

# The Ontological and Gnoseological Meaning of the Theophany in Nicholas of Cusa

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## §1. Vision and Theophany

**I**N HIS WORKS, NICHOLAS OF CUSA DETERMINES finitude as a vision of the Absolute. As we will see further on, this is the key to understanding the continuity between the ontology and the gnoseology of the doctrine of theophany. In order to show this, we will base our explanation mainly around the work *De visione Dei*, and we will split our research into two parts, which relate to each of those two aspects of theophany.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, according to *De visione Dei*, the essence of the finite is that all things are a vision of God: *visione tua sunt*. This principle of Cusa's thought poses the question of the unique identity of the finite in as much as it differs from the Infinite. The *coincidentia oppositorum*, which is the principle for *docta ignorantia*, shows us the position of the finite in regard to the Infinite: it tells us what is most characteristic of the being of finite things, namely that they are an expression of the Infinite which manifests itself. This expression is a theophany<sup>2</sup> that never coincides with what is expressed, but which requires the presence of that which is expressed in the expression, for it to ever be *something*.

<sup>1</sup> The first part of this article revises some of the conclusions reached in a previous publication: María Jesús Soto-Bruna, «La manifestación del Logos en la visión divina: Nicolás de Cusa y Eriúgena». *Cauriensia. Revista anual de ciencias eclesiásticas IX* (2014): pp. 131–154. Here we have omitted the thoughts on Eriugena, and the second part is an attempt to draw together the concept of theophany and the gnoseological ideas of Nicholas of Cusa. In its entirety, the article is an original presentation, in English, of the relationship between theophany and knowledge in Nicholas of Cusa. It is based mainly on the work in *De visione Dei*.

<sup>2</sup> C. Riccati talks about creation as a theophany when talking about Eriugena, comparing him to Nicholas of Cusa: Carlo Riccati, '*Processio*' et '*explicatio*'. *La doctrine de la creation chez Jean Scot et Nicolas de Cues* (Nápoli: Bibliopolis, 1983).

Finitude is presented here as a limitation (*visus contractus*), both in difference and in alterity, but which at the same time is based on the divinity's *visus abstractus*; we can therefore say that the finite being is the self-expression of the Absolute from the form of alterity. The thesis that seems to flow throughout the work of Nicholas of Cusa as far as the ontological status of the finite is concerned posits that the identification of *videre* and *creare* in God helps to explain how God's all-encompassing vision manifests itself as the creative foundation of all finite beings (*esse creaturae est videre tuum et pariter videri*). God's invisible *videre* manifests itself in finitude: that which is created or seen, in the classic theophanic sense, is the visibility of God (*videre tuum est creare tuum*); it is an active vision of the *visio divina* in regard to the being and the becoming of the finite. The creation of the finite depends on the gaze of God, which reminds us that finitude is what it is thanks to God's gaze (*in eo enim quod omnes vides, videris ab omnibus*). In this sense, the finite is theophany.

*De visione Dei* by Nicholas of Cusa firmly establishes that God is *the infinitude that encompasses everything* and that, in this sense, in the Absolute things identify with Him, as there is no space for any alterity or diversity. We understand this identification of things in the Absolute through the concept of an infinite thinking that thinks itself as such, just as it sees in itself all that it is or that it can be. So it is fair to say that in Cusa's 1453 text he develops the idea of *veritas absoluta*, that is, an Absolute that thinks and conceives itself; the notion of *divine vision* denotes the *absolute reflection* which provides inspiration for the title, because in fact, starting from the symbol of the *Icona Dei* illustrated in the Preface, we understand that God sees and that, at the same time, He is seen by those who He sees. The final gaze, that is, the gaze of those who God himself sees is included in His own act of seeing.<sup>3</sup> And so God is the identity that goes beyond any identity or any difference. He is the maximum equality, outside of any range and unthinkable as the final grade on any scale. Word and imagen are identified in He who is infinite wisdom.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Werner Beierwaltes, «*Visio absoluta* o reflexión absoluta», in *Cusanus. Reflexión metafísica y espiritualidad*, edited by Werner Beierwaltes (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2005), p. 181. For *De visione Dei* I refer to the following editions: *De visione Dei* (abr. VD, followed by chapter and number), edited by Jacobus Faber Stapulensis, *Nicholae Cusae Cardinalis Opera* I (Paris: 1514) (Imprint: Frankfurt – Main: Minerva, 1962), fol. 99r – 114r. Critical text: *Nicolai de Cusa. Opera Omnia, iussu et auctoritate Academie Litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita, vol. VI: De visione Dei*, edited by Adelaida Dorothea Reimann (Hamburg: Meiner, 2000). English translation: Jasper Hopkins, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis: Banning, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Antonio Dall'Igna, «*Viva imago verbi: La sapienza del Verbo e la viva immagine di Dio nel primo libro De Sapientia*», in *Verbum et imago coincidunt. Il linguaggio come specchio vivo in Cusano*, edited by

From this concept of vision, the finite is presented as a manifestation or expression<sup>5</sup> of the gaze of God on it, also expressed as an *explicatio*. We can summarise these terms by saying that that which is created is a theophany, as in some way all of the created world shows God, this being more clearly explicit in human beings. This leads us to question the ontological consistency of this theophany, which is a finite entity. The answer Nicholas of Cusa provides is precise and we have mentioned it before: *visione tua sunt*.<sup>6</sup> This idea implies that the theophany is the way which the finite has of presenting itself, and, in the case of human beings, which establishes the way in which it can access the Absolute. The idea of the mind as a living image will help clarify the thesis which we have just mentioned, as we will see further on.

As we have been saying, this principle of his thought presents the idea of a specific identity for the finite inasmuch as it is different from the Infinite. For Nicholas of Cusa, seeing (*videre*) is equal to creating (*creare*): "It is the same to say that God sees all things to point out that the Absolute creates all things",<sup>7</sup> the vision with which the Absolute sees itself is also the vision with which it sees things because since it is an absolute equality, it cannot contain duality or alterity<sup>8</sup> — in God, in fact, opposites coincide. At the same time, the finite possesses an essence that allows it to be manifested, due to the presence of the divine within it:<sup>9</sup> presence and manifestation define the meaning of theophany.

This presence to which we have just made reference means nothing other than that things are what they are because of the divine vision within them: "You are seeable by all creatures, and You see all creatures. For in that You see all creatures You are seen by all creatures. For otherwise creatures could not exist, since they exist by means of Your seeing. But if they were not to see You, who see

Gianluca Cuzzo et al. (Milano: Mimesis. Bibliotheca Cusana, 2019), pp. 237–256.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. María Jesús Soto–Bruna, «Nicolás de Cusa y la idea metafísica de expresión». *Anuario Filosófico* 28 (1995): pp. 737–754; and María Jesús Soto–Bruna, «Die Schöpfung des Endlichen als Sehen Gottes: Cusanus (*De visione Dei*) und Johannes Scottus Eriugena», in *Eriugena–Cusanus vol. I*, edited by Agnieszka Kijewska, Roman Majeran, and Harald Schwaetzer (Lublin: Colloquia Mediaevalia Lublinensia KUL, 2011), pp. 141–162: this article takes into account the conclusions reached in this work.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, X.

<sup>7</sup> Ángel Luis González, La articulación de la trascendencia y de la inmanencia del Absoluto en *De visione Dei* de Nicolás de Cusa. Introduction to *La visión de Dios. Nicolás de Cusa*, by Ángel Luis González (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2007), p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. González, La articulación de la trascendencia y de la inmanencia del Absoluto en *De visione Dei* de Nicolás de Cusa. Introduction, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. João Maria André, *Sentido, simbolismo e interpretação no discurso filosófico de Nicolau de Cusa* (Coimbra: F. Calouste Gulbenkian, 1997), p. 168.

[them], they would not receive being from You";<sup>10</sup> in this quotation, we see that the entity of the creature is determined by a divine *seeing* that elevates it to the theophanic aspiration to union with the Absolute.

We must therefore think about whether the Absolute's creating gaze is really a self-explanation of God in the world and therefore whether it allows us to consider the finite as the visibility of this self-explanation, that is, as a *theophany*. This hypothesis does not in any way imply that the Infinite can explain itself from the finite, as the former only remains in itself, even if it is seen in all that is visible. The following quotation is essential in this aspect. It is the beginning of chapter XII of *De visione Dei*, essential for our thesis, and entitled "Where the invisible is seen the uncreated is created":

Earlier, O Lord, You appeared to me as invisible by every creature since You are an infinite and hidden God. Infinity, however, is incomprehensible by every mode of comprehending. Later, You appeared to me as visible by all [creatures] because a thing exists insofar as You see it, and it would not exist actually unless it saw You. For Your seeing gives being, because [Your seeing] is Your essence. Thus, my God, You are both invisible and visible: You are invisible as You are [in Yourself]; You are visible in accordance with the existence of creatures, which exist insofar as they see You. You, then, my invisible God, are seen by all [creatures]. In all sight You are seen by every perceiver. You who are invisible, who are free from everything visible, and who are superexalted unto infinity are seen in everything visible and in every act of seeing.<sup>11</sup>

This invisible and unattached God seems to us, however — in a careful reading of the text we have just cited — to show itself, much like in His self-explanation, in the alterity that he himself shapes with his act of creative seeing. We, therefore, think that we can sustain the idea that finitude is nothing other than participation, in the particular sense within the theophany, which is referred to as *non-aliud*, *idemo*, or *possest*. In this sense, we argue that in the work of Nicholas of Cusa we can talk of an ontological entity of finitude.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, X, 41. Cfr. André, *Sentido, simbolismo e interpretação no discurso filosófico de Nicolau de Cusa*, p. 199.

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XII, 48. Cfr. Johann Kreuzer, «Das Bild und sein Sehen bei Nikolaus von Kues», in *'Videre et videri coincidunt'. Theorien des Sehens in der ersten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts*, edited by Wolfgang Christian Schneider et al. (Münster: Aschendorff Vg., 2011), pp. 81–96.

## § 2. The Theophany and Ontology of Created beings

The argument presented above clearly refers to the problem of identity and difference, but it also becomes entangled in the problem of the articulation between immanence and transcendence. In fact, and according to the illustration offered by Nicholas of Cusa in his Prologue, the true gaze of the true God is immutable in and of itself and, at the same time, manifests itself as distinct in the eyes of he who is looked by Him or looks at Him; which is why the subject "knows that the icon is stationary and unchanged, he will marvel at the changing of the unchangeable gaze. Moreover, if while fixing his sight upon the icon he walks from west to east, he will find that the icon's gaze proceeds continually with him".<sup>12</sup> We must point out here that the finite gaze does not coincide with that which is manifested in it, but it does require an understanding of the divine gaze as the infinite *complicatio* that holds in itself the principle of *explicatio*, and that then the multiplicity of the finite is understood open to its principle, much like the relationship we can find between a point and a line.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the presence of that which is manifested in its manifestation means that the *explicatio* is the way through which the first principle allows itself to participate in the limitation of finitude; and this participation gives a certain ontological consistency to the finite entity. As we have stated, there is a clear difference between this understanding of participation and the metaphysics of the participation of the act of being.<sup>14</sup>

Nicholas of Cusa is trying to formulate a real presence of God in things, without which they would not be able to express divine origin. This presence, as has been argued throughout this text, refers to the fact that the Absolute is supposed or is seen in all that is visible and in every act of seeing: this is precisely what the idea of theophany in an ontology of created beings means.<sup>15</sup>

This is shown clearly in the following text: "In seeing me, You who are *deus absconditus* give Yourself to be seen by me. No one can see You except insofar as You grant that You be seen. To see You is not other than that You see the one

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, *Prologue*.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. Werner Beierwaltes, «*Visio absoluta* o reflexión absoluta», pp. 185–186.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. Ángel Luis González, *Ser y participación* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2001); González, La articulación de la trascendencia y de la inmanencia del Absoluto en *De visione Dei* de Nicolás de Cusa. Introduction.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XII, 47; Klaus Kremer, «Gottes Vorsehung und die menschliche Freiheit ("sis tu tuus, et Ego ero tuus")», *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge des Cusanus-Gesellschaft* vol. 18 (1989): pp. 227–266; Wilhelm Dupré, «Das Bild und die Wahrheit», *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge des Cusanus-Gesellschaft* vol. 18 (1989): pp. 125–127; Werner Beierwaltes, *Visio facialis: Sehen ins Angesicht. Zur Coincidenz des endlichen und unendlichen Blicks bei Cusanus* (München: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1988), pp. 121–124.

who sees You";<sup>16</sup> that is — the divine vision over things not only makes them be, but their very essence consists in seeing the Absolute; and this very act of seeing means that they can be seen as the manifestative visibility of the Absolute, or theophany.

For Cusa, in fact, things are *something* only when we can consider that the Absolute is within them, in the same way that different mirrors reflect the face that is *present* in them.<sup>17</sup> We can therefore establish both the immanence and transcendence of the Absolute in regards to the orb of the finite: on the one hand, "the transcendence, in which all implication of finitude is separated from God, and, on the other hand, the immanence, or better, presence, in which the divine virtuality is affirmed universally turned to the created order";<sup>18</sup> which can lead us to state that "the complicative foundation is also in its own explanation",<sup>19</sup> as God is in everything and is outside or above everything that has been created: "*Omnia et nihil omnium simul*".<sup>20</sup>

On the basis of the different points stated above, we must clarify that "the two terms, immanence and transcendence, are unequal: indeed, the finite implies the presence of the Infinite within it, but it is not necessarily given with the Infinite. If not, the Infinite could not go without the finite and it would not be possible to talk about a true transcendence".<sup>21</sup> In other words, things cannot be considered without God, but that He can be considered without finite entities: "If you consider things in their independence from God, they are nothing — even as number without oneness [is nothing]. If you consider God in His independence from things, He exists and the things are nothing".<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, V, 15.

<sup>17</sup> Thanks to this presence a deification of the creature takes place. The last book of *De docta ignorantia* shows this possibility, taking into account the reality of the Word; which leads to him stating in chap. 2 of Book 3 that "Maximum contractum partier est et absolutum, creator et creatura", a statement that we can only understand from the Theology of the Word, whose light illuminates the doctrine of man as *ad imaginem Dei* and his theophanic nature.

<sup>18</sup> Luis Martínez Gómez, «De los nombres de Dios al nombre de Dios en Nicolás de Cusa», in *Philosophica. Al filo de la historia*, edited by Luis Martínez Gómez (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 1987), p. 87. Cfr. Beierwaltes, *Cusanus. Reflexión metafísica y espiritualidad*, esp. pp. 145–180.

<sup>19</sup> Werner Beierwaltes, «*Visio absoluta* o reflexión absoluta», pp. 185–186.

<sup>20</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, DV, XII.

<sup>21</sup> Mariano Álvarez Gómez, *Die verborgene Gegenwart des Unendlichen bei Nikolaus von Kues*, (München: Pustet, 1968), p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, Lib. 2, cap. 3.

*Quasi in speculo et in aenigmate*: the world as a mirror in which man can see God; an often repeated image throughout classical philosophy, particularly within medieval theology, and which is central – following the Eckhartian principle of the ineffability of the divine being<sup>23</sup> — in Nicholas of Cusa. Due to this lively endeavour to understand "the accessibility or inaccessibility of what the Absolute is, its comprehensibility or incomprehensibility",<sup>24</sup> it has been recently argued that the starting point of Cusa's speculation is the Pauline text which states that man accedes to the invisible through the visible.

But the divine presence within things does not, however, imply a pantheistic identification. Rather, the theory of manifestation that implies *complicatio* and *explicatio* fundamentally shows a mutual belonging between God and world, implying a radical dependency of the latter. We could say that, when creating, God intends a manifestation which is never absolute: "the world is the *explicatio*, the unfolding of what God has produced in his unity; the world consists only in the development of the unity in the multiplicity; is the self-expression of the Absolute in the form of an alterity (*Andersheit*). That is why the Cusanus can talk about the world as *Deus sensibilis*",<sup>25</sup> without it, in principle, implying a destitution of the finite's own ontological status. In this non-pantheistic context, the expressive relationship between image (in the general sense of *Bild* and *Abbild*) and archetype (*Ubbild*) must be considered as a relationship of similarity with very strict boundaries that are not subject to profound changes.<sup>26</sup> And this is so taking equally into account two interpretations which are diverging in part; this is both if we consider that similarity is the result of a *flowing out* of the Archetype-Good, or if we consider that the image needs a *conversion* towards its principle. In both cases, we can see that the, to say so, ontological place for each term is perfectly fixed, as the dynamism between the two poles is determined by the degree of participation, of filiation, which regulates the movement (*anabasis*) of the finitude as difference from the non-other as identity.<sup>27</sup> So the sphere of the finite

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. Vladimir Lossky, *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart*, (Paris: Vrin, 1960): the entire book covers the theme that occupies us here. Chapter VI is of particular relevance for us, «*Imago in speculo*», pp. 339–389.

<sup>24</sup> González, La articulación de la trascendencia y de la inmanencia del Absoluto en *De visione Dei* de Nicolás de Cusa. Introduction, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> Erwin Metzke, «Nikolaus von Cues und Hegel». *Kant-Studien* 48 (1956–57): p. 220. Cfr. Ángel Luis González, «La doctrina de Nicolás de Cusa sobre la mente. Hacia una nueva gnoseología». *Studia Philosophica Valentina* 28, no 7 (2007): pp. 1–24.

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. Paul Schmitt, «Das Urbild in der Philosophie des Nikolaus von Cues». *Ernanos-Jahrbuch* 8 (1950): pp. 291–321.

<sup>27</sup> Cfr. Robert Javelet, «La réintroduction de la liberté dans les notions d'image et de ressemblance, conçues

can only be understood from the reciprocal compenetration of unity and alterity or of identity and difference. From the perspective of the Prologue of the work we are analysing, without this presence, things would not be able to express their identity as different from each other.

Starting from *De visione Dei* and following what has been stated up until now, we truly believe that the finite can be understood as a *theophany* of the absolute identity, and this, in as much as we have accessed it as the *visibility* of the divine self-explanation from the *complicatio*. The problem is that if the Absolute is the principle of being, alterity cannot, therefore, be it, an alterity which would represent the finite as the visible manifestation of the invisible: "*Alteritas igitur non potest esse principium essendi*".<sup>28</sup> We find this final element — alterity or diversity — in what we consider the world *outside of God*. Nonetheless, we insist that as God is the maximum identity, it seems we cannot find a positive principle for the alterity that finitude implies, but rather, if we think of the finite in isolation, it is presented more like non-being than being as,

otherness derives its name from non-being. For because one thing is *not* another thing, it is called *another*. Therefore, otherness cannot be the Beginning of being, because it derives its name from not-being. And it does not have a beginning of being since it derives from nothing. Therefore, it is not the case that otherness is something. But the reason the sky is not the earth is that the sky is not Infinity itself, which encompasses all being.<sup>29</sup>

Let us now ask ourselves how to understand the finite in terms of a manifestation or dependence on the principle of being, which is different from the absolute equality that the Word implies.

In a way, alterity, even if it has to be considered as the negative element in any non-absolute being,<sup>30</sup> does express the circumstance that all finite beings, based on their respective unit or identity, are *not* the other and precisely because of that

comme dynamisme», in *Der Begriff der repraesentatio im Mittelalter*, edited by Albert Zimmermann (Berlin–New York: De Gruyter, 1971), pp. 1–34. The author refers to two interpretations: a theological consideration that sees the archetype as a participle *alpha*; and a spiritual consideration which sees it as a participable *omega*; I argue we can find both in the work of Cusa. Cfr. Nicolas de Cues, *Du non-autre. La guide du penseur. Préface, traduction et annotation par Hervé Pasqua* (Paris: Cerf, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XIV, 58.

<sup>29</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XIV, 61–62. Cfr. Maurice Alvarado Cordero, «*Aequalitas essendi* in Nicholas of Cusa's *De Docta Ignorantia*». *Veritas* 26 (2012): pp. 57–79.

<sup>30</sup> Cfr. Werner Beierwaltes, «Identidad y Diferencia como principio del pensamiento del Cusano», in *Cusanus. Reflexión metafísica y espiritualidad*, edited by Werner Beierwaltes (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2005), p. 149.



can be considered as an *other*. In this sense, alterity allows us to understand ontological consistency in as much as it recognises its identity as difference from the rest: "for because one thing is *not* another thing, it is called *another*".<sup>31</sup>

From the above we can understand why Nicholas of Cusa, following the mirror simile, argues that *God is all things*; as it is His divine face that is in them; He can see Himself in them as if in a mirror,<sup>32</sup> and so can creatures see Him in themselves. The creature resembles God, and at the same time things are seen, in their truth, in the Absolute, but in a context of absolute transcendence that — sometimes — overcomes the comprehension of finite minds. Ever since *De docta Ignorantia* Nicolas of Cusa had warned of the problems around the question: "Who, in fact, can understand that God is the Form of being and nevertheless is not mingled with the creation?".<sup>33</sup> Keen on mathematical comparisons, Cusa explains that, much as we cannot understand that the essence of the curved line is a straight line, "though the infinite straight line does not inform the curved lines as a form but rather as a cause and an essence. The curved line cannot participate in this essence either by taking a part of it (since the essence is infinite and indivisible)", we cannot understand "as several mirrors [partake of] the same face in different ways (for it is not the case that as a mirror is a mirror before it receives the image of a face [...]). [...] For created being cannot be anything other than reflection".<sup>34</sup> In Cusa, the idea that an infinite form (God) is participated in by different entities in an unequal way, related to the theme of manifestation, leads us to consider finite beings as if they were the *radiance* of the infinite light, adding the new metaphor of light to that of the mirror.<sup>35</sup>

It would seem in this mirror simile that either the creature is reduced to a simple reflection, without an identity, or the Absolute is immanent to the form reflected in it, as if — the author explains — in looking at himself in it the creature *gave back* to the creator that which He already is. Cusa understands material creation as an imprint of God, and only the spiritual creature has an authentic similarity to the creator (*creatoris similitudo*): man is an *imago imitationis*

<sup>31</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XIV, 61.

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. Marcel Viau, «La métaphore du miroir chez Nicolas de Cues». *Revue des sciences religieuses* 83, no 2 (2009): pp. 257–276.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, Lib. 2, cap. 2, 102. Cfr. Norbert Henker, *Der Abbildbegriff in der Erkenntnislehre des Nikolaus von Kues* (Münster: Aschendorff Vg., 1969).

<sup>34</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, Lib. 2, cap. 2, 102–103.

<sup>35</sup> This is, as we know, an attempt which is present throughout *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* de San Buenaventura; Cfr. on this: María Jesús Soto–Bruna, *La recomposición del espejo. Análisis histórico-filosófico de la idea de expresión* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 1995).

*creata*.<sup>36</sup> This does not mean however that this *reflected image* which we have just presented as a characterization of the finite from a metaphysical understanding of theophany, makes of the created world a mere *copy* — in the strictest Platonic sense;<sup>37</sup> but rather it allows us to contemplate how entities can make present the face of the Absolute that is within them. Volkmann–Schluck has established this in very specific terms; when he speaks of the symbolic representation of the world in Nicholas of Cusa he argues: "from the beginning it is necessary to be clear that *imago* does not mean *copy (Abbild)* of an original (*Urbild*), but visible expression of what is invisible",<sup>38</sup> where expressing, rather than copying, means to imitate and replicate the essential invisibility of the Absolute — to make it visible —, an important point in our discussion: "the essential invisibility of the Absolute and the possibility of its visibility are the two points on which the articulation of God's transcendence and his immanence in everything what is created pivots".<sup>39</sup> And in regard to the created being or the finite, in order for the real existence of the creature to occur, God's gaze is not enough, but rather this needs to happen in conjunction with the gaze of the creature itself, "because a thing exists insofar as You see it, and it would not exist actually unless it saw You",<sup>40</sup> and so the divine presence, in the simile of the mirror, alludes to nothing other than a vision of the truth of the finite being.

Truth and image are thus united in this absolute vision: "my face is a true face; for You, who are Truth, have given it to me. My face is also an image; for it is not Truth itself but is the image of the Absolute Truth".<sup>41</sup> As has also been stated:

<sup>36</sup> Unlike the Verb, the Son, who is *imago aequalitatis genita Patris*. Cfr. González, «La doctrina de Nicolás de Cusa sobre la mente. Hacia una nueva gnoseología». I believe this theme to be aptly covered by Claudia D'Amico, in her article «Nicolás de Cusa, 'De Mente': la profundización de la doctrina del hombre–imagen». *Patristica et Medievalia* XII (1991): pp. 53–67; and from the same author: «Nicolás de Cusa, 'De Sapientia': un nuevo concepto de sabiduría a la luz de la tradición medieval». *Patristica et Medievalia* XIII (1992): pp. 107–120. Agnieszka Kijewska has also covered this theme in «*De ludo globi*. The Way of Ascension towards God and the Way of the Self–Knowledge», in *El problema del conocimiento en Nicolás de Cusa: genealogía y proyección*, edited by Jorge M. Machetta and Claudia D'Amico (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2005), pp. 157–164.

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. Plato, *Timaeus*, 30c; where he declares that the universe of the multiplicity has been constituted as a *copy* «of the most beautiful of the intelligible beings».

<sup>38</sup> Karl–Heinz Volkmann–Schluck, *Nikolaus Cusanus. Die Philosophie im Übergang vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1984), p. 25.

<sup>39</sup> Ángel Luis González, «Creador y creatura en el *De visione Dei* de Nicolás de Cusa», in *Biblia, exégesis y cultura. Estudios en honor del prof. D. José María Casciaro*, edited by Gonzalo Aranda, Claudio Basevi, and Juan Chapa (Pamplona: Eunsa, 1994), pp. 550.

<sup>40</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XII, 48. Cfr. Kremer, «Gottes Vorsehung und die menschliche», p. 230.

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XV, 69.

"The absolute seeing is, therefore, the complete seeing of the finite being, but at the same time is also the possibility that it itself sees from itself and that, therefore, the absolute seeing is seen *by it*, by the finite. The infinite gaze of the absolute seeing accompanies the finite gaze, just as the 'icona dei' should make clear at the beginning of the *De visione dei*",<sup>42</sup> and so we can completely understand that the creature's being is both the divine gaze upon it and the act through which the created being sees the Absolute. This explains the idea of the finite as a theophany, that is, as a created vision. In other words, through this absolute gaze which constitutes the being as a creator, the Absolute is made visible. It is the appearance of the Absolute, a theophany, but in a limited mode.

### § 3. Mirror, Manifestation, and Image in *De visione Dei*

"The being of a creature is, alike, Your seeing and Your being seen",<sup>43</sup> and that is why everything is in God. Therefore, when we consider it from the Absolute, the creature cannot be other: "For Your one Concept, which is also Your Word, enfolds each and every thing. Your eternal Word cannot be multiple or different or variable or changeable, because it is simple eternity",<sup>44</sup> and this eternal simplicity is the absolute difference, which Cusa sees as "beyond the wall of the coincidence of opposites".<sup>45</sup> By highlighting the divine transcendence and difference, the creature cannot but be thought of except as being in the Absolute creator: "For creation's going out from You is creation's going in unto You; and unfolding is enfolding",<sup>46</sup> which is not very far removed from the Augustinian concept of interiority: "The cardinal will propose a way of knowing that is superior to the rational one: that of *visus intellectualis* [...]. The thinker of Kues will return to the path of Augustinian interiority, although at the same time he goes further".<sup>47</sup>

We can deduce from the above that the creature, considered as pure alterity, is not, and that it can only be to the extent that this alterity is understood as the

<sup>42</sup> Beierwaltes, «*Visio absoluta* o reflexión absoluta», p. 198.

<sup>43</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, X, 41.

<sup>44</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, X, 43.

<sup>45</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XI, 47: "I turn once again in order to find You beyond the wall of the coincidence of enfolding and unfolding".

<sup>46</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XI, 47.

<sup>47</sup> Alexia Schmitt, «Interioridad agustiniana y la noción de "intelecto humano" como *viva imago Dei*: antecedentes de la subjetividad moderna», in *La cuestión del hombre en Nicolás de Cusa: Fuentes, originalidad y diálogo con la modernidad*, edited by Jorge M. Machetta and Claudia D'Amico (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2015), p. 60.

manifestation of the creator's visibility in the world. This thesis would overcome the problem which runs through chapter XII: "how is that You create things that are other than Yourself?".<sup>48</sup> It is true that God is above all concepts, that He is the infinity that contains everything with no alterity, the absolute unity where all multiplicity is found together. At the same time, He is the foundation of all entities. So, if the created world is presented as the development of all that is complicated within Him, we can therefore say that the finite is *explicatio Dei*, this time in the specific sense that everything that is divine image, reflecting God in a very specific way:<sup>49</sup> "At times, You appear to me [in such way] that I think You see all things in Yourself as would a living mirror in which all things shined forth",<sup>50</sup> and all that radiates is none other but the multiplicity that unfolds from the primary unit. But we must not understand this display in a Neoplatonic emanating sense. It really implies God's creation from nothingness. Here the mirror simile helps us clearly understand that there is no difference within the absolute identity either *before* or *after* creation.

It is true that God, as the creator, is the power that explains: "When I found You to be a power that enfolds all things, I go in".<sup>51</sup> In his decision not to introduce difference within the Absolute, Nicolas of Cusa often points out that God complicates things without alterity.<sup>52</sup> The explanation for the creation of the world is understood in *De visione Dei* as the vision that God has of the world, and subsequently, as the seeing of the creator by the creature, or the dependency on the other by the non-other:<sup>53</sup> "because a thing exists insofar as You see it, and it would not exist actually unless it saw You. For Your seeing gives being, because [Your seeing] is Your essence".<sup>54</sup> God's act of seeing and the created being's gaze on the Absolute allow the manifestation or visibility of a God who is *hidden* and *invisible*. This is precisely what shows the theophanic nature of creation. The following extract, already quoted, holds the key to this idea:

<sup>48</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XII, 50.

<sup>49</sup> Cfr. Charles Hummel, *Nikolaus Cusanus. Das Individualitätsprinzip in seiner philosophie* (Bern–Stuttgart: Vg. Paul Haupt, 1962), pp. 37 and ff. Ernst Hoffmann and Raymond Klibansky, *Das Universum des Nikolaus von Cues* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1930): p. 16.

<sup>50</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, DV, XII, 49.

<sup>51</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, DV, XI, 47.

<sup>52</sup> Cfr. Nicholas of Cusa, DV, XV.

<sup>53</sup> Cfr. Hervé Pasqua, Préface to *Du non–autre. La guide du penseur* by Nicolas of Cusa (Paris: Cerf, 2002), 25; Nicholas of Cusa develops this idea in chapter X of the *De visione Dei*.

<sup>54</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XII, 48.

Thus, my God, You are both invisible and visible: You are invisible as You are [in Yourself]; You are visible in accordance with the existence of creatures, which exist insofar as they see You. You, then, my invisible God, are seen by all [creatures]. In all sight You are seen by every perceiver. You who are invisible, who are free from everything visible, and who are superexalted unto infinity are seen in everything visible and in every act of seeing.<sup>55</sup>

As we have established, the principle of being, understood as an act of seeing, cannot, in rigour, be considered as the principle of real difference within things. Chapter X in *De visione Dei* leads us to think that this manifestation of the finite is merely a display of the *idem*: "The absolutely oneself or one unfolds oneself in oneself. This display certainly constitutes relationality, but not real difference".<sup>56</sup> Is creation, then, a *processio sine processione*, that is, an immanent explanation or inward *processio*? Chapter XII seems to provide a clear answer to this question. God creates in a way such that, by communicating being to everything, it becomes abstracted from everything (*maneat absolutus*), an essential aspect of the theory of the theophany: "For Your creating is Your being. Moreover, Your creating and, likewise, being created are not other than Your imparting Your being to all things [...]. For to summon nonexistent things into being is to impart being to nothing. Hence, Your summoning is creating, and Your imparting is being created".<sup>57</sup> And though God is more than a creator ("You are not creator but are infinitely more than creator"<sup>58</sup>), and cannot be explained from the world, the truth is that He is manifested visibly when we understand the created being from this idea of vision: it is seen by the Absolute and in seeing itself it sees that which sees it. In order to explain this, Cusa often uses the mirror simile.

God appears in his work as *the living mirror of eternity* which is *the form of forms* and:

When someone looks into this Mirror, he sees his own form in the Form of forms, which the Mirror is. And he judges the form seen in the Mirror to be the image of his own form, because such would be the case with regard to a polished material mirror. However, the contrary thereof is true, because in the Mirror of eternity that which he sees is not an image but is the Truth, of which the beholder is the image. Therefore, in You, my God, the image is the Truth and Exemplar of each and every thing that exists or can exist.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XII, 48.

<sup>56</sup> Werner Beierwaltes, «*Visio absoluta* o reflexión absoluta», p. 191.

<sup>57</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XII, 50.

<sup>58</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XII, 51.

<sup>59</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XV, 67.

From the above quote, we can deduce that Nicolas of Cusa turns around the mirror metaphor. The creature's recognition of itself as such requires it not merely to see itself in a subjective self-reflective way; but it rather requires it to look at itself in God, the living mirror: "The vision of God that reaches our intellect, when interpreting the word as an enigmatic sing of what is true, is superior to rational knowledge".<sup>60</sup> Because the Absolute is and contains in itself all truth, it returns a reflection of its own divine being to the creature. The creature then sees both God and itself in its own truth. This truth of the creature is not an image which is reflected in a *polished material mirror*, but it is rather the very eternal and divine idea, as is explained in Chapter X on the theology of the Word.

If God is the *living mirror*, the creature is then a *living shadow* which sees itself in Him, receives from Him what makes it, allowing the form of forms to manifest itself to each creature in a different way, according to the truth of the image of each one of them:

But because I am a living shadow and You are the Truth, I judge from the changing of the shadow that the Truth is changed. Therefore, O my God, You are shadow in such way that You are Truth; You are the image of me and of each one in such way that You are Exemplar.

Lord God, Enlightener of hearts, my face is a true face; for You, who are Truth, have given it to me. My face is also an image; for it is not Truth itself but is the image of Absolute Truth.

<sup>61</sup>

The manifestation is then different depending on the image of whoever is looking in the mirror; and the truth of the image is in the model, which is manifested in it, and in each individual, in a different way.

In conclusion, as stated by Rudolf Haubst,<sup>62</sup> the concept of manifestation as a way of capturing finitude goes back to a classic idea in Nicholas of Cusa: the understanding of creation as an *imago imitationis creata*, which occurs in human beings in a special way. According to this idea, the concept of representation, if understood in a strictly metaphysical way, would easily explain the meaning of

<sup>60</sup> Alexia Schmitt, «Interioridad agustiniana y la noción de "intelecto humano" como *viva imago Dei*», p. 61.

<sup>61</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, 68–69.

<sup>62</sup> Cfr. Haubst Rudolf, «Wort un Leitidee der 'Repraesentatio' bei Nikolas von Kues», in *Der Begriff der repraesentatio im Mittelalter*, edited by Albert Zimmermann (Berlin–Nueva York: De Gruyter, 1971), pp. 139–162.

the finite as the manifestation of the infinite, inasmuch as this manifestation is understood as proceeding from an act of creation and manifestative knowledge.

#### § 4. Creation and Theophany. Gnoseologic understanding<sup>63</sup>

According to Nicholas of Cusa, the intellective soul, when searching within itself, is contemplating God and all things. As we can understand from *De venatione sapientiae*: "Hence, since knowledge is assimilation, the intellect finds all things to be within itself as in a mirror that is alive with an intellectual life. When the intellect looks within itself, it sees in itself all the assimilated things. And this assimilation is a living image of the Creator and of all things".<sup>64</sup> In the light of this doctrine, he links the knowledge of things to the self-knowledge of the soul as an image of God, which in this sense implies *a new way of understanding knowledge*.<sup>65</sup> For Nicholas of Cusa, in fact, the principle of being is characterized as intellect, and human knowledge is understood as the manifestation of the divine exemplar. This explains that humans reach fulfilment when uniting with the Absolute through knowledge. As we shall see, this act of knowing is of a theophanic nature. This is how the idea of creation as theophany and the idea of humans as having the power of knowing are joined, representing the human being's image as a theophany of divine knowledge.

Through knowledge, man resembles God and reaches fulfilment: "But since the intellect is a living and intellectual image of God, who is not *other* than anything: when the intellect enters into itself and knows that it is such an image, it observes within itself what kind of things its own Exemplar is".<sup>66</sup> In the above extract, the metaphor of the mirror works as a logical nexus between the self-knowledge of the soul, the knowledge of God and the knowledge of the world: the soul resembles God because it is a living mirror. And, because it is a mirror, it can contemplate it in itself and know itself as an image of God, and know the

<sup>63</sup> For the broader theme, see: Pietro Secchi, *La conoscenza possibile. Tre saggi su Cusano* (Roma: Lithos, 2017).

<sup>64</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae* XVII, 50. Cfr. Agnieszka Kijewska, «Conception of Intellect in Eriugena and Cusanus», in *Nicolaus Cusanus: ein bewundernswerter historischen Brennpunkt Philosophische Tradition und wissenschaftliche Reception*, edited by Klaus Reinhardt, Harald Schwaetzer, and Oleg E. Dushin (Regensburg: S. Roderer, 2008), pp. 11–20.

<sup>65</sup> Cfr. González, «La doctrina de Nicolás de Cusa sobre la mente», pp. 1–24. Cfr. Jorge M. Machetta and Claudia D'Amico, *El problema del conocimiento en Nicolás de Cusa: genealogía y proyección* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2005); María Jesús Soto–Bruna, *El Renacimiento: De Nicolás de Cusa a Giordano Bruno* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2020), pp. 117–124.

<sup>66</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae*, XVII, 50.

entire world inside itself, just as all things are complicated within the Absolute. This is what we mean when we say that there is a parallel between the ontology of the creation and the nature of human knowledge from the doctrine of theophany.

As a *living image* man has the capacity to recreate within himself all the things which, as exemplars, are within the intellect or divine Logos, and because of this, he is called the *measure* of things. Here, the idea of a measure implies that the human mind assimilates within it all things, so that, with the participation of divine power, it can assimilate them as a concept, making them intelligible within themselves or giving them a meaning.

It is true that with the mirror simile it would seem that either the creature is reduced to a mere reflection without entity and that therefore God has created a non-intelligible world; or that the Absolute is imminent in the form reflected in it, as if, as Nicholas of Cusa points out, when looking within, the creature *gave back* to the creator what He already is.

For Nicholas of Cusa, the creature is never a mere reflection of the Absolute, rather, it possesses its proper consistency. As we will see, this becomes especially clear when the Cardinal speaks of the human mind and its capacity for acting. But now, regarding the finitude in general, Nicholas of Cusa's position is that the world appears as *imago*; but first and foremost, the finite is an expression of the Absolute. Through this way, one could speak of a theory of analogy in Cusa. In any case, the doctrine of theophany at this moment allows us to understand both the ontology of the finitude and the possibility that the human knowledge has to direct itself towards the Principle, thanks to the human mind and the mission of human knowledge.

In this sense, to know is not to copy reality, but rather it is the creative activity of the spirit: "The man can contemplate God not only veiled and enigmatically [...], but also without veils, that is, without any representation, within the intellectual spirit".<sup>67</sup> And for the real existence of the creature, in terms of the created creature or finitude, to occur, God's gaze is not enough, we need it to be in conjunction with the gaze of the creature itself, because "a thing exists insofar as You see it, and it would not exist actually unless it saw You",<sup>68</sup> and so in this

<sup>67</sup> Alexia Schmitt, «Interioridad agustiniana y la noción de "intelecto humano" como *viva imago Dei*», p. 64.

<sup>68</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XII, 48. Cfr. Henker, *Der Abbildbegriff in der Erkenntnislehre des Nikolaus von Kues*, pp. 25 and ff.



simile of the mirror, the divine presence alludes to nothing other than a vision of truth by the very being of finite understanding.

We will now take our understanding of the mind as a living image further and examine the consequences of this for the understanding of knowledge.

## § 5. The Mind as a Living Image

Nicholas of Cusa understands the mind as an image of God, but this does not imply that it exists as a copy that merely reflects the world. Because it is an image, it is capable of manifesting the content of the divine Logos. But it is, above everything, a *living image* which imitates the Absolute by *recreating* that which is created, which means that, when knowing, it configures or recreates, an understanding of the things in the world, and these then acquire a meaning intelligible to the human mind. In this sense, we can say that this action is assimilative or notional, but not intentional in the classical sense, as it sees and knows entities within it, as it senses itself as an image. We can say that it *produces* its own action, not the reality. It is true that the mind "is active principle of knowing, but a principle whose activity falls on itself and not on the real".<sup>69</sup>

There is no doubt that the material creation is a manifestation or a theophany, but human knowledge, as we have seen, also "finds all things to be within itself as in a mirror that is alive with an intellectual life. When the intellect looks within itself, it sees in itself all the assimilated things".<sup>70</sup> Its act of knowledge consists of configuring created things by measuring them: the mind recreates within itself likenesses of things, and as well as creating, it gives name to things that do not exist. In this sense, we can state that things exist as *species* within the human mind, which means that they can refer back to the creator through the intellect. This is an idea of *mens* as *mensura* which rethinks the classic idea of intentionality. The human mind never loses its dependence on the origin, as the culmination of its function is making the essential invisibility of the Absolute visible. Also, the real cannot be reduced to thought; what is real in the human mind is the real which has been thought, recreated, configured, which refers back to the exemplar of the divine mind. In this sense, we speak of a *species* which complicates the human mind in order to access the Absolute.

<sup>69</sup> Daniel Gamarra, «*Mens est viva mensura*. Nicolás de Cusa y el acto intelectual». *Anuario Filosófico* 28 (1995): p. 589.

<sup>70</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae*, XVII, 50.

In reality, the human mind is not some sort of *explicatio* of divinity (much as the world can be) but rather it is *the image of the Eternal Enfolding*.<sup>71</sup>

All things are present in God, but in God they are exemplars of things; all things are present in our mind, but in our mind they are likenesses of things. Just as God is Absolute Being itself that is the Enfolding of all beings, so our mind is an image of that Infinite Being itself – an image that is the enfolding of all [other] images [of God]. [... The] mind is both an image of God and an exemplar for all the images-of-God that are [ontologically] subsequent to it. Hence, to the extent that all things subsequent to the simplicity of mind partake of mind, to that extent they also partake of the image of God. Thus, mind, in and of itself, is an image of God; and all things subsequent to mind [are an image of God] only by way of mind.<sup>72</sup>

Nicholas of Cusa can then say that the mind is a finite art, image of the infinite art. To the extent that it recreates things by knowing them, it can be argued that its assimilation of the things of the world is not intentional in the classical sense of the term, since the human mind recreates the world within itself: "The mode of operation of *mens* indicates that it produces similarities of all things, that is, the intellect sees in itself all things".<sup>73</sup> This is not representation in the Kantian sense, as some authors of the Neo-Kantian School of Marburg may have thought — think of Ernst Cassirer's volumes on *The Problem of Knowledge*, whose first volume begins precisely with Nicolas of Cusa, within the framework of a *Rebirth of the Problem of Knowledge*<sup>74</sup> — because the recreation Nicholas of Cusa makes means illuminating the world in such a way that man can then see that it remits us back to divinity.

<sup>71</sup> Cfr. Nicholas of Cusa, *De mente*, IV.

<sup>72</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De mente*, III. Cfr. Agnieszka Kijewska, «*Idiota de Mente: Cusanus'Position in the Debate between Aristotelianism and Platonism*», in *Nicholas of Cusa on the Self and Self-Consciousness*, edited by Walter Andreas Euler, Ylva Gustafsson, and Iris Wikström (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2010), pp. 67–88.

<sup>73</sup> Alexia Schmitt, «Interioridad agustiniana y la noción de "intelecto humano" como *viva imago Dei*», p. 67.

<sup>74</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *El problema del conocimiento en la filosofía y en las ciencias modernas* (Ciudad de México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1906), pp: 65–71: "In the first writings of this thinker we see how, at first glance, the concept of God (a topic considered central in Cusan philosophy) and the concept of knowledge appear to be referred to each other and intertwined in a negative way. Progressively denying and abolishing all the determinability proper to knowledge and its finite object, we thereby arrive at the being and at the determination of the content of the absolute [...] The Middle Ages considered the object of supreme knowledge as transcendent [...] The modern era begins by inverting the medieval conception [...] The object to which it directs its gaze is immanent: the consciousness".

In this sense, we can state that one of the principles that governs Nicholas of Cusa's thought is this idea of the mind as an image of divinity. I consider this image, as an act of knowing, to be the theophany of the Absolute.

As Ángel Luis González has stated: "Man orders the created images, just as the Absolute creates entities [...]; God is an entitative creator, the man is a notional creator. The human mind, noble image of God, participates according to its possibilities, in the fecundity of the creative nature, insofar as it extracts from itself, as image of the omnipotent form, rational entities, similar to real entities".<sup>75</sup> In this sense, to know is to measure, it is not to create, but to cognitively recreate, as Álvarez Gómez pointed out in *Der Mensch Schöpfer seiner Welt*. Perfect knowledge is only made in God. The world is spoken by God, and this act of speaking is constitutive; the world is also spoken by human beings, but this is a notional speaking that represents or refers back to the divine speaking,<sup>76</sup> since *the mind is the image of the divine enfolding*.<sup>77</sup> In short, things are found in the divine Logos as their own truth, but in the human mind they are found as a likeness and as a meaningful and intelligible notion.

As stated by Claudia D'Amico, we cannot understand truth in Nicholas of Cusa as the *adaequatio intellectus ad rem*.<sup>78</sup> Rather, within the context of an inaccessible Absolute and the idea of *mens* as *mensura*, we find another of the great principles of Nicholas of Cusa's thought: the principle of *docta ignorantia*. Within the context we are examining, it implies that if the inaccessibility of the original Truth affects the limits of human knowledge, its characterization as a *measure* allows it to have in its mind the *explicata dei*, which it gives meaning to, and thus makes visible — in a human measure — the essential invisibility of God Himself. So we will almost always have a progressive, conjectural understanding of the real.

To conclude "in the framework of Cusan thought the fundamental question is still directed to the entity and not to the subject in the modern sense"<sup>79</sup>, though it is a subject understood as a living image where the fundamental question of knowledge is resolved since his conception of the mind as an image is where the

<sup>75</sup> Ángel Luis González, «La doctrina de Nicolás de Cusa sobre la mente. Hacia una nueva gnoseología», p. 9.

<sup>76</sup> Daniel Gamarra, «*Mens est viva mensura*», p. 595.

<sup>77</sup> Cfr. Nicholas of Cusa, *De mente*, IV.

<sup>78</sup> Claudia D'Amico, «Nicolás de Cusa, 'De Mente': la profundización de la doctrina del hombre–imagen», p. 54.

<sup>79</sup> Claudia D'Amico, «Nicolás de Cusa, 'De Mente': la profundización de la doctrina del hombre–imagen», p. 60.

relationship between theophany and vital plenitude<sup>80</sup> is made clear in human beings. This is true in the sense that the novelty here consists of seeking the response of ontic reality in the realm of the human mind. The *mens* is not in fact the basis for the real, but it is what gives reality of meaning to things. It creates *similitudines similitudinum divini intellectus*.<sup>81</sup>

In his dialogue on the mind he clearly explains that the mind possesses a potency or strength, which, though in need of the stimuli of the senses because it is "image of the Absolute Enfolding [Being], which is the Infinite Mind, our mind has the power by which it can assimilate itself to all unfoldings".<sup>82</sup> Thus the intellect is a clear way to ascend to divine contemplation,<sup>83</sup> which goes with being the image of an infinite simplicity that completes all things. So, he continues:

[...] we learn that mind is that power which, when stimulated, can assimilate itself to every form and can make concepts of all things, even though, [initially], it lacks all conceptual form. [The situation is] similar, in a certain way, to unimpaired sight when it is in darkness – sight that never was in the presence of light. This sight lacks any actual concept of visible objects; but when it comes into the light and is stimulated, it assimilates itself to what is visible, so that it makes a concept [thereof].<sup>84</sup>

In this way, the human mind, by giving meaning to things, comes to resemble the divine creation. This is the theophanic meaning within gnoseology, in parallel to this same character in the ontology of the infinite. God creates, through His self-knowledge through the Logos, and human beings, from within themselves, can also come to know.

<sup>80</sup> Cfr. Nicholas of Cusa, VD, XXV, 112: "Yet, all other intellectual spirits, by the mediation of this Spirit, are also likenesses. And the more perfect they are, the more like unto this Spirit they are. In this Spirit they all find rest, as in the ultimate perfection of the Image of God. And they have attained unto a likeness of this Image and unto a certain degree of its perfection.

<sup>81</sup> Cfr. Nicholas of Cusa, *De Beryllo*, IV. Cfr. Cecilia Rusconi, «El doble movimiento del despliegue especular en el opúsculo *De Beryllo*», in *El problema del conocimiento en Nicolás de Cusa: genealogía y proyección*, edited by Jorge M. Machetta and Claudia D'Amico (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2005), pp. 241–252.

<sup>82</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De mente*, IV, 75.

<sup>83</sup> Cfr. Christiane Bacher, «The role of freedom in Nicholas' idea of the *mens humana*», in *La cuestión del hombre en Nicolás de Cusa. Fuentes, originalidad y diálogo en la modernidad*, edited by Jorge M. Machetta and Claudia D'Amico (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2015), p. 119.

<sup>84</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De mente*, IV, 78. Cfr. Mariano Álvarez Gómez, «La mente como imagen viva en Nicolás de Cusa», in *Mente, conciencia y conocimiento*, ed. M<sup>a</sup> del Carmen Paredes Martín (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2001), pp. 11–29.

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### The Ontological and Gnoseological Meaning of the Theophany in Nicholas of Cusa

This article addresses a novel aspect of the classic theory of manifestation which is characteristic of Nicholas of Cusa's work. It is examined here through the lens of the theophany and we inquire into creation as such. We then go on to explain how the principle of *coincidentia oppositorum* determines the truth of the finite in relation to the Absolute: presenting the finite as an *explicatio* of the infinite. This *explicatio* or expression does not coincide with that which is expressed, but rather it requires the presence of the *complicatio* in its expression in order for the finite entity to be *something*.

In what follows, we explain the thesis according to which this *something* that is the creature is determined in a specific way in man as image, particularly in regard to knowledge. We argue that through knowledge human beings are presented as a *second* God and that they reach the aspect of creation as theophany through their union with the Absolute.

**Keywords:** Explicatio · Manifestation · Knowledge · Cusan Philosophy.

### El significado ontológico y gnoseológico de la teofanía en Nicolás de Cusa

El artículo aborda un aspecto novedoso de la clásica teoría de la manifestación que caracteriza la obra de Nicolás de Cusa. Se estudia aquí desde su aspecto de teofanía y se pregunta por la creación en cuanto tal. Explica a continuación cómo el principio de la *coincidentia oppositorum* determina la verdad de lo finito en relación con el Absoluto: la finitud como *explicatio* de lo infinito. Esta *explicatio* o expresión no coincide con lo expresado, sino que requiere la presencia de la *complicatio* en su expresión para que de este modo la entidad finita pueda ser *algo*.



A continuación se explica la tesis según la cual ese *algo* que es la criatura se determina de modo peculiar en el hombre comprendido como imagen, especialmente en lo que se refiere al conocer. Se sostiene que mediante el conocimiento el ser se presenta como un *segundo* Dios y alcanza el aspecto teofánico de la creación, mediante la unión con el Absoluto.

**Palabras Clave:** Explicatio · Manifestación · Conocimiento · Filosofía cusana.

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#### **HISTORIA DEL ARTÍCULO | ARTICLE HISTORY**

Received: 14-February-2021; Accepted: 19-March-2021; Published Online: 30-March-2021

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#### **COMO CITAR ESTE ARTÍCULO | HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE**

Soto-Bruna, María Jesús (2021). «The Ontological and Gnoseological Meaning of the Theophany in Nicholas of Cusa». *Disputatio. Philosophical Research Bulletin* 10, no. 16: pp. 1-25.

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