

*TIME, CREATION
AND WORLD-ORDER*

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PREFACE

This series of papers derives mainly from a symposium arranged May 1996 by the Center for Cultural Research, the Department of Philosophy, the Department for History of Ideas, and the Theological Faculty, all at Aarhus University, and the Department for Communication, Aalborg University.

The symposium, devoted to the theme made explicit by the title of the book and dedicated to the memory of Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, theologian and cosmologist, gathered a number of specialists from all over the world: India, the United States, Russia, Switzerland, Scotland, the Netherlands, and Danmark. All agreed that the meeting had been successful and the discussion inspiring. Its outcome is the present collection of papers.

It should be mentioned that the contributors came from such diverse fields as logics, physics, philosophy, and theology. Some of us are members of *International Society for the Study of Time*, of which David Park was formerly president. André Mercier†, initiator of *GRG*, co-founder of *CERN*, and former secretary general of *FISP*, was a famous physicist who later turned whole-heartedly to metaphysics. Tom Torrance is a very eminent theologian. Our circle was later extended with the inclusion of papers written by invited persons who could not attend the meeting; one of these is J.R. Lucas, former president of the *British Society for the Philosophy of Science*.

Originally it was intended to provide each of the papers with some 'Editor's Comments', to be followed by the 'Author's Response'. This plan, whose implementation delayed the publication considerably, eventually had to be given up due to unforeseen complications. I offer my sincere apologies to those authors who responded in vain.

M.W.

GRG = *Gravitation et Relativité Générale*
CERN = *Centre Energetique du Recherche Nucleaire*
FISP = *Fédération Internationale des Societés Philosophiques*

INTRODUCTION

Although this is not the proper occasion for a genuine jubilee, it has been decided to dedicate the symposium to the memory of Nicolas of Cusa (1401-64): theologian, philosopher and cosmologist, Catholic cardinal with ecumenical engagement, a pious believer who yet inspired the revolutionary teachings of Giordano Bruno, the prophet of infinity and freedom, burned at the stake for heresy in 1600 A.D.

We celebrate Nicolas by reprinting his little dialogue entitled:

De Deo Abscondito (cf. Isaiah 45.15)

(On the Hidden God, or, freely: On the God who plays hide and seek)

Herein we witness a fictitious conversation between a Christian and a heathen, expressing the ecumenical attitude of Nicolas. The work, however, is not specifically Christian in its teaching: there is no invocation of the Holy Trinity, nor is any mention made of the Incarnation of God as Son of Man. But the dialectic reasoning of the master, bearing the name of Christian and seeking to explain in words that very Truth which remains unfathomable and inexpressible - God - leads us with the firm yet frolic steps of a ballet-dancer up towards the peak of pure reason from where we can forebode that Divine Greatness which, in another work, is called *Coincidentia Oppositorum* and, in still another, *Non Aliud* - both ideas which are akin, if not identical, to the Absolute Paradox of Søren Kierkegaard.

Nicolas is not very precise regarding time. In his main treatise:

De Docta Ignorantia (On the learned, or enlightened, ignorance)

he follows Plato by depicting time as a moving image of Eternity which is interpreted as simple undivided Oneness. In itself time is nothing but an ordering of the present. This present infolds both past and future, just as past and future unfolds the present. The point seems to be that the present, which is itself of variable duration, includes both the past as a having-been-present and the future as a going-to-become-present.

Oneness, by transcending time, comprises the changeable in an unchanging way. The Divine Providence thus encompasses everything which has happened, is happening, and will ever happen, perceiving what is possible in time as being actualised of eternity. The universe itself, like everything created, had a beginning, though not in time, and may thus be termed eternal in the sense that there was no time before the universe. Eternity, not time, reigned ahead of the creation of heaven and earth; time and world first emanated together - and still emanates - from their only source: Eternity.

The main work of Nicolas has three parts.

Part One treats of God as that Oneness which is the Coincidentia Oppositorum, being both the Absolute Maximum and the Absolute Minimum. This idea is elaborated by means of geometric analogies which in important respects anticipates insights peculiar to the later invented systems of non-Euclidean geometry. We may interpret the idea by characterising God as the Actual, or Absolute, Infinite. The created universe, by contrast, is the merely Potential, or Contracted, Infinite.

Part Two treats of the World as that Wholeness which is the Unity of the infinitely many, both a Contracted Maximum and a Contracted Minimum. To describe the second idea Nicolas uses another geometric analogy, namely that of a sphere which has its center everywhere and its periphery nowhere. This idea stems from the Hermetian writings where it is applied to God; but Nicolas, who probably knows it from the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* (5.8) of St. Bonaventure, brings it to bear on the created universe. By this ingenious move he gains a metaphor of astonishing depth and strength which contains in its germ the basic principle of modern cosmology: "center everywhere", originally signifying the Ubiquity of God, now claims the formal equivalence of all so-called fundamental observers, while "periphery nowhere", originally signifying the Infinity of God, now claims the structural invariance of the universe to all fundamental observers. The metaphor can also be interpreted as an expression of the idea of Cosmic Isotropy which, assuming a relation between the structure and its contents, involves also Cosmic Homogeneity, both properties characterising all the standard-models of modern cosmology. But Nicolas did not stop here. Rejecting both a geocentric and a heliocentric world, his intuition of an astrocentric universe of limited or potential infinity leads him to suggest that the stars are heavenly bodies similar to the sun, that no heavenly body can constitute a perfect sphere because perfection is a prerogative of the highest, or divine, nature and that innumerable globes are populated with living conscious beings like ourselves.

Part Three elucidates Man before the Fall as a Created God, the Unity of Creator and Creation, Absolute and Contracted Greatness, whereas Man after the Fall is exposed as a nature corrupt and stained, depending for its salvation on that Mercy of God which is obtainable solely through faith in the Divine Mediator, Christ. Anticipating the crucial doctrine of Martin Luther, Nicolas expressly wrote: '*Humanitas in Christo Iesu omnes omnium hominum defectus adimplevit ... Non est iustificatio nostra ex nobis, sed ex Christo ... quem cum in hac vita per fidem formatam attingamus, non aliter quam ipse fide iustificari poterimus.*' (DDI, iii.6)

Nicolas was evidently inspired by Meister Johann Eckhart whose mystical doctrines are reminiscent of Hinduism and Buddhism, though, of

course, there is no question of any direct influence. According to Eckhart: 'The eye whereby God beholds me is the same as that whereby I behold God: it is all one eye, one sight, and one love'. He also said: 'If God could separate from Truth, I would follow Truth and skip God'. These words, which might be chosen as a maxim for the entire development of science in modern times - the very *motto* of modernity - need an addition, however. What Eckhart meant to state was in the end nothing but a simple *assumptio ex impossibile*. In fact, as he added: 'God cannot separate from Truth, for God is Truth!'

With this homage to Nicolas, and to spirits kindred to his, we want to indicate that science is not the only source of truth, and that religion need not hamper reason. Both lessons are important in an age still intoxicated by the prejudices of positivism. If knowledge could ever eradicate religious belief it would have done so long ago. The warfare of science against religion may turn out to be the most spectacular instance in history of an unsuccessful attempt at falsification; this insight is an urgent warning against all premature judgment, as well as a fascinating inspiration to a renewed search for open dialogue and intellectual synthesis.

M.W.

EDITORIAL NOTE

Italics are used for the accentuation of words and linguistic phrases, and for longer quotations where usual quotation marks are easily overlooked.

Shorter quotations are denoted by single quotation marks, whereas peculiarities are denoted by double quotation marks.

Editorial insertions within quotations are put into brackets.