benefits the community of faiths as a whole. Evangelization is a loving response overcoming the distinctions between faiths in a manner which allows each to attain and enhance its own unique identity. Authentic Evangelization is not an attempt to subjugate other faiths, or to blur the distinctions between faiths,

but an attempt by each faith to give a full and dynamic expression of its beliefs so that all faiths may benefit from its insights.

Interactionism offers an alternative which acknowledges both principles and in so doing establishes the possibility of dynamism and diversity. Taking advantage of Cusa's integration of the principles of individuality and community this perspective realizes the value of each individual view. It recognizes also that the understanding of any individual view requires an understanding of its relation to the rest of the community of faiths and that every faith can potentially learn from the others. Thus, evangelization is seen as indispensable to religious discourse. Only interactionism can preserve both diversity and dynamism in that each group is required to enter into active dialogue with every other group in which each articulates its own unique vision of reality. This interaction not only creates an atmosphere of dynamism, but increases diversity by opening up all the possibilities of cross-fertilization to develop new alternatives and enhance existing ones.

Notes

1. Nicholas of Cusa, "De Pace Fidei" in *Unity and Reform*, John Patrick Dolan, ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), p. 196.
2. Joseph Runzo, "God Commitment & Other Faiths," *Faith & Philosophy*, V (Oct 1988), 346.
3. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, E. Graham Waring and F. W. Strothmann, eds. (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1957), p. 12.
4. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*; Vol. I (second half) *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, G. W. Bromiley and T. J. Torrance eds. (New York: Scribner's, 1956), p. 350.
5. Runzo, p. 348.
6. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*; Vol. VI (Baltimore: Helion Press, 1969), p. 397.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 391.
8. Runzo, p. 350.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 354.
10. John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1985), p. 34.
11. Jay Newman, "The Idea of Religious Tolerance," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1978), 189.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
14. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, Germain Heron, trans. (London: Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1954), p. 128.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
16. Nicholas of Cusa "De Pace Fidei" in *Unity and Reform*, p. 216.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

Chapter VII
A Cusan Approach to Social Unity

This chapter will examine how one's understanding of the principles of individuality and community relate to some fundamental issues with regard to social unity. It will be divided into three distinct sections: the first will address issues of national unity, the second section will focus upon issues of international unity, while in the final section issues of family unity will be the point of concentration.

Three different perspectives on these issues will be examined. The first emphasizes the principle of individuality to the relative exclusion of the principle of community; it will be referred to here as the singularist perspective. This focuses on those aspects of identity which separate particular individuals from the community at large. An example of this orientation can be seen in the work of Thomas Hobbes who regards the state of nature as being equivalent to a state of war between all men. For Hobbes everyone has a right to whatever one can acquire by any means one chooses within the state of nature. In fact, one enters into a civil society only in order to better preserve one's own life and better pursue one's own comfort. Furthermore, one will put aside one's rights only provided others, likewise, put theirs aside.[1] This Hobbesian singularism sees all human beings as radically distinct and autonomous units, sharing no inherent relationship with any other person. By isolating individuals into discrete units singularism in general has a tendency to generate opposition not only between individuals, but even of individuals to society as a whole.

The second perspective will be referred to as collectivism. This view emphasizes the principle of community against that of individuality. It does so by ignoring those elements which distinguish being from each other, recognizing only those common elements shared by all. One finds this type of orientation in the work of Karl Marx for whom humanity can prosper only in a system where production forces are collectively owned and class distinctions are eliminated. Marx believes that individual ownership is destructive to social unity and inevitably will lead to oppression.

The final perspective is that of mutual integrationism. This perspective seeks to achieve a complementary fulfillment of the principles of individuality and community where each can obtain its full potential without incorporating its partner into itself. It does so not only by recognizing the value of unique individual beings, but also by appreciating the way in which that individual is inherently related to the greater community in which one lives. In so doing it acknowledges that the communities themselves are made up of individual beings, but is not synonymous with them. This lays the groundwork for establishing a mutually beneficial relationship between the individual and the community, rather than the Hobbesian or Marxist perspectives. The diagram outlines the issues examined in this chapter.

Singularism	Mutual Integrationism	Collectivism
Emphasizes principle of individuality at the expense of the principle of community.	Integrates principles of individuality and community.	Emphasizes principle of community at the expense of the principle of individuality.

	community.	ity.	
National Unity pp.261-285	Emphasizes distinctions between individuals.	Seeks to pre- serve distinc- tions within an overarching unity.	Emphasizes uniformity and seeks to eliminate distinctions.
Inter- national Unity pp.285-291	Withdrawal from the value of dis- tinct individ- ual nations and the importance of the relationships all nations share.	Recognizes the elements of which nations but fails to recognize the inherent unique nature of individual nations.	Emphasizes world.
Family Unity pp.291-296	Emphasizes individual autonomy.	Promotes indi- vidual autonomy within family structure.	Emphasizes family structure.

Social Unity in a National Context

In medieval society religious unity was intimately related to social unity due to the prominent role played by religion within society. Examples of this can be seen in the importance attached to such concepts as Christendom and in the social disorder which accompanied the Protestant Reformation not long after Cusa's death. Generally speaking, in modern society religion no longer plays the role it once did and is no longer as tightly linked to social unity. Many other social divisions, however, now emerge which are as destabilizing to the social order as were the religious divisions at the time of the expansion of Islam or of the Reformation. These social divisions are reflected in such dramatic instances as urban riots, civil wars or, on a smaller scale, the problems of family structure.

As stated, Cusa's ideas on religious unity reflect his ideas on social unity. He sought to achieve this unity by allowing individual religious groups as much freedom as possible and interfering with this freedom only when either public order or the integrity of the faith was jeopardized. Modern society has drawn upon religion as a keystone for maintaining social unity within rather than between groups. Hence, to work in the spirit of Cusa today one faces the serious challenge of identifying the over-arching unity which can bind together society.

One can argue that just as social circumstances have created this vacuum, they also have filled it. In short, religion, now divided, is no longer regarded as the universally inclusive identity; national political identity now plays a far stronger role. Whereas, for Cusa himself, unity was once provided by one's relationship to the Roman Catholic Church, today modern social unity often is based on membership within a pluralistic state regardless of any religious or ethnic considerations (as well as considerations of gender, age, et cetera).

For Cusa the distinctive element of human nature is its intellectual capacity. In *De Docta Ignorantia*, he writes that such things as stature and race are irrelevant to one's intellectual capacity.[2] In order to correctly interpret this claim one must bear in mind that intellectual capacity

does not refer merely to deductive reasoning which is itself grounded on intuition and judgement and embraces a broad range of cognitive abilities. This is particularly the case for Cusa who constantly exhorts his readers to reach beyond the limits of discursive reasoning and relies so heavily upon metaphors and paradoxes to achieve this. It must be admitted that ultimately one's cognitive abilities are founded on an awareness of one's relationship to God and one's neighbors. This ultimately links one's intellectual outlook to one's cultural context. It should also be noted that this cultural context will to some extent be influenced by various physical characteristics. Thus, when Cusa separates intellectual capacity from such things as stature and race he, in fact, is asserting that intellectual capacities are not contingent upon such factors, though they may indeed play some role in determining the particular manner in which this capacity is expressed.

Thus, though religion may no longer serve as the ultimately unifying context, nonetheless, still it grounds and pervades all social unity. Just as one cannot treat the unity of the family by abstracting it from sexual differences, likewise if there are differences in religious perspectives in society one cannot promote social unity by simply abstracting from these differences. One must attempt to establish a positive interrelationship between these groups and to do so in distinctly religious terms. This is due both to the unique nature of religious commitment and to the natural operation of the human intellect.

The Existence of the Person in Society

It is perhaps best to begin an analysis of a Cusan notion of social unity by examining the nature of the individuals who will form this unity. For Cusa diversity among individuals is something quite natural. In *De Docta Ignorantia,* Cusa claims that, no two human beings can be identical in anything. Each possesses unique perceptions, imaginations, ideas, etc.. Thus, each will engage in unique activities. In fact, Cusa points out that even if one person consciously sets out to imitate another, he would never be able exactly to reproduce the model even on some particular point.[3] Thus, Cusa preserves the fundamental uniqueness of each individual human being.

He states also that universals posses no actual existence apart from their existence in individual beings.[4] This, however, does not result in Cusa adopting an atomistic view of society where each person becomes something of a world unto one's self. He believes that the entire universe exists in an harmonious manner and that each thing acts in a way which will allow it to realize its best possible existence. In performing this activity it influences other things and helps enable them to realize their potential. He claims that bright things do not illuminate so human beings can see, but do so because that is the nature of their being. God has ordained, however, that the order of the universe is such that as things act in accordance with their nature they will enhance the capacities of other beings to fulfill their respective natures. Thus, in order to realize their visual nature human beings take advantage of the light, which bright things give off to fulfill their illuminative nature. Cusa writes that, God "has so created all things that whilst each thing strives to conserve its own being as a gift of God, it does so in participation with other things;"[5] Thus Cusa's philosophy sets up an harmonious unity of being where individual fulfillment can be achieved only through service to the whole of reality. No being can realize its identity apart from the whole of being and benefiting that whole becomes essential to individual identity.

Since human nature is both conscious and rational it can understand the interrelationship of being and respond to it in an appropriate (i.e. personal) manner. Thus, it seems for Cusa that all human beings are linked by a sense of cultural identity. He claims that God has arranged the universe in such a way that even though each will admire the culture of others he will be content

also with his own and this produces unity and peace as far as is possible on earth.[6] It is this human need for cultural identity which, in part, provides the basis for Cusa's claim in *De Pace Fidei* that no one wants a way of worship which is common to all,[7] but yearns for something which is distinctively one's own.

Varghese Manimala in an article entitled, "Person, Community and Culture", asserts that the individual's destiny can be attained only in concert with others, but never in isolation.[8] In short, the personal growth of the individual cannot be assured except within the community.[9] It is in this sense that one can conclude that personal identity is not something the individual is born with, but is rather something which develops in people because of their membership in society. T. I. Oizerman gives an example of this when he points out that, though the capacity for human language may be inherent in the individual, a particular individual can acquire a language only through contact with other people.[10] Thus, though human nature is inherent in all human beings its individual potential can be fulfilled only in society with others. Thus, one is justified in claiming that the person is to a significant extent relational.[11] Every person inevitably is influenced by their families, friends, neighbors, fellow citizens, religious congregations, et cetera.

This relationality provides the foundation for the mutual concern which must animate any authentically human community. True personal fulfillment is never at the expense of the community which shapes one's identity, nor is true service to the community ever destructive to the person. When the primary relationship of every person is to the Absolute in the form of a personal and loving God who endows all reality with being, one must expand one's concern to embrace all of reality. Since every being is a contraction of the Absolute a unity of being is established which eliminates the distinction between personal fulfillment and the good of the community.

The Nature of Society

This insight into the nature of relationships plays an indispensable role in understanding the true nature of society. Martin Buber in *Between Man and Man* outlines the social drawbacks of singularism (which he refers to as individualism) and collectivism. He sees both perspectives as merely partial expressions of the integrity of human experience, which it therefore distorts.[12] Singularism isolates the person into a separate being which shares no inherent relationship with any other being. On the other hand, collectivism, though it successfully gathers people into a "whole", fails to form a true society in that it makes impossible the creation of individual relationships within the whole. For Buber, collectivism renders social life impossible for the person since it entombs the individuals who enter into social relationships in the whole so that they cannot establish any sort of independent being.[13]

The failures of the collectivist and singularist visions of society are solved by Buber through a relational society. Here the individual exists to the extent that he enters into living relationships with others. For Buber the preeminent reality of human existence can be neither the individual nor the collective. These two concepts when viewed in isolation are nothing more than mere abstractions. The individual can achieve authentic reality only through living relationships with others. Likewise, the community can achieve authentic reality only in so far as it is constructed of these living relationships.[14]

It is the position of mutual integrationism, however, which authentically reflects the philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa with its emphasis upon the principles of individuality and community. The perspective of mutual integrationism is somewhat different than that expressed by Buber. As has been said, for Cusa, the primary relation which any being has, particularly the human being, is with the Absolute. It is this relationship which endows the individual person with his or her very being, and thereby allows one to enter into relationships with others. Thus, mutual integrationism asserts that the fact of existence is not dependent on one's relation to others, but rather on one's relation to the Absolute which endows every individual with its own being. Since these beings are each unique contractions of the Absolute, each being shares an inherent relationship with every other being in respect to their source and end. Thus, interaction with others becomes part of the very nature of individual being. This is particularly the case for rational beings whose interaction takes on a distinctively personal character and leads to an enhanced awareness of the Divine. Likewise, the community is not merely a collection of relationships, but is itself an organic unity expressive of its own truth. This expression occurs not only due to the various natures of the community's constituent members, but because the community is itself a contraction of the Absolute which also provides it with its end.

Because Cusa recognizes the importance of the role played by cultural identity in respect to one's own personal fulfillment one should clearly make no attempt to create a more homogeneous society by assimilating various distinct groups into the whole. As has been shown, Cusa does not believe that unity requires homogeneity. Since all questions of social harmony essentially come down to relating people who are different,[15] this is a prime example of the significance of Cusa's ideas on diversity within the unity of contemporary society. G. McLean correctly points out that an exclusive connotation has all too often been applied to the term culture, thereby implying that cultural identity results in cultural alienation.[16] Life in the modern world, however, makes it imperative that a less exclusive notion of culture take hold.[17] In fact, cultural traditions can be seen as bridges rather than barriers. They connect individuals to their communities and when properly understood may also connect communities to each other. This is particularly the case when one views these cultures from a transcendent religious perspective, as did Cusa. From such a perspective all cultures recognize themselves as partial manifestations of the Absolute to which they are subordinate. In this fashion one establishes the possibility that other cultures will see themselves as partial, though distinctive, reflections of divine perfection and come to regard each other not as enemies, but as collaborators.[18]

Such a relationship between cultures encourages a climate conducive to cultural interchange and dynamic interaction. Since no culture regards itself as absolute and each culture sees the others as being engaged in a common enterprise, they can enter into dialogue with each other. This cultural interchange eliminates the risk of cultural stagnation and invigorates the participating cultures by engaging them in a process of continual revision and growth. It allows each culture to discover the new implications of its own tradition and to make modifications necessary in the face of contemporary challenges. Each culture can retain its historic identity and insights without running the risk of becoming a relic of the past, unable to speak to newly developing situations.

Through such cultural dialogue error may be eliminated and truth revealed. The goal here is not that one group achieve domination over the others, nor to establish some new group to serve in this dominant role. Its goal is for each culture to recognize its own finite nature and develop its own capacities and insights to whatever level their nature allows.[19] These new possibilities are

least likely to be brought out through interaction by those who share a similar cultural identity since the experiences, assumptions, stocks of ideas, *et cetera* are also fairly similar. Interaction with those of radically different cultural perspectives is likely to prove far more productive in generating new insights since one encounters new ideas, assumptions, et cetera. This can liberate the participants from their most basic prejudices, deceptions and other limitations. It can enable them to form new insights into their cultural identity and new more authentic ways to articulate this enhanced vision.[20]

This sort of authentic cultural dialogue will require two elements. One is an appreciation of other cultures; the other is an appreciation of one's own. This will enable one to see that what originally had appeared to be a mere local custom when viewed from a singularist perspective can, in fact, perform a far more fundamental role when viewed from the perspective of mutual integration. Through interaction what previously had seemed exotic enriches the heretofore mundane and reveals it to be an expression of something essential to human life and human values, thereby forming a cultural bridge.[21]

From the perspective of mutual integrationism cultural change is not in its most authentic sense a matter of compromise, rather it is a completion or correction of some value which had not been properly expressed.[22] Furthermore, mutual integrationism fosters a cultural dialogue imbued not with a crusader spirit seeking to defend some position and to defeat all differing views, but with the attitude of an explorer in search of new approaches. In this spirit integrationism seeks out views which challenge those with which it is familiar and in so doing opens the possibility of liberation from these limitations and biases. Thus, integrationism can provide a more profound understanding of one's own heritage and, therefore, discover for it new applications.

A Cusan Response to Discrimination. From a Cusan perspective we can see clearly the importance cultural identity possesses for the individual, and just as clearly the destructiveness of discriminatory policies which stigmatize certain groups. The consequences of such policies are felt not only by the individuals who suffer directly from them, but also by society as a whole which must pay the price of diminished resources available for cultural interaction. Most importantly, however, such discrimination is a wedge dividing the human community, eliminating the identity between personal fulfillment and service to the community, and undermining the mutual concern that must animate such a community. An interesting question, however, is what could be a Cusan approach to remedying the previous injustice of past discrimination.

The answer to this question, I believe, rests on the nature of what such remedies would entail. If they consisted of active attempts to recruit members of underrepresented groups into the various institutions and organizations which make up society, Cusa would in all likelihood respond quite favorably. There can be no denying the importance of cultural interaction for the creation of a healthy and dynamic community. It is, therefore, indispensable that the social structure attempt actively to realize this interaction as an everyday occurrence.

If these remedies, however, consisted of policies of forced integration (e.g. of ethnic neighborhoods, religious schools) then it could be argued that a Cusan perspective would tend toward a different judgement. For such policies could lead not to the dynamic interaction of various groups within the community, but to the homogenization of the community. Such policies could lead to the dispersal of smaller cultural groups within the community at large; over time the distinctive cultural identities which make cultural interaction productive would be lost. Once deprived of the particular community which shares one's vision and through which one could articulate one's distinctive cultural identity, the person would have a far more difficult time passing

on that living tradition to the next generation. If the Italian neighborhoods, the historically black colleges, the Jewish charitable organizations, *et cetera* were to be assimilated, rather than truly integrated, into the broader community, in time their unique cultural identity would be lost and with it the indispensable contributions they could have made to the cultural dialogue. From a Cusan perspective this would be a major tragedy.

Another problem with forced integration is that because of its mandatory nature it is likely to suffuse all cultural interchange with a confrontational, rather than a dialectical spirit. This would prove more conducive to conflict than to dialogue, and so again fail to create the open and interactive community intended. The above would seem to suggest that a better option for society would be the vigilant enforcement of strong anti-discrimination laws which keep neighborhoods and institutions open for people of all cultural backgrounds and, yet, allow them to create enclaves where their own culture is predominately, though not exclusively, represented. So long as the ethnic neighborhood or historically black college is open to others of differing background it plays a positive role in the cultural dialogue necessary for a healthy society in the modern world.

From this perspective affirmative action policies based on preferential treatment of particular groups become problematic. Lisa H. Newton points out that, if special rights are granted to one group all other groups will demand that they receive similar considerations.[23] Under such circumstances, no stable unity would be possible since all groups constantly would be competing against one another to gain this or that benefit denied to others of a different background.

The Advantages of the Cusan Perspective. Another point worth noting is Cusa's considerable respect for human freedom as long as social order is maintained; this is quite consistent with modern sentiments. Though Cusa's own writings on this issue deal primarily with the freedom of religious minorities, rather than particular individuals, there is nothing in them to suggest that he would object to their being extended. In fact, one can feel quite confident in making this extension since, it is entirely consistent with Cusa's understanding of the principle of individuality which has been shown to be one of the cornerstones of his thought and in no way to impinge upon the principle of community.

One can see clearly that mutual integrationism, approaches the issue of social unity in a way which relies upon the realization of a complementarity between the principles of individuality and community which is the heart of Nicholas of Cusa's philosophy and serves as the foundation for a new social paradigm where service to others becomes the path to personal fulfillment. The principle of individuality allows for the uniqueness of the person, giving each one the freedom to realize their full potential in service to the greater community, upon which the fulfillment of every individual depends. Such mutual integrationism would promote the value inherent in an ethnically diverse society where one's cultural identity can serve as a rich pool of resources.

On the other hand, the principle of community allows for the integration of these individuals into a political order regardless of their ethnic make-up, cultural background, *et cetera*. All are treated equally and therefore have a shared and continuing concern to work together to maintain the order in which all can flourish. Thus the relationships which exist between members of the community are not merely based upon peaceful coexistence, but are animated by a spirit of mutual contribution where each member shares an inherent bond to, and concern for, every other member, and one cannot prosper in opposition to the others. In this manner diversity is retained and even celebrated, but no particular group receives any sort of special treatment which others do not. Diversity then becomes a source not of social divisiveness, but of strength and dynamism.

This is not the case with either the singularist or collectivist approaches. Because both of these perspectives are anchored in a relatively exclusive fashion to only one of these principles it quite naturally exaggerates the role this plays while neglecting other concerns. The end result as we have seen is the creation of a world-view which fails to properly account for either principle so that neither diversity nor dynamism can be fully developed. The exclusive concentration upon individuals leads to an emphasis on the distinctions which separate them along a variety of lines. Conversely, exclusive concentration upon the collective ignores all such distinctions and seeks to clump all individuals into a single homogenized mass.

Each of these approaches creates a radically different type of society. For example, a society's appreciation of ethnic diversity will almost certainly be determined by its vision of social unity. An exclusive emphasis upon the principle of individuality would tend to ignore ethnic diversity entirely and instead see social diversity as an individual matter. This inevitably results in a fragmented society where all individuals are concerned with protecting only their particular interests since there are no ontological bonds linking individuals. The exclusive focus on the principle of individuality leads to a vision which tends to see society as an atomistic entity. On the other hand, an exclusive focus on the principle of community fosters a perspective which sees society as a uniform and homogeneous whole. Therefore this later perspective has a tendency to encourage the suppression of all diversity within society and the incorporation of these distinctive elements into a single seamless whole. It encourages, or forces, an abandonment of individual identities in favor of this assimilation into the greater society.

These diverse social visions have direct consequences for many more specific issues which remain matters of considerable controversy. The contributions which Cusa's understanding of the interrelationship between unity and diversity can make should not be underestimated. Within Cusa's philosophy the importance of social unity is undeniable as is the role of cultural identity in maintaining this unity. With this in mind the deeply destructive nature of discrimination can be all the more readily exposed. For Cusa the disastrous consequences of discrimination are imposed not only on the person discriminated against, who is denied full participation in society and, because of this is restricted in the opportunity to develop one's potential, but also upon those not specifically discriminated against. By denying some people the ability to fulfill their potential the contribution they could have made to society is lost and no one can draw upon it. Thus, through discrimination every individual person in society suffers because the resources of society as a whole upon which each person is dependent for their own development have been impoverished. Furthermore, discrimination is also destructive to the community in that invariably it divides the community in an antagonistic fashion setting its members against one another. For Cusa, however, all of these problems flow from the fact that discrimination strikes at the very heart of society in its attempt to inhibit diversity and to separate personal fulfillment from the communal good. Cusa sees the proclamation of the Absolute as the ultimate end of society. Diversity of finite beings each working to promote the good of the other enhances the accuracy with which finite reality can proclaim infinite reality. Therefore discrimination is revealed to be a fundamentally self-destructive act for society.

Mutual integrationism will recognize the important role group identity plays in shaping one's personal identity. This perspective will therefore encourage people to draw upon those resources. It is important to remember that for Cusa each culture represents a partial articulation of an absolute truth which no single culture could ever express as well by itself. Therefore, preserving diversity is indispensable in that it gives us a clearer perception of this truth which is both the source and goal of all being. Furthermore, just as individual cultures are partial articulations of a greater truth,

personal identity itself is a partial articulation of both a greater cultural truth and the absolute truth itself.

In fact, because Cusa so clearly recognizes the role cultural identity plays in personal development he is aware that only in a society where such identities are not in some way stigmatized will persons be able to make their full contribution to the enrichment of society. Indeed, personal achievement requires a concern for the welfare of these groups in recognition of the role they play in everyone's development, and a willingness to enrich these resources in order to foster the development of the whole.

In short, mutual concern is fostered in that, just as these groups contributed to the development of each person, all in turn should enrich the resources of such groups by making their own unique contributions. Cusa recognizes that a society which includes a variety of cultural identities does not jeopardize its existence, but enhances it. These various identities are productive in fostering the person upon whom the health of any society is founded. Therefore, such identities should not be stigmatized, but encouraged to reach the fulfillment of their potential. The greater diversity a society exhibits the closer it will be to proclaiming the Divine which, as has been said, is the purpose of its society's existence.

Cultural Interaction. Another controversial issue which is related to one's view of social unity is that of multi-culturalism. Singularism with an atomistic view of society will likely regard any kind of multi-culturalism with indifference. This perspective will be inclined to see cultures as being of minimal value in the achievements of the individual. Thus, any program of multi-culturalism will be considered essentially marginal. The collectivist's approach to multi-culturalism will tend to water down all distinctions between the various cultural perspectives and see each as merely different ways of articulating the same message. It will exaggerate whatever common elements it can identify and reduce all differences to the point of insignificance. In doing this it inevitably alters that culture to the point where it would alienate its own adherents. Thus, what is created is not so much the possibility of a multi-cultural dialogue where all can participate and gain a deeper understanding, but rather the creation of some sort of amorphous and artificial culture that speaks to no one.

The position of mutual integrationism promises to be the perspective truly conducive to establishing any sort of multi-cultural program. This is because it recognizes both the similarities and the differences of each individual culture and attempts to place both in their proper relation to each other, giving each their due. Thus, each culture retains its unique identity and is able to enter into a dialogue with other cultures in their own terms,rather than as some outsider's version of what they should be (as occurs above). Hence, all cultures are able to interact in a fashion which may challenge the fundamental presuppositions of the others; each thereby can shed light upon the other. Mutual integrationism, unlike singularism, does not regard cultures as being matters of individual perspective and therefore incapable of forging inherent bonds between individuals. It recognizes the cultural bonds which individuals share and the interaction that is made possible by these bonds not only within groups, but also between them. This is where the true value of multi-culturalism lies. In fact, devoid of this interaction multi-culturalism is reduced to a dilettantism which pays no regard to the underlying truths these cultures attempt to articulate.

Related to the issue of multi-culturalism are the controversies revolving around language. Singularism tends to encourage an essentially laissez-faire policy in respect to this issue. This perspective will be willing to let individuals fend for themselves in respect to learning a new language, seeing their efforts as purely personal decisions. This is entirely consistent with a view

of society as an atomized aggregate whose members share no internal relationship. As has been shown, such a vision of society is based on the principle of individuality as inherently exclusive. Given this perspective, a libertarian position, letting individuals make their own decision without interference or support from anyone else, is quite natural. The collectivist perspective tends to foster a policy which establishes a single uniform language because of its emphasis on the principle of community. Since the collectivist perspective looks upon diversity as a source of dissension it will attempt to eliminate all diversity including linguistic diversity.

The policy of mutual integrationism, however, is far more complex. In accord with the principle of community, mutual integrationism recognizes that social interaction is considerably eased by a shared common language. Conversely, in accord with the principle of individuality mutual integrationism is inclined to recognize the value of the positive possibilities which linguistic diversity offers society, such as the ability to encounter cultures on their own terms, rather than through an interpreter which inevitably would distort that culture. Because of this it is conducive to structuring society in such a way that people are encouraged to learn a variety of languages.

Furthermore, where languages face extinction, this perspective will tend to generate attempts to establish methods by which they can be preserved. For example, language requirements in the field of education will be seen as not only relevant, but indispensable. In order to have a true understanding of one's own language one requires an understanding of its own roots and of other languages as well. It is important to remember also that languages are not perennial truths, but unique and evolving responses to various perceptions of reality. Thus, they are inherently dynamic and interaction between linguistic groups can serve only to enrich the resources upon which each can draw, making its response more comprehensive and deepening the understanding of its unique nature. This would be another opportunity for mutual integrationism to preserve both diversity and dynamism within society.

The perspective of Cusa suggests structuring society in a manner consistent with encouraging both diversity and dynamism. This will promote the idea that every group or individual retain, develop and celebrate its own distinctive identity. In such a society these groups are encouraged to interact with one another in a caring manner and in so doing influence each other increasing the cultural diversity of the whole, while deepening each culture's understanding of itself and those with which it interacts. Also, just as the various religions were themselves partial articulations of the absolute truth, the same may be said for society's various cultural groups. Through cultural interaction each participant gains an enhanced awareness of itself by knowing its similarities to, and differences from, the other participants. Thus, each group will be able to enrich its own heritage. The various groups will not view each other as competitors attempting to dominate one another, but as partners contributing to the enrichment of each other's lives. As in the case of persons, the individual fulfillment of the various cultures can be achieved only through benevolent interaction.

Social Unity in an International Context

Cusa's insights into the nature of unity can also be applied productively to the international arena. Conflict between nations is a problem as old as it is common. It can take a variety of forms from contentious, but non-violent, trade disputes to brutally destructive military confrontations. As the world becomes more a global marketplace and the destructiveness of modern warfare, including nuclear warfare, continues to remain a possibility these confrontations will become all

the more destabilizing. Cusa's philosophy holds out the possibility of building a true community of nations within which each nation can retain its unique identity and autonomy. This approach will lessen the likelihood of international conflict.

The purpose of this section is to examine the implications of singularism, collectivism and mutual integrationism with regard to international questions. It will show how these perspectives are shaped by their particular understanding of the relationship between the principle of individuality and that of community. It also will show that through a proper understanding of the principles of individuality and community one can gain new insight into the field of international relations which will help resolve some disputes regarding to the nature of these relationships. Conversely, it will show how a misunderstanding of the relationship between these two principles is likely to lead to some characteristically one sided and very often disastrous decisions in the international arena.

Possible Approaches to International Unity

The singularist perspective, as has been shown, relies upon the principle of individuality, while ignoring the principle of community. Because of this when it comes to international issues the singularist orientation quite naturally inclines one to withdraw from any situation in which one does not perceive oneself to be directly and immediately involved. Naturally, such an orientation is extremely restrictive, for the singularist perspective sees no fundamental link between oneself or one's nation and the larger whole, in this case, the global community. Hence, it renders one extremely reluctant to involve oneself in broader affairs for either good or ill.

The collectivist perspective is considerably different: its focus is upon the principle of community to the neglect of the principle of individuality. Therefore the collectivist orientation inclines one to adopt a policy which, though entirely willing to engage in the affairs of the world, fails properly to appreciate the distinct and unique nature of the individual nations with which one interacts. Since the collectivist perspective does not recognize the value of individual distinctiveness, it inclines one to a policy which does not take into account the individual nature of the problems and possible solutions which are unique and distinctive to these nations. Because collectivism inclines one to see one's own vision as the only viable one, there is a tendency to disregard those distinctive features from which a nation derives its own unique identity. Thus, one lessens the chance of dealing effectively with such problems.

A Cusan Approach to International Unity

The perspective of mutual integrationism views the relationship between nations in a manner entirely different from either that of collectivism or of singularism. Because mutual integrationism acknowledges both the principle of individuality and the principle of community in a manner which expresses their complementarity, the singularist and collectivist orientations are entirely unacceptable. In accord with the principle of individuality, the perspective of mutual integrationism recognizes the value of each nation's distinctiveness and seeks to capitalize on the positive possibilities that it presents.

On the other hand, in accord with the principle of community it recognizes also the importance of the inherent bond all nations share, regardless of how insignificant this relationship might appear superficially. Mutual integrationism clearly sees that what happens in any nation has an effect upon all nations. Obviously, no nation can be secure and prosper in an unstable climate; and any

nation, regardless of how small or unimportant it may appear, influences the nature of this climate. Thus no nation can promote its own prosperity without promoting the prosperity of the entire international community.

Cusa's insight into the nature of unity moves beyond simple utilitarian considerations, and articulates why no individual nation can authentically realize its own potential without concern for the community of nations in which it lives. Just as religious congregations or ethnic groups could not come to truly appreciate their identities without interacting with those of differing perspectives, the same is true for nation states. Only through a shared and open dialogue with the global community can these nation states develop their true potential. From the perspective of mutual integrationism, authenticity depends upon interchange and interaction; therefore, no nation can afford to ignore invasions, civil wars, starvation and similar catastrophes in other nations. The same can be said for the quiet catastrophes of poverty, unavailability of education,*et cetera*. Such events in any nation will adversely effect the global climate, which naturally will have an adverse impact upon every other nation. Aside from these problems, however, each nation also will find diminished the resources upon which it must draw in international interchange. Thus, one can clearly see that because of the inherent and intimate link between the principle of individuality and the principle of community the relationship between the parts and the whole is not competitive, but complementary. Thus, one cannot benefit at the expense of the other.

In fact, to the extent that particular individuals do not engage in the communal dialogue the nature of being itself is compromised. This is because, for Cusa, as we have seen, being both emanates from, and returns to, the Absolute. Since it is the purpose of being to reflect the Absolute then each particular being must reflect the Absolute to the full extent possible for its limited nature. In this fashion being, when taken as a whole, can approximate the Divine in a way which is far more comprehensive than otherwise would have been possible. To the extent that beings fail to engage one another in a creative fashion, they inhibit the accuracy of that reflection which is the very purpose of their existence.

This is even more true on the social plane than it is on the physical, since the social plane is inhabited by rational and conscious individuals who have a far more enhanced creative capacity than merely physical entities. Furthermore, rational beings can approximate the Divine more accurately by consciously acting in order to enhance the being of the other, thereby, imitating the creative act of the Divine.

Once more this reveals the importance of the Cusan perspective for preserving both dynamism and diversity. This perspective recognizes and respects the unique individual nature of other nations and, yet, also understands that the fate of a single nation, no matter how small and insignificant it may appear, inevitably effects what happens to every other nation. Thus, for Cusa every nation's well-being is indispensable to the well-being of every other nation. None may be dismissed, since each represents the partial and unique articulation of that which the whole attempts to express. Because of this every nation is fundamentally effected by what happens in every other nation and so must remain engaged in the world. Thus, mutual intergationism recognizes the distinctiveness and independence of other nations, yet, also binds them together within a dynamic global community, in that each nation recognizes that the path to individual prosperity requires the promotion of international prosperity.

Social Unity and the Family

Just as Cusa's ideas on unity have proven to be insightful on the macro level of international relations it is equally promising on the micro level of family relationships. Modern society continues to be plagued by problems which reflect familial conflict, ranging from the prevalence of divorce to the destructiveness of family violence. Though it is difficult to precisely say to what extent these problems within the family may contribute to broader social problems (such as crime), evidence seems to indicate that the effect is considerable. This is hardly surprising since every person is socialized in his family environment and any hostility within this environment is likely to have a dramatic impact on personal development. Thus, if Cusa's philosophy can play a role in resolving conflict and facilitates the growth of family unity it presents society with the possibility of significantly improving its circumstances.

The purpose of this section is to show how one's understanding of social unity influences one's conception of the family. It will further examine how one's understanding of the nature of the family relates to some specific contemporary issues. Because the singularist, collectivist and mutual integrationist perspectives offer radically different views of the relationship between the principle of individuality and that of community, quite naturally they will have different conceptions of the nature of the family and of the individual's role therein. A proper understanding of this will therefore play a fundamental role in resolving a number of contemporary controversies and creating a sound environment for the development of capable individuals who promote the well-being of the social structures which nurtured them.

Possible Approaches to Family Harmony

In accordance with the principle of individuality the singularist perspective tends to view the family as an essentially arbitrary unit of atomic individuals. The idea of the family as a cohesive organic structure is rejected, which has a number of far-reaching implications. The singularist perspective inclines one to embrace such social policies as liberal divorce laws and the legal recognition of non-traditional family structures. Perhaps the singularist view of the family has had its most profound impact on the field of biomedical ethics, particularly with respect to such critical issues as euthanasia, surrogate motherhood and abortion. In all these instances the patient is regarded as an entirely independent and autonomous individual who may do as he or she sees fit. From the singularist perspective, a woman may bear a child and give it to another disregarding the fundamental relationship of the woman to the child, or of siblings, the woman's parents, *et cetera*. Likewise, in respect to abortion the singularist outlook gives the woman full and complete autonomy. Such things as spousal notification or, in the case of minors, parental notification are regarded as serious violations of personal autonomy. Attempts to recognize fundamental familial relationships are rejected as unreasonable infringements on individual liberty. The same may be said for euthanasia, where singularism urges that the individual be given absolute autonomy to determine when one's own life should end, without interference from anyone else.

The collectivist outlook following the principle of community inclines to the opposite approach. Since collectivism sees all value as being derived from the principle of community, and ignores the principle of individuality, its understanding of family relationships tend to focus much more on the corporate identity of the family. Because of this the collectivist outlook inclines one to see individuals as nothing more than members of the family with no unique value in, and of, themselves. An example of this collectivist notion of the family can be seen in some societies

where the value of women is derived exclusively from their roles as wife and mother, while their value as individual persons is minimized. The collectivist outlook inclines toward support for social policies which emphasize family stability and coherence, but without regard to the good of the individual members of the family.

A Cusan Approach to Family Harmony

Inevitably any social policy which fails to recognize the indispensable and fundamental link between the families which foster the development of persons, and the persons of which these families consist, is no longer adequate. This is due both to the new sense of the person which has evolved in the modern era, and to the large number of centrifugal forces present in contemporary life. It is now quite clear that the good of the person is inextricably linked to the good of the family in which one exists. It is important to note here that when one refers to the good of the family or the individual person one is referring not merely to their physical well-being, but also to such things as appropriate socialization, psychological welfare, maturation, spiritual development, *et cetera*.

The recognition of this fact is at the center of a Cusan approach to unity. As has been shown this approach to social unity is one of mutual integrationism. Because this perspective seeks to integrate the principles of individuality and community it also seeks to integrate the needs of the family-unit with those of its individual constituent members. The perspective of mutual integration recognizes the value of fully developed persons for the family, as well as how indispensable strong families are for fostering such persons. Such an outlook suggests the need for stable family relationships, while recognizing that such stable relationships cannot be preserved by violating the interests of the individual person. This is why in *De Pace Fidei*, Cusa specifically mentions marriage (along with Holy Orders) as something on which the various groups within society will have to come to some agreement if social harmony is to be maintained. Cusa himself recommends that, in accord with the law of nature, marriage should be between one man and one woman.[24]

In fact, mutual integration implies that only by stressing the value inherent in each and every human being will the family be able to achieve its full potential and fulfill its mission. Likewise, the successful development of the individual is equally dependent upon the family. In this fashion mutual integrationism avoids the excesses of both the singularist and collectivist perspectives and preserves both diversity and dynamism. It does this by acknowledging the unique value of every individual as well as the need of those individuals to form with those around them meaningful relationships based on mutual concern. In this manner they can develop their full potential due to the social nature of human existence. Furthermore, only by acknowledging this and acting upon it can society and the individual person achieve their mutual goal of proclaiming the Absolute to the maximum degree allowed by their finite natures. All of this is possible because Cusa articulates a vision of unity where individual fulfillment is achieved by advancing the good of others and no contradiction is created.

Notes

1. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Michael Oakeshott, ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), p. 85.

2. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, Germain Heron, trans. (London: Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1954), p. 141.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
7. Nicholas of Cusa, "De Pace Fidei" in *Unity and Reform*, John Patrick Dolan, ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), p. 197.
8. George F. McLean and John Kromkowski, eds., *Relations Between Cultures* (Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1991), p. 45.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 323.
12. Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (London: Kegan, Paul, 1947), p. 200.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
15. *Relations Between Cultures*, p. 7.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 326.
23. Thomas A. Mappes and Jane S. Zembaty, *Social Ethics: Morality and Social Policy* (New York: Mc Graw Hill, Inc., 1972), p. 307.
24. De Pace Fidei, p. 235.

Chapter VIII
A Cusan Approach to Economic Unity

By inquiring into the relationship between the principles of individuality and community one acquires a new perspective on the nature of society and the role of the person within it. The two preceding chapters have productively applied this perspective in the contexts of attempts to establish religious and social harmony. This chapter will explore its applications within the economic realm. It will address fundamental issues about the nature of economic interaction, the role to be played by social institutions and the legitimate obligations and expectations of persons with regard to this interaction.

This chapter will focus primarily upon how a Cusan vision of unity can provide new insight and thereby new solutions to some contemporary economic problems. The first section will examine the nature of economic structures as a whole, with particular attention to the role of government within such structures. The second and third sections will narrow their scope and concentrate upon the relationship between the classes within the economic structure. The former will concentrate on what, if any, obligation the economically successful have to help those less fortunate, while the latter will discuss the equitable distribution of the financial costs of running society. A brief diagram of this chapter can be seen below.

Unity in an Economic Context

Possible Approaches to Economic Organization

It is possible to interpret all economic structures as conforming, to a greater or lesser degree, to one of three very basic models. The first model will be referred to as acquisitionism. It sees all economic activity as being at bottom an obsessive and singleminded pursuit of individual wealth. This view is most clearly epitomized in Max Weber's seminal work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which describes capitalism as being essentially a "Philosophy of Avarice".[1]The reason for this is that in such a system the idea of duty, as Weber sees it, consists primarily in the individual's ability to amass capital, which is assumed as an end in itself.[2] Thus, the *summum bonum* of capitalism becomes the earning of ever more money; acquisition becomes the ultimate purpose of a person's life.[3]

The second model which will be examined here is referred to as statism. Here all economic activity is placed directly under the control of the state so that it can meet the needs of society as it perceives them. This view is expressed in the writings of Karl Marx who asserted that industrial capacity had to be socialized in order for humanity to exist in a non-explotive, non-alienating context. From this perspective the unique role played by each individual in determining the nature of economic activity tends to be minimized, if not eliminated. Hence, individual initiative often comes to be regarded as being, at best, superfluous or, at worst, inimical to the interests of society.

In a work entitled *The Catholic Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, Michael Novak offers his vision of a just economic structure which he refers to as democratic capitalism. Novak points out that the true essence of capitalism is not the individual's acquisition of private wealth, but innovation and invention; this requires insight into determining what society's needs are in order to respond to them in a creative fashion. In short, capitalism's "distinctive materials are new possibilities glimpsed by surprise through an enterprising imagination".[4] Thus, the capitalist does

not so much take wealth, as create it.[5]Novak also argues that democracy plays an indispensable role in the functioning of a true capitalist system. This is not only because democracy solves problems of legitimacy through a peaceful succession of power which makes long term investment possible, but also because it permits majorities to temper those excesses of capitalism which are found to be detrimental.[6] One should note also that this democratic political structure stimulates creativity and cooperation within society. This is because in a democracy one may participate in determining the laws which govern the social structure. Inevitably, this will require interaction and cooperation with one's fellow citizens in the decision making process.

Thus, it is clear that Novak's theory of democratic capitalism requires not only individual initiative and creativity, but social cooperation as well.[7] He points out that few economic enterprises can be conducted entirely by a lone individual and that none can succeed in isolation.[8] In fact, he asserts that the most characteristic feature of democratic capitalism is not the glorification of the individual, but the idea of many individuals acting together in a creative enterprise [i.e. the corporation, the pension fund, the credit union].[9] Even the market itself (including the labor market) exerts an integrating influence on society in that it obliges people, if they are to succeed, to pay attention to the wants and needs of others and to seek out ways in which these needs can be met.[10]

It should also be noted that the transactions in the marketplace usually will benefit both parties since customers must be satisfied if one expects them to return, while businesses must have a steady flow of customers if they are to continue. Likewise, workers must be treated in a just fashion if they are to be expected to create the quality products businesses require to satisfy their customers. Moreover, the order of the market is not a static one imposed from above, but on which is voluntary, cooperative, and above all dynamic.[11] Within this order every individual is free to pursue his or her own economic objectives in accord with his or her own particular vision. Likewise, the democratic order follows the direction of its own members. Thus, changes within both orders are not random occurrences, but products of a rational dialogue between human beings. In both instances human beings are encouraged to interact with others and to imagine improvements which enhance the quality of life and release human creativity.[12]

In *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusa tells the reader that God has created the universe in such a way that as each thing attempts to conserve its own being it participates with other beings. He gives the example of light which illumines not so that human beings may see, but because that is inherent in its very nature, and humanity benefits from that nature expressing itself.[13]When one seeks to conserve one's being by economic pursuits it is quite clear that one's success will require interaction with others. Furthermore, because one is possessed of a rational nature this interaction with others need not be blind, but is carried out in a conscious fashion with an awareness of one's role in the proclamation of the Divine. In fact, one's rational nature entails a moral responsibility to create a system which allows each individual to proclaim the Divine to the greatest degree that a person's limited nature allows.

Furthermore, at the beginning of *De Pace Fidei*, Cusa claims that because so many are preoccupied with earning their living, they have not the time to embark upon their own quest for the Absolute.[14] However, if human rationality could discover a way to erect an economic structure in which individuals were able to meet their physical needs, and yet still possess the time to seek the Absolute, Cusa would no doubt see this as an incredible boon to humanity. It is reasonable to believe that the Cusan perspective can provide some key insights into the foundation principles of such a structure.

Novak's vision of democratic capitalism is attractive as a structured dynamism which allows individuals to pursue their unique insights. Furthermore it rewards people for being sensitive to the needs of their fellow human beings; but through consensus it also allows for the restriction of actions which may be destructive to the whole.

However, it has one significant drawback when analyzed from a Cusan perspective, namely, its understanding of social unity. For Novak one serves others as a means to attaining self-fulfillment. Thus, though society is cooperative their remains a fundamental opposition between the individual and society, as well as among individuals themselves. Social unity, from this perspective, is not so much a metaphysical reality but an arranged order which is intended to promote individual fulfillment; it advances the communal good as a means to individual fulfillment.

A Cusan Approach to Economic Organization

In the Cusan perspective, all men share an innate bond through the fact that each individual person is a contraction of the whole. Though each contraction is unique, as contractions of the same whole all share a common source. In short, everyone is in the image and likeness of God. Furthermore, because all have as the goal of their existence the approximation of the Absolute they also share a common end. Thus, all of humanity becomes linked through bonds of mutual concern and the good of all becomes the goal of each. Moreover, as has been shown, to the extent that persons are finite beings attempting to approximate an absolute being, a diverse variety of such beings will be capable of expressing a far greater range of possibilities than can any single individual. Thus, no one can ever achieve in isolation what they can in a community. In fact, one can obtain one's identity only through one's relationship with the community. Therefore, society is not merely a voluntary association which people enter in order to achieve some subordinate good, but something which is called for by the very nature of humanity. In fact, it is only social interaction based upon mutual concern which enables humanity as a whole, and each person in particular, truly to achieve fulfillment.

This element of mutual concern, the desire that the other achieve the good, and a willingness to make a deliberate effort to realize this goal generally are absent from Novak's analysis. In Novak there is a degree of complementarity, but its essentially grounded in self-interest rather than a willing commitment to the other's good. Cusa's vision offers an opportunity to overcome the separation between personal fulfillment and community service by integrating the person into the community.

Because of this recognition of one's communal nature, a Cusan perspective would suggest amending the system of democratic capitalism in a way which will retain its dynamism and its respect for individuality in both the political and economic areas, yet enhance its understanding of unity and its spirit of community. The principles of Cusa's thought suggest a system where society is viewed not only as a collection of discrete individuals who come together in order to further their own interests, but as a true community whose members enhance each others lives in a complementary fashion and who consciously seek to develop that community in all of its facets to its complete potential. In short, it seeks to create a community animated by a spirit of active commitment to the overall well-being of both the community as a whole and each constituent member of the community. Further, the Cusan perspective recognizes the inherent connection between these two positions which so often are regarded as being inherently contradictory.

This Cusan perspective, henceforth, will be referred to as integrated entrepreneurship. It retains the values of individual initiative moderated through some form of participatory government, but incorporates these individuals into a living and unified community animated by a spirit of mutual concern rooted in the inherent nature of every human being. This encourages the individual to see how personal achievement culminates in service to others.

This sheds new light upon the passage in *De Dato Patris Luminum* where Cusa points out that, through the use of his reason, one can obtain the fruits of physical life, i.e., food from the earth, wool from sheep, wine from grapes, *et cetera*.[15]Likewise, he goes on to say that one can obtain also the fruits of intellectual or spiritual life by cultivating truth and uprooting the weeds which kill fertility.[16] This can be achieved by structuring the economic order in a way that encourages personal initiative and responsibility in a manner consistent with service to others. Thus, it becomes possible to integrate the person into the community in a manner that enhances the physical, intellectual and spiritual lives of every person within the community and of the community as a whole.

In recognizing the communal nature of one's personal identity one must recognize also one's personal responsibilities for enhancing the life of that community through which others enhance their own life as well. Thus, by careful use of one's reason, one can recognize the nature of one's ontological relation to one's fellows and design a structure which integrates the needs and goals of both. In this manner, that which provides for one's physical life is integrated with that which enhances one's intellectual and, most importantly, one's spiritual lives as well.

With this in mind, one gains a new perspective on Cusa's earlier assertion that every creature ascends to deification as closely as its nature permits, so that corporeal being finds perfection in living being, living being in intellectual being, and intellectual being in God.[17] The human person, microcosm of the universe, uses rationality to design a system which not only meets one's physical needs, but in so doing contributes to one's own intellectual and spiritual well-being and that of one's community as well. Furthermore, by establishing a system which facilitates the realization of the potentials of its participants, the community enhances its own existence. In so doing the system increases the accuracy with which both individuals and the community approximate the Absolute and thereby contribute to their achieving the purpose of their existence. Thus, one's physical, rational and spiritual natures achieve harmony.

The perspective of an integrated entrepreneurship by recognizing the interrelationship between the principle of individuality and that of community, enables one to devise a structure which is far more suited to establishing this harmony then is possible in either an acquisitionist or a statist perspective. Like acquisitionism, integrated entrepreneurship recognizes the value of a free market where individuals are free to act in a manner which maximizes personal fulfillment. Both positions also understand that for such a market to function efficiently a certain social order must be maintained and that this is best done by the consent of those within this order.

Contrary to the acquisitionist perspective, integrated entrepreneurship realizes that the excessive centrifugal forces of unrestrained individualism would ultimately risk the destruction of the social order itself including the market. This would not only destroy the community, but weaken all those within that community by depriving them of its advantages. In short, acquisitionist perspective tends to care only for the individual's own gain while integrated entrepreneurship's, understanding the person's inherent links to the larger community, knows that the success of a single person is ultimately contingent upon the resources of society, economic and otherwise, and that any contributions made thereto will, quite naturally, benefit that person as well.

The difference between these two perspectives is that between one who seeks only to enrich oneself and the compassionate researcher working to discover genuine cures for the devastating diseases that afflict society. The researcher seeks not merely to enhance one's own economic well-being, but to improve the quality of life for the entire community in which one lives. Furthermore, one will gain not merely economic well-being, but also the advantages of enriching the interaction of one's own community and actualizing one's creative capabilities. In this fashion one enhances one's own relationship to the Absolute and that of one's community as well.

The relationship between integrated entrepreneurship and statism is somewhat different. Integrated entrepreneurship though aware of the need for an orderly economic structure, is aware also of the dangers of centralized control imposed from above which, because of its external nature, stifles individual creativity and leads to stagnation. This suggests a policy according to which the government uses its power only through the consent of the governed to maintain a stable order in which individuals are free to pursue their own personal fulfillment through serving their community. This is because integrated entrepreneurship takes note of the inherent interrelationship which all reality shares due to the very nature of existence. With this in mind one realizes that neither social institutions, nor society as a whole, can prosper in conflict with the interests of its individual members. The statist, however, while recognizing the importance of a stable society neglects the role creative individuals play in keeping a community vibrant and so subjugates the person to the community.

By adopting Cusa's understanding of the principles of individuality and community one is able to recognize the essential interrelationship between the person and the community. As a consequence of this interrelationship the character of the community takes on an inherently personal nature; likewise, the character of the person takes on a social nature. Thus it is no longer possible for the community to achieve prosperity apart from its individual members. In such a situation, stifling the creative capacities of its constituent members, society would succeed only in diminishing its own resources. Furthermore, since the person's well-being is linked inherently to the community in which one develops one cannot achieve prosperity independently therefrom. Thus, since human beings are by their very nature social organisms, their participation in society becomes a profound part of their identity; anything which depletes the resources of that community inhibits its fulfillment by eroding its potential.

By recognizing this interrelationship between the principles of individuality and community, the integration between the person and the community, sought in terms of an integrated entrepreneurship, takes on an entirely new dimension. This need no longer be based on simple utilitarian considerations, but can now find a far more secure foundation in metaphysics. Because the personal character of society and the social character of the person can be seen clearly, one can now understand that the benefits of integrated entrepreneurship are a consequence of its proper cultivation of the relationship between the person and the community. The understanding of reality articulated by Cusa's principles provides a context which, when transferred to the social realm, makes possible the very cooperation and consideration required for any practical accomplishments. The principle of individuality recognizes that people should be given the freedom to cultivate their own unique abilities, and that this will maximize their contributions to the community, while the principle of community recognizes that some order is required in any society for such personal development to take place.

The true strength of Cusa's insights lie in the recognition of the fact that the principles of individuality and community cannot coexist in a fashion where the concerns of one merely are balanced against competing claims of the other, but that the two must be integrated in a

complementary fashion where each one achieves its fulfillment in the other and neither can be subjugated to the other. Thus, the efficiency of integrated entrepreneurship is dependent upon the extent to which it successfully manages this integration. It does this by creating a community which allows the individual person to participate in determining those rules under which he or she will live. It encourages one to recognize that success is contingent upon paying careful attention to the needs of those involved and making creative contributions to meeting their needs in a way they find acceptable. In this fashion the person can contribute to the community which nurtured him or her; the principles of individuality and community become mutually implicative aspects of human life. The efficiency of integrated entrepreneurship is made possible only because it recognizes some basic truths about the nature both of the person and of the society. In illuminating these truths, the Cusan perspective yields a far deeper understanding of the person and the community than does a strictly utilitarian outlook in which efficiency is regarded as the prime consideration.

Should one neglect the principle of community entirely, as occurs in an acquisitionist perspective, one would incline toward an extremely *laissez faire* view of economic structures. In accord with the principle of individuality, this view would see individual creativity as the prime element of a successful society, but fail to recognize the inherent link the individual shares with society as a whole. From this perspective, society is seen only as a collection of individuals bound together merely by common interests. Within such a framework individuals may form temporary alliances for certain limited ends, but nothing more is possible. In this perspective individual well-being is interpreted in a way in which it negates the communal good.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is a statist perspective which, in accord with the principle of community, sees society as a whole, but neglects the importance of its individual constituent elements. Because of this the statist perspective is likely to encourage an economic arrangement which often has been loosely described as a command economy. In such economies government controls strictly what business practices will be; little if any room is left for individual judgement. Hence, statism believes that a single centralized authority is needed in order to see to it that every individual serves the best interest of society as a whole. This is because the communal good is interpreted in a way which compromises personal fulfillment.

In short, the outlooks of both statism and acquisitionism are one-sided. Statism asserts that the individual must serve society, while acquisitionism claims that society must serve the individual. Neither harmonizes and integrates the person with the community and, therefore, both fail to understand the true nature of reality (social and otherwise) in all of its interrelated complexity. Because of this failure each perspective is in danger of generating some fundamental errors when it seeks to provide a foundation upon which remedies for social problems can be constructed. Statism places too much confidence in the power of the state due to its failure to appreciate the personal character of society and the indispensable role played by individual initiative. On the other hand, acquisitionism through exclusive concentration upon the individual ignores the communal nature inherent in the individual's being. Because of the inherent link between the individual and the community, the end result of either approach is alienation of the person and of the community. This weakens not only the neglected element but also that which had been its exclusive focus. When this occurs the distinctive elements of Cusan thought, diversity and dynamism, can no longer be maintained. Simply put, to the extent that a structure is successful in limiting dynamism it will impoverish diversity, and to the extent that it is successful in limiting diversity, it will restrain dynamism. The outright hostility with which the statist perspective regards these qualities leads to attempts to purge them from existence, while the acquisitionist perspective's neglect of the community impedes the development of the interactive and cooperative conditions

necessary for such a structure to be actualized. Only the Cusan perspective offers the possibility of integrating the person into society in a manner where personal achievement is based upon service to the community.

Economic Unity and a Contemporary Welfare Policy

Another contemporary issue which has been the topic of much speculation is the relationship between rich and poor, and their respective responsibilities and obligations to society. The current situation is one where the wealthy, and increasingly the middle class, often express a feeling that too great a portion of what they work for is taken from them, yet the condition of the poor has not markedly improved. Likewise, the creation of an underclass has deprived many of the poor of any sense of hope and left them feeling quite abandoned. A social policy consistent with the principles of Nicholas of Cusa would be one animated by a spirit of charity and would offer the poor both assistance in providing for their own needs and the opportunity to fulfill their own potential. On the other hand, those who are more well-off would have the responsibility to promote the well-being of others, but would find their own fulfillment in so doing.

Possible Approaches to Public Assistance

In an article entitled "The Right to Eat and the Duty to Work", Trudy Govier outlines three possible relationships between economic haves and have-nots.[18] The first scheme can aptly be described as survivalist. It proposes that no one has a legal right to state-supplied benefits produced by taking wealth from the more fortunate or industrious members of society through state coercion. This view is most clearly expressed by those who assert that the poor should "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps". The second perspective will be referred to as the entitlist perspective. This asserts that everyone is entitled to receive state supplied benefits as an unconditional right. These benefits are guaranteed to the individual regardless of personal behavior. It is the state's responsibility to see to each individual's welfare based entirely upon the individual's membership in society. The final perspective can be referred to appropriately as developmentalist. This view argues that one's right to receive state benefits is conditional upon one's willingness to work. Should one decline to work then one forfeits any claim to society's benefits. However, if one is incapable of working or unable to find work, the developmentalist approach will seek to encourage society to provide the assistance necessary to enable this person to realize his or her potential.

The survivalist perspective, in accordance with the principle of individuality, sees society as nothing more than a random aggregate of individuals who share, at most, some common interests. There are no inherent bonds linking any of them together on an ontological level. Because of this, survivalism inclines towards a policy where every individual should be left to provide for him or herself as best one can or turn to voluntary charities for support. From the survivalist perspective each person is responsible for his or her own welfare and has no right to claim support from anyone else, nor is there any obligation for anyone to provide such support.

The entitlist view and the survivalist perspective are diametrically opposed. In accord with the principle of community the entitlist perspective sees society as a cohesive unit in which all individuality is minimized. It asserts that if the state does not provide an individual with the basics of life under all circumstances then the state denies the value of that life. The entitlist perspective claims that people who cannot secure the necessities of life themselves, do not forfeit their status as human beings. Hence, society should not sit idly by while its members suffer, even if such

suffering results solely from their own inaction. From the entitlist perspective every individual is guaranteed the basics of life, which should be supplied by the state without any reference to whatever actions that individual may happen to take.[19] Thus the entitlist would be inclined to support a policy of life-long and unconditional welfare that places no claims upon the recipient.

The developmentalist perspective attempts to offer something of a middle ground between these extremes. Within this view all rights entail correlative responsibilities.[20] Hence, it becomes incumbent upon individuals to work in order for them to provide the means for the state to carry out its mission of caring for its citizens.[21] This outlook sees personal achievements as the product of individual initiative, but recognizes also that these achievements presuppose institutions requiring extensive social cooperation such as families, schools, *et cetera*. Therefore, the benefits accruing from such cooperation should, to some extent, be shared with society as a whole.

From the developmentalist view the relationship between the individual and society is essentially symbiotic. Each individual is related to, and dependent upon, every other member of society as well as being dependent upon society as a whole. Thus, the developmentalist perspective supports a policy where the recipient of society's assistance has an obligation to strive toward self-actualization and financial self-sufficiency.

The entitlist outlook sees society exclusively as a whole and fails to recognize the value of the very individuals it seeks to help most. Therefore, it regards the developmentalist and the survivalist perspectives as demeaning to the poor. However, by allowing the poor to receive benefits, but not encouraging the poor to develop their own potential and requesting other members of society to bear the cost of these benefits, entitlism treats these same poor people not as full and active members of society, but more as wards of the state. Because the poor are not encouraged to develop their own unique potentialities, those potentialities may very well become lost to society forever. Thus, though well-intentioned, such compassion benefits neither the poor nor society, but diminishes the resources (economic and otherwise) of both. This is because the entitlist perspective inclines the recipients of aid toward passivity, in that they receive aid, but have no correlative responsibility toward others in this respect.

In short, entitlism fails to recognize the value of cultivating the person. Survivalism, however, makes the opposite error and reduces society to nothing more than a collection of separate units which share no inherent bond. It fails to recognize that for individuals to be successful they require a society which nourishes them and encourages them to develop their latent potentialities. The survivalist perspective inclines people toward an attitude of indifference to one's fellowman, thereby rendering mutual concern an impossibility.

A Cusan Approach to Public Assistance

The Cusan approach to the relationship between haves and have-nots clearly is consistent with the developmentalist view. This is because the developmentalist perspective recognizes the interrelationship and interdependence of individuals and society. In accord with Cusa's interpretation of the principle of individuality, the value which each person inherently possesses is recognized; hence it will not accept a system which does not attempt to enable persons to cultivate their own potential and to develop into active and contributing members of society. Such a view would not merely seek to see the poor supported, but would encourage them to develop their abilities so they to can participate in the proclamation of the Absolute, both as individuals and as members of society. This is because the Cusan perspective bases personal fulfillment not

upon mere economic well-being, but upon service to others. Thus, all must work to benefit others to the degree that their particular circumstances allow.

Once again it must be pointed out that for Cusa this proclamation of the Absolute is the very purpose of existence. He opens the very first chapter of *De Docta Ignorantia* by claiming that,

> God has implanted in all things a natural desire to exist with the fullest measure of existence that is compatible with their particular nature. To this end they are endowed with suitable faculties and activities . . . if at times this does not happen, it is necessarily the result of an accident, as when sickness deceives taste or conjecture upsets calculation.[22]

Any system which frustrates the person's attempt to realize this goal, regardless of the fact that it may well be motivated by the very best of intentions, is in effect some sort of metaphysical and spiritual contagion which must be corrected. Following this outlook one would not create a system which merely sustains the poor in their poverty forcing them to become dependent upon others, but one which encourages them to realize their potential and to become full and active members of society.

However, following the principle of community, the Cusan perspective also recognizes the importance society plays in a person's development and the extent to which all are indebted to their social circumstances. This would reject any system which allowed some people to languish in poverty, whether or not this poverty is state-sponsored, while others live in luxury. Society must provide assistance for its less fortunate members, since it cannot prosper as a whole while ignoring the fate of some, or even one, of its constituent members. This is particularly the case since service to others is the means to personal fulfillment in the Cusan perspective. Again it is important to note that the Cusan notion of prosperity is not merely or even primarily about material prosperity. It is rather most appropriately defined in terms of enhancing one's ability to proclaim the Divine, both in oneself and in harmony with the community. If one is forced to exist in a state of dependence, one will not be able fully to articulate one's unique nature; this diminishes the whole community's image of the Absolute, as well as one's own.

Thus, one can see that though the Cusan approach is consistent with the developmentalist perspective described by Govier, they are not in fact synonymous. The philosophy of Cusa suggests not a compromise between the survivalist and entitlist perspectives, but a full integration of survivalism's valid insights about the importance of personal achievement with the equally valid concerns of entitlism for establishing overall social well-being. Furthermore, whereas the developmentalist approach bases its policy upon society's need to care for its members, the Cusan perspective rests upon a far more secure foundation, namely, the very nature of the personal and social realities involved.

For Cusa, the goal of all economic policy is not merely increasing the sum total of material wealth or even its equitable distribution, but the perfection of the finite universe's proclamation of the Absolute. Since both the individual and the community are derived from the Absolute which is also their goal, their needs cannot be interpretated as being in competition. A far more accurate way to view this relationship is as a complementarity where the needs of the individual are fulfilled by the community and vice-versa. Thus, it becomes possible to integrate the person within the community without compromising his or her nature. In fact, the community is revealed to be the natural home of the person through which the nature of his or her being is expressed and personal

fulfillment attained. The community for its part can no longer be seen as some arbitrary social arrangement, but is an entity with its own personal character which must be respected.

The Cusan perspective sees all people as sharing an inherent bond with each other and with the community as a whole; none truly can benefit if it be, at the expense of others. Thus providing for the welfare of the whole becomes the means for advancing the welfare of each. Because of this the rich and poor should not be pitted against each other as if they were in competition. It is the responsibility of those who possess sufficient resources to assist the poor in acknowledgement of the benefits they have received from the community which contributed to their personal success. The poor must be given the opportunity to develop their abilities so that they can become active members of the community rather than its wards.

Cusa's principles suggest interpreting class differences in a manner similar to the interpretation given to religious and social differences. These differences serve not as barriers which alienate people from each other and from society, but as bridges through which people can reach out to each other and forge bonds which will enhance the existence of all. Each member of the community is seen as inherently related to the others and, therefore, responsible for their well-being.

At the same time, each member likewise is seen as a unique and active person whose well-being is indispensable to the welfare of the whole. The rich and poor are not opponents battling over pieces of a stagnant economic pie, but are partners each striving to fulfill their potential and in so doing expand the resources which make possible a better life for all. Thus, in a Cusan perspective economic activity becomes an expression of the active interrelatedness which pervades all reality. Because of this its main goal is no longer the production of goods, but can be stated aptly as the production of human creativity which serves to articulate the Absolute.

In his Papal encyclical entitled, "On Human Work", Pope John Paul II points out the importance of work. He quotes the Second Vatican Council that workers "can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the creator's work, consulting the advantages of their brothers and sisters, and contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan".[23] This is clearly consistent with the spirit of Cusa's philosophy. Because work provides a context in which individuals realize their potential and express their creativity it allows them more closely to approximate the Divine. Furthermore, because work always involves a collaborative effort it naturally places the person in contact with his or her fellows so that society thereby becomes engaged in a system of mutual cooperation through which the lives of all involved are enhanced. Thus, work not only enhances the worker's approximation of the Divine, but, to the extent that it integrates the worker into the community it likewise enhances that community's approximation of the same Absolute. Each enables the other to fulfill its end; the mutual integration of both becomes not only possible, but necessary.

This is why earlier in his encyclical, when discussing the importance of labor unions, The Holy Father explains that their purpose is not to enable the workers to have more, but to enable them to become more. In short, unions should enable workers to realize their humanity more fully in every respect.[24] They do this by allowing the worker to play a role in determining the nature of his or her work in concert with the others involved in this enterprise. Cusa's view suggests that in doing this unions play a positive role in integrating the individual into a society. Thereby, the individual is transformed into a person and society into a community. In short, they become living entities rather than mere abstractions and are engaged in relationships which shape their identity.

As has been noted time and again, the relationship to the Absolute is of paramount importance in that it endows persons not only with their own being, but also with the purpose of their existence.

Cusa's thought, therefore, suggests striving to create a system in which all people are integrated into the community in a manner which allows them dynamically to express their own unique natures. This is not antithetical to the notion of the community, since its very heart is the relationships between persons which, in turn, shape the individual's identity. Both the person and the community contribute to the achievement of the purpose of the other's existence. In contrast without the other the ability of either to approximate the Absolute would be severely compromised.

This concept of an integrated community has profound implications within the international arena as well. Just as the prosperity of every person is linked to every other person the same can be said for whole nations within the global community. Therefore, much of what has been said about how the well-off within the community should assist those who are in need may also be applied to the discussion about how wealthy nations should assist impoverished ones. This aid can be justified pragmatically on the grounds that the economic health of every individual nation contributes to global economic health as a whole.

Once again it is important to note, however, that from the perspective of Cusa such utilitarian considerations are entirely secondary. What is most important, according to the principles of Cusa's thought, is the creative contributions such nations make to the articulation of the Absolute. The poverty of one impoverishes all just as the wealth of one enriches all in accord with the inherent ontological relationship between the principles of individuality and community. This is true both in terms of the material resources available and, much more importantly, in terms of the creative capacities in operation.

Economic Unity and Tax Policy

This section is particularly important because the issue of taxation underlies much of the debate about public assistance. Furthermore and at least initially, a system designed to integrate people into society is likely to have a significantly higher financial cost than one which merely seeks to warehouse such people. Hence, this section will concentrate upon the relationship between economic classes with respect to distributing the financial burdens incurred by the community. As in the previous sections it will search out how one's understanding of the principles of individuality and community essentially determines one's understanding of what constitutes a just tax policy. In this light, it will suggest some options available for understanding this relationship.

Possible Approaches to Tax Policy

The acquisitionist perspective, acknowledging solely the principle of individuality, tends to see society as a merely arbitrary conglomerate with no inherent bond holding it together. Because of this, acquisitionism sees little reason why one individual should bear a greater proportion of society's cost than another. Arguments that one individual has benefited more from society and therefore owes more to it will be rejected on the grounds that each individual is essentially self-made and that society has played no fundamental role in determining his or her destiny. With respect to tax policy acquisitionism therefore will be inclined to favor such things as user fees where one pays only for that which that one uses.

The statist perspective has an entirely different understanding of the situation. In accord with the principle of community it sees an individual's achievements as being solely attributable to his or her social circumstances. Because of this statism will be inclined toward policies which call for the confiscation of excess wealth and its redistribution to those who are less well off. According

to the statist those who have, through no effort of their own, received so many of the benefits which society can provide are obliged to help relieve the suffering of those who, through no fault of their own, have been less fortunate.

A Cusan Approach to Tax Policy

Integrated entrepreneurship, since it is based upon the inherent interrelationship of the principles of individuality and community would take exception to both positions. Because integrated entrepreneurship understands the complementary nature of the principles of individuality and community it is able to recognize both the role which the community plays in the development of the person and the value of personal initiative as well as the role this plays in shaping the community. On this basis one could realize that the confiscatory and redistributionist policies of statism, through its neglect of the principle of individuality, fails to appreciate the important, indeed indispensable, role such initiative plays in the development of the community.

The policies statism would advocate ultimately would result in the repression of this initiative and the impoverishment of the community as a whole. Thus, the equity at which the statist legitimately seeks is likely to diminish the resources of all. Furthermore, it runs a serious risk of undermining its own purpose, in that by placing all decisions about the distribution of resources in the hands of the state, those individuals who are the administrators of the state determine how such resources will be parcelled out. They, therefore, possess a disproportionate share of authority. In this fashion the vast majority of society becomes alienated from the economic life it must support; social divisiveness is the natural result.

The problems of acquisitionism though admittedly somewhat different, are analogous in nature. Acquisitionism seeks to establish a policy where each member of society pays only for those resources which he or she in fact uses. Because it does not recognize the principle of community it is little inclined to acknowledge the role played by the community in the development of the person. This view leads towards a society in which individuals are radically alienated from each other and from their community as a whole. The inevitable indifference this engenders diminishes social vitality and in so doing inhibits the development of those highly capable individuals around whom acquisitionism seeks to build its society. By neglecting to encourage the development of all members of society acquisitionism itself impoverishes the resources not only of society as a whole, but of every individual member of that society by assuring that those resources will not be there to be drawn upon.

Because integrated entrepreneurship takes account of the interdependent relationship existing between the principles of community and individuality, it favors a moderately progressive tax system where those who are more wealthy pay a greater proportion of their income in order to help the community meet its expenses. In this fashion, the wealthy recognize their obligation to the community which nurtured them and in which they live by helping to provide for those who are less fortunate. At the same time, however, they keep the major share of what they have earned (baring some sort of dire emergency), regardless of how much that might be, in recognition of their personal achievements and in acknowledgement of the contribution made to the community by creating such wealth. In this manner, the principle of individuality is integrated with the principle of community, so that both are realized without compromise.

It should also be noted that since integrated entrepreneurship sees the government as but a single category in the vast network of relationships which form a community, its policies would be far less expensive than those of the statist who believes that for the most part government must

bear such burdens by itself. Furthermore, since integrated entrepreneurship also seeks to develop the potential of all of the people within the community it is likely to create wealth in a far more dynamic manner than those policies the acquisitionist perspective is inclined to advocate. Ultimately, integrated entrepreneurship holds out the promise of a reduced tax burden on every individual since this cost will be distributed over a far greater number of people and far fewer people, suffering from the social pathologies linked to alienation, will be drawing upon state resources.

Thus the view of integrated entrepreneurship seems most conducive to the establishment of diversity and dynamism. This is because, unlike the statist perspective, entrepreneurship does not tend to suppress the very individuality which makes diversity and dynamism possible. Likewise, it recognizes the importance of helping those who require assistance to develop their individual capacities to become active and contributing members of a dynamic and diverse culture. This contrasts to the acquisitionist perspective which would leave each one to fend for oneself as best one can. Only integrated entrepreneurship establishes a system where service to others coincides with personal fulfillment. Acquisitionism subjugates the needs of the community to those of the individual, while statism subjugates the individual to the community. Integrated entrepreneurship, however, links both concerns in a complementary whole, for neither can succeed at the expense of the other.

Notes

1. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Talcott Parsons, trans. (New York: Scribner's, 1958), p. 51.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
4. Michael Novak, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Free Press, 1993), p. 10.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
13. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, Germain Heron, trans. (London: Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1954), p. 113.
14. Nicholas of Cusa, "De Pace Fidei" in *Unity and Reform*, John Patrick Dolan, ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), p. 196.
15. Nicholas of Cusa, "De Dato Patris Luminum" in *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysic of Contraction*, Jasper Hopkins, ed. (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1983), p. 130.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
18. Trudy Govier, "The Right to Eat and the Duty to Work," *Philosophy and Social Science*, 5 (1975), 125.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 130
21. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
22. Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, p. 7.
23. Pope John Paul II, *On Human Work* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Catholic Conference, 1981), p. 55.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Chapter IX
Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to show the way in which Cusa's understanding of reality enriches more traditional concepts of metaphysics, and in doing so opens new approaches to resolving a variety of contemporary societal problems. In order to do this, the chapter is divided into three sections. The first will show how the idea of unity occupied a central position in Cusa's thought and played a fundamentally important role in shaping his insight into the nature of reality. The second section evaluates some specific ways in which Cusa altered the more traditional understanding of reality. The final section of this chapter will discuss the ethical implications of Cusa's thought in both the public and private realms. The principles of individuality and community will once again play key roles in interpreting Cusa's thought. The diagram outlines the way Cusa integrates his concern for the individual with that of the community as a whole.

Unity as the Shaping Force in Cusa's Thought

For Cusa the idea of unity is the central pillar around which the whole of his philosophy is constructed. This has great significance because in making unity the central theme of his thought he does not denigrate the role of the individual or encourage a static conception of reality as may have been the case for Parmenides. Cusa can do this because his concept of unity does not demand uniformity. In fact, within the Cusan scheme, unity is not antithetical to diversity, but is enhanced thereby.

The Metaphysical Implications of a Cusan Interpretation of Unity

Cusa sees unity as a fundamental characteristic of being. Furthermore, it is this unity which all being shares that allows reality to exist in so fundamentally a dynamic manner. Each individual entity is itself a contraction of the whole of reality. Hence, the rigidly stratified hierarchy of being which dominated most of the Middle Ages was modified by Cusa. Though Cusa retains the same essential structure which qualitatively grades reality as do most medieval thinkers, his understanding of it is far less rigidly compartmentalized. Within Cusa's hierarchy each entity relates not merely to those entities which are directly above and directly below it, but in accord with the principle of community, to the whole of being. Also, in accord with the principle of individuality each being can retain its own separate and distinctive nature and not become engulfed in an existence of undifferentiated oneness. Thus, for Cusa unity is not solely the possession of Being Itself but is given to each and every existing entity.

One can see also the importance of unity in Cusa's philosophy by the fact that absolute unity becomes, in Cusa's writing, a term virtually synonymous with the Divine. Since the Divine is the hub around which all of Cusa's thinking ultimately revolves, the importance of unity cannot be denied. Because the Absolute reconciles all the oppositions of finite reality, the human intellect is incapable of comprehending it. This is because, according to Cusa, the human intellect can come to know an entity only by comparing it to some other entity already known. There is, however, no entity to which the Absolute is comparable.

Thus, one is forced to fall back upon metaphors and paradoxes in order to explicate the nature of the Divine. These can give no exact knowledge of the divine nature, but they can communicate

an awareness of the Divine. The reason it is possible for one to construct such symbols to express the divine nature is because the unity of reality, in accord with the principle of community, insures that finite reality is not entirely excluded from the Absolute. In fact, not only is finite reality not opposed to the Absolute, but it serves as the end, archetype and source of finite existence. Because of the unity of reality, the Divine is not considered by Cusa as alien to the finite but as the Not-Other.

This idea of the Divine as Not-Other is derived from Cusa's understanding of finite reality as being unfolded from divine unity. As finite being is a dynamic emanation from the Divine, every quality found in finite being is derived from that source. Thus finite reality neither contradicts nor opposes the Divine, but is its limited expression in the same sense that a self-portrait is a limited expression of its artist. Because finite reality consists of a great variety of limited beings, and each being expresses the Divine in its own unique fashion, a diversity of beings enhances the way in which finite reality reflects the Divine.

Moreover, since the Divine is absolute unity, then, as far as finite being is concerned, the more diverse it is the more approximately it expresses the unity of the infinite. Furthermore, as these limited beings interact and, thereby create new beings and/or fulfill their own divinely ordained ends, they themselves contribute to the way in which finite reality approximates the Divine and enhances it. Thus, finite reality's approximation of the Absolute is a dynamic and open ended approximation. For Cusa, the created world is an image of the Divine which it reflects to a greater or lesser degree.

Ethical Implications of a Cusan Conception of Unity

The importance of the idea of unity in Cusa's thought is not, however, confined to the metaphysical realm but extends into the field of ethics. One's relationship with the physical world is not that of opposition but of harmony. The physical world is not something which one must subjugate and upon which one must capriciously impose one's will. Likewise, one should not make the mistake of regarding oneself as nothing more than a part of the natural world of non-rational things. In accord with the principles of individuality and community one must recognize that nature is neither one's equal nor one's enemy, but one's ward. Nature is as much an image of the Absolute as are humans, but it is an image distinctly inferior in quality. Therefore, one's interaction with nature should take this relationship into account. In short, one should work with nature in a manner which will enable both to fulfill their divinely appointed ends.

Cusa's concept of unity as an harmonious diversity also sheds light upon the relationship between the person and the community. For Cusa, the relationship between these two is not adversarial, but complementary. The person cannot flourish without the benefits of a nurturing community, nor can the community prosper by either imposing lock-step conformity upon its members or by ignoring the potential of some of its constituents. The integration of unity and diversity which applies in the metaphysical world in respect to finite being applies equally well to human society. Only by encouraging the expression and cultivation of personal uniqueness can the community fulfill its potential. Likewise, only by promoting the interests of the community can the individual ultimately prosper. Thus, for Cusa the pinnacle of personal fulfillment is achieved in service to others, and the greatest service one can render another is to enable that person likewise to be of service. All social systems must be evaluated in the light of there ability to do this, and all social problems must be responded to in a manner which is consistent with this insight.

This relationship has important ramifications for determining the necessary requirements of freedom and when the use of compulsion within society is justifiable. Because Cusa's thought does not place unity and diversity in opposition to each other, the relationship between the community and the person is not one of antagonism or hostility. Likewise, the relationship between freedom and compulsion is also one of complementarity. One does not have genuine freedom within a state of anarchy because where there is no order, one cannot calculate the likely consequences of one's actions or have any basis for rational expectations and choice.

Thus, freedom requires a social order which inevitably forbids certain actions and compels others. However, if the social order should try to regulate society completely and extinguish freedom it will succeed only in provoking the very disorder it had sought to prevent. Any attempt to regulate each and every aspect of life inevitably will produce whole classes of criminals who must either be punished or tactfully ignored. If punished, they will react to being penalized for transgressing laws which they find unjust. If transgressions are ignored, however, it will only encourage disrespect for the law in general. In either case, the final result will be the very disorder which society had sought to prevent. Cusa's vision of society is one in which compulsion is used to enhance individual freedom, rather than to inhibit it. Since personal fulfillment requires service to others, Cusa's philosophy resolves the apparently fundamental opposition between the person and the community. Similarly, Cusa's philosophy resolves the apparent opposition between personal liberty and social order in that personal freedom can be actualized only within a social order which is conducive to this. Likewise, social order requires personal liberty if ultimately it is to prosper. In short, personal liberty and social order are mutually implicative.

The link between one's understanding of unity and one's ethical thought is clear. The subject of ethics is greatly concerned with the proper ordering of human relationships. Unity also looks into the nature of relationships and, therefore, has much to say when one considers how these relationships should be ordered. For Cusa, who sees a fundamental unity between all being, the nature of relationships is characterized not by antagonism but by complementarity. Thus, beings do not exist at the expense of one another; rather each being exists in order to enhance the whole. Cusa's understanding of unity is not one which encourages the elimination of all differences, but rather mutual respect and an understanding of differences which will itself serve as a foundation for mutual concern.

Perhaps no one described the pervasive character of unity in Cusa's thought better than Henry Bett.

> He was the advocate of unity in the political system of Europe; he was the apostle of unity amid the ecclesiastical dissensions of Christendom; and he was the philosopher of unity also, who consistently sought to see the beginning and end of all things, the real essence and the real significance of all existence, as hidden in the superessential Unity of God.[1]

Quite clearly Cusa seeks to overcome the apparent opposition of finite reality and to reveal the deeper unity it contains. Thus, the fact that human diversity has so often led to conflict was tragically unnecessary and destructive. For Cusa, diversity within the community should be celebrated as an expression of the inexhaustible and inexpressible perfection of the Absolute. One should focus not solely upon the distinctions between various individuals and groups, but also upon the deeper unity toward which all reality points.

Cusa's conception of unity as an harmonious diversity is dependent upon his integration of the principles of community and individuality. The principle of individuality relates to the unity of individual entities which makes them different from other entities and thereby unique. This uniqueness establishes the inherent and distinctive value which Cusa sees in every individual being. The principle of community relates to the unity of being as a whole. It is the principle of community which reconciles all the distinctions of individual entities. This is because each individual being is a particular contraction of the Absolute and through this participation in the Absolute all of the diverse finite individuals are united. Thus, the principle of community harmonizes the diversity of unique beings which the principle of individuality establishes, and personal fulfillment is best achieved through service to the community.

Cusa's Contribution to the Traditional Understanding of Reality

The purpose of this section is to discuss the contributions which Cusa's unique understanding of unity have made to the more traditional views of reality. In order to do this, it will address four different aspects of reality, namely, the directedness of reality, the dynamism of being, the cohesiveness of being, and the nature of relationships within reality.

The Directedness of Reality

Reality within traditional medieval metaphysics has always been in some sense oriented toward the Divine. However, drawing upon the mystical tradition Cusa incorporates a new dimension to this directedness. Within the Platonic scheme there is fundamental opposition between the One and physical reality. Even from the Christian perspective which makes the Absolute the creator of all finite reality, this sense of otherness is retained. Cusa, however, couples this sense of otherness with a sense of identity. He sees finite reality as a limited expression of the Divine which, though distinct therefrom, nonetheless, reflects it. Hence, there is no fundamental opposition between the finite and the Absolute. This is because for Cusa finite reality is not merely the product of the Absolute, but its expression. Finite reality is an image of the Absolute and possesses no qualities independent of it. In this sense, all finite reality is entirely at home with the Divine, for as a contraction of the Absolute finite being cannot exist apart from the Absolute and finds only there its true end.

The Dynamism of Being

Cusa's perspective on dynamism is also rather unique and is derived from his understanding of unity. Because finite reality is distinct from the Divine, but not opposed to it Cusa can account for its existence by asserting that it is unfolded from the Divine. Likewise, there is an enfolding process in which the opposition of finite reality is reconciled within Absolute unity. This idea of finite reality moving away from the Absolute and then returning to it is of Platonic origin. Cusa, however, adds something new to this which is related to his concept of unity. For Cusa it is not merely each individual entity which seeks to fulfill its potential and return to the Divine, but reality as a whole, where each entity is a unique and indispensable contraction of being. Individual entities do not act in isolation ignoring all other entities around them. As far as Cusa is concerned, the return to the one is achieved by individual entities interacting with one another. Only by interacting with things outside of itself is it possible for an individual entity fully to achieve its own true

potential. Thus, the dynamism of Cusa's thought is produced by his vision of finite reality as a true community of being. This holds true also for the human community in that only by serving others can a person realize his true potential.

The Cohesiveness of Being

This dynamism of being is intimately related to the cohesiveness of being which exists within Cusa's metaphysics. As has previously been shown, Cusa realized that individuals could exist only in community with other beings, rather than as isolated atoms unrelated to any other entity, or as mere links in a great collectivist chain. The community of being which Cusa articulates is one in which each individual being is related to every other being, just as each part of the body relates to the body as a whole. The needs, purposes, and functions of every being require other beings in order to be fulfilled. Thus, just as the hand requires the eye to operate efficiently, the predator requires prey, the plant requires soil, and the soil requires rain. Each individual entity performs a vital function for the whole, whose main purpose is to proclaim the Divine. Thus, no individual can be dismissed as unimportant or peripheral.

Cusa, however, takes this a step further. Not only is each part necessary for the whole, but each part is a contraction of the whole. An example of this can be seen in the human body which requires various types of cells in order to function; yet, each individual cell contains the DNA pattern of the entire body and, in this sense, may be regarded as a contraction of the whole. For Cusa, the community of being is so tightly interwoven that in order for anything to be that which it is it must also be in a certain sense everything which exists.

The Nature of Relationships Within Reality

This cohesiveness of reality sheds new light upon the nature of relationships within reality. In this context, relationships are based not upon opposition or accidental similarities, but upon an ontological complementarity. Thus, a gain made by one does not inevitably entail a loss to others. In fact, quite the reverse is true. An authentic gain by one entity enhances not only its own perfection, but the perfection of the whole. Likewise, a dimunition in the perfection of one entity represents a dimunition of the perfection of the whole. Just as an entire team is improved if the performance of one player improves, the more a single part of reality fulfills its potential the more the perfection of the whole is enhanced. Further should the performance of a single player slip the whole team suffers. Likewise, should a single object of reality be diminished the whole universe is diminished. The nature of relationships in both of these cases is such that the individual cannot prosper apart from the community in which it exists or at the expense of that community.

The Roles of the Principles of Individuality and Community

The new insights which Cusa has for metaphysics are based upon the relationship he articulates between the principles of community and individuality. The directedness of reality comes from the orientation toward the Divine of all finite being. This is the case for individual beings which, as unique contractions of being reflect the Absolute according to the principle of individuality. Likewise, the universe itself is a contraction of being and, as a whole is reflective of the Absolute according to the principle of community. It is similar for dynamism. The principle of

individuality establishes a variety of beings which interact with each other. The principle of community relates these beings to each other and allows them to influence each other.

The cohesiveness of being is also related to the principles of individuality and community. The principle of individuality correlates to the distinctness of individual beings based upon the finite unity of those beings. The principle of community transcends the distinctions of finite reality in that each particular being is a contraction of the whole. In this manner, Cusa established the unity of the whole of reality. This cohesiveness of being has important implications for the nature of relationships within reality. In accord with the principle of individuality each being has an inherent value which is to be respected. Similarly, in accord with the principle of community all being is related to every other being and is part of the whole.

These four aspects of reality dramatically condition the way in which human beings relate to each other. In terms of the directedness of being, all of reality must seek to approximate the Divine. Thus, just as the Divine endows all reality with whatever excellence it possesses through an act of selfless charity, every human being must act in a way which will promote excellence in others, and in so doing enhances one's own excellence. Furthermore, just as the creativity of the Divine is dynamic, the person can only approximate the Divine by interacting with one's fellow human beings in order to unleash their own creative capacities. The cohesiveness of being overcomes all the apparent distinctions of finite reality and enables one to assert that the notion of service to others as the pinnacle of personal fulfillment is in no way contradictory. Thus, the paradigm for all relationships becomes complementary unification which approximates the Absolute, and in so doing makes each being most authentically itself. In brief, the goal of every entity is to become harmoniously integrated into the whole of being and thereby to achieve the fullest development of its own unique nature.

The Ethical Implications of Cusa's Thought

This section will outline the ethical implications of Cusa's thought in both the public and the private realms. It will attend to the way in which Cusa's understanding of unity as an harmonious diversity effects the way in which one understands one's environment. It is this understanding of reality which conditions all deliberations about what is, and what is not ethical behavior.

Humanity and the Natural Environment

The first question to be addressed is the relationship between human beings and their physical environment. Because both humans and nature are contractions of the Absolute, humans cannot treat nature in a fashion that does not recognize the community which exists with nature. Likewise, however, it would be a mistake to regard oneself merely as another object of the natural world with no special dignity. This is because even though humans and nature are both contractions of the Absolute, the human is a distinctly superior contraction. Hence, people should treat nature in accord with the principles of individuality and community. In accord with the principle of community, one is linked to nature and should seek to preserve its integrity. However, human responsibility does not end there, for in accord with the principle of individuality humanity is superior to nature and as such has stewardship over it. The persons proper role is to interact with nature and through this interaction create new entities to enhance the diversity of reality and further proclaim the Divine. One must work to actualize in nature potentialities which, without human

effort would never have come to be. In short, persons must integrate a respect for nature as it is in itself with a willingness to make the effort necessary to unlock its latent potentialities.

The Social Context of Persons

Much the same thing can be said of relationships to one's fellow humans. The main difference is that non-rational natures are categorically inferior as images of the Divine, while among persons no such categorical distinctions apply. Thus, Cusa's thought establishes an equality among people in accord with the principle of community. The principle of individuality, however, keeps this sense of equality from developing into a rigid egalitarianism, where all differences would be assimilated in favor of social uniformity. Cusa is not only aware of the differences between individuals, but sees them as fundamentally important in that they are the basis for a diversity that makes humankind a closer approximation of the Divine. For Cusa, diversity and individuality should be not eliminated, but celebrated.

It is important to note that the celebration of individuality is not tantamount to indifference. Because Cusa's thought seeks to integrate the principle of community with that of individuality his view is hardly compatible with the type of Libertarianism according to which each person is left to pursue one's own goals so long as no one else is hurt. The anti-Libertarian implication of Cusa's thought comes out most clearly when one considers one's relationship to oneself. For Cusa, no individual can exist in isolation without constantly influencing and being influenced by everyone and even everything else. This does not mean that Cusa eliminates the distinction between the public and the private. In fact, Cusa is willing to allow the individual a significant amount of latitude in choosing how to live so long as one does not jeopardize the public order.

Perhaps the main difference between the Cusan perspective and that of the Libertarians is that Cusa sees society itself as a unity and not as a mere conglomeration of individuals. The Libertarian perspective tends to view society as a means to obtain individual fulfillment, whereas, the Cusan perspective sees society as the necessary context through which personal fulfillment takes place. Therefore, order consists not only in regulating the way individuals interact among themselves, but also how they interact with society as a whole. Since Cusa resolves the distinction between personal fulfillment and service to others, the needs of the person do not compete against the needs of the community, but both are integrated in an harmonious whole. Thus, according to the principle of individuality, Cusa seeks to provide every individual with its own inherent autonomy, while simultaneously ontologically relating each of these individuals to every other in accord with the principle of community. For Cusa, the individual is possessed of its own value, yet also is inherently related to the community of being. This is the heart of his philosophy which enables his thought to keep from embracing excessive individualism or rejecting the value of the individual entirely. In brief, Cusa integrates the individual within the whole without compromising either and thus bringing both to fulfillment.

The New Possibilities Presented by a Cusan Paradigm

The purpose of Part II of this work was to examine Cusa's philosophy in the hope of revealing some underlying principles which could be productively applied to some of the contemporary social dilemmas. As valuable and important as Cusa's insights are they cannot serve as a simple formula mechanically to producing automatic solutions to very complex problems. What Cusa's philosophy does, and does quite successfully, is to open up new perspectives on the understanding

of various relationships which can enable new solutions to age-old problems. A prime example of this is the new insights presented by a Cusan notion of unity.

In much contemporary thought, unity and diversity are considered to be essentially antithetical. This is because the paradigm for the notion of oneness is the finite individual, so the fundamental characteristic of unity conceived along such lines is the distinct separation of everything in existence. Cusa, however, offers his readers an alternate paradigm of oneness which is an infinite and absolute unity. The fundamental characteristic of this notion of oneness is not its distinctness, but its all-encompassing transcendent nature. The individualized version of unity fosters a Hobbesian view of society where each person exists in a state of fundamental opposition to one another and society is created to promote individual advancement. Thus conflict, either between individuals or between the individual and society as a whole, becomes a natural condition of human existence. The only way such conflicts can be dealt with is for the opposing parties to make compromises which entail the sacrifice of things they may well have every right to possess. Thus, the only way for one to enter society is to abdicate some of one's natural rights.

The Cusan vision of transcendent unity encourages a society which emphasizes and, in fact, requires the formation of relationships between persons founded upon mutual concern. Thus conflict, though it remains a possibility since the whole is not a simple homogeneous mass, is seen to be an aberration. Furthermore, conflict resolution is not primarily a matter of compromise, but of integration which consists in highlighting and enhancing natural social relationships. Thus, disputes are not merely terminated in a manner which may leave both parties feeling wronged and looking for another opportunity to achieve their desires, but are eliminated by the new ties the parties form with each other.

This alternative vision of unity has profound importance for the modern world. With every passing day the world becomes a smaller place as people are constantly brought into closer contact with each other. If this contact is not to produce conflict, one must not focus exclusively on what makes people distinct, which emphasizes the separateness of all human beings. Instead this separateness must be viewed in the context of an over-arching unity which links all people together in a single human family.

The positions I have presented in the final three chapters of this work are by no means intended to be regarded as the only, or even the best, methods of practical application of Cusa's insights. They are, however, intended to provide concrete examples of how such applications can be made, and to point out the goals these applications are intended to achieve. In short, any social policy which claims to be founded on the philosophical insights of Nicholas of Cusa must recognize the unique value of each and every individual, and preserve the freedom necessary so that each can discover and realize the authentic and unique nature which lies at the core of one's being. However, it must also promote a supportive environment within which, and only within which, people can develop their own natures.

This becomes possible only because Cusa sees each existing being as a contraction of the whole. Thus, personal fulfillment and service to others are not antithetical, but complementary concepts. Concern for the community is consistent with self-realization and promotes this, while self-fulfillment is epitomized by promoting the good of the commuinity. Neither concept is subjected to the other; both are seen as complementary components of the whole and mutually implicate each other.

Such policies cannot pursue static repetitive solutions which fail to recognize the unique nature of those effected or the unique resources at their disposal. They can, however, acknowledge the common human nature in which all human beings share and which endows them with an

inherent dignity which must be respected. All human beings possess also a common end which they can achieve only in the context of a community.

Indeed, because Cusa's insights are so metaphysically rooted, I would assert human endeavors can be successful only to the extent that they achieve this integration whereby the isolation of the lone individual is overcome by social participation and the emptiness of alienation is transformed by unifying love into an active and liberating communal existence. This work is intended to promote discussion of what policies can, in fact, best achieve these ends and help remedy the problems which so fundamentally challenge our world.

Notes

1. Henry Bett, *Nicholas of Cusa* (London: Meuthen and Company, Ltd., 1921), p. 204.

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