

Zeitschrift: Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie = Revue philosophique et théologique de Fribourg = Rivista filosofica e teologica di Friburgo = Review of philosophy and theology of Fribourg

Band: 66 (2019)

Heft: 1

Artikel: The innate power to judge as the mind's guiding principle : iudicium connatum or concreatum in De docta ignorantia, De sapientia, De mente and De pace fidei

Autor: Pico Estrada, Paula

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-869317>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 09.12.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

PAULA PICO ESTRADA

The Innate Power to Judge as the Mind's Guiding Principle: *Iudicium connatum* or *concreatum* in *De docta ignorantia*, *De sapientia*, *De mente* and *De pace fidei*

1. OVERVIEW

In the first paragraph of *De Docta Ignorantia*, Cusanus compares wonder, which precedes philosophizing, to the hunger pains that precede appetite. Hunger pains are one of the resources by virtue of which nature finds its way to self-preservation, and their function is to stimulate it to restore itself. In a similar way, wonder stimulates love of knowledge “in order that the intellect (whose understanding is its being) will perfect itself by the study of truth.”¹ Thus Cusanus defines human beings and their final goal. Human beings are intellectual natures, natures whose preservation consists in striving for their perfection or fulfillment. This search for perfection is no other than “the study of truth”. Truth is, therefore, the ultimate goal that fulfills human nature.

Since the human mind's end is truth, the first question to answer is how does the mind know what is true or what is the truth. Cusanus answers it in paragraph 2. In each creature, he says, there is a natural desire to exist in the best way allowed by its own condition². This desire is the inclination creatures have to identify themselves with the divine unity that created them, in which they exist perfectly or completely. Since creatures are finite and the divine unity is infinite, none of them fully identifies with it, although they all participate in some way of it³. Still, all creatures operate toward this end and each species has the instruments it needs for its own type of operation. In the case of intellectual natures, the desire to be better than they are manifests itself as a desire to know, i.e. as a desire for truth. Cusanus calls “*iudicium connatum*» (innate judgment) the instru-

¹ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *Opera omnia* (h). I. *De docta ignorantia*. Iussu et Auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita, Raymond Klibansky/Ernst Hoffmann (eds): Lipsiae: Felix Meiner 1932. Translation into English: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*. 2nd edition. Minneapolis: Banning Press 1985.

² NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De docta ignorantia* (h I, n. 2).

³ Cf., for instance, NICOLAI DE CUSA: *Opera omnia* V. *Idiota. De sapientia. De mente*. Renate Steiger (ed.); *De staticis experimentis*. Ludovicus Baur (ed.). Hamburgi: Felix Meiner 1983 (h V, nn. 25–27).

ment that this type of nature possesses in order to successfully operate toward its end⁴.

Cusanus uses the expression "*iudicium connatum*" on many occasions, as well as another one, "*iudicium concreatum*", which he uses as a synonym of the former⁵. Cusanus also uses these terms to modify nouns other than "*iudicium*". In *De concordantia catholica* (1433)⁶ he refers to "*liberum arbitrium concreatum*" ("innate free will": h XIV, n. 31), "*lex connata*" ("innate law": h XIV, n. 127), "*connata principia*" ("innate principles": h XIV, n. 268) and "*clementia connata*" ("innate clemency": h XIV, n. 265). In *De docta ignorantia* (1440), apart from the aforementioned "*iudicium connatum*" ("innate judgement": h I, n. 2), Cusanus refers to "*connaturales passiones*" ("innate passions": h I, n. 217) and "*spiritus connaturalis*" ("akin spirits": h I, n. 253). In *Idiota. De sapientia* (1450), the "*praegustatio connaturata*" ("innate foretaste": h V, n. 11) plays a key role, while in *Idiota. De mente* the term *concreatus*, -a, -um appears thirteen times, more than in any other work by Cusanus. There, he brings up "*iudicium concreatum*", "*notiones concreatas*", "*vis iudicaria concreata*" ("innate judgement", "innate notions", "innate power of judgement": h V, nn. 75, 77 et 78), "*aptitudo concreata*" ("innate aptitude": h V, n. 155), "*iudicium mentis sibi concreatus*" ("judgement created together with the mind": h V, n. 158), and "*connata religio*" ("innate religion": h V, c. 15, n. 159). The latter expression also appears in *De pace fidei* (1453)⁷, together with "*connatum desiderium*" ("innate desire": h VII, n. 45). In the same work, Cusanus refers to "*potentia connaturalis*" ("innate power": h VII, n. 34) and "*lumen concreatum*" ("innate light": h V, n. 59). Leaving the sermons aside, the enumeration ends with "*motus concreatus*" ("innate movement": h IX, n. 25) in *De ludo globi*

⁴ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De docta ignorantia* (h I, n. 2).

⁵ I will translate both as "innate" because the difference between their respective definitions is just a nuance. "*Connatus*" means "born with". Therefore, "*iudicium connatum*" would be a judgment, in the sense of "ability to judge", born together with the human mind: that is, not acquired through experience. "*Concreatus*" means "created with" and it means that something exists in something other since its creation. Thus, "*iudicium concreatum*", would be a judgment that has existed in the mind since its creation and is therefore not acquired through experience either.

Both terms are perfect passive participles, used as adjectives. "*Connatus*" appears in late Latin, although not specifically in ecclesiastical one, while "*concreatus*" is typical of ecclesiastical Latin. Its first appearance would seem to be in St. Jerome's translation of *Ecclesiasticus* 1:14: "*Initium sapientiae timor Domini et cum fidelibus in vulva concreatus est*" ("To fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and it was created with the faithful in the womb.") That is: the fear of God exists in the faithful from the moment of their creation.

⁶ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *Opera omnia* XIV/1–3. *De concordantia catholica*, Gerhard Kallen (ed.). Hamburgi: Felix Meiner 1959–64.

⁷ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *Opera omnia* VII. *De pace fidei, cum epistola ad Joannem de Segovia*. Raymond Klibansky/Hildebrand Bascour (eds). Hamburgi: Felix Meiner 1970.

(1462)⁸ and “*natura concreata*” (“innate nature”: h XII, n. 10) in *De venatione sapientiae* (1463)⁹.

Some of these references do not allude to the innate power to judge. Such is clearly the case with “*connaturales passiones*” (h I, n. 217), “*spiritus connaturalis*” (h I, n. 253), “*potentia connaturalis*” (h VII, c. 11, n. 34) and “*natura concreata*” (h XII, n. 10). In fact, the first three examples introduce another adjective, *connaturalis* -e. The *Totius Latinitatis Lexicon* defines it with a synonym, “*congenitus*” (present from birth) and quotes Boethius: “*Videtur autem haec omnibus inesse animalibus, habent enim connaturalem potentiam iudicativam, quam vocant sensum*”¹⁰. (“However, it seems that it exists in all animals, for they have an innate power of judgment, which is called sense.”) Although it can therefore be taken in the same sense as “innate”, Cusanus seems to use it with another nuance, meaning “of the same nature as”. And he definitely does not apply it to the *potentia iudicativa*.

The first example of these appears in *De docta ignorantia* III, chapter 6, when Cusanus briefly describes human nature. This “short digression” [*digressio parva*] is included in a wider context, namely, a philosophical analysis of Jesus Christ’s death. Cusanus characterizes human nature as divided in three parts: senses, intellect and reason. Presupposing a hierarchical order that descends from the higher to the lower, reason is described as an intermediate force that connects the other two, while intellect, unrelated to time and matter, occupies the first position in the chain. The senses, temporally subject to the motions of the world, occupy the last. In reason, which participates in both, temporal things coincide with supratemporal ones. As for the senses, they are incapable of reaching supratemporal things. Consequently, sensorial knowledge “in accordance with the flesh it is moved, through the power of concupiscence, toward carnal desires [...]”¹¹ The darkness of this movement would be complete if it was not because in human beings, animal nature is subordinated to the rational and the rational is subordinated to the intellectual. Hence, reason “contains in its own nature and as a result of its capability of participating

⁸ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *Opera omnia* IX. *Dialogus De ludo globi*. Johannes Gerhard Senger (ed.). Hamburgi: Felix Meiner 1994.

⁹ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *Opera omnia* XII. *De venatione sapientiae. De apice theoriae*. Raymond Klibansky/Johannes Gerhard Senger (eds). Hamburgi: Felix Meiner 1982.

¹⁰ FORCELLINI, Egidio/FURLANETTO, Giuseppe: *Lexicon Totius Latinitatis (Latino-Latinum)*. Entry: “*Connaturalis, -e*”. Available at <http://www.lexica.linguax.com> (1775, reprint 1940).

¹¹ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De docta ignorantia* (h I, n. 216). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*, 127.

in the intellectual nature”¹² certain laws that moderate sensorial appetite, so that intellect can pursue its spiritual desire. Cusanus names three of these laws, and he calls them “the most important”. They are that no one does to another, what he would not want to be done to himself, that eternal things are preferable to temporal things, and that clean and holy things are preferable to dirty and base things. The adjective *connaturalis*, -e is not applied to these laws, but to the passions that they are supposed to govern. But even when reason governs the senses, it is still necessary that the intellect govern reason in order that human beings reach their end. It is by intellect’s rule, not by reason’s, that man adheres to Christ through faith formed by charity.

In chapter 11 of *De docta ignorantia III*, Cusanus develops this idea, and states that human beings can only fulfill their nature if they faithfully adhere to Christ. In paragraph 253 he differentiates the full perfection of human nature when it attains *christiformitas* from the fantastic character of the nature obtained by magical practices. By means of these practices, man could be united to certain spirits akin to him (*spiritus connaturalis*).

“This is the perfect nature which we who have been transformed into Christ’s image can obtain in Christ after the flesh and sin have been mortified. It is not that fantastic [nature] of the magicians, who allege that by faith and through certain practices a man ascends to a nature of influential spirits who are akin to himself—so that by the power of such spirits, with which the magicians themselves are united by faith, they perform many special wonders as regards fire or water or musical knowledge, visible transformations, the revealing of hidden matters, and the like”.¹³

Nicholas of Cusa does not deny that these practices can result in some feigned and ephemeral benefit. But since they imply the union “with evil spirits” [*cum malignis spiritibus*], they lead to the loss of eternal salvation. It must be noticed that the alleged kinship between these spirits and human beings is not asserted by Cusanus, but by the magicians, whom he accuses of seduction and of departing from life and truth. Therefore, in this example the adjective *connaturalis* -e is not even in the author’s mouth.

The third reference to the term “*connaturalis*, -e” is in *De pace fidei*, and it takes place during a theological argument between Saint Peter and the Persian, a representative of Islam. The subject they discuss is the union of the divine and human natures in Christ, which the Persian considers impossible. He argues that, just as there is a single king and several letters of

¹² NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De docta ignorantia* (h I, n. 216). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*, 127.

¹³ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De docta ignorantia* (h I, n. 253). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*, 144.

the king who are not the king but transmit his word, there is one God and several prophets, Christ among them. Peter replies that the living word of the king is not found in his letters, but only in his son, to which the Persian answers that father and son are two different persons. Peter forwards the discussion beyond the concrete example of one or two persons toward royal power in itself. This power, he says, is one and the same in both the father and the son. In the father it is unbegotten, while in the son it is begotten. If we admit that this power, that in the case of creatures has inevitable limits, is absolute when it comes to God, then this one power would be simultaneously begotten and unbegotten. Encouraged by the Persian to proceed, the apostle says:

“Suppose, then, that there is such an absolute royal power that is unbegotten and begotten; and suppose that the unbegotten power summons into a close association-of-succession—with the naturally [*connaturalis*] begotten [power]—someone alien in nature, so that the alien nature, in union with the power's nature, jointly and indivisibly possesses the kingdom. Don't the natural succession and the adopted, or freely bestowed, succession join together in a single inheritance?”¹⁴

In this paragraph, the term “*connaturalis*” is applied to the community of nature between the first and the second persons of the Trinity. The alien nature above mentioned is the human one. The problem at stake is that of the union between human and divine natures. Consequently, the use of the adjective “*connaturalis*” does not refer at all to the innate power of judgment.

Neither does its appearance in *De venatione sapientiae*, paragraph 10, within the framework of a metaphysical explanation. Cusanus has just said that one of the principles that has governed his thinking is the Aristotelian affirmation that what is impossible to be made is not made (“*Impossibile fieri non fit*”¹⁵). Consequently, he argues that since what is impossible to be made is not made, the possibility of being made precedes ontologically all that has been made (i.e., the creatures). On the other hand, that which is, but which has not been made, precedes the possibility of being made. This is the uncreated Creator, the first principle of the possibility of being made. Just as the inventor of the syllogism established his art's possibility's of being made, and that possibility of being made enfolded the predetermined figures that are materially expressed as discourse, so the Creator established the world's perpetual possibility to be made, which enfolds

¹⁴ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De pace fidei* (h VII, n. 34). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa's De Pace Fidei and Cribratio alkorani*, translation and analysis. Minneapolis: Banning Press 1990, 651.

¹⁵ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De venatione. sapientia* (h X, n. 3).

“practical predeterminate forms [...] suitable for the world’s structure”¹⁶. And for these forms or reasons to unfold in the material sphere, God created Nature together [*concreata*] with the world’s possibility of being made. “For example, in accordance with the predeterminate form of man nature unfolded the possibility of man’s being made”.¹⁷

Apart from the four above mentioned examples in which Cusanus is obviously not referring to the innate power of judgement, there are certain uses of the adjectives *connatus*, -a, -um and *concreatus*, -a, -um whose relation to the power of judgement needs to be demonstrated. The required analysis exceeds the limits of the present article. The formulas in question are “*liberum arbitrium concreatum*” (h XIV, n. 31), “*motus concreatus*” (h IX, n. 25) “*lex connata*” (h XIV, n. 127), “*connata principia*” (h XIV, n. 268), and “*clementia connata*” (h XIV, n. 265). All of them belong to *De concordantia catholica* and they all enfold problems concerning the moral and social dimensions of the human mind, some of which I have addressed elsewhere¹⁸.

In this article I will examine Cusanus’ references to the *iudicium connatum* (and/or *concreatum*) in *De docta ignorantia*, *De sapientia*, *De mente* and *De pace fidei*. My aim is to consider the significance that the use of this notion has in these works, with the hope that it might unfold new aspects of the human mind’s journey toward the truth.

2. THE INNATE POWER TO JUDGE (*IUDICIUM CONNATUM*) IN *DE DOCTA IGNORANTIA* (H I, N. 2)

According to *De docta ignorantia*, paragraph 2, the *iudicium connatum* is the criterion that guides the human mind toward its end, which is the truth. It seems almost redundant to specify that the movement by which the mind seeks the truth is intellectual. But the passage introduces another aspect of this journey that is not so obvious. Cusanus says that the

¹⁶ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De venatione sapientia* (h X, n. 10). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa: Metaphysical Speculations*. Minneapolis: Banning Press 1998, 1286.

¹⁷ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De venatione sapientia* (h X, n. 10). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa: Metaphysical Speculations*. Minneapolis: Banning Press 1998, 1286.

¹⁸ On the social and moral dimensions of the human mind, cf. for instance PICO ESTRADA, Paula: *Unidad, justicia y amor en el modelo antropológico de Nicolás de Cusa*, in: CORTI, Enrique (ed.): *Las justicias en la filosofía medieval*. General San Martín: Unsam Edita 2013, 247–257; PICO ESTRADA, Paula: *Amor a sí y amor a los demás. El impulso de autoconservación como principio de tolerancia en el pensamiento de Nicolás de Cusa*, in: PERETÓ RIVAS, Rubén (ed.): *Tolerancia: teoría y práctica en la Edad Media*. Porto: Textes et Études du Moyen Âge n. 64 2012, 245–263; and PICO ESTRADA, Paula: *Movimientos helicoidal y circular como símbolos de la libertad humana en el diálogo De ludo globi de Nicolás de Cusa*, in: BAUCHWITZ O.F. (ed.): *Seminários do Seridó. Solidão e liberdade*. Natal: Edufrn 2015, 351–371. On Cusanus’ ethics, see the indispensable monograph: MANDRELLA, Isabella: *Viva imago. Die praktische Philosophie des Nicolaus Cusanus*. Münster: Aschendorf Verlag 2012.

mind needs the *iudicium connatum* in order to rest in the beloved goal toward which its own weight is inclined. Since the mind loves its goal, then the movement by which it progresses toward it is a loving one. Therefore, the *iudicium connatum*, which guides the mind in its journey, must enfold a loving dimension.

In addition to implying that the *iudicium connatum* has a loving facet, *De docta ignorantia* paragraph 2 describes it as infallible. If the mind deviates in its path toward the truth, it says there, these deviations do not arise from the *iudicium connatum*'s nature. Rather, the capacity for choosing the good is inherent to it. The same could be said of taste, to which Cusanus compares it. Just as taste chooses healthy foods by nature, the mind chooses the truth by nature. Error occurs by accident. In the case of taste, error happens when taste is clouded by a disease, a phenomenon that has no entity in itself but is rather a disorder of health, which in its turn is the harmony of body functions. In the case of the mind, error takes place when its harmony is disordered, that is, when the lower degrees of knowledge burst into the realm of the higher ones. In paragraph 165 of *De coniecturis*, Cusanus develops this idea. When a person's intellect is "absorbed by the otherness of reason"¹⁹, she mixes up true opinion with true understanding. Or when imagination absorbs reason, he might believe that what he imagines is true. Likewise, says Cusanus, the senses might absorb the imagination, and what somebody perceives is erroneously taken to be what she imagines. (In this last case, Cusanus' example is an infant, whose power of judgement is still unformed and thus it might believe its nanny is its mother.)

3. THE INNATE FORETASTE (*PRAEGUSTATIO CONNATURATA*) OF WISDOM IN *IDIO-TA. DE SAPIENTIA* (H V, N. 11)

Both the loving aspect of the *iudicium connatum* and its infallibility reappear in *Idiota. De sapientia*, where another characteristic of this criterion, namely, its innateness, is made explicit. Although Cusanus does not speak of *iudicium connatum* but of *praegustatio connaturata*, the context makes it clear that they are one and the same guiding principle. *De sapientia* is the first book of the tetralogy *Idiotae Librii*, four dialogues whose protagonist is the Layman, a character that represents the mind's capacity to attain wisdom on the basis of its own inner force. The expression "*praegustatio connaturata*" appears in paragraph 11, while the Layman is praising wisdom. On the one hand, wisdom is the closest understanding

¹⁹ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *Opera omnia* III. *De coniecturis*. Joseph Koch/Karl Bormann/Johannes Gerhard Senger (eds). Hamburgi: Felix Meiner 1971 (h III, n. 165). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa: Metaphysical Speculations* [Volume Two]. Minneapolis: Banning Press 2000.

that human beings can attain of the incomprehensible truth toward which their natural tendency leads them. In this sense, it is identified with the learned ignorance. On the other hand, wisdom is the incomprehensible truth itself, and in this sense, it is identified with the divine principle. The relationship between these two poles is one of participation, where the first one is the image and the second is the exemplar, and this participation is the condition that enables the human mind to search for truth. That is, because human wisdom participates in divine wisdom, human beings can seek for it. As Cusanus says, in order to be able to look for its food, the mind must be able to recognize it, but the recognition could not take place unless the mind already had a certain foretaste of what it looks for. The Layman calls this foretaste, which guides the mind toward its goal, “*praegustatio connaturata*”²⁰. As the last paragraph of the first book shows, *De sapientia* insists that the tasting of wisdom is a loving experience:

“[...] wisdom is not present in the art of rhetoric or in large books but in a separating from these sensible things and in a turning toward [that] infinite and most simple Form and in receiving Wisdom in a temple purged of all moral failing and in clinging to Wisdom with fervent love until you are able to taste of it and to see how delightful is that which itself is every delight.”²¹

The infallibility of the mind’s guiding principle is not stated as such in *De sapientia*, but the dialogue implicitly bears witness to the same idea that lies behind *De docta ignorantia*’s concept of error, namely, that by nature the mind chooses the truth, and that error occurs by accident. *De sapientia* has two characters, the Layman and the Orator; the Orator, as opposed to the Layman, leans on books and external authority. When the dialogue begins, the Orator’s mind has been corrupted by his submission to the authority of others. The adjective “corrupt” should not suggest “decomposed” (in the sense of “destroyed”) but rather “deviating”. Since Cusanus does not attribute to error an existence *per se*, what we call “error” always consists of a minor participation in the truth. Therefore, the Orator’s knowledge, the “knowledge that pertains to this world”²², should not be conceived as a false doctrine that is opposed to “true knowledge”²³. The Orator is “engaged in seeking wisdom” but “with much futile effort”²⁴. His natural appetite was diverted when he was seduced by a multitude of opinions. The *curiosa inquisitione* that drives him seems to be a strayed version of the desire for truth that is connatural to humans. The desire may have

²⁰ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De sapientia* (h V, n. 11).

²¹ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De sapientia* (h V, n. 27). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*. Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press 1996, 510. All the expressions quoted in the following paragraph are taken from this translation.

²² NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De sapientia* (h V, n. 1).

²³ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De sapientia* (h V, n. 1).

²⁴ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De sapientia* (h V, n. 2).

strayed, but it has not been destroyed. When the Layman offers the Orator fresh and natural food, his appetite is restored and it resumes its original path. The confrontation between both characters is very brief, and soon the Orator does not even depend on the Layman's advice. The latter has led him to rely on his own criterion, that is, on the healthy innate instinct which, without the distractive intermediation of authority, guides the mind in its search for truth and leads it to learned ignorance.

4. THE INNATE POWER TO JUDGE (*IUDICIUM CONCREATUM*, *VIS IUDICIARIA CONCREATA*) AND INNATE IDEAS (*NOTIONES CONCREATAS*) IN *IDIOTA. DE MENTE* (H V, NN. 74, 77 ET 78)

In the dialogue *Idiota. De mente*, the third book of the *Idiotae Librii*, the expression "*iudicium concreatum*" turns up for the first time in the title of chapter 4:

"Our mind is not the unfolding [*explicatio*] of the Eternal Enfolding [*complicatio aeterna*] but is its image [*imago*]. However, the things that are subsequent to mind are not an image. The mind is without concepts but does have a con-created power-of-judgment [*iudicium concreatum*]. Why a body is necessary for a mind"²⁵.

I quote the full title, because it provides the necessary context. It is a key chapter, which sets the difference between the mind and the rest of the creatures. While all creatures, because they are principiates, reveal their principle to a certain extent, only the mind shows it in its simplicity. In the rest of creation, the principle's unity is unfolded as the unity of multiplicity. This is the reason why only the mind can be called in a proper sense "*imago Dei*", whereas the other creatures are better described with the expression "*explicatio Dei*".

Being the simple image of absolute enfoldement (*complicatio absoluta*, i.e., the unity that encloses all being and all possibility of being, while remaining separated from its creatures), the mind "has the power by which it can assimilate itself to all unfolding"²⁶ (i.e., *explicatio*, the actual unfolding of creative divine force). In an earlier chapter, Cusanus has referred to this assimilating power of the mind:

²⁵ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 74). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 543–544.

²⁶ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 75). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 545.

“If you say that the Divine Mind is the All-encompassing Unity of the true nature of things, then you will say that our mind is an all-encompassing unity of the assimilation of things, so that it is an all-encompassing unity of concepts”.²⁷

Does this mean that the doctrine of the mind as *imago dei* implies innatism, in the sense that just as God enfolds in himself the whole of creation, the mind enfolds in itself the ideas of creation? It is within the framework of this problem, the problem of innatism, that the expression “*iudicium concreatum*” appears in the body of the text for the first time. During the discussion, “*concreatus, -a, -um*” also qualifies the nouns “*notion*” (*notio*) and “*power*” (*vis*). The Philosopher, the character who is the Layman’s interlocutor in this dialogue, asks him whether he adheres to the Aristotelian or to the Platonic position:

“Aristotle claimed that no concept is concreated with our mind or soul, inasmuch as he likened the mind to a blank tablet. But Plato maintained that concepts are concreated with our mind or soul, but [he said] that because of the burden of the body the soul has forgotten [them]. What do you believe to be true in this regard?”²⁸

The Layman’s answer is that no innate notions exist that are forgotten or lost when the mind animates a body, but rather the mind has an innate power [*vis concreata*] that needs to be stimulated by perception in order to become actual. In this sense, Aristotle was right. However, this innate power could not progress in the knowledge of things if it did not have an ability to judge that is not given by experience, since it is needed to organize and evaluate that same experience. So, in this sense, Plato was right: “If by ‘concreated concept’ [*notio concreata*] Plato meant this power, then he did not at all err”²⁹. Cusanus for his part calls it “*iudicium concreatum*”:

“[...] our mind has—concreated with it—power-of-judgment [*concreatum iudicium*], without which it could not learn. This power of judgment is, by nature, concreated with the mind. Through it the mind makes its own judgments about rational considerations—[judging] whether they are weak or strong or conclusive”.³⁰

The expression “*concreatum iudicium*” is used in this passage as a synonym of “*vis concreata*”. Although Cusanus may concede that Plato used the phrase “*notio concreata*” to describe that same power, he is adamant that this expression does not imply that the human mind enfolds, from the mo-

²⁷ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 72). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 543.

²⁸ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 77). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 545.

²⁹ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 77). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 545.

³⁰ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 77). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 545.

ment of its creation, a set of notions that correspond to the essences of the extramental world. The *iudicium concreatum* is a guiding principle, not a source of given information.

As regards *De docta ignorantia* and *De sapientia*, *De mente* discloses a new aspect of this innate guiding principle. Not only does it organize human knowledge. It also leads human beings toward what is good. That is, it has an ethical facet:

“For, clearly, we experience that there is a mental power [*spiritus*] speaking with-in our mind and judging this thing to be good, that thing to be just, another thing to be true—and reproving us if we veer from what is just. The mind did not at all learn this discourse and this judgment; rather, they are innate to it”.³¹

According to this excerpt, the innate judgment guides the human mind not only toward truth but also toward the good. There is therefore an innate power in the mind that distinguishes good from evil: a spirit that speaks and judges. The context in which this passage is inserted denies, as seen, the existence of an innate given knowledge. Just as the mind does not contain notions that reflect the essences of extramental things, it does not possess a given code that regulates behaviour. This does not contradict the fact that there are laws connatural to the mind, such as the ones referred to above³².

5. THE INNATE POWER (*VIS CONCREATA*) IN *IDIOTA. DE MENTE* (H V, NN. 147–149)

The nature of the innate power, and the question of its assimilation to the first principle, are further explained in *De mente*, paragraphs 147 and 148. The power of judgement is God's image in the human mind, and it is so because it is an image of the divine activity or art [*ars divina*], namely, creation. The mind is therefore active, and its action is creation. This is why it may be called “*imago viva*”: because it has the power to conform itself, without limit, to its exemplar. In doing so, the mind imitates infinity in the best way it can. It happens that the mind, being an image, does not fully realize its exemplar's perfection, but rather is its reflection. Therefore infinity, which in the exemplar is actual, in the image is a potency [*potentia*] “to conform itself ever more and more, without limit, to its inacces-

³¹ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 78). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 546.

³² On the issue of Cusanus' type of innatism, see KREMER, Klaus: *Das kognitive und affektive Apriori bei der Erfassung des Sittlichen*, in: *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft* 26. Trier: Paulinus 2000, 101–144 and FIAMMA, Andrea: *La questione dell'innatismo nel De mente di Nicola Cusano*, in: DALL'IGNA, Antonio/ROBERI, Damiano (eds): *Cusano e Leibniz: Prospettive filosofiche*. Milano: Mimesis Edizioni 2013.

sible exemplar”³³. The word “potency” signifies both possibility and power. The mind, a living image, has the power and the possibility of assimilating itself more and more to its exemplar. This explains why the mind is not a substrate in which the essences of all things are inscribed from the moment of its creation. Its resemblance to the divine principle consists in reflecting the divine activity. Just as God creates being, the mind, stimulated by the world that is offered to the senses, creates concepts. It is therefore “a perfect and living image of the Infinite Art”³⁴, that is, a power. As its exemplar, this power is triune.

“Therefore, mind is three and one—having power, wisdom, and the union of both in such a way that it is a perfect image of the Art, i.e., in such a way that it can conform itself, when stimulated, ever more and more to its Exemplar. In this way, even though our mind at the outset of its creation does not have the actual reflection of the Creative Art in terms of trinity and oneness, nevertheless it does have the concreate power [*vis concreata*] through which it can make itself, when stimulated, more conformed to the actuality of the Divine Art”³⁵.

6. THE INNATE DISPOSITION (*APTITUDO CONCREATA*) IN *IDIOTA. DE MENTE* (H V, N. 155)

The adjective *concreatus*, -a, -um reappears in paragraph 155, qualifying the innate ability of the mind to learn again things that it has forgotten. The human mind’s search for truth, which, as seen above, is a creative activity, can be described as a transferring to the immutable realm of truth of the notions acquired in this mutable world. Because the mind is a creature, it is limited, and one of the signs of this limitation is that without a body it cannot be stimulated to know³⁶. Therefore, to obtain notions it must proceed from perception to imagination, from imagination to reason, and from reason to intellectual knowledge. Contrary to what it would seem, intellectual knowledge is not the result of a process of abstraction. Nevertheless, the mind has to go through abstraction to attain it³⁷. It is a type of knowledge that transcends the contradiction between opposites, to which the mind is subjected as long as it sticks to the principle of non-

³³ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 149). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 582.

³⁴ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 149). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 582.

³⁵ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 149). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 582.

³⁶ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 155).

³⁷ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, nn. 152–153).

contradiction stated by Aristotle. Being infinite, truth lies beyond all opposites³⁸.

The mind's necessary bond with the body is the cause of its forgetfulness. While human spirits that have acquired supreme blessedness after bodily death possess concepts that are both immutable and unforgettable, as long as the spirit (i.e., the mind) is bound up with the body in order to know, it will find distractions, it will deviate from its object, and it will forget what it has learned³⁹. Sanctified spirits do not forget because they are blessed with the continuous presence of the truth. That is not the case of the still embodied mind, which lives the paradox of needing the body to know, and at the same time forgetting what it learns because of the body. In order for it to successfully pursue its end, it has "a permanent concreated aptitude [*aptitudo concreata permanens*] for relearning"⁴⁰ the immutable notions it has forgotten.

This innate aptitude or capacity, necessary for the mind to achieve its goal, is none other than the power to judge referred to in previous passages. Despite its being an innate criterion that evaluates experience, and therefore not acquired through it, each quotation has showed it, up to now, as inevitably linked to this same experience. Its power cannot be unfolded unless sensorial perception awakens it. Paragraphs 152 to 155 of *De mente* acknowledge this necessary bond with the body, while underlining that the *iudicium connatum* is an innate capacity that the mind possesses to draw itself toward the upper realms of knowledge whenever it loses its way to truth. In this sense, the *aptitudo concreata permanens* can be identified with *Idiota. De sapientia's praegustatio connaturata*, the innate foretaste of wisdom, that rescues the Orator from the authority of other people's opinions.

7. THE JUDGEMENT CREATED TOGETHER WITH THE MIND (*IUDICIUM MENTIS SIBI CONCREATUM*) IN *IDIOTA. DE MENTE* (H V, N. 158)

Just as the previous reference highlights the innate power of judgement's link to the material world, the following one gives emphasis to its independence from it. The expression "*iudicium mentis sibi concreatum*" (judgement created together with the mind) comes up while discussing the mind's immortality, a consideration that develops from paragraph 156 to 159, the penultimate one of the dialogue. When knowing, the mind abstracts forms from the mutable world in which it finds them and it draws them towards

³⁸ Cf., for example, NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De docta ignorantia* (h I) cc. 1–5 and cc. 11–12 and *De mente* (h V), cc. 7–9.

³⁹ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, nn. 154–155).

⁴⁰ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 155). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 585.

itself, but the immutable truth that thus the forms acquire does not belong to the things from which the mind has abstracted them, but to the mind's own nature: "The immutable truth of geometrical figures is not found on the floor but in the mind", writes Cusanus⁴¹. This would not be possible if the mind was not immutable in itself.

All of the above can also be applied to the power of judgement that has been created together with the mind. According to a previous reference, this judgment is necessary to advance knowledge, since it assesses whether the mind's reasons are weak, strong, or conclusive⁴². Now, if this judgment is the criterion by which the knowledge obtained from experience is measured, it is clear that it, in turn, is not derived from experience and can not be measured by it: in fact, neither by experience nor by the notions abstracted from it.

Thus, the adjective "*concreatum*" shows its full meaning: the mind's power to judge has been created in it and together with it. Moreover, it is the living image of truth, by means of which the mind can realize its end, that is, can apprehend the non-apprehensible truth in a non-apprehensible way. This description does not imply that the mind is one thing and its power to judge is another. Neither the mind nor its power to judge are "things" but rather one and the same activity, which unfolds in different levels: the sensorial, the imaginative, the rational, and, when it finally returns to itself, the intellectual.

"If someone takes note of the mind's concreated power-of-judgment, through which the mind judges about all rational considerations, and if he notes that rational considerations are from mind, then he recognizes that no reasoning attains unto the measurements of the mind. Therefore, our mind remains unmeasurable by, unboundable by, and undelimitable by any reasoning. Only the Uncreated [Divine] Mind measures, delimits, and bounds our mind—even as Truth measures, delimits, and bounds its own living image, created from Truth, in Truth, and through Truth".⁴³

8. INNATE RELIGION (*CONNATA RELIGIO*) IN *DE MENTE* (H V, N. 159)

The Layman ends his defense of the soul's immortality with a reference to innate religion (*connata religio*), "which has brought these countless people to Rome this year and has led you, a philosopher, unto intense wonderment, and which has always been manifest in the world in a diversity of modes"⁴⁴. The innate religion

⁴¹ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 156).

⁴² NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 72).

⁴³ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 158). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 588.

⁴⁴ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 159). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 588.

"[...] attests that immortality-of-mind is naturally bestowed upon us. Thus, the immortality of our mind is known to us from the common, undisputed affirmation of all men—just as the humanity of our nature [is so known]. For we do not have more assured knowledge that we are human beings than we have that we possess immortal minds, since the knowledge of both is the common affirmation of all men".⁴⁵

The excerpt quoted above shows the identity between innate religion, innate power to judge and innate foretaste, although this is not the only possible interpretation. The dialogue happens in Rome, during the Jubilee of 1450, and the "countless people" mentioned in the quotation are the pilgrims reunited there. At the beginning of the dialogue, there has been a first reference to the drive that leads pilgrims to Rome and it has been called "faith": "For although no one individual can be like another, nevertheless among all these individuals there is a single faith that has brought them here, in such deep devotion, from the ends of the earth".⁴⁶

Since the occasion is the Jubilee and the goal is Rome, it is understandable that M. Honecker and H. Menzel-Rogner have translated "*connata religio*" into German as "*unsere Religion*" ("our religion")⁴⁷. "Our religion", the Catholic one, brings countless people together, promises them immortality and leads them to Rome. Nevertheless, I agree with Jasper Hopkins on the idea that in *De mente* the expression "*connata religio*" enfolds much more than a reference to Catholicism⁴⁸.

According to paragraph 159, innate religion is an appetite that sets people in search for truth and revives natural wonder in those who, like the philosopher, have been misled toward academic knowledge. It also gives human beings a taste of their own immortality. This experience is identified with another immediate understanding, that of being human.

As specified in *De docta ignorantia* and in *Idiota. De sapientia*, those are the functions of the innate power to judge or, as the latter calls it, the innate foretaste of wisdom. The human mind's ascent toward truth is unfolded under the guidance of a foretaste of truth, which on its turn is desired by the mind precisely because it possesses this foretaste. In other words: when the mind desires the truth, it becomes aware that it already knows it, because if it didn't, then it couldn't desire it. But at the same

⁴⁵ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 159). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 588.

⁴⁶ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De mente* (h V, n. 51). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, 533.

⁴⁷ Quoted by Jasper Hopkins in his *Nicholas of Cusa: Metahysical Speculations: Volume Two*. Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press 2000, 342.

⁴⁸ HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa: Metahysical Speculations: Volume Two*, 58. On the subject of faith, and the tension between its dogmatic and innate dimensions, see ZIEBART, K.M.: *Nicolaus Cusanus on Faith and Intellect: A Case Study in 15th Century Fides-Ratio Controversy*. Leiden: Brill 2014.

time, it realizes that if it fully knew the truth, then it would not want it, because it would already possess it. Thus, the human mind comes to know that it is not truth itself, but its image.

When the mind learns that it is an image of truth, at the same time it learns that it is a living image, since its nature as image has been revealed to it by virtue of a permanent and innate desire, a desire that knows no limit. Knowing itself to be a living image is the same as knowing that it is immortal, because the incommensurability of the truth toward which it strives entails that the search has no end. The mind's experience of its own immortality is the core of innate religion, because when the mind knows itself as the image of truth, then it implicitly acknowledges that truth exists. Cusanus believes that the search for truth reveals to the seeker that the object of his or her search exists and can be identified with the infinite God. Since every human being *qua* human being seeks the truth, every human being participates in innate religion.

9. INNATE DESIRE AND INNATE RELIGION IN *DE PACE FIDEI* (H VII, N. 45)

The existence of an innate religion is the underlying presupposition of the *De pace fidei*. Written by Nicholas following the fall of Constantinople in the hands of the Turks in 1453, *De pace fidei* intends to show that behind the variety of rites and ceremonies there is a central belief common to all human beings, i.e., an innate religion. The author states so in paragraph 16: "[...] for all those who are of sound understanding there is one religion and worship, which is presupposed in the diversity of the rites".⁴⁹

The narrator of this work is a pious man who has had a vision and consequently transcribes it: he has been witness to a heavenly agora, where delegates of all religions participate. The agora was called by God the Father and is presided over by His Word; indeed, the lines just quoted above are attributed by Cusanus to the Word, who at that moment is talking to the Arab, one of the characters that represent Islamic monotheism.

The notion of innate religion reappears during a discussion on the union of human and divine natures in Christ, held by Saint Peter and a character called the Syrian. Although the first part of this discussion is theological, in chapter 13 Peter's argumentation is based on an anthropological experience, namely, the innate desire for happiness. His line of reasoning shows a close link between innate desire and innate religion. The Syrian, who has already accepted the union of human and divine natures in Christ, consequently asks the apostle which shared presuppositions could help the various sects to attain agreement on this subject. Pe-

⁴⁹ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De pace fidei* (h VII, n. 16). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa's De pace fidei and Cribratio alkorani*, translation and analysis. Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press 1994, 640.

ter answers that the shared presupposition in question is the universal desire for happiness. He identifies this happiness with eternal life and more precisely with eternal life in the form that is specific to human beings: "Men seek after happiness (which is eternal life) in no other nature than their own. A man wishes to be only a man—not an angel or any other nature. But he wishes to be a happy man who attains ultimate happiness".⁵⁰

Human being's happiness or eternal life necessarily implies union with God, since human nature needs to adhere to divine nature in order for it to achieve immortality. This necessary union has been completed in Christ, who is therefore the man through whom all human beings can access God as the goal of their desire. Therefore, Peter concludes, the innate desire for happiness shared by all human beings is a desire for Christ.

Peter's argument seeks to show that both the doctrine of the hypostatic union, on which Christ's role as mediator between God and man is based, and the doctrine of eternal life are reasonable, that is, there is nothing in them that directly contradicts the principles of reason, which is all human being's specific form. Hence his conclusion, that they are both implicit as a presupposition in every person's search for happiness. Although Peter's reasoning is based on a shared human experience, the vocabulary he uses is theological; it is the Syrius who sums it up with philosophical terminology, equating the universal desire for happiness, which Peter identified with the desire for eternal life, with the universal desire for wisdom.

"Now, everyone's hope is to be able some day to attain unto the happiness on account of which every religion exists. And there is no deception in this respect, because this hope, which is common to all, stems from an innate desire. From this common hope there follows religious conviction, which, accordingly, is also innate to all".⁵¹

The Syrius's recapitulation provides another piece of information. The desire for happiness, which saint Peter understands to be desire for eternal life, can also be described as desire for wisdom. In other words, whenever it is said that human beings *qua* human beings desire knowledge, it is being said that they desire eternal life. Human beings' longing for happiness is fulfilled by nothing other than the truth. Now, Christ is the truth and adhesion to Him entails the obtention of eternal life.

Cusanus aim in this passage is to show that all human beings share an implicit desire for Christ, which manifests itself as a desire for knowledge or truth. The Syrian expresses this by saying that the human intellect's search for wisdom presupposes that some intellect has attained it. Since this search cannot be in vain, then it must be admitted that there is an in-

⁵⁰ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De pace fidei* (h VII, n. 44). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa's De pace fidei and Cribratio alkorani*, 656.

⁵¹ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De pace fidei* (h VII, n. 45). Translation: HOPKINS, Jaspers: *Nicholas of Cusa's De pace fidei and Cribratio alkorani*, translation and analysis, 656.

tellest, a supreme intellect, that reached the goal. This supreme intellect is Christ.

10. THE INNATE LIGHT (*LUMEN CONCREATUM*) IN *DE PACE FIDEI* (H VII, N. 59)

A new character that comes forth in chapter 16 of *De pace fidei*, restarts the discussion about the mind's innate power. He is the Tartar and appears to be, using an anachronistic vocabulary, a noble savage. That is, a simple, innocent, and illiterate man, albeit pious; a man whose spiritual development depends solely on the natural light of reason. The text does not explicitly describe him as such, but his goodwill and common sense are conveyed by his attitude. He is a pagan who has a natural desire for conversion. Appropriately, his interlocutor is the apostle Paul, whom the same text calls the "Teacher of the Gentiles", a name that Paul gives to himself in 1 Timothy 2:7 and 2 Timothy 1:11, and that is used referring to the specificity of his apostleship as a diffusor of Christianity. As is well known, Paul is also the first Christian theorist to introduce the notion of "natural law", that same law that in this chapter 16 will be said to be illuminated by an "innate light" (*lumen concreatum*).

The episode begins when the Tartar, who confesses monotheism, wonders at the variety of rites and sacrifices (circumcision, baptism, polygamy, communion) by which others worship the same God that he worships and he asks how could religious unity be achieved, given the diversity of existing practices. Paul answers that the soul's salvation does not depend on works but on faith. The multiple and diverse practices are but the perceptible signs of true faith, and although the signs might change, faith remains unchanged. If salvation depended on works, it would be a payment to something owed. But what could God owe to man? God "bestows upon whom He will that which He wills to"⁵². The promise of salvation has been made "on the basis of grace alone"⁵³ and human beings attain the fulfillment of the promise solely by believing in the divine Word.

Now, although salvation depends not on works but on faith, this faith is dead unless it is vivified by the love infused by the Holy Spirit. Cusanus expresses this idea through Paul, who intervenes with a reference to the expression "*Fides caritate formata*", saying: "Without faith it is impossible for anyone to please God. But faith has to be formed; for without works it is dead".⁵⁴ Although the expression reached its classical formulation with St.

⁵² NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De pace fidei* (h VII, n. 55). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa's De pace fidei and Cribratio alkorani*, translation and analysis, 663.

⁵³ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De pace fidei* (h VII, n. 55). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa's De pace fidei and Cribratio alkorani*, translation and analysis, 633.

⁵⁴ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De pace fidei* (h VII, n. 58). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa's De pace fidei and Cribratio alkorani*, translation and analysis, 664.

Thomas Aquinas, its attribution to Paul is legitimate because it is based on a certain interpretation of Romans 5:5. From verse 1 to 5 it reads as follows:

“(1) So far then we have seen that, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by faith we are judged righteous and at peace with God, (2) since it is by faith and through Jesus that we have entered this state of grace in which we can boast about looking forward to God's glory. (3) But that is not all we can boast about; we can boast about our sufferings. These sufferings bring patience, as we know, (4) and patience brings perseverance, and perseverance brings hope, and this hope is not deceptive, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us”.⁵⁵

From a grammatical point of view, the expression «the love of God» in verse 5 is a genitive. From Origen to Martin Luther in 1515, including St. Augustine, St. Thomas, and certainly Cusanus, who uses it repeatedly, it has been understood as an objective genitive, i.e. a construction where “God” is the object. That is to say that from the first theological interpretations of this expression to the beginning of the 16th century it was understood that “the love of God” that the Holy Spirit pours in our hearts is our love for God. The Lutheran doctrine of justification by grace alone interpreted it for the first time as a subjective genitive, where “God” is the subject. This is better understood in English if we translate “*caritas Dei*” as “God’s love” instead of “the love of God”. Thus, it can be seen how the expression can also refer to God’s love for us.

The Council of Trent pronounced itself against this interpretation. Although the polemic is a hundred years posterior to Cusanus’ death and therefore of no consequence to his work, my reference to it is meant to emphasize that despite Paul’s and the Tartar’s insistence on the role of grace during the first paragraphs of the chapter, Cusanus subscribes to the traditional doctrine that combines grace with works. The explanation given by Paul in the dialogue is relatively simple and leads to the expression “*lumen concreatum*”.

As quoted above, Paul says to the Tartar: “Without faith it is impossible for anyone to please God. But faith has to be formed; for without works it is dead”. It refers to the first line of Romans 5: “[...] by faith we are judged righteous and at peace with God”. To be judged righteous is equivalent to being found worthy of fulfilling the divine promise, that is, of attaining happiness, i.e. blessedness, i.e. eternal life. The promise, says Paul, is grounded in the promise that God made Abraham: namely, to give him a descendant in whom all nations would be blessed. God judged Abraham righteous, so that he could attain the promise, understood, in this first instance, as the conception and birth of Isaac, which Sarah’s age made naturally impossible. It happened, but “had Abraham not believed God, he

⁵⁵ Romans 5:1–5 in: *The Jerusalem Bible, Reader's Edition*, ed. Alexander Jones. New York: Doubleday (1968), 201.

would not have obtained either justification or [fulfillment of] the promise".⁵⁶

Now, the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise has been completed in Christ. Only faith in Him, therefore, enables human beings to attain eternal life. Paul has added something more: this faith must be vivified (i.e. "formed") by works; without them, it is dead. The works in question are nothing but the observance of the commandments. The Tartar worries. Given the variety of sects, how could harmony be reached in this respect? Which are the commandments that should be followed in order to attain blessedness? Paul calms him down. The commandments are very few, notorious to all and common to all nations. The reason why every human being can attain them is that "the light that shows us these [commandments] is created together with the rational soul" ("*...lumen nobis illa ostendens est concreatum rationali animae*"). God speaks within us, Paul continues, and He commands us to love Him and to do to others only what we would like to be done to us. "Therefore, love is the fulfillment of God's law, and all [other] laws are reducible to the law of love".⁵⁷ The Tartar is satisfied: "I do not doubt that both faith and the law of love—about both of which you have spoken—will be accepted by the Tartars".⁵⁸

11. CONCLUSIONS

In this article I have surveyed Cusanus' main references to the innate power that guides the image, that is, the human mind, to its exemplar, that is, truth. From this survey, it follows that the innate power to judge has, apart from a cognitional dimension, an affective and a social one, a fact that gives rise to some questions.

(a) The expressions "innate judgement" (*iudicium connatum*: h I, n. 2), "innate forestaste" (*praegustatio connaturata*: h V, n. 11), "innate power" (*vis concreata*: h V, nn. 78 and 149), "innate aptitude" (*aptitudo connata*: h V, n. 155), "innate power of judgement" (*iudicium concreatum*: h V, n. 74, 158), "innate religion" (*connata religio*: h V, n. 159 and h VII, n. 46), and "innate desire" (*connatum desiderium*: h VII, n. 45) signify a reality that for Cusanus is one and the same. It is an innate movement or tendency that constitutes the human mind. This movement manifests itself as a desire for happiness. Because this happiness, which lies in attaining union with divine wisdom, is reached only by adhering to Christ, this desire is reli-

⁵⁶ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De pace fidei* (h VII, n. 56). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa's De pace fidei and Cribratio alkorani*, translation and analysis, 663.

⁵⁷ All the quotations above in NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De pace fidei* (h VII, n. 59). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa's De pace fidei and Cribratio alkorani*, translation and analysis, 665.

⁵⁸ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De pace fidei* (h VII, n. 60). Translation: HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa's De pace fidei and Cribratio alkorani*, translation and analysis, 665

gion, Christian religion, even when the desiring mind does not know whom it desires. Insofar as the mind's essential desire is a desire for truth, the innate power to judge has a cognitional dimension.

(b) In addition to its cognitional dimension, the innate power to judge is described in *De docta ignorantia* as a weight by virtue of which intellectual natures are able to attain rest in their beloved goal. The desire for truth has therefore a loving or affective dimension as well. What is its nature? How does it relate to the cognitional aspect of the human mind's movement?

(c) The notion of "innate light" in *De pace fidei*, i.e. a light that illuminates the commandment that sums up all the other commandments, opens the question of the character of natural law in Cusanus' thought. In *De concordantia catholica* he wrote: "All legislation has its root in natural law, and if it contradicts natural law, it cannot be valid legislation. Hence, since natural law is naturally within the reason, every law is, at its root, innate to man".⁵⁹ If the commandment that sums up all the others is to love each other as Christ has loved us, is it love, then, that natural law in which all constitutions must have its roots to be valid? Does the loving dimension of the mind beget a social dimension, which would be the foundation of social order?

Abstract

This article collects and analyzes the occasions on which Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) refers, in his philosophical works, to the iudicium connatum or concreatum, that is, the human mind's innate power. Its aim is to examine the different uses that Cusanus attributes to this power, usually understood merely as cognitional, in order to find out whether the notion includes other aspects of the human mind's journey toward the truth.

⁵⁹ NICOLAI DE CUSA: *De concordantia catholica* (h XIV, 127). Translation: GALLAGHER: *De concordantia Catholica*. New Jersey: Princeton 2010. Excerpts published in: *Natural Law, Natural Rights, and American Constitutionalism* found at: <http://www.nlnrac.or>.