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NICOLAS OF CUSA'S *THE VISION OF GOD* AS AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE IDEA OF DIVINE OMNISUBJECTIVITY*

1. ZAGZEBSKI'S CONCEPT OF GOD'S OMNISUBJECTIVITY: AN OUTLINE

In her remarkable book *Omnisubjectivity*: *An Essay on God and Subjectivity* (2023) Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski sums up the discussions of omnisubjectivity as one of God's principal attributes she carried out in several of her previous texts. She begins by defining the fundamental notion of subjectivity in general:

> What I mean by subjectivity is consciousness as it is experienced by the subject of conscious states, not consciousness as an object of personal reflection or empirical investigation or theoretical description. The degree and kind of consciousness differs from one species to another, but in human beings the range of conscious states is enormous. (1)

Essential for a rational being's experience of oneself as the conscious subject—the "owner", so to say, of his or her consciousness (as opposed to someone's reflecting upon oneself as an object)—is the first-person perspective: the perspective of an "I".[1] What matters in this ego-centered perspective are not certain definite "facts" concerning our subjective states, but the very essential

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[1] Zagzebski (2023, 5) says, "Subjectivity is not an object. Even so, first-person perspective is something that exists."

fact of "being within the consciousness as its centre and subject", as "subjectivity is the experience of the world from inside a conscious mind. Objectivity is the world as it can be described from the outside" (12). Thus the distinction "subjectivity versus objectivity does not coincide with the distinction "the mental versus the physical", it does not concern the nature of objects, but the perspective in which objects are viewed (12).

Zagzebski claims that the importance of subjectivity, and correspondingly, of the distinction subjectivity–objectivity was first fully realized in the art and literature of the Renaissance, and only a century later was it taken up in philosophy and science. True enough, the idea of subjectivity had its precursors before, for instance St. Augustine. Nevertheless, Zagzebski states:

> The revolution in subjectivity began before Descartes when it was discovered how subjectivity can be expressed in art and literature. When perspective geometry was brought to Florence in the fifteenth century, that made it possible for visual works to have a consciously chosen point of view. That in turn led to greater awareness of the existence of different points of view and the individual minds that possess them…. Art began to express an interior and singular point of view and it began to be much more common for works to be signed. Originality became a dominant value, whereas previously it would have been thought egoistical to call attention to oneself in one's creation. (16–17)

If the author claims here that the discovery of the significance of the difference between the subjective and objective point of view only took place in the fifteenth century, this is in part because she means to point out that the discovery of subjectivity does not come down to the technical aspect of finding out the possibilities of the first-person perspective, but carries some implications concerning the uniqueness and corresponding dignity of this subjective perspective. Historically, the development of the concept of subjectivity was closely related to the development of reflection on the person, its uniqueness, irreplaceability and dignity.

It is not my intention in this paper to discuss Zagzebski's reconstruction of the historical development of the idea of subjectivity, as the author herself does not make any claims as to its completeness, her sole intention in it being "to call attention to the fact that the contrasting notions of objectivity and subjectivity did not always exist" (20). My rather modest goal in what follows is to provide a particularly graphic illustration of her concept of "omnisubjectivity" taken from some works by Nicholas of Cusa, and in particular from his treatise *De visione Dei* (*The Vision of God*). I believe that the works of the

German cardinal offer an excellent introduction to and commentary upon the conception of divine subjectivity.

In her opening explanations concerning the meaning of the key term of her book, Zagzebski identifies subjectivity with consciousness insofar as it is experienced from within, that is by the conscious subject. She argues there are different degrees and kinds of consciousness and therefore of subjectivity, yet a privileged place in the hierarchy of conscious beings belongs to human beings, whose "range of conscious states is enormous". The special position of human subjectivity brings it into a relationship with God's. Undoubtedly, the God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is a person who refers to Himself as "I" (the best known references in Exodus 3:14 and John 14:6). Not only does He refer to Himself as a Person, He also enters into relationships with other persons, other "I's", including the human "I". Zagzebski sums up briefly: "I have said that only a God with subjectivity can be omnisubjective" (26).

Zagzebski's point is that the conception of divine omnisubjectivity is crucially important in our philosophical comprehension of God: this notion bridges the gap between the conception of God as the most perfect being, the incomprehensible Absolute, and the representation of God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (27), who speaks to and cares for human beings. More than that, divine subjectivity provides the ground for the explanation of how God can enter into intimate contact with human subjectivity in mystical contemplation: being omnisubjective, God not only comprehends our mental states from the inside, as it were, but can also make us, by means of special grace, participate in His own subjectivity, which is the essence of unifying mystical experience:

> Traditionally, sanctifying grace has been defined as sharing in the divine life, a doctrine that is mysterious given that we are not capable of divine understanding. Aquinas argues that in heaven our eyes are opened to a vision of the divine essence in the Beatific Vision. St. Paul says that "now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13). The promise of knowing everything fully through seeing God who fully sees us is the zenith of intersubjectivity. (28–29)

Zagzebski observes that divine omnisubjectivity has in fact been assumed in the practice of prayer, including liturgical prayer, it is implied in the conceptions of God's charity and justice as well as in those of His omniscience and omnipresence: "God is not the omniscient being of the great monotheistic religions unless he is omnisubjective" (39).

Omnisubjectivity, according to Zagzebski, is not just another divine attribute, alongside such attributes as omniscience, omnipotence, goodness etc. It is a fundamental feature of God's consciousness which is essentially presupposed by all divine attributes:

> It is not possible that God is not omnisubjective, but divine subjectivity is not a component of the divine nature. It is a feature of the interiority of divine consciousness. Each of the divine attributes also includes interiority. God's omnipotence, omniscience and perfect goodness are all features of divine consciousness. God's states of willing, knowing, and loving are subjective states, but we describe those attributes from the outside, often ignoring the fact that our third-person perspective leaves aside the first-person aspect of those attributes. There is something that it is like for God to think and to will and to love. (145)

Zagzebski is aware that the conception of divine omnisubjectivity leads to certain problems, one of which is how God in His supreme subjectivity can be close to our own subjectivity without infringing upon the proper sphere of our own selves. She examines this problem in the third chapter of her book and analyzes a number of solutions discussing the strong and weak points of each. She states,

> In this chapter I will offer three models of omnisubjectivity and a metaphor. The first is the model of empathy. The second is the model of perception. The third is panentheism. The first two attempt to help us imagine the possibility of fully and accurately grasping a feeling or thought or intention without being the one who has it. The third model is one in which the creature who has the thought or feeling is part of God. I will then discuss the metaphor of light to help us imagine the possibility that creaturely consciousness is infused by divine consciousness while being ontologically distinct from God. (60)

It appears that the metaphor of light, so firmly rooted in Neoplatonic philosophical tradition, is the closest to the author's mind as a plausible solution to the difficulties involved in the notion of omnisubjectivity. God's creative consciousness is the first Cause of the world coming into being and continuing in existence, embraces all forms, kinds and modes of being, without identifying with any of them. If everything is within God's consciousness, it does not follow that everything is within God, so this observation does not entail panentheism. Even in humans, our consciousness extends far beyond the limits of ourselves as human organisms. Our consciousness keeps expanding with

experience and reflective thought, and we can sometimes feel that there is a sense in which the self-expands along with our consciousness (80–81).

Thus the way consciousness takes in all objects without becoming one with them, which is analogous to the way light illuminates all kinds of things and remains distinct from them, serves as an excellent illustration of the relationship between God's transcendence and immanence: God as the transcendent source of all things is the creative consciousness which by envisioning all sorts of things brings them, as it were, out of non-reality. This is also, Zagzebski affirms, the best analogy at our disposal to represent to ourselves how God's consciousness can comprehend our subjective states without violating the ontological distinction between His transcendent reality and our individual being (87).

The theological work of the fifteenth-century German cardinal, Nicholas of Cusa, and in particular his treatise *The Vision of God* provide, in my opinion, an excellent elucidation God's consciousness viewed as omnisubjectivity. In his in-depth treatment of this and related matters we will also find valuable suggestions concerning the solution of the question of the relationship between God's creative consciousness and the human individual self: suggestions that appear to come in between the model of perception (as described by Zagzebski) and the metaphor of light.

2. CUSANUS AND HIS *THE VISION OF GOD*

In his seminal monograph *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, Ernst Cassirer described Nicholas of Cusa as the "father of modern individualism" (2000, 37). This description is grounded the distinctive character of Cusanus's oeuvre, a product of the turning point in the history of ideas which was the passage from the medieval intellectual culture to the Renaissance style of thinking. His philosophy represents personal and sometimes critical rethinking of the essential strands of medieval thought and also restates them in a modified form to pass them on to subsequent centuries.

Cusanus has been a much-studied thinker over recent decades and there are many works that thoroughly and extensively present his life, speculative achievements and reforming activity (KIJEWSKA 2024, 21–23), so in this presentation I will only give relevant facts to grasp the context and content of his *The Vision of God* adequately

Cusanus was born Nicholas Krebs in 1401 in Kues, a prosperous town on the Moselle. In 1416 he enrolled in the university of Heidelberg. The doctrinal orientation at the philosophical faculty of this school was towards ontological nominalism, the legacy of the first chancellor of Heidelberg University, the nominalist philosopher Marsilius of Inghen. Nominalism stressed the individual nature of every being, thus providing the metaphysical ground for individualism in anthropology and the theory of spirituality. In 1417–1423, Cusanus was in Padua studying canon law and forming friendly relationships with many Italian humanists. Having completed his studies, he embarked on a church career, first becoming a secretary to the archbishop of Trier and then as a delegate of the Chapter of Trier to the council of Basel. At this assembly he made himself known as an excellent canonist, a supporter of conciliarism. His *The Catholic Concordance* (*De concordantia catholica*), written 1434, became a kind of manifesto of the conciliarist party at the council. However, he soon surprised his colleagues (and caused much controversy among historians) by switching to the side of Pope Eugene IV and becoming, from that moment on, a staunch supporter of papal supremacy in the Church and an unswerving servant of three successive popes. Eugene IV made him a member of the delegation sent to Constantinople to invite hierarchs of the Eastern Orthodox Church to an ecumenical council to be held in Florence. During the return voyage from Constantinople in November 1437, on the high seas between East and West, Cusanus had a singular experience, a kind of illumination, which crucially reoriented the course of his further life and directed his pursuits towards *vita contemplativa*. He mentions this experience in the dedicatory preface to his work *On Learned Ignorance*:

> Receive now, Reverend Father, the things which I have long desired to attain by various doctrinal approaches but could not—until while I was at sea en route back from Greece, I was led (by, I believe, a heavenly gift from the Father of lights, from whom comes every excellent gift) to embrace—in learned ignorance and through a transcending and incorruptible truths which are humanly knowable—incomprehensible things incomprehensibly. Thanks to Him who is Truth I have now expounded this [learned ignorance] in these books, which [since they proceed] from [one and] the same principle, can be condensed or expanded. (1985a, Letter 263, p. 151)

It is “He, who is the Truth, the Father of lights”, that Cusanus will, from then on, strive to attain some comprehension of and somehow express the fruits of his efforts to his readers in all of his subsequent works. This decisive turn

towards mysticism did not, however, make him give up his active involvement in the affairs of the Church, yet the character of his activity changed from then on. His subsequent efforts, whether as a papal envoy or a cardinal and bishop in the diocese of Brixen, will be directed towards reforming church institutions and Christian life so as to make them truly conform to Christian ideals and beliefs.

His efforts as a reformer met with varied responses, earning him both enthusiastic supporters and implacable enemies. The monks from the Benedictine abbey of St. Quirinus in Tegernsee belonged to the former group; they elected him to be their spiritual director after his first visit to that monastery in 1452 (WATANABEE 2011, 211). The fruitful relationship between Nicholas and the monks from Tegernsee is attested by a rich preserved correspondence (454 letters) with the monks, especially with the abbot, Father Kaspar Aindorffer, and Prior Bernhard von Waging (VASTEENBERGHE 1915, 1–4). Some of the main points on which the correspondents exchanged their views were the questions of mystical theology, mystical union, and the structure of the human mind, and the place within it of the faculty responsible for mystical contemplation. In a letter of 22 September 1452, Abbot Aindorffer formulates the following question:

> This is the question: Whether the devout soul can attain to God without intellectual knowledge, and even without prevenient or accompanying knowledge, and only by means of affection or of the highest capacity of the mind, which is called synderesis. (quoted in WATANABEE 2011, 211–12)

This exchange on the matters concerning mystical contemplation had its source in the work of Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, which was much studied and commented upon at this time. The Carthusian monk Hugh of Balma argued in his work *On Mystical Theology* that it is primarily affection (*affectus*)—love (*desiderium amoris*)—that directs and elevates the soul to God introduction.[2] Grand Chancellor of Paris University, Jean Gerson, thought that another spiritual faculty was responsible for the orientation of the human spirit towards goodness, namely the faculty of *synderesis*, which is the power responsible for balancing the affective and intellectual powers of the

[2] See the editors' introduction to *Théologie mystique*, 1:12–14, by HUGUES DE BALMA, prol. 2, p. 126: "Sapientia enim haec, quae mystica theologia dicitur, a Paulo apostolo edita, a beato Dionysio Ariopagita, suo discipulo, conscripta, est quae idem est quod extensio in Deum per amoris desiderium; et quantum distat ortus ab occidente, omnem creatam scientiam incomparabiliter praeexcellit."

human spirit (FISCHER 2006, 222–23). Vincent of Aggsbach shifted emphasis again onto the affective component of the human mind (VANSTEENBERGHE 1915, 22–36). Nicholas of Cusa attempted to mediate between the proponents of affectivity and intellectual approach; he attempted to uphold a balance between *intellectus* and *affectus*, since both of these capacities of the human soul have their indispensable roles to play in the ascent of the human spirit to God. He gave a detailed account of his views on the mystical ascent and contemplation in his treatise written for the monks of Tegernsee, *The Vision of God*. The preface to this treatise contains an excellent exposition of the meaning and function of individual subjectivity.

Linda Zagzebski described mystical experience as the climax of intersubjectivity—the highest point in the interpersonal relationship of a human subject to God, whose attribute is omnisubjectivity. In *The Vision of God* Cusanus means to provide his readers with an introduction into the domain of mystical life; he begins with ordinary human experience, the world which can be grasped by ordinary human consciousness and described in ordinary human language. However, the end of the journey, towards which he leads his followers as if by hand (*manuductio*), lies in the mysterious domain of that which cannot be grasped in ordinary human notions, nor expressed in terms of ordinary human language, but can only be immediately felt and perceived, or "incomprehensibly comprehended", to use his expression from *Learned Ignorance*. In his preface Cusanus wrote:

> But I will attempt to lead you—by way of experiencing (*experimentaliter*) and through a very simple and very common means – into most sacred darkness. Upon arriving there and sensing the presence of Inaccessible Light, each of you—of yourself and in the manner granted you by God—will endeavour to approach ever nearer. And [you will seek] to acquire in this lifetime, through a most pleasant savoring, a foretaste of that meal of eternal happiness to which we are called in the Word of Life by the Gospel of the Ever-blessed Christ. (NICOLAS OF CUSA 1985b, 112–13)

An essential requisite for the experiment arranged by Cusanus for the monks of Tegernsee was an image representing God in the form of a human face, whose peculiarity was that it appeared to look directly at the viewer, no matter at what angle they might look at it; that was the famous image of the All-Seeing Face. This picture was sent to the monastery as an accompaniment to the treatise *The Vision of God* and described by the author as "the icon of God" (*eiconam Dei appello*). The preface to that work contained instructions on how

to use this image and what features of it should be observed so that it could become the source of experience for the viewers that would enable them better to follow his reflections further on in the treatise. The monks are thereby invited to enter into the presence of divine omnisubjectivity and discover their relationship to God and the world:

> Hang this icon somewhere, e.g. on the north wall; and you brothers stand around it, at a short distance from it, and observe it. Regardless of the place from which each of you looks at it, each will have the impression that he alone is being looked at by it. To the brother who is situated in the east it will seem that the face is looking toward the east; to the brother in the south, that the face is looking toward the south; to the brother in the west that it is looking westward. First of all, then, marvel at how it is possible that [the face] behold each and every one of you at once.… 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, and if he returns from east to west, the gaze will likewise not desert him. He will marvel at how the icon's gaze is moved unmovably. (NICOLAS OF CUSA 1985b, preface 3–4, p. 115)

Cusanus's experiment arranged for the monks to make use of the Renaissance studies on perspective. Despite numerous attempts to find information on Nicholas's relationship with Leon Battista Alberti, the question still remains whether he knew the famous humanist in person or whether he was acquainted with the latter's treatise, *On Painting*.[3] This question aside, Charles Carman discovers nevertheless a common approach to the question of perspective in both thinkers, an approach taking into account the theological dimension of this problem. He observes following Giovanni Santinello:

> For Santinello, both Alberti and Cusanus emphasize visualising what may not be visible—God's continuing creation in which mankind has a share. This is a view with which I deeply concur, and which is important to understand. It differs fundamentally from views that stress Renaissance art as a kind of anthropomorphic drive towards copying what the eye sees. Again, while the secularizing view is not hegemonic, my concern is that such a tendency … clouds what I will argue is more fundamental—the stimulus to theological visuality. Along the lines of Santinello's point of view I will attempt to elucidate that Alberti does suggest painting embraces a divine-like creative process. Important, as well, is not so much the product,

[3] We read in CARMAN (2014, 4): "Consequently, one can assume or easily imagine the possibility of their encounters, though the trail of evidence seems to have stopped short of anything more confirming than their having circulated among a tightly knit group of prominent intellectual, religious and political leaders."

> as the way in which the object produced springs from and stimulates understanding of an originative force or process through which things come into being—ultimately the result of exercising image-likeness to God, one's *Imago Dei.* (CARMAN 2014, 5)

In this passage a reference is made to the principle of analogy obtaining between the way God is and acts and the manner in which creatures, especially humans, imitate the Divine Reality in their own functioning. This principle applies to the way the icon of the All-Seeing functions in the mystagogic experiment devised by Cusanus for the monks of Tegernsee. As there is a resemblance, be it very distant, between the divine and artistic creative activities, so there is some analogy between perceiving all things by God and the way the All-Seeing Face appears to see, and is seen, by human viewers. The analogy here is that between truth and appearance: "Whatever is *apparent* with regard to the icon-of-God's sight is *truer* with regard to God's true sight" (NICOLAS OF CUSA 1985b, I 6, p. 119). The phrase "vision of God" as used by Cusanus in his treatise signifies both the divine creative and providential vision which brings into and preserves in being the whole of created reality, and the experience/vision of man in so far as he enters into a cognitive and contemplative relationship with God, made possible for man by the fact that he himself is the bearer of the image of God impressed in him. There is an interpenetration of these two visions, divine and human, which enables the experiment devised by Cusanus to form a suitable introduction into mystical theology. In his own words, "On the basis of such a sensible appearance as this, I propose to elevate you, very beloved brothers, through a devotional exercise, unto mystical theology" (preface 5, p. 117).

3. DIVINE OMNISUBJECTIVITY IN CUSANUS'S *THE VISION OF GOD*

In her discussion of the perceptual model of divine omnisubjectivity, Linda Zagzebski observes that within that model there is a problem of the separation of the knower from that which is known. When considering perception in general, we typically refer to the faculty of seeing, which we regard as the epitome of perceiving as such. However, reference to other sense faculties is not ruled out:

> Perhaps the perceptual model can be saved if we use touch rather than vision or hearing as our perceptual analogy for God's grasp of our feeling. Touch is the sense that brings us closer than any other sense to something outside of us. Can you

> touch someone's pain? We can imagine many more senses than our five, and it is not hard to imagine a sense that brings subject and object even closer than touch. But if the perceptual model is to be helpful, it must be clear that it is not perception from the outside standpoint. (ZAGZEBSKI 2023, 72)

For many ancient and medieval authors, especially those following the Platonic tradition, sight was a privileged sense because it provided the subject of sensation with the closest contact with perceived objects: seeing was the result of the *radius* going out of the eyes getting mixed with the radii sent by the objects. According to Zagzebski, this model of seeing enables the perceptual model to be combined with the metaphor of light, for it represents light in the form of a radius as the source and medium of visibility (81). Another merit of the introduction of light into the perceptual model was that it allowed a simple and plausible explanation of individual differences in the "field of subjectivity": every perceptor receives his or her visible data with a different clarity as with a different degree of focus. These different degrees of acuteness in perception can vary indefinitely, but the highest possible degree of perfection in perceiving all things belongs to God's vision: the Greek name of God, *Theos*, can be interpreted as "Seer", "the Seeing One":

> For indeed, God is the summit of all perfection and who is greater than can be thought, is called "theos" by virtue of the fact that he observed all things. Therefore, if the image that depicted gaze can appear to be beholding each and every thing at once, then since that [capability] belongs to sight's perfection, it cannot truly befit the Truth less than it apparently befits the icon, or appearance. For if one person's sight is more acute than another's, if one person's sight scarcely discerns nearby objects but another's discerns more distant objects, if one person's sight reaches its object slowly but another's arrives more quickly, then without doubt, Absolute Sight, from which comes the entire sight of those who have sight, excels all the acuity, swiftness, and power both of all those who actually have sight and all those who can be given it. (NICOLAS OF CUSA 1985b, I, 6, p. 119)

In her work, Zagzebski showed in what way God's omnisubjectivity is essentially related to Divine Omniscience and Omnipresence, how it conditions God's all-embracing love and justice, and also how it is presupposed in the practice of prayer. Cusanus's work *The Vision of God* is interspersed with passages styled as prayers and the eighth chapter of the treatise contains a direct reference to the Lord's Prayer, which introduces the theme of Divine Paternity. God's fatherly love is the prevenient loving embrace offered by God to each

and every of His creatures taken in their singularity and individuality; it is the foundation of divine omnipresence and providence: God is lovingly present in and for every child of His. It appears to be so close to divine omnisubjectivity as to be synonymous with it:

> Your paternity is the seeing which paternally embraces us all for we say "Our Father". For You are father of each and all alike. For [in praying the prayer] each confesses that You are "our Father". Your paternal love comprehends each and every son. For the Father loves all sons in such a way that He loves each son because He is father of all in such way that He is father of each. He loves each son in such way that each son conceives himself to be preferred over all others…. Thus, You will be our paternal provider, showing paternal concern for us. You seeing is Your providence. (NICOLAS OF CUSA 1985b, VIII, 29–30, p. 149)

God's fatherly, loving relationship with every one of His creatures constitutes the essential quality of the intentional act with which God embraces the whole of His creation (cf. KIJEWSKA 2017, 201–6), and in this way is an inseparable feature of divine omnisubjectivity. Love is also the essential quality of Divine Providence, which embraces each particular creature in its uniqueness and individuality. It is the mode of Divine Presence. Consideration of this omnipresence of love inspires the flow of prayer:

> O Lord, Your seeing is loving, and just as Your gaze regards me so attentively that it never turns away from me, so neither does Your love. And since Your love is always with me and is nothing other, Lord, than You Yourself, who love me. You Yourself are always with me, o Lord, You do not desert me. Lord, You safeguard me on all sides, because You most carefully watch over me. Your being, O Lord, does not forsake my being, for I exist insofar as You are with me. And since Your seeing is Your being, I exist because You look upon me [*ego sum quia tu me respicis*]. And if You were to withdraw Your countenance from me, I would not at all continue to exist. (NICOLAS OF CUSA 1985b, IV, 11, pp. 125–27)

This passage makes it clear that the relationship of God's subjectivity to my finite ego does not consist merely in receptive perceiving, God's seeing is really the act of constituting the seen object in being: God "watches over me", so He makes me exist. Divine act of seeing is creative: it is capable of bringing into and preserving in being its object insofar as this object is also acceptable to God's will. Therefore, I am only insofar as I am an object of His loving and seeing. Long before Berkeley Cusanus represented God's subjectivity as the

source of being: I am because You see me (that is, You are conscious of me): *ego sum quia tu me respicis.* My own being, my coming into and continuing in existence, is a correlate of the intention of God's seeing: should He stop seeing me, I would perish completely.

The creative aspect of the divine act of seeing exceeds the explanatory power of the perceptual model of divine subjectivity. This model has also been sort of exploded in Nicolas by eliminating the ontological distance between the subject and object of perception: God's perceiving does not need any organ of perception, God's seeing is done by means of an "eye": God Himself is seeing, He is the eye, He is the "living mirror" which sees all things in itself, without any ontological separation and sees them simultaneously from all possible points of view. God's perception is "circular" or "spherical", it embraces the perceived object from all sides. Cusanus knew well the quasi-definition of God found in Alain of Lille's *Rules of Theology*, which posits that "God is the intelligible sphere, whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere" (cf. ALAIN DE LILLE 1995, 109–11; KIJEWSKA 2024, 63). Cusanus says:

> But since Your sight *is* an eye, i. e. a living mirror, it sees within itself all things. Indeed, because it is the Cause of all living things, it embraces and sees all things in the Cause and Rational Principle of all things, viz. in itself. Your eye, o Lord, proceeds to all things without turning. The reason our eye turns toward an object is that our sight sees from an angle of a certain magnitude. But the angle of Your eye, O God, is not of a certain magnitude but is infinite. Moreover, the angle of Your eye is a circle—or better, an infinite sphere—because Your sight is an eye of sphericity and of infinite perfection. Therefore, Your sight sees—roundabout and above and below—all things at once. (NICOLAS OF CUSA 1985, VIII, 32, p. 153)

God's creative seeing, whose essential "quality" is love, is identical with the Divine Providence and Omni- and Prescience. All these attributes—and many others that the human mind can ascribe to God—are one reality in God, without compromising His absolute simplicity. Therefore, human discourse about God (theo-logia) imitates God's way of knowing in being circular:

> Hence, although we ascribe to God sight, hearing, taste, smelling, touch, sense, reason, understanding and other such things, in accordance with different forms of signification of each word, nevertheless in Him, seeing is not other than hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, perceiving, and understanding. And so, the whole of

> theology is said to be circular, because [any] one of the attributes is affirmed of [any] other. And God's having is His being. (III, p. 123)

The theological discourse on God takes the form of a circle also because it is never finished and always paradoxical: the end of theological considerations appears to point back to the beginning: ignorance and realization of inadequacy of the categories of the human mind for a comprehension of divine reality. Normally, a human cognitive process aims at comprehending its object as a distinct reality, graspable by means of a distinct notion, but this way of acquiring knowledge fails with respect to God: all of His attributes graspable by different distinct human concepts are one absolutely simple Essence in Him; His perfect simplicity defeats the attempts of the human mind to form one simple and distinct notion of God's nature. Starting from the perception of the All-Seeing Face, Cusanus arrives at the following formulation of the paradox at the heart of theological discourse:

> Therefore, as regards whoever sets out to see Your Face: as long as he conceives of something, he is far removed from seeing Your Face. For every concept of face is less than Your Face, o Lord; and all beauty that can be conceived is less than the beauty of Your Face. All faces *have* beauty, but they are not beauty itself. But Your Face, o Lord, has beauty, and this having is being. (VI, p. 139)

Another paradox involved in theological discourse is that it starts from the realm of visible realities but tries to reach into the domain of what by nature is invisible and the transcendent principle of all visibility. The analogy of light suggests itself: light makes it possible to see/know objects it illuminates, and yet light itself exceeds the limits of what can be objectified: when we turn our gaze toward it, the blinding light in the absence of things it can get out of darkness turns into darkness itself:

> But when our eye strives to view the sun's light in an unveiled manner, it passes beyond all visible light, because all such light is less than the light it seeks. But since it seeks to see a light which it cannot see, it knows that as long as it sees something, this is not the thing it is seeking. Therefore, it must pass beyond all visible light. So if one has to pass beyond all light, the place into which he enters will have to be devoid of visible light, and so, for the eye, it will be darkness. (VI, 22, pp. 139–41)

Yet the theological discourse, despite its circularity, opens a way to overcome such paradoxes. The human natural, rational way of knowing is governed by the principle of (non-)contradiction—very efficient as it is in matters concerning created finite reality, but it stops before the wall of the Paradise in which God Himself dwells. This wall is unity or coincidence of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*), a reality that can only be grasped by the human intellect, the power of intuition that exceeds reason and transcends the realm of non-contradiction. This intellectual intuition, immediate and evident as it is, cannot be expressed in words:

> And when I see You-who-are-God in Paradise, which this wall of coincidence of opposites surrounds, I see that You neither enfold nor unfold—whether separately or collectively. For both separating and conjoining are the wall of coincidence, beyond which You dwell, free from whatever can be either spoken or thought of. (XI, 47, pp. 171–73)

With this passage we reach the core of Cusanus's position in the question of mystical theology: rational discourse develops until it finally turns into "vision", which is the act of intellect, transcending the domain of that which can be comprehended by reason; however, this vision, as occurring beyond the limits of non-contradiction, cannot be articulated in terms of usual human thinking, and even less expressed in ordinary human language. This emphasizes even more strongly the circularity of theological discourse: it starts with ordinary human ignorance concerning the object of consideration and arrives at a knowledge that God is not something that can really be discoursed about, that is a qualified or mediated ignorance.

However, there is one aspects of this intellectual vision which exceeds its purely cognitive dimension: the intellectual vision of divine reality should be characterized by the quality that is also the essential feature of God's own vision, namely the quality of love. Our ability to love is a gift of God: we are capable of loving because God was the first to embrace us with His supreme Love and to enable us to love. To Love God is the only suitable response of man to God's prevenient love. This response involves human freedom, because it has to be a human person's own free act, expressive of his or her personal attitude. The free nature of the human act of love directed towards God does not rule out the necessity of divine grace, which alone can enable the person to effect such an act. Cusanus mentions the interplay between human free will and divine grace in the following prayer-like passage:

> O Lord, You have given me being: and my being is such that it can make itself more and more capable of receiving Your grace and goodness. And this power, which I have from You and by virtue of which I possess a living image of Your omnipotent power, is free will. Through free will I can either increase or decrease my capability for receiving Your grace. I can increase it through conformity, when I endeavour to be good because You are good … when my every endeavour is turned only toward You because Your every endeavour is turned toward me, when I look most attentively only unto You (never turning the eyes of my mind away) because You embrace me with a steadfast look, and when I turn my love only toward You because You, who are love, are turned only toward me. (IV, 12, p. 127)

In my view, Cusanus's treatise on divine creative perception in *The Vision of God* is an excellent example of representing Divine Omnisubjectivity in terms of the perceptual model combined, however, with the metaphor of light. His conception joins these two modes of explanation, especially at the point when he treats human consciousness as a corelate of God's active perception (*Ego sum quia Tu me respicis*). Undoubtedly, Cusanus's conception is a remarkable attempt to overcome the dichotomy between the notions of God of philosophy and God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

This accords with the fact that Nicholas rejected scholastic attempts strictly to separate the discourses of philosophy and (revealed) theology, returning instead to the Boethian conception, also dominant in the 12th century, regarding theology as the innermost part of theoretical philosophy, alongside physics and mathematics (cf. KIJEWSKA 2023, 672). This tendency to reduce the gap between ordinary human experience and the most elevated speculation accounts for his choosing in *The Vision of God* a sense perception and seeing it as the starting point for considerations that finally lead to the realm where all rational discourse fails and is replaced with conceptually and linguistically ineffable vision:

> I thank You, my God, for disclosing to me that there is no other way of approaching You than this way which seems to all men, including the most learned philosophers, altogether inaccessible and impossible. For You have shown me that You cannot be seen elsewhere than where impossibility appears and stands in the way. And You, o Lord, who are the Nourishment of the full-grown, have encouraged me to do violence to myself, because impossibility coincides with necessity. And I have found the abode wherein You dwell unveiledly—an abode surrounded by the coincidence of contradictories. (NICHOLAS OF CUSA 1985b, IX, 39, p. 161)

In the climactic phase of the experience of seeing God the difference between the cognizing subject and the cognized object: seeing God is the same as being

seen by God. However, this does not imply any sort of pantheism or panentheism, for the ontological separation, which is the basic presupposition of sense experience is still preserved. In the ultimate phase of mystical "vision" all cognitive faculties become one, and the affection suffusing the whole act is that of love—the pinnacle of intersubjectivity:

> I begin to see You, o Lord. For You are present where speaking, seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, reasoning, knowing, and understanding are the same and where seeing coincides with being seen, hearing with being heard, tasting with being tasted, touching with being touched, speaking with hearing, and creating with speaking. If I were to see just as I am seeable, I would not be a creature. And if You, o God, were not to see just as You are seeable, You would not be God Almighty. You are seeable by all creatures, and You see all creatures. Or 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 [them], they would not receive being from You. The being of a creature is, alike, Your seeing and Your being seen. (X, 41, pp. 163–65)

Does this not sound like the fulfilment of St Paul's prophecy from 1 Corinthians 15, 28 concerning God being "all in all"?

Translated by Roman Majeran

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NICOLAS OF CUSAS'S *THE VISION OF GOD* AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE IDEA OF DIVINE OMNISUBJECTIVITY

Summary

The article concerns Linda T. Zagzebski's book *Omnisubjectivity: An Essay on God and Subjectivity* (2023), in which she proposes the property of omnisubjectivity as a fundamental property of God's being, encompassing a number of other attributes (such as love, justice, omniscience, and omnipresence) and is assumed in that fundamental relationship between the human being and the Absolute represented by prayer. In my article, I would like to illustrate Zagzebski's concept with some examples taken from Nicholas of Cusa's work *The Vision of God*. In my opinion, Cusanus' texts not only provide a rich source of examples of the concept of omnisubjectivity, but also perfectly clarify Zagzebski's understanding of omnisubjectivity in terms of the metaphor of light.

Keywords: concept of God; omnisubjectivity; Nicholas of Cusa; vision of God; perspective

O WIDZENIU BOGA MIKOŁAJA Z KUZY JAKO ILUSTRACJA IDEI BOŻEJ WSZECHSUBIEKTYWNOŚCI

Streszczenie

Artykuł stanowi nawiązanie do książki Lindy T. Zagzebski *Omnisubjectivity: An Essay on God and Subjectivity* (2023), w którym proponuje, że cecha wszechsubiektywności (*omnisubjectivity*) jest fundamentalną własnością bytu Bożego, obejmującą szereg innych przymiotów (jak miłość, sprawiedliwość, wszechwiedzę i wszechobecność) oraz jest zakładana w tej podstawowej relacji bytu ludzkiego do Absolutu, jaką jest modlitwa. W swoim artykule chciałabym zilustrować koncepcję Lindy Zagzebski przykładami wziętymi z dzieła Mikołaja z Kuzy *O widzeniu Boga*. W mojej opinii teksty Kuzańczyka nie tylko stanowią bogate źródło przykładów, ale znakomicie doprecyzowują zaproponowane przez Zagzebski rozumienie wszechsubiektywności w kategoriach metafory światła.

Słowa kluczowe: koncepcja Boga; wszechsubiektywność; Mikołaj z Kuzy; widzenie Boga; perspektywa