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Autor: Fiamma, Andrea

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ANDREA FIAMMA[1]

The *Fundamentum naturae* and the Plato-Aristotle controversy in Nicholas of Cusa's *De docta ignorantia*

INTRODUCTION: A CASE OF PLAGIARISM?

Much has been written about the possibility of applying the modern category of plagiarism to the analysis of a work composed in the Late Middle Ages. In that period, intellectual activity was conceived as the reworking of the cultural tradition(s), reading and sharing texts of the previous centuries, considered to be milestones and essential reference points for contemporary (and future) thinking. Theologians and philosophers during the late Middle Ages, instead of reformulating the ideas of the ancients in a new, personal manner, appropriating only the doctrinal contents of their texts, sometimes preferred to plagiarize these works, effecting juxtapositions of their textual parts. What began as an unsystematic technique in the early Middle Ages became a consolidated practice in the transmission of culture in the 15th centuries. With such copy-paste, they placed the "new" works in the wake of the "ancient" ones.

This, so to speak, "plagiarism" permitted the transmission of the latter over the centuries and encouraged their spread in ever new ways and in heterogeneous contexts, from Universities to monastery libraries. For this reason, many works found of the 14th or 15th century codices are constructed as compositions of sections of texts, joined to one another like tiles in a mosaic. This technique used in the construction of works is nowadays called "textual bricolage"[2]. Theologians and philosophers borrowed whole

[1] This research was funded by the Department of Philosophy "Piero Martinetti" of the University of Milan under the Project "Departments of Excellence 2018–2022" awarded by the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR).

[2] Cf. ECO, Umberto: *Riflessioni sulle tecniche di citazione nel Medioevo*, in: *Ideologie e pratiche del reimpiego nell'alto Medioevo*. Spoleto: Fondazione CISAM 1999, 461–484; BRÎNZEI, Monica: *Plagium*, in: ATUCHA, Iñigo/CALMA, Dragos/KÖNIG-PRALONG, Catherine/ZAVATTERO, Irene (eds.): *Mots médiévaux offerts à Ruedi Imbach*. Turnhout: Brepols 2011, 559–568, on 561f. distinguished different kinds of textual *bricolage*; Cf. KALUZA, Zénon: *Auteur et plagiaire : quelques remarques*, in: AERTSEN, Jan A./SPEER, Andreas (eds.): *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter? = Qu'est-ce que la philosophie au moyen âge? = What is Philosophy in the Middle Ages?* Berlin: De Gruyter 1998, 312–320; ZAHND, Ueli: *Plagiats individualisés et stratégies de singularisation. L'évolution du livre IV du commentaire commun des Sentences de Vienne*, in: BRÎNZEI, Monica (ed.): *Nicholas of Dinkelsbühl and the Sentences at Vienna in the Early Fifteenth Century*. Turnhout: Brepols 2015, 85–265.

sections of the works of the ancients without mentioning either their titles or the names of their authors. What was important was the final product, that is to say, the assembly of a sum of knowledge, until then available in the previous textual traditions, that would provide the best possible doctrinal framework, presented in the clearest and most exhaustive manner.

The modern comprehension of the writer, conceived as a creative subject and holder of rights, was far to come. The discovery of these plagiarized sections to a certain extent shocks the modern reader, a reaction that would not have been shared by an author of that time. In 1995, Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen attracted scholars' attention by publishing, in the appendix to one of his articles, the edition of an anonymous treatise that opens with the words 'Fundamentum naturae', and which is contained at ff. 4r-10r in the codex numbered 'sr 687' in the Eichstätter Universitätsbibliothek—hereafter indicated by "FN".

Hoenen maintained that this work constitutes a "Vorlage des Kernstücks der *Docta ignorantia*"[3] (Nicholas of Cusa's *De docta ignorantia* will be indicated hereafter as "*DDI*"[4]) and that it must have been "vermutlich integral und wörtlich in die Docta ignorantia eingearbeitet" by Nicholas of Cusa[5]; indeed, "was er in diesen Kapiteln ausführt, hat er wohl dem Traktat *Fundamentum naturae* [...] wörtlich entnommen"[6]. Hoenen's discovery was surprising for the scholars because it refers to one of the most famous sections in *DDI*, that is Book II, chapters 7–10. Nicholas of Cusa re-elaborates the Platonic notion of 'soul of the world' there, applying his learned ignorance method and presents a cosmological doctrine that, he declare, it has never been heard anywhere else—these are things "prius inaudita"!—, that is: the universe is a self-relating unit, constituted in the image of the Tri-

[3] HOENEN, Maarten J.F.M.: *'Ista prius inaudita'. Eine neuentdeckte Vorlage der Docta ignorantia und ihre Bedeutung für die frühe Philosophie des Nikolaus von Kues*, in: Medioevo. Rivista di storia della filosofia medievale 21 (1995), 375–476, see 380. The *Fundamentum naturae* manuscript can be found in Cod. sr 687 in the Eichstätter Universitätsbibliothek, f. 4r-10r. This manuscript codex contains some works by Georg Schwartz and Johannes Tinctores, besides some 'notulae' on Thomas Aquinas' *De fato* and *De vero et falso*, on the Thomist notions of movement and abstraction and a copy of Dionysius the Areopagite's *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, cf. HOENEN, Maarten J.F.M.: *Speculum philosophiae medii aevi. Die Handschriftensammlung des Dominikaners Georg Schwartz († nach 1484)*. Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner 1994, 84–91.

[4] NICOLAUS DE CUSA: *De docta ignorantia*, in: *Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate academiae litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita*, Vol. I, hgg. v. Ernst Hoffmann, Raymond Klibansky. Leipzig: Meiner 1932.

[5] HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 380

[6] HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*. 387.

nity[7]; it is like an infinite sphere which has neither a centre nor a circumference[8].

Similarly, *FN* intends to show that it is not a shapeless matter that lies at the 'basis' of nature, as the Platonic philosophers maintained, according to Nicholas of Cusa's text, but a self-moving spirit, which is God: according to the author of the treatise, the indeterminate matter that constitutes nature and God coincide[9]. After presenting God as the 'absolute necessity', *FN* explains that the universe, in being a manifestation of God, is a 'maximum contractum'[10], which is in itself compounded of possibility and form and the tie between the two, which is called 'motus' or 'spiritus'[11].

The treatise further states that God reveals Himself in four different ways of being, a doctrine that explicitly recalls both Thierry of Chartres' commentary on *Genesis* and precisely the second book of *DDI*. Hoenen points out a surprising affinity between *FN* and Nicholas of Cusa's text in

[7] SCHNARR, Hermann: *Modi essendi. Interpretationen zu den Schriften* De docta ignorantia, De coniecturis *und* De venatione sapientiae *von Nikolaus von Kues*. Münster: Aschendorff 1973, 22f.

[8] FIAMMA, Andrea: *La réception du Timée par Nicolas de Cues (*De docta ignorantia *II, 9)*, in: Revue des Sciences Religieuses 9 (2017) 1, 39–55, where at 42f I accepted the individuation of the sources proposed by Hoffmann and Klibansky in the edition of DDI (1932), *Introduzione*, X–XII, according to which Nicholas of Cusa must have developed the central chapters of the second book after reading Thierry of Chartres' commentary on Genesis. Indentifing Nicholas of Cusa's source in the Chartres school was proposed at the beginning of the twentieth century by DUHEM, Pierre: *Thierry de Chartres et Nicolas de Cues*, in: Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques 3 (1909), 525–531, see 521f. and *Le Système du Monde: histoire des doctrines cosmologiques de Platon à Copernic*, tome X. Paris: Hermann 1959, 269–275 (where he accused Nicholas of Cusa of "plagiarism"), and was later traced more precisely by HAUBST, Rudolf: *Das Bild des Einen und Dreieinen Gottes in der Welt nach Nikolaus von Kues*. Trier: Paulinus Verlag 1952, 99–144 and 203–299, and by SANTINELLO, Giovanni: *Mittelalterliche Quellen der ästhetischen Weltanschauung des Nikolaus von Kues*, in: WILPERT Paul/ ECKERT, Willehad P. (eds.): *Die Metaphysik im Mittelalter. Ihr Ursprung und ihre Bedeutung*. Berlin: De Gruyter 1963, 679–685. In summary, Hoenen's article, *Ista prius inaudita*, contributed to re-opening the discussion of the sources of *DDI*. The hypothesis of the Chartres source has recently been reconfirmed by ALBERTSON, David: *A learned thief? Nicholas of Cusa and the anonymous Fundamentum naturae: Reassessing the Vorlage theory*, in: RTPM 77 (2010) 2, 351–390, see 351–356, who also offers a historiographical reconstruction of the relationship between Thierry of Chartres and Nicholas of Cusa (see in footnote no. 11 at 355); cf. also ALBERTSON, David: *A late medieval reaction to Thierry of Chartress (d. 1157) philosophy: The anti-platonist argument of the anonymous Fundamentum naturae*, in: Vivarium 50 (2012) 1, 53–84; for a comprehensive interpretation of the Chartres School's influence on Nicholas of Cusa, cf. ALBERTSON, David: *Mathematical Theologies: Nicholas of Cusa and the Legacy of Thierry of Chartres*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014 and RUSCONI, Cecilia: *Cusanus und Thierry von Chartres. Die Einteilung der spekulativen Wissenschaften und der Begriff* forma essendi *in* De possest *und im Kommentar* Libum hunc, in: SCHWAETZER, Harald /ZEYER, Kirstin (eds.): *Das europäische Erbe im Denken des Nikolaus von Kues: Geistesgeschichte als Geistesgegenwart*. Münster: Aschendorf 2008, 285–302.

[9] HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 393.

[10] *DDI* II, c. 9, n. 58, 1f.

[11] HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 394.

terms of philosophical concepts,[12] and even the use of the same linguistic expressions to denote the characteristic concepts in Nicholas of Cusa's philosophy[13]; these and other considerations lead Hoenen to conclude that "die wichtigsten Gedanken der frühen Cusanischen Philosophie [..] bereits in unserem Traktat enthalten sind"[14].

Hoenen evaluates some hypotheses concerning the identification of the author of *FN*. First, he writes, it is necessary to consider the eventuality that the treatise might be a draft drawn up by Nicholas of Cusa himself in the years preceding his writing *DDI*, or a later reformulation of the second book alone[15]. However, there are several objections to this: it would not explain, for example, the reason why Nicholas of Cusa makes no mention of *FN* in his later works, or why it is not mentioned in catalogues, lists or documents concerning the heritage Nicholas of Cusa left in his library; a further objection is why this anonymous treatise was transcribed in a codex containing the works of Georg Schwartz, a Dominican friar in St. Andrew's convent in Cologne.

Hoenen is of the opinion that *FN* was written by an author other than Nicholas of Cusa, who, however, must have been working in the same places he frequented. Nicholas of Cusa may have used the treatise as a 'Vorlage' of *DDI* II, 7–10, much as he had already done in the past since he used the *Defensor pacis* by Marsilius of Padua to draw up the introduction to

[12] HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 401: "auffallende Übereinstimmung". The philosophical theses that Hoenen considers 'similar' are the following: (1) the opposites of the contracted world coincide; (2) there is neither a maximum nor a minimum in the contracted world since there are only the more and the less there; (3) in the contracted world one can have no precise equality; (4) there is an absolute difference between the absolute (infinite) and the contracted (finite), and it is not possible to identify any middle term; (5) the divine trinity is composed of possibility (father), form (son) and nexus (spirit); (6) the contracted universe is articulated in everything, as in the two parts, in a trinitarian manner. Despite these numerous affinities, Hoenen also points out the differences between the theses maintained by Nicholas of Cusa and those found in *FN*: (1) the *regula doctae ignorantiae* is used in both texts but it is not presented in *FN* explicitly as a philosophical method; (2) there is no 'terminus ad quem' of the coincidence of opposites in *FN*; 3) in *FN* the doctrine of learned ignorance is merely outlined and does not assume the centrality that Nicholas of Cusa, on the contrary, proposes for it; (4) there are no Christological references in *FN*, which on the contrary constitute the introducetion to the treatise of the third book of *DDI*.

[13] HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 447–476, where there is a synopsis of *FN* and *DDI* II, c. 7–10.

[14] HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 402.

[15] Nicholas of Cusa mentions a similar attempt at a compendium of the *DDI* of the issues already addressed in the book, including the relationship between singularity and universality; he wrote this "little book" in Orvieto and he called it *De figura mundi*, cf. NICOLAUS DE CUSA: *De venatione Sapientiae*, in: *Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate academiae litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita*, vol. XII, ed. by Robert Klibansky, Hans G. Senger. Leipzig: Meiner 1982, c. 22, n. 67, 17–18: "Supra de his atque in libello, quem de figura mundi nuperrime in Urbe Veteri compilavi".

the third book of *De concordantia catholica*[16]. This conclusion aroused much discontent among scholars, above all because it raised doubts about the originality of a very important part of *DDI*[17]. Indeed, in the 19th century Nicholas of Cusa historiography had already pointed to those very chapters in his text as the most 'modern' of his entire works: in those pages, the philosopher from Kues is believed to have managed even to anticipate the formulation of Copernican doctrines about the universe[18].

In my book, published in 2019 and entitled *Nicola Cusano da Colonia a Roma (1425–1450)*[19], I analyzed some aspects of *FN* and of its reception by Cusanian historiography; moreover, I provided further elements in order to understand how and why Nicholas of Cusa had read it. In the meantime, however, research has produced new studies and critical editions of the work of Heymeric de Campo, which, as I will show below, I believe useful in confirming the hypothesis of an Albertist derivation of *FN* as already formulated by Hoenen. In this essay, I reconsider the question, contextualizing Nicholas' plagiarism in Plato-Aristotle controversy. Furthermore, I articulate an interpretative hypothesis regarding the Cusanian use of *FN*, attributing his choices of cutting and adding passages to the original text of *FN* to reasons not strictly philosophical, but rather political.

1. Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen's attribution hypothesis

Very little information has been unearthed concerning the early life and intellectual background of Nicholas of Cusa († 1464) in the 1420s and early 1430s. We know that in that period, despite being concerned with legal matters, Nicholas of Cusa acquired the elements of his philosophical and theological education, which shortly afterwards permitted him to draw up his *De docta ignorantia* (1440); in this work, he reveals a considerable knowledge of Platonic philosophy[20].

An important stage in his education was a stay in Cologne: from 1425 he was a frequent visitor to the cathedral library and perhaps also to the general *Studium* of the Dominican friars, founded by Albert the Great (1248), near St. Andrew's church, where the trial of Meister Eckhart had also been

16 Hoenen, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 417.

17 Senger, Hans Gerhard: *Ludus Sapientiae: Studien zum Werk und zur Wirkungsgeschichte des Nikolaus von Kues*. Leiden: Brill, 49–50 briefly lists the main (and negative) reactions to the publication of Hoenen's article. For more information, see below, footnote no. 41.

18 Nicolaus de Cusa: *De concordantia catholica*, liber tertius, in: *Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate academiae litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita*, vol. XIV/3, ed. by Gerhard Kallen. Leipzig: Meiner 1959, c. 1, n. 1.

19 Fiamma, Andrea: *Nicola Cusano da Colonia a Roma (1425–1450). Università, politica e umanesimo nel giovane Cusano*. Münster: Aschendorff 2019, 135–149.

20 Wackerzapp, Herbert: *Der Einfluss Meister Eckharts auf die ersten philosophischen Schriften des Nikolaus von Kues: (1440–1450)*. Münster: Aschendorff 2019, 17f.

held (1326); while attending the newly-founded university (1388), Nicholas of Cusa met the "Albertist" master Heymeric de Campo († 1460), who, according to some interpretations, is thought to have "transmis la grande tradition néoplatonicienne"[21] to him.

In order to comprehend the seeds of Nicholas of Cusa's works, it is, therefore, not possible to overlook the influence of the sources to which he had access in Cologne[22], and it is necessary to clarify the historical situation, the philosophical context and, more generally, the political and cultural setting in which Nicholas of Cusa must have conceived his *DDI*. Indeed, as Maarten Hoenen writes, we still know all too little about the state of philosophy in this time[23]; Hoenen finally adds that Nicholas of Cusa is well known, yet his philosophical environs are not[24].

Such considerations lead me in this article to consider Heymeric de Campo's influence on Nicholas of Cusa's education as a possible historiographical key to how one may tackle the latter's texts[25]; to ask whether it is

21 KOROLEC, Jerzy B.: *Heymeric de Campo et sa vision néoplatonicienne de Dieu*, in: ZIMMERMANN, Albert (ed.): *Albert der Grosse. Seine Zeit, sein Werk, seine Wirkung*. Berlin: De Gruyter 1981, 208–216, particularly 208, where he identifies the following four doctrines that are assumed to reveal Heymerich's influence on Nicholas of Cusa: (1) the coincidence of opposites; (2) the conception of matter; (3) the role of sensitivity and imagination in knowledge of God; (4) the notion of 'being'. Korolec adds that Heymerich developed these points in *Compendium divinorum*, in *Theoremata de esse et essentia* and in *Alphabetum doctrinale*, with particular attention paid to Dionysius and Proclus. In short, Dionysius' predilection for 'Platonism' is taken to be Heymerich's greatest legacy inherited by Nicholas of Cusa. Cf. MEUTHEN, E.: *Das Trierer Schisma von 1430 auf dem Basler Konzil. Zur Lebensgeschichte des Nikolaus von Kues*. Münster: Aschendorff 1964, 78, states that Nicholas of Cusa must have come across Proclus' work for the first time "während seiner Kölner Studienjahre". Senger, however, recalls that there are "keine Anhaltspunkte" supporting this opinion, cf. SENGER, Hans G. (ed.): *Cusanus-Texte III 2.1 Proclus latinus. Die Exzerpte und Randnoten zu den lateinischen Übersetzungen der Proclus-Schriften. Theologia platonis-Elementatio theologica*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter 1986, 126. Cf. FIAMMA, Andrea: *Nicola Cusano ed Eimerico da Campo: gli anni coloniensi*, in: Medioevo. Rivista di storia della filosofia medievale 41 (2016), 217–257, see at 220–223.

22 Cf. the entry *Albertism* edited by Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen in: LAGERLUND, Henrik (ed.): *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy. Philosophy between 500 and 1500*. Dordrecht: Springer 2011, 44–51 and the homonym entry edited by Andrea Fiamma in: SGARBI, Marco (ed.): *Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy*. Cham: Springer 2019, DOI https://doi.org/10.1007.

23 HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 404.

24 HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 405.

25 FIAMMA, A.: *Nicola Cusano da Colonia a Roma*, 13f., where it is shown that the main studies on Nicholas of Cusa's philosophy in the twentieth century were carried out according to the conviction that his intellectual character, innovative ideas and unusual mathematical elaborations played a significant role both in the context of the fifteenth-century 'renovatio platonica' and in the development of philosophy and modern sciences. The numerous studies that enquired into this perspective at greater depth and confirmed it have to my mind the merit of highlighting some Renaissance traits in Nicholas of Cusa's personality, for example the love of reading the classics in the original, which he revealed throughout his entire life. Cf. BIANCA, Concetta: *Niccolò Cusano e la sua biblioteca: note, "notabilia", glosse*, in: CANONE, Eugenio (ed.): *Bibliothecae selectae: da Cusano a Leopardi*. Firenze: Olschki

possible to identify any eventual traces of an "Albertist" philosophy in the anonymous manuscript that he entitled *Fundamentum naturae*. In this regard, I formulate my own proposal concerning the writer of *FN* and its influence on Nicholas of Cusa's *DDI*. I thus also find a way of clarifying the motivations that led Nicholas of Cusa to rewrite *FN*, removing part of the original text and adding some of his own considerations concerning Platonic philosophy.

Can one assume that Nicholas of Cusa plagiarized *FN*? A comparison between this anonymous text and *DDI* II, 7–10, furthermore, permits us to see "wo Cusanus in der *Docta ignorantia* seine eigene Akzente hat setzen wollen"[26]. Hoenen notes that Nicholas of Cusa transcribes, from the seventh to the tenth chapter, a considerable part of *FN*, even copying the internal structure[27], but that he also intervenes in numerous passages, modifying at times the text and frequently underlining that "his" standpoints were prompted by using the method of learned ignorance. Hence Nicholas of Cusa does not restrict himself to copying the text but integrates it into his own thought, successfully rendering it coherent with the framework of *DDI* in its entirety.[28]

Hoenen further observes that in this work of transcription and adaptation Nicholas of Cusa did not pedantically use every section of *FN* since he

1993, 1–11, see 5–6. Nicholas of Cusa adopted this 'modern' style of life particularly in the years when he spent more time in Italy; it is not merely by chance that it is precisely the works written after 1450 that emphasize this historiographical interpretation. Cf. FLASCH, Kurt: *Nikolaus von Kues. Geschichte einer Entwicklung. Vorlesungen zur Einführung in seine Philosophie*. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann 1998, 13–27, rightly noted that there are very few, poorly expressed proofs of Nicholas of Cusa's intellectual activity in the 1430s: such texts, either in form (for example, his sermons) or in content (his studies on astronomy), are insufficient to provide adequate indications of his philosophical standpoint. Flasch follows the historiographical approach formulated by Senger, who in his monograph on the young Nicholas of Cusa does not take into consideration as a possibility the influence of the so-called "Albertism" in Cologne. Cf. SENGER, Hans, G.: *Die Philosophie des Nikolaus von Kues vor dem Jahre 1440. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung einer Philosophie in der Frühzeit des Nikolaus (1430–1440)*. Münster: Aschendorff 1971. On the other hand, it must be considered that Senger expressed skepticism about the existence of a "Albertist school", cf. for ex.: SENGER, Hans G.: *Albertismus? Überlegungen zur "via Alberti" im 15. Jahrhundert*, in: ZIMMERMANN, A. (ed.): *Albert der Grosse*, 217–236.

26 HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 417.

27 HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 410–411.

28 HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 418–419. Hoenen points out in particular four original contributions by Nicholas of Cusa in the transcription of *FN*: (1) Nicholas of Cusa illustrates the relationships among the three ways of being contracted, of which the treatise only says that they are correlated; (2) Nicholas of Cusa makes the references to the 'ancient' philosophers explicit: in both texts, they are thought to be wrong in their judgement of matter by considering it indeterminate; (3) Nicholas of Cusa introduces some reflections on the differences between the Platonic notion of *anima mundi* and the Aristotelian one of *nature*, the latter not appearing in *FN*; 4) Nicholas of Cusa examines in greater depth the notion of spirit, which becomes central for him in order to comprehend the relational nature of the universe.

ignored the references to the Aristotelian tradition found in the anonymous text[29]. Hoenen explains this choice as an attempt on the part of Nicholas of Cusa not to become involved in university and school debates[30]. To my mind, this proposal of Hoenen's for an eventual interpretation is convincing: we should not forget that it was precisely at that moment in time, towards the end of the 1430s, that the conciliatory party, which Nicholas of Cusa had already abandoned in order to follow Eugene IV, presented a vast range of "Aristotelian" masters from German universities (among whom the name of Johannes Wenck stood out)[31].

Those pages of Nicholas of Cusa's work do not only contain an attempt to maintain a distance between himself and the masters from Basel. Nicholas of Cusa avoids transcribing from *FN* the references to the peripatetic philosophers and yet at the same time he also introduces some own reflections. Here is one example: in Chapter Nine of the second book, Nicholas of Cusa is concerned with defining the differences between the Platonic notion of 'anima mundi' and the Aristotelian one of 'natura'. Here,

[29] HAMESSE, Jacqueline (ed.): *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis: Un Florilege Medieval*. Louvain: Publications Universitaires 1974.

[30] HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 420: "[...] betrachtet man den gemeinsamen Hintergrund dieser Texte, so ist man versucht zu sagen, dass Nicholas von Cusa sich in der Docta ignorantia von der damals an den Universitäten und Schulen eingewurzelten Tradition des Aristotelismus fern hat halten wollen und deshalb diese Stellen gestrichen hat".

[31] The substantial number of the *via antiqua* university teachers participating in the 'conciliarist' sittings in Basel after 1438 was no exception, see MIETHKE, Jürgen: *Le università e il concilio di Basilea*, in: Cristianesimo nella storia 32 (2011), 1–41; indeed, as the case of Johannes Wenck testifies, it was in this very period that the interventions of the Basel conciliarists in the political life of the town and in ecclesiastic questions increased, with the aim of bearing increasingly strong witness to their presence in Germany. Similar dynamics were registered during the Council of Constance, on which cf. KALUZA, Zénon: *Le chancelier Gerson et Jérôme de Prague*, in: AHDLMÂ 51 (1984), 81–126, and HOENEN, Maarten J.F.M: *Academics and Intellectual Life in the Low Countries. The University Career of Heymeric de Campo († 1460)*, in: RTPM 61 (1994), 173–209, see at 175: "[...] the late medieval period was favourable to an extension of the traditional territory of the academics, giving them a greater opportunity to engage themselves in areas not confined to the classroom or the disputation hall: ecclesiastical politics and matters of orthodoxy". The criticism of university tradition that Nicholas of Cusa formulates in *DDI* is a consequence of these events, cf. FIAMMA, Andrea: *Nicolaus Cusanus and the University Philosophy: Paris, Cologne and Leuven*, in: SCHWAETZER, Harald/ VANNIER, Marie-Anne (eds.): *Nikolaus von Kues: Die Großregion als Denk- und Lebensraum*. Münster: Aschendorff 2019, 89–100, see 90f., and is articulated as follows: (1) Nicholas of Cusa himself presents the method of learned ignorance as an alternative to Scholastic doctrine; in fact, for Nicholas of Cusa knowledge does not consist in a process during which the intellect adapts its notions to the sensible species of things present before it but by becoming conscious of the fact that the truth of a thing will always remain unattainable for human intellection; (2) in *DDI*, *Epistula ad cardinalem Iulianum Cesarini*, n. 2, 4, Nicholas of Cusa states that in this work he is presenting 'rara et inaudita' knowledge, that is to say the method of learned ignorance, the coincidence of opposites and the doctrine of the universe lacking a centre. FLASCH, K.: *Nikolaus von Kues*, 127 states that Nicholas of Cusa criticised the universities because he had understood, before others, their 'failure', that is their inability to respond to the new problems posed by a historical context that was rapidly changing.

Nicholas of Cusa refers that "multi christianorum illi viae Platonicae acquiverunt"[32], since they took Platonic doctrines, which were suitable for explaining the derivation of the many from the unique God, to be true.

At the same time, the Platonists stated both that God is unique and indistinct and that things are represented in different ways in the divine mind; it is from this, therefore, that multiplicity derives. For this reason, they "necessarium putabant has rationes distinctas, secundum quas res distinctae sunt, post Deum et ante res esse, cum ratio rem praecedat"[33]. According to some interpreters of Nicholas of Cusa's philosophy, this passage would veil not, as I am suggesting, a political-philosophical criticism that can be seen within the framework of the environment young Nicholas of Cusa frequented, and in the context within which *FN* was composed, but a reference both to the ontology of Meister Eckhart, who is believed to have hypostatized divine ideas in his commentary on *Genesis*, and, slightly further on, to that of Erigena[34].

However, I should like to point out that, in my opinion, this interpretation, which has recourse to the best-known authors, encounters some difficulties:

(1) neither Erigena nor Meister Eckhart claimed what Nicholas of Cusa attributes to those he calls "Platonists", that is to say, the doctrine of the soul of the world as governor of heavenly intelligences;

(2) we cannot state with certainty that Nicholas of Cusa had any precise notion of Eckhart's exact stance in the field of ontology before February 1440 since we know that he came into possession of Cod. Cus. 21 only in the mid-1440s[35];

(3) Wenck's composition of *De ignota litteratura*, a work in which, as we shall see, the Albertist master accuses Nicholas of Cusa of sustaining standpoints similar to those of Meister Eckhart, led Nicholas of Cusa himself, in *Apologia doctae ignorantia*, to dissociate himself partly from Eckhart; nevertheless, before that we can find no reason of a political nature to introduce a criticism of Meister Eckhart's philosophy.

2. Who was the author of *FN*?

Maarten Hoenen is of the opinion that to identify the author of *FN* is a complex matter. Yet, according to him, we can be guided by the evidence at our disposal, however scanty this may be, in order to comprehend the

[32] *DDI* II, c. 9, n. 146, 1. Cf. Fiamma, A.: *La réception du Timée par Nicolas de Cues*, 42f.

[33] *DDI* II, c. 9, n. 146, 3–5.

[34] *DDI* II, c. 7, n. 129, 1–10. Meister Eckhart: *In Gen.* II, 49–69 (LW I 523, 239) and Ioannes Scotus Eriugena: *De div. nat.* III 25; III 27 (PL 122 col. 692 a sq.; 696 d).

[35] Fiamma, Andrea: *Nicholas of Cusa and the so-called Cologne School of the 13th and 14th Centuries*, in: AHDLMÂ 84 (2017), 91–128, see 105 and following.

distinctive traits in the cultural context in which it was composed. First, it is known that Nicholas of Cusa made no mention of *FN* as a source for *DDI*, although, as has been shown, he freely helped himself to it, even going so far as to transcribe part of the text.

According to Hoenen, the author of *FN* cannot have lived at too remote a time from Nicholas of Cusa; indeed, in the fifteenth century contemporary authors were frequently not mentioned in a text that had just been written, unless it was a case of explicit polemics[36]. The doctrines expressed in *FN* and the variety of its sources, however, lead one to conjecture that the author must have been close to the Albertist school in Cologne[37]: several traces of the *corpus aristotelicum* reinterpreted by Albert the Great (for example, the doctrine of the *incohatio formae*), of the *corpus hermeticum* and of Proclus' work can be found in the text.

Hoenen excludes the hypothesis that the author of the treatise was Heymeric de Campo[38], although it was probably someone very close to him. In this case, the conclusion must be that Nicholas of Cusa examined the *FN* during the years he spent in Cologne or during the Council of Basel[39].

[36] HOENEN, Maarten J.F.M.: *Heymeric van de Velde (†1460) und die Geschichte des Albertismus: Auf der Suche nach den Quellen der albertistischen Intellektslehre des* Tractatus problematicus, in: HOENEN, Maarten F.J.M./DE LIBERA, Alain (eds.): *Albertus Magnus und der Albertismus. Die deutsche philosophische Kultur des Mittelalters.* Leiden: Brill 1995, 303–331, at 309, states, for example, that Heymeric de Campo in his *Tractatus Problematicus* frequently does not cite his sources by name.

[37] HOENEN, Maarten J.F.M.: *Heymeric van de Velde (†1460) und die Geschichte des Albertismus,* 311, underlines the role of mediation of this complex of sources carried out by Albert the Great, *De natura et origine animae*, and by authors such as Meister Eckhart, Dietrich of Freiberg, Berthold of Moosburg and Heymerich de Campo himself.

[38] Although certain works by Heymeric de Campo, such as *Compendium divinorum* and *Theoremata totius universi*, seem to present a structure and content similar to that of *FN*, it is necessary to consider that (1) *FN* cannot be found on the list of Heymerich's works; (2) Heymerich adopts a more complex and better articulated sentence structure compared to that found in *FN*: cf. HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 434: "[...] der Satzbau des Traktats ist weniger aufwendig und gekünstelt als in den Schriften des Heymericus"; (3) Heymerich mentions the rule of learned ignorance for the first time only in the *Centheologicon* (1456), paraphrasing precisely some passages of the *DDI*. A critical edition of this text was recently published, cf. HEYMERICUS DE CAMPO: *Centheologicon* (= CCCM 292), ed. by Giovanna Bagnasco. Turnhout: Brepols 2020. Studies on the presence of Cusanian traces in the *Centheologicon* were started by IMBACH, Ruedi: *Einheit des Glaubens: Spuren des cusanischen Dialogs* De pace fidei *bei Heymericus de Campo*, in: FZPhTh 27 (1980), 5–23 and *Das* Centheologicon *des Heymericus de Campo und die darin enthaltenen Cusanus-Reminiszenzen: Hinweise und Materialen*, in: Traditio 39 (1983), 466–477. On the contrary, as we shall see below, a philosophical methodology similar, albeit not precisely expressed, to Nicholas of Cusa's rule of learned ignorance is applied in *FN*.

[39] HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 434, concludes that the anonymous treatise must have been composed by an author who frequented "den Kreisen um Heymericus de Campo, wie sie sich in der Zeit von 1420 bis 1440 in Dienst, Köln, Basel und Löwen gebildet hatten. Cusanus könnte dann auf den Traktat während seiner Zeit in Köln oder als Teilnehmer am Basler Konzil gestossen sein".

On the other hand, one cannot fail to notice that the main doctrines that determine the originality of Nicholas of Cusa's work in the philosophical panorama of his time can be found *in nuce* in *FN*: the method of learned ignorance and the coincidence of opposites. Ultimately, it represented "einen archimedischen Punkt der cusanischen Entwicklung".[40]

Here are now brief summaries of the theories Hoenen formulated about the authorship of *FN* and the transmission of the above-mentioned doctrines of Nicholas of Cusa, seen in the light of the debate to which this discovery gave rise among scholars[41], followed by the hypothesis of the existence of an as-yet unknown source common to both texts[42]. As far as the author of *FN* is concerned, he might be identified as:

(1) Nicholas of Cusa himself: *FN* may in fact have been conceived as a draft for *DDI*; in this case, the treatise could be dated between 1426 and

[40] HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita* 436.

[41] ALBERTSON, D.: *A learned thief?*, 360–364 sums up the main aspects of the discussion arising from the publication of the above-mentioned article by Hoenen. We point out that there have been several criticisms of Hoenen's historiographical approach and that certain scholars did not accept Hoenen's research itself, attributing to it the hidden aim of denying any originality in Nicholas of Cusa's work. DUPRÉ, Wilhelm: *Ista prius inaudita. Einige Bemerkungen zu M. Hoenen's Aufsatz*, in: Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft 24 (1998), 238–242, objected that it was not Nicholas of Cusa's 'style' to copy an entire text without mentioning its source, adding moreover that the counter-examples provided in advance by Hoenen were not significant because (1) while it is true that in the prologue to the third book of *De concordantia catholica* Nicholas of Cusa does not mention the name of Marsilius of Padua, (a) they are not whole passages copied from Marsilius but *exzerpta*; (b) one has to bear in mind that Marsilius was an author who had been condemned; (c) Marsilius' works were sufficiently well known to the participants at the Council of Basel, for whom the text was composed; (2) it is true that Nicholas of Cusa rarely mentions his sources in the *Sermons*, yet one must remember that they were not intended for publication. Dupré therefore invites Hoenen to reconsider the hypothesis that *FN* may constitute a first draft for *DDI*: this is not unlikely, Dupré argues, if one considers, for example, the fact that in the '30s of the 15th century Nicholas of Cusa drew up various drafts for *De concordantia catholica*, many of which have come down to us, and which, obviously, do not appear on the lists of Nicholas of Cusa's works. It seems to us, however, that should Hoenen's theories be confirmed, then the worth of *DDI* within the entire history of philosophy would indeed be increased: it would have to be considered not only a complex work, not restricted to the second book, on the part of a philosophical genius such as Nicholas of Cusa was, but it would also constitute, in some parts of it, one of the most important documents of a structured circulation of neo-Platonic ideas in the Rhineland in the first half of the 15th century. Other criticisms of Hoenen's article are in the aforementioned (see footnote no. 17) SENGER, H.G.: *Ludus sapientiae*, 50, and in HOPKINS, Jasper: *Nicholas of Cusa: Metaphysical Speculations*, vol. II. Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press 2000, 4–11, in part. 11, who holds that "Hoenen's reasoning is beset by many difficulties" and that, therefore, "we may abide by the earlier judgment of Jaspers, Lohr, Haubst, and others to the effect that Nicholas is, indeed, an original metaphysician"; for Hopkins, *FN* is a 'compilatio' of Nicholas of Cusa's *DDI* after it had circulated. ALBERTSON, D.: *A learned thief?*, 365 has pointed out a few problems with Hopkins' criticisms.

[42] PAULI, Heinrich: *Neues aus der Cusanusforschung*, in: Aktuelle Mitgliederinformation der deutschen Cusanus-Gesellschaft 1 (1996), 4–6, suggests the hypothesis that the two texts are based on a common source.

1437, that is to say, to a period prior to Nicholas of Cusa's journey to Constantinople. The treatise may thus have seen the light of day during his years in Cologne or in Basel, when he was working side by side with Heymerich de Campo. This would explain the reason why philosophical standpoints in line with the Cologne Albertism emerge. The treatise would therefore constitute the missing link between Nicholas of Cusa's studies in Cologne and the re-elaboration that occurred in *DDI*;

(2a) another author, but a contemporary of Nicholas of Cusa: in this case, *DDI* does not constitute a 'unicum' at that time.[43] Nicholas of Cusa may have wished to refrain from spreading the doctrines in the treatise in order to present them in a better-articulated, fuller context;

(2b) another author, but not a contemporary of Nicholas of Cusa: David Albertson recently stated that the authorship of the treatise was to be attributed to a commentator on Boethius' work[44]; and that Nicholas of Cusa must, however, have identified the author of the *Fundamentum* as Thierry of Chartres. Albertson deduces this fact on the basis of a study of *Apologia doctae ignorantia* and of further critical considerations about the Chartres tradition. Let me now examine this hypothesis more closely.

First of all, Albertson points out that the three central concepts that Nicholas of Cusa must have gleaned from *FN*, according to Hoenen's reconstruction, were not used by Nicholas of Cusa for the first time in the second book of his main work, but were mentioned several times in the first book[45]: it was in these very cases that Nicholas of Cusa had attributed the authorship of these doctrines to Boethius and to the commentary on Boethius written by Thierry of Chartres[46]. But Hoenen had already noticed these affinities thanks to the fact that in the treatise there are doctrines and a terminology traditionally associated with the Chartres school[47]. For

[43] HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 437: "die Gedanken, wie wir sie bei Cusanus finden können, auch an anderer Stelle entwickelt wurden, wenn auch auf andere Weise".

[44] ALBERTSON, D.: *A learned thief?*, 364–378.

[45] ALBERTSON, D.: *A learned thief?*, 369. Cf. *DDI* I, n. 7, 1–10, 1.

[46] BOETHIUS: *De trinitate* III, 171–173, in: BOETHIUS: *De consolatione philosophiae*; *Opuscula theologica*, ed. Claudio Moreschini. München: K.G. Saur 2000 and THEODORICUS DE CHARTRES: *Commentum super Boethii librum* De Trinitate, III, 1–20, in: HÄRING, Nikolaus M.: *Commentaries on Boethius by Thierry of Chartres and His School*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies 1971, 89–94.

[47] HOENEN, M.: *Ista prius inaudita*, 423. RUSCONI, Cecilia: *Commentator Boethii 'De Trinitate' [...] ingenio clarissimus. Die Kommentare des Thierry von Chartres zu De Trinitate des Boethius als Quellen des Cusanus*, in: Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft 33 (2012), 247–290, in part. 267–268, shares the criticisms already formulated by Pauli and Dupre against Hoenen's hypothesis (see above, footnote no 41) and adds that in the evaluation of this *affaire* it is necessary to pay more attention to the doctrine of "modi essendi": in fact, it is found in both Thierry of Chartres' *De trinitate* and Nicholas of Cusa's *DDI*, but it does not appear in the *FN*. This would lead us to believe that Nicholas of Cusa was addressing Thierry's original writings and did not need further intermediate sources. Cf. THEODORICUS DE CHARTRES: *In Boethii De trinitate* II, 10, where he illustrates the doctrine of

this reason, should one consider *FN* a work composed in the context of Thierry of Chartres' teaching in Paris, that is to say, drawn up by himself or by one of his pupils?

Albertson has studied the text previously pointed out by Hoenen (*DDI* II, c. 7–10) and also found an influence of *FN* there. He furthermore sees certain considerable 'coincidences', to which he draws the reader's attention, for example: in the above-mentioned chapters, Nicholas of Cusa mentions the following passage by Augustine taken from the commentary on the Gospel of St. John: 'ubi cogitare coeperis, incipis numerare', but in the form 'dum incipis numerare trinitatem, exis veritatem'. This expression is also repeated in a chapter of the *Apologia*, albeit according to a slightly different version: "si incipis numerare, incipis errare"[48].

Albertson explains these variations between the quotation of Augustine found in *DDI* and that in the *Apologia* on the basis of the fact that in 1449 Nicholas of Cusa was "working from memory"[49]. From his point of view, there can be no doubt that in the *Apologia* Cusanus wanted to refer to the passage quoted from *DDI*; at that time, in point of fact, he was occupied with defending himself from Johannes Wenck's accusations concerning precisely the themes dealt with in *DDI* II, 7–10. Moreover, shortly afterwards, Nicholas himself stated that he had taken the quotation of Augustine from a "vir facile omnium, quos legerim, ingenio clarissimum", a brilliant commentator on Boethius.

In *DDI*, the author mentions the extract from Augustine's work in the same 'lectio' that we find in *Fundamentum* (dum incipis numerare trinitatem, exis veritatem). According to Albertson, this quotation can be explained as follows: Nicholas of Cusa must have thought that *FN* (from which he himself took the reference to Augustine) was composed by a commentator on Boethius, that is, Thierry of Chartres; some years later, while writing the *Apologia*, he recalled the same passage from memory.

To sum up: Albertson believes that Nicholas of Cusa must have thought that the author of *FN* was Thierry of Chartres, who, it is true, did tackle similar themes to those in the treatise in the second book of his commentary on Boethius' *De trinitate*; however, once more according to Albertson, Nicholas of Cusa was wrong: the author of *FN* was probably not Thierry

"modi essendi" and, in the same passage, in order to indicate the relationship between God and the world, he uses the terms 'explicatio' and 'complicatio', which terminology is also found also in the *DDI*.

[48] ALBERTSON, D.: *A learned thief?*, 378–389. The quotation from Augustine was identified by Senger in his revised version of the edition of the NICOLAUS DE CUSA: *Apologia doctae ignorantiae*, n. 35 but not by Wilpert (Lipsia 1932), cf. *Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate academiae litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita*, vol. II, ed. by Paul Wilpert, Hans G. Senger. Hamburg: Meiner 1988², and it refers to AUGUSTINUS DE HIPPO: *In Iohannes evangelium* XXXIX, 4 (= CCSL 36, 347). The quotation in *DDI*, on the other hand, is to be found in the book I, c. 19.

[49] ALBERTSON, D.: *A learned thief?*, 384.

himself but an as-yet unidentified commentator on Boethius. In fact, despite certain philosophical similarities between compositions of the Chartres school and *FN*, there are, in Albertson's opinion, too many differrences between the texts[50].

3. The Plato-Aristotle Controversy in Nicholas of Cusa's *De docta ignorantia*

To conclude, I propose my hypothesis, which is based on a set of elements already collected in my monograph *Nicola Cusano da Colonia a Roma (1425–1450)* and concerns new acquisitions in historiographical research. As I state further below, it is also based on my new reading of the aforementionated passage in *DDI*, which I present in the last paragraph. I am aware that I am not able to provide any strong proof of some of the insights set forth here. In fact, new systematic studies and new critical editions would be necessary. However, a conviction of its importance should by now be clear. In fact, the issues addressed here should induce an awareness of the fact that one needs to rethink the historiographical categories that scholars have hitherto adopted concerning the role played by German university philosophy (of which Albertism constitutes a particular manifestation) in the education of unstructured personalities from an academic point of view, such as Nicholas of Cusa was: he reused the Albertist philosophical categories and compared them to his concrete experience as a 15th-century man of the Church, as if in a stress test with the political emergences of those times.

In this paper I have followed the more significant arguments in Hoenen's interpretative proposal concerning *FN*. He retraced in that work the doctrinal outlines of the so called Albertist of the 15th century and raised the problem of Nicholas of Cusa's relationship to it. This interpretation did not convince some scholars, including David Albertson. The results of Albertson's research shift the focus of the discussion from Albertism to the medieval tradition of commentaries on Boethius and to the Chartres school. On the other hand, Albertson's explicit historiographical intention, which he reiterates several times in his works, is to demonstrate the direct dependence of Nicholas's philosophy on Thierry of Chartres' commentaries on Boethius.

I have some doubts in this regard: Chartrian cosmology is orderly in the principles and coherent for his 12th century world; Boethius' philosophy is its main source. Nicholas of Cusa's *DDI*, certanly adopts the aforementionated categories of Boethius and Thierry, but also re-elaborates them in the light of numerous other sources and in a political context that has completely changed. The wealth of heterogeneous elements with respect to

[50] Albertson, D.: *A learned thief?*, 387–388.

Boethius and Thierry which are instead present in Cusanus' work, and which, however, do not characterize Cusanian philosophy alone, should suggest the possibility that this very same tradition, rightly recalled by Albertson, might have been transferred to a further re-elaboration, theoretically closer to Nicholas of Cusa, and from which he drew as a source, recognizing it as being almost contemporary to himself.

One testimony in this sense is provided by the earlier synoptic comparison between the philosophical concepts in *FN* and *DDI*: it has been proved that Nicholas of Cusa did not restrict himself to transcribing the content of the source word for word; on the contrary, from *Fundamentum* Nicholas of Cusa extracted a well-defined anthology and specifically privyleged those passages where there is a discussion of the ideas of absolute maximum, contraction and coincidence of opposites: concepts that we sometimes also find in the writings of the Albertist authors identified by Hoenen. But Nicholas does not mention these authors, as if to avoid, politically, an explicit reference. On the other hand, Nicholas' reluctance to mention his contemporaries is known.

My opinion is that Nicholas of Cusa must have effected this selection according to a precise political-philosophical criterion, that is to say:

1) transcribing part of the source in his book, eliminating from *FN* those references to the Aristotelian masters that he must have associated, from a philosophical point of view, with the Albertist and schismatic professors in Basel. As far as Albertson's hypothesis is concerned, to my mind a core point is that we must consider that the philosophy of Boethius' *De trinitate* and *De hebdomadibus*, just like the terminology of the Chartres school, is to be found in Nicholas of Cusa's work[51] not in an acritical manner but reinterpreted according to its particular historical and cultural context. Indeed, it may well be that it was precisely the people whom the young Nicholas of Cusa frequented in Cologne and Basel that imparted the knowledge of Boethius and of the Chartres school to him. On the other hand, it is a known fact that the Albertists dedicated particular attention to Boethius: John of Nova Domus confutes precisely Thomas' commentary on Boethius' *De hebdomadibus*, and Heymeric de Campo finds inspiration for his *Compendium divinorum* in the very axiomatic method. Nicholas of Cusa's *De coniecturis* also preserves a trace of this tradition[52].

[51] ALBERTSON, D.: *Mathematical theologies*, 126s. Cf. *DDI* II, c. 5; NICOLAUS DE CUSA: *De coniecturis* I, c. 4, in: *Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate academiae litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita*, vol. III, ed. Joseph Koch, Carl Bormann. Hamburg: Meiner 1972, and NICOLAUS DE CUSA: *De venatione Sapientiae*, c. 17.

[52] FIAMMA, A.: *Nicola Cusano da Colonia a Roma*, 203–233. On the spread of the axiomatic method in the late medieval albertism, and in particular in Wenck, cf. MELIADÒ, Mario: *Axiomatic Wisdom: Boethius'* De hebdomadibus *and the* Liber de causis *in Late-Medieval Albertism*, in: Bulletin de philosophie médiévale 55 (2013), 73–131.

Identifying the author of *FN* as an anonymous commentator of Boethius does not, however, conflict with Hoenen's theory, according to which the work was produced by an Albertist master: my hypothesis is that Nicholas of Cusa must have formulated the notions proposed in *DDI* on the basis of his own personal re-elaboration of cultural suggestions originating in Albertism, within which the use of commentaries on Boethius was totally coherent. One should not forget that there are no works of Thierry of Chartres testifying to a direct knowledge of this source in Nicholas of Cusa's library. It would, therefore, not be surprising if Nicholas of Cusa had absorbed Thierry's doctrines through the Albertism of Cologne, i.e. through Heymeric de Campo and his pupils. However, we are far from the possibility of affirming this conclusion with certainty, also because, as Imbach referring precisely to *FN*, recalled in a note recently published in a previous issue of this journal, there is still no systematic study regarding Thierry of Chartres' influence on Heymeric's work[53].

Recent studies on Heymeric's thought, and the critical edition of his *Centheologicon* published last year, permit us to affirm his knowledge of 12th century theology, in particular of the writings of Richard von Sankt Viktor, Nicholas of Amiens and Alan of Lille. Heymeric also quotes Nicholas of Cusa's *De pace fidei*[54]. In *Centheologicon*, Heymeric cleverly analyses the methodologies of both axiomatic and allegorical theologies, which he opposed to the dialectical debates of the 13th and 14th centuries. Therefore, in this work Heymeric follows a concordist ideal of *Sapientia*, recovering the aforementioned tradition, which also occurs in Nicholas of Cusa's works[55]. In my view, the doctrines expoused in *FN* denote coherence with this genre of "Albertism", which intends to reinstate the perspective of the 12th-century schools, but correcting their Platonism with the Aristotle.

[53] IMBACH, Ruedi: *Multiplex erit scientia. Bemerkungen zur Edition des* Centheologicon *von Heymericus de Campo*, in: FZPhTh 68 (2021) 2, 471–479, see 476, footnote no. 17: "wenn man diese Forschungen berücksichtigt, kann man sich fragen, ob die Prüfung möglicher Spuren des Denkens von Thierry bei Heymericus nicht angebracht wäre".

[54] For an analysis of the above mentionated sources, see the introduction of the HEYMERICUS DE CAMPO: *Centheologicon*, by Giovanna Bagnasco, XXV–XXVIII. Cf. IMBACH, R.: *Multiplex erit scientia*, 475 wrote: "noch bedeutsamer ist indes eine andere Aufspürung, die noch eindeutiger das Interesse Heymerichs für das Denken des 12. Jahrhunderts belegt".

[55] GARIN, Eugenio: *Rinascite e rivoluzioni*. Bari: Laterza 1975, 28–29 claims that the recovery of the 12th century theology characterized also the Italian humanism. However, Garin does not recognize Nicholas of Cusa as humanist; cf. FIAMMA, Andrea: *Cusanus und das Gelehrtenideal der Humanisten. Die Interpretation von Eugenio Garin im Lichte ihrer Vor- und Nachgeschichte*, in: MELIADÒ, Mario/NEGRI, Silvia (eds.): *Praxis des Philosophierens, Praktiken der Historiographie. Perspektiven von der Spätantike bis zur Moderne*. Freiburg i.B.: Karl Alber 2018, 270–302. On the Heymeric's understanding of the theologies of past centuries in *Centheologicon*, cf. MELIADÒ, Mario: *Sapienza Peripatetica. Eimerico di Campo e i percorsi del tardo albertismo*. Münster: Aschendorff 2018, 263–284.

2) adding critical evaluations of an unspecified Platonic theology, which he must have seen embodied by individuals such as George Gemistus Plethon and other orthodox theologians, with whom he shared a voyage from Constantinople to Venice. To my mind, in order to understand the reasons for such choices it is necessary to consider that *DDI* was drawn up at the same time as the celebration of two Councils, one in Basel and the other in Ferrara-Florence. Nicholas of Cusa's work maintains traces of the historical and political significance of these events: he may have removed the 'Aristotelian' annotations in the *Fundamentum* in order to distinguish his own position from that of the conciliatory university masters who still formed a group in Basel in those years; at the same time, the reiterated criticisms of the Platonic tradition found in those chapters imply a severe judgement of Byzantine Platonism, which through the voice of Gemistus Plethon had taken to speaking from the pulpit in Florence[56].

Nicholas of Cusa did not lack good reason for resentment towards the Byzantines: on 6th June, 1439, John VIII Palaeologus and Eugenius IV had

[56] PLETHON, Georgios Gemistos: *Contra De dogmate Latino*, in: IBID.: *Nomon syngraphes ta sozomena. Traite des lois, ou recueil des fragments, en partie inedits, de cet ouvrage, texte revu sur les manuscrits, precede d'une notice historique et critique, et augmente d'un choix de pieces justificatives, la plupart inedites*, ed. Charles Alexandre. Paris: Firmin Didot 1858, reprinted in Amsterdam: Hakkert 1982, 300–311, written contesting Argyropoulos' unionist standpoints; it explains that the three persons of the Trinity have the same *ousia* (that of the Father) but that they differ in their characteristics: the Father is he who generates, the Son is caused by the Father by generating and the Spirit is caused by procession. Gemistus states that this doctrine is confirmed by John of Damascus, Dionysius the Areopagite, Justin, Gregory of Nazianzus and Cyril of Alexandria; he adds, moreover, that the bull of union between the Greek and Latin churches, stipulated by Nicholas of Cusa himself, was signed at the conclusion of the Council of Florence for political reasons but not as a result of any agreement as far as doctrine is concerned. It's possible that Nicholas of Cusa had the opportunity to read Plethon's writing entitled *De fato* and translated with a dedication to him by a Roman Byzantine named Johannes Sophianos. The manuscript, however, does not have any annotations by Nicholas of Cusa, so we don't know if he really read it. It certainly wasn't a translation commissioned by Nicholas of Cusa. The pagan positions and references to Zeus expressed by Plethon in this text certainly have irritated Nicholas, despite the translator's efforts to accommodate the Plethon's writings to the Christian tradition. Cf. MONFASANI, John: *Cardinal Bessarion's Greek and Latin Sources in the Plato-Aristotle Controversy of the 15th Century and Nicholas of Cusa's Relation to the Controversy*, in: SPEER, Andreas/ STEINKRUGER, Philipp: *Knotenpunkt Byzanz. Wissensformen und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen* (= Miscellanea Mediaevalia 36). Berlin: de Gruyter 2012, 469–480, in part. 477–478. It is also important to mention here the Plethon's contribution at the controversy Plato-Aristotle at Council of Florenz, cf. LAGARDE, Bernadette: *Le "De differentiis" de Plethon d'apres l'autographe de la Marcienne*, in: Byzantion. Revue Internationale des etudes byzantines 43 (1973), 312–343. For an overall perspective on Cusanus and the Byzantines cf. BLUM, Paul Richard: *Nikolaus von Kues und die italienische Renaissance* (= Trierer Cusanus Lecture 18). Trier: Paulinus Verlag 2015, 26–28; MONFASANI, John: *Nicholas of Cusa, the Byzantines, and the Greek Language*, in: THURNER, Martin (ed.): *Nicolaus Cusanus zwischen Deutschland und Italien*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2002, 215–252; SENGER, Hans Gerhard: *In mari me ex Graecia redeunte, credo superno dono – Vom Wissensfrust zur gelehrten Unwissenheit. Wie platzte 1437/1438 der Knoten?* in: SPEER/STEINKRUGER (eds.): *Knotenpunkt Byzanz*, 481–495.

signed the 'Laetentur caeli' bull, drawn up by Nicholas of Cusa himself, for the Roman part, and signed by Basil Bessarion for the Greek one. In this document, the Byzantine Emperor gave way to the pressure exerted by Eugenius IV and apparently accepted the Roman version of the 'Creed', but opting for one of the many remodulations of the filioquist doctrine, which had been circulating in Byzantine theology since the 13th century, and which rethought the hypostatic relationship among the three persons of the Trinity[57]. On his return to Constantinople on 1st February, 1440, John VIII Palaeologus, prompted by a significant internal opposition that had been contesting the 'unionist' initiative with Rome, disavowed the agreement, thereby definitively breaking off any attempt at dialogue between the two churches, a project to which both Eugenius IV and Nicholas of Cusa had devoted much of their energy.

It therefore seems plausible that, irritated by such a political situation, Nicholas of Cusa did not miss the chance to add a warning against the Platonic-Byzantine interpretation of the Trinitarian doctrine to the section of his *DDI*, which dealt with the Platonic notions of the soul of the world. Thus Nicholas of Cusa seems to affirm that the Greeks do not comprehend that, while it is true that Christ is the sole intermediary between God and the world, he "est Verbum et Filius aequalis Patri in divinis"[58]. Christ is God as a second person and in so far as he is God he "dicitur logos seu ratio" of the world[59]. Hence the world *a Patre Filioque procedit*[60]. There is no way to expand on this argument any further. I only point out that, in my opinion, historiography has not yet sufficiently considered the fact that the arguments Nicholas of Cusa provides against the Platonic philosophy in *DDI* concern precisely those doctrines shared by Byzantine theology[61].

[57] SCHABEL, Christopher: *Nicholas of Dinkelsbühl and the Filioque at Vienna on the Eve of the Council of Florence*, in: ANGOTTI, Claire/BRÎNZEI, Monica (eds.): *Studia Sententiarum: Nicholas of Dinkelsbühl and the Sentences at Vienna in the Early Fifteenth Century*. Turnhout: Brepols 2015, 15–83; and of the same author: *Pope, Council, and the Filioque in Western Theology, 1274–1439*, in: Medieval Encounters 21 (2015), 190–213.

[58] *DDI*, II, c. 9, n. 149, 15–16.

[59] *DDI*, II, c. 9, n. 149, 15–16.

[60] NICOLAUS DE CUSA: *Sermo* XXIV (1–5. Ianuarii 1445), n. 14, 1–18, in : *Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate academiae litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita, Sermones* I (1430–1441), ed. Rudolf Haubst. Hamburg: Meiner 1970, 399.

[61] Nicholas of Cusa's enmity towards the Byzantines has often been underestimated, despite the fact that he expressed it in a substantial number of sermons, cf. NICOLAUS DE CUSA: *Sermo* CCXL (24 Aug. 1456), n. 3, 1–14, in: *Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate academiae litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita, Sermones* IV (1455–1463), ed. Walter A. Euler, Harald Schwaetzer. Hamburg: Meiner 2002, 299: "permisit autem Deus regnare persecutorem crucis quousque illam magnam novam Romam civitatem Constantinopolitanam plenam templis sanctissimis occuparet. Nam illi inhabitatores ab unitate fidei catholicae quoad processionem Spiritus Sancti scismatice recesserunt et demum fidem subdole promissam in synodo Florentina ad finem habendi contra Turkum adiutorium non servaverunt. Non enim nisi delusorie accesserunt ad finem, ut temporale commodum assequeren-

Nicholas of Cusa may thus have read *FN* in the light of the political events he experienced and may have wished, therefore, to reproduce its contents in *DDI*, but from a totally new historical-political perspective compared to the one in which the anonymous treatise had been produced. These considerations lead me to state that Nicholas of Cusa did not "plagiarize" *FN*. Indeed, we are not even facing here a traditional case of "textual bricolage". Nicholas of Cusa, starting from his education and political circumstances, declined the Plato-Aristotle controversy, which was known in the fifteenth century, as an alternative between the peripatetism that he had known through the Albertists and the Platonism of the Byzantines. He distanced himself from both the one and the other. Nicholas of Cusa used the anonymous text, rethought it according to his needs and worked on it, removing some textual lines and adding some other considerations, motivated by both doctrinal and political factors. *FN* thus found a suitable seat in the second book of the *DDI*, which provided it with a philosophical framework and a political and theological depth that, in its original version, it did not possess, allowing it, not least, to survive over the centuries as part of a work, *DDI*, which has been repeatedly transcribed, printed and translated into numerous languages.

Abstract

Fundamentum naturae *is an anonymous text that Nicholas of Cusa († 1464) used as a source for drawing up his masterpiece De docta ignorantia, Book II, chapters 7–10. Here he discusses the Platonic notion of 'soul of the world' by applying his method of learned ignorance, thus presenting a cosmological doctrine that is to his mind 'prius inaudita': the universe is in itself a relational unit constituted as the image of the Trinity. In this paper, after introducing the content of* Fundamentum naturae *and considering the hypotheses still debated as to the identity of the author of the text and the cultural context in which it was written, I offer my own suggestions 1) about the hypothesis of M.J.F.M. Hoenen, who considers* Fundamentum naturae *to be a product of the University Albertism of the 15th century; 2) about the political reasons that led Nicholas of Cusa to "plagiarize" the work selectively, removing part of the original text that concerns the Aristotelian tradition, while adding some of his own considerations about Platonic philosophy, that appear, in my interpretation, to be polemical with regard to the Byzantine Platonists.*

tur. Et ideo postea ostenderunt voluisse ecclesiam Romanam decipere, quia plures, qui in recepta unitate permanere volebant, ut haereticos abiecerunt".