



Nicholas Cusanus' *De Deo Abscondito*: An Elementary Logical Analysis
De Deo Abscondito de Nicholas Cusanus: Un Análisis Lógico Elemental

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Abstract

Cusanus' brief dialogue *De Deo Abscondito* presents a dialog between a Pagan and a Christian on the question of whether God can be known. It is shown that the Pagan argues within classical logic, whereas the Christian consistently reasons through doubly negated propositions and *ad absurdum* arguments—forms of reasoning that belong to what was formalized in the twentieth century as intuitionist logic. Interpreting the dialogue through this logical distinction yields a more accurate and coherent understanding of both the content and the structure of the argument. The negative solution to the central problem is expressed through propositions belonging to a logic later formalized by Vasiliev in the twentieth century. In the end, both discussants reach an agreement in which even the Pagan comes to speak of God in the same logical mode as the Christian, namely through, as usually after Augustine, a mere analogy, which preserves the unknowability of God as transcending all kinds of specific logic. However, Cusanus' inventiveness leads him to a new logical thinking, i.e. to both reason in intuitionist logic and organize according to a new method, albeit in an incomplete way.

Keywords: Cusanus, *De Deo Abscondito*, doubly negated propositions, intuitionist logic, alternative theoretical organization.

Resumen

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El breve diálogo de Cusano, *De Deo Abscondito*, presenta una conversación entre un pagano y un cristiano sobre la cuestión de si Dios puede ser conocido. Se muestra que el pagano argumenta dentro de la lógica clásica, mientras que el cristiano razona consistentemente mediante proposiciones doblemente negadas y argumentos ad absurdum, formas de razonamiento propias de lo que se formalizó en el siglo XX como lógica intuicionista. Interpretar el diálogo a través de esta distinción lógica permite una comprensión más precisa y coherente tanto del contenido como de la estructura del argumento. La solución negativa al problema central se expresa mediante proposiciones pertenecientes a una lógica posteriormente formalizada por Vasiliev en el siglo XX. Finalmente, ambos participantes llegan a un acuerdo en el que incluso el pagano habla de Dios del mismo modo que el cristiano, es decir, mediante, como suele hacerse después de Agustín, una simple analogía que preserva la incognoscibilidad de Dios, trascendiendo toda lógica específica. Sin embargo, la inventiva de Cusano lo lleva a un nuevo pensamiento lógico, es decir, a razonar con lógica intuicionista y a organizar una teoría según un nuevo método, aunque de forma incompleta.

Palabras clave: Cusanus, *De Deo Abscondito*, proposiciones doblemente negadas, lógica intuicionista, organización teórica alternativa.

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1. Introduction

In 1440, Nicolaus Cusanus (or Nicolaus de Cusa, or Nicholas of Cusa) wrote his most famous work, *De Docta Ignorantia*. In it, he introduced two major philosophical innovations: first, reasoning about infinity through the negation of proportions (that is, by stating that something is “neither more nor less”); and second, the use of mathematical series converging to a limit. Above all, he introduced the notion of the *coincidentia oppositorum* (and even *coincidentia contradictorium*), through which he sought to move beyond Aristotelian logic, founded on the principle of non-contradiction. He wrote:



However, the [absolute Maximum, i.e. God] transcends all our understanding. For our intellect cannot, by means of reasoning, combine contradictories in their Beginning, since we proceed by means of what nature makes evident to us. Our reason falls far short of this infinite power and is unable to connect contradictories, which are infinitely distant. Therefore, we see incomprehensibly, beyond all rational inference, that Absolute Maximality (to which nothing is opposed and with which the Minimum coincides) is infinite. But “maximum” and “minimum,” as used in this book, are transcendent terms of absolute signification, so that in their absolute simplicity they encompass... all things.²

Just a few pages later, he deepened this idea: “He Himself apprehends what He is; our apprehension of Him is a defective approximation of His apprehension”³.

It is therefore of great interest to understand the next step in Cusanus’ reflection on the possibility of thinking God, as developed in the short treatise *De Deo Abscondito* (*On the Hidden God*) (hereafter abbreviated as *DDA*), a dialogue between two interlocutors—a Pagan and a Christian. It was written between 1440 and 1445, after *De Docta Ignorantia*. The dialogue appears to elaborate on a proposition from that earlier work: “The ancient pagans derided the Jews, who worshiped one infinite God of whom they were ignorant.”⁴

In *DDA*, Cusanus dramatizes a conversation between a Christian at prayer and a Pagan who asks why he worships what he does not know. Cusanus’ thesis, expressed through the Christian’s replies, is that one cannot know God. The Christian’s answers gradually lead the Pagan to acknowledge the impossibility of knowing God, and finally, through analogy, to recognize the unbridgeable distance between human knowledge and the divine.

Few scholars have analyzed this remarkable text in detail⁵, and none have addressed its logical structure. Yet, since throughout his works Cusanus explicitly opposed “*Aristotelis secta*”.⁶ Ernst Cassirer, a century ago, suggested that Cusanus had intuitively introduced a new logic⁷. Although many scholars consider Cassirer’s claim an exaggeration, Drago⁸ recognized that Cusanus’ search for ever-new names of God inaugurated a new mode of logical thought—beyond

² Cusanus 1440/2001a, I-iv, p. 12.

³ Cusanus, 1440/2001a, I-xvi, p. 44.

⁴ Cusanus, 1440/2001a, I-xvi, p. 84.

⁵ See, e.g., Cusano, 1995, 2002, 2010; Miller, 2003; Monaco, 2014.

⁶ Cusanus, 1449/2001c, p. 463, no. 6.

⁷ Cassirer, 1927/1963, 15, 31.

⁸ Drago, 2017.



both affirmative and negative theology—and anticipated the use of modern intuitionist logic. Cassirer's intuition was therefore correct.

In what follows, we shall see that, by identifying the kinds of logic employed by each interlocutor, it is possible to achieve a detailed and coherent analysis of Cusanus' *De Deo Abscondito*.

2. The Numerous Problems in Cusanus' Work and the Negative Solution to its Central Question

Let us begin with some quantitative observations. The dialogue, as translated by Hopkins, spans approximately five and a half pages and is divided by Cusanus into fifteen short sections comprising 124 propositions in total.

Even a cursory reading reveals the presence of numerous questions or problems—twenty-seven in all, averaging about five per page. To my knowledge, this density of problems is unparalleled in any literary or philosophical text, and it constitutes the first difficulty a scholar encounters when approaching *DDA*.

The fifteen sections naturally divide into four parts, each centered on one of four main problems. Their sequence first addresses the question of whether God can be known; then the Christian suggests approaching God in a way parallel to the Truth; any approximate knowledge through a word-name is rejected; finally, the pagan agrees with the Christian, who proposes an analogy as the best outcome of the quest to know God. The problems are as follows:

1. [Sections 1–2] *Is God known?*: The two discussants put forward opposing arguments, which ultimately lead to an unresolved divergence that halts this first stage of dialogue.
2. [Sections 3–7] *Why can both Truth and God be known only through themselves?*: The Pagan objects to the Christian's claim, reopening the dialogue by challenging the thesis that Truth and God are self-revealing.
3. [Sections 8–12] *How can God be characterized?*: This is the most profound section, addressing God as principle, being, and nothingness, as well as His name. The Pagan proposes various ideas, all of which the Christian rejects as inadequate.
4. [Sections 13–15] *If God is unknown, can one still call Him "God"?*: Both interlocutors finally agree on an analogy: God stands to created beings as sight stands to colors.

The central problem of the entire text is posed at the beginning: *Is God known?*



It is noteworthy that almost all questions and problems are raised by the Pagan (with the exception of one rhetorical question by the Christian in section 3: "...how, then, [Truth] can be apprehended except through itself?"⁹). For example, section 1 alone contains the following four questions: "Who are you?" / "What are you worshiping?" / "Who is your God?" / "How is it that you worship so seriously that of which you have no knowledge?"

At the end of section 1, the Christian offers two responses to the main problem, the second being: "Because I am without knowledge [of Him], I worship [Him]."¹⁰ His subsequent replies to the Pagan's questions further emphasize this theme of ignorance of God. Eventually, section 14 is devoted entirely to the analogy mentioned above, which expresses how this ignorance is to be conceived. In the final section, the Pagan accepts the Christian's analogy.

However, an analogy does not directly solve the main problem or its related questions; it merely transcends them intuitively. The true answer to the question is given instead by three key propositions, found respectively in sections 10, 11, and 13, all of which assert the ignorance of God—even with respect to His very name:

Christian: That it is neither the case that He is named or is not named, nor the case that He both is and is not named.

Christian: It is not the case that He is nothing or that He is not nothing; nor is He both nothing and not nothing.

Christian: Neither the one [way of speaking of God] nor the other, nor both¹¹.

This type of proposition ("A, not-A, A and not-A") was later called "indifferent" by the logician A. Vasiliev, who in 1924 founded upon it a form of logic known as *paraconsistent logic*, which allows contradictions without explosion.

What do these three propositions mean? They express that God is unknown because He transcends all affirmative and negative propositions, however they may be combined. God surpasses every kind of statement—even two mutually contradictory ones. In this sense, He stands beyond the coincidence of opposites, anticipating what Cusanus would later write: "God is beyond the wall of contradiction."¹²

3. The Word "Truth" as a Doubly Negated Proposition

⁹ Cusanus, 1440-45/2001b, 3 p. 300.

¹⁰ Cusanus, 1440-45/2001b, 1, p. 300.

¹¹ Cusanus, 1440-45/2001b, 13, p. 304.

¹² Cusanus, 1453/2001d, ch. X.



Our purpose is to investigate how the two interlocutors in *De Deo Abscondito* reason about God. The problem of speaking logically about Him is admittedly difficult. However, we may benefit from the historical experience of scientific reasoning concerning unknown entities.

Let us first consider how the notion of “truth” has been expressed through different words in the past. The ancient Greeks used the term *ἀλήθεια* (*alētheia*), while the Romans used *veritas*. The Greek word derives from the privative prefix *a-* and the verb *lantano* (“I am hidden”), so that *alētheia* literally means “not being hidden” or “unveiling.” Thus, its meaning is not that of a fixed reality or an abstract hypostasis, but of a dynamic process—one involving both the refutation of error and the recognition of truth. In this sense, *alētheia* denotes not a static, once-and-for-all knowledge, but an ongoing process of discovery.

By contrast, the Latin term *veritas* denotes “faith” or “trust,” that is, a truth accepted without the need for critical investigation.

In time, however, the Greek *alētheia* itself came to acquire a fixed, metaphysical meaning, perhaps beginning with Plato, and thus became closer to *veritas*. Aristotle, immersed in this later understanding, defined truth as follows: “To say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true”¹³. From this definition arises the basic principle of classical logic, which treats all propositions abstractly and dichotomously: “Either a proposition is true or it is not.” The history of the term *truth* in Greek thought therefore reveals a fundamental duality between two conceptions—one dynamic, revelatory, and processual (*alētheia*), the other static and assertive (*veritas*).

In rhetoric, a doubly negated proposition is equivalent to its corresponding affirmative form, since rhetoric follows the law of double negation ($\neg\neg A \rightarrow A$), a characteristic law of classical logic. However, the word *a-lētheia* represents a double negation of a non-rhetorical nature, because its corresponding affirmative term, *veritas*, has a different meaning. Hence, in this case, the law of double negation fails.

Contrary to a widespread linguistic prejudice¹⁴, natural language contains many doubly negated words—such as *in-nocent*, *in-nocuous*, and *non-violent*—whose affirmative counterparts do not exist or have different meanings. In such cases too, the law of double negation fails. This failure is a defining feature of non-classical logics, the most significant of which is the intuitionist

¹³ Aristotle, *Met.* 1011b.

¹⁴ Horn, 1989, pp. 84ff., 296–308; 2002, pp. 79ff.



logic formalized in the twentieth century¹⁵. It has been recognized that the failure of the double negation law alone suffices to distinguish intuitionist logic from classical logic.¹⁶

Consequently, every genuine double negation introduces discourse into the realm of intuitionist logic—a mode of reasoning particularly well suited to investigating, in the spirit of the original meaning of *alētheia*, that which is unknown.

4. Modern Accurate Use of Doubly Negated Propositions

Modern culture has likewise obscured the fundamental duality of meanings embedded in the word “truth,” reducing it to a single, idealist conception. Moreover, with the proliferation of idealist notions, natural language has increasingly lost its close correspondence between propositions and empirical facts. As a result, little attention has been paid to distinguishing between rhetorical and non-rhetorical uses of doubly negated propositions.

This linguistic inaccuracy, however, has been resisted in two important domains: legal discourse and experimental science—both of which require statements to be grounded in demonstrable evidence.

Consider, for instance, a legal formula such as: “Acquitted owing to insufficient evidence of guilt.” This statement does not mean that the defendant acted lawfully, but only that the court’s investigation failed to establish guilt. Here, the double negation law does not hold; the statement therefore belongs to intuitionist logic. In what follows, we shall refer to such propositions—those whose corresponding affirmative propositions differ in meaning—as doubly negated propositions (DNPs).

Let us next turn to scientific research in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries concerning previously unknown entities, namely the atoms of matter. This inquiry led to the creation of a new scientific theory: classical chemistry. At the beginning of the foundational text of this theory, Lavoisier reports that the philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac advised him to base the new science on natural language, but improved so as to be as precisely structured as algebra¹⁷. By following this suggestion, Lavoisier claimed to be effecting “a scientific revolution.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Drago, 2021.

¹⁶ Dummett, 1977, p. 24; Grize, 1970; Prawitz & Melmnaas, 1968.

¹⁷ Lavoisier, 1789, I, vii, xiv-xv.

¹⁸ Berthelot, 1890.



The key aspect of Condillac's linguistic reform was a more rigorous qualification of the copula "is".¹⁹ Lavoisier's revolution may be said to culminate in his definition of a chemical element through a doubly negated proposition: "We will call an element what is not yet decomposed".²⁰ This statement is not equivalent to any corresponding affirmative proposition (e.g., "that which is united"), because the latter lacks experimental verification. In this way, Lavoisier effectively replaced the copula "is" with the two negative terms "not decomposed."

A similar pattern appears at the birth of thermodynamics, where the ontological status of heat was uncertain—whether it was a massless fluid or the mechanical energy of invisible, colliding particles. Sadi Carnot, the founder of thermodynamics, likewise employed numerous DNPs in his reasoning about heat.²¹ His work can be summarized by the proposition: "It is not true that heat is not work." Both the affirmative ("Heat is work") and the negative ("Heat is not work") propositions are false, since heat is only *partially* equivalent to work.

Another noteworthy feature of the language used by both Lavoisier and Carnot is their reliance on modal terms—such as the "impossibility" of *Hyle* (the hypothesized primordial matter) or of perpetual motion. It is well known that modal logic, under the S4 system, can be translated into intuitionist logic²²; thus, a modal term is equivalent to a DNP. Ordinary language, rather than burdening discourse with repeated explicit negations, often employs modal terms to express equivalent meanings in a more natural and fluid manner.

These examples demonstrate that it is indeed possible to reason about unknown entities using the logical resources inherent in natural language—namely, doubly negated and modal propositions. Three centuries before the scientists mentioned above, Cusanus had already recognized and implicitly employed these linguistic and logical possibilities in his search for the most fitting names of the supreme Unknown, God²³. Indeed, in the final period of his life, he explicitly proposed such names: in 1460, *De Possess* (*On "Possibility is Being"*), where he used a modal expression, and in 1462, *De non Aliud (Not-Other)*, where he used a doubly negated one.

5. The Intuitionist Propositions in Cusanus' Text

¹⁹ De Condillac, 1780, pp. 378–393.

²⁰ Lavoisier, 1789, p. viii.

²¹ Drago & Pisano, 2004.

²² Hughes & Cresswell, 1996, pp. 224ff.

²³ Drago, 2017.



Let us return to *De Deo Abscondito* (*DDA*) and begin analyzing the ways in which the two discussants argue. This requires examining the logical features of their propositions.

As noted by Miller²⁴ and Monaco²⁵, the dialogue presents several points of opposition that can be traced back to the Platonic distinction between the two faculties *diánoia* and *nóesis*. Cusanus interpreted these as two faculties of the human mind: *ratio*, the discursive faculty operating under the principle of non-contradiction, and *intellectus*, capable of *coniecturae*. However, neither scholar connected these two mental faculties with two distinct kinds of logic. Previous studies²⁶ have shown that: in Cusanus' thought, these two faculties operate according to the two main kinds of logic: the classical and the intuitionis, the latter based on doubly negated propositions (DNPs).

Indeed, Cusanus' text presents numerous DNPs, although the author never explicitly identifies this logical feature in his propositions. One example is: "It is not false that 'God' is His name"²⁷. This proposition is not equivalent to its affirmative counterpart, "God is His name," since the latter lacks sufficient evidence.

In *DDA*, there are 94 DNPs among 124 total propositions—roughly three-quarters of the entire text. Their density, over 18 per page (about 38 lines each), is remarkably high. This demonstrates that Cusanus' use of double negation is not a rhetorical device but a genuine logical feature distinct from classical reasoning.

Listing all DNPs would be lengthy; many will appear in the following analysis. In each case, the two negations can be identified, and one can verify the nature of the DNP by substituting the corresponding affirmative terms—which will always yield a non-equivalent proposition.

Their distribution is summarized in the following table, which reports the main logical characteristics of *De Deo Abscondito*:

Part	Section	Problems	DNPs	Vasiliev's Propositions	Possible Reasonings	Provocative Arguments	Christian's AAA	PSR
I	1	2	3	—	1	1	—	—
	2	4	5	—	2	2	2	—
II	3	2	6	—	3	—	1	—

²⁴ Miller, 2003, pp. 1–11.

²⁵ Monaco, 2014, pp. 99–106.

²⁶ Drago, 2010, 2019.

²⁷ Cusanus, 1462/2001g, sect. 13.

Part	Section	Problems	DNPs	Vasiliev's Propositions	Possible Reasonings	Provocative Arguments	Christian's AAA	PSR
	4	2	4	–	1	–	1	–
	5	1	<i>18</i>	–	8	1	2	–
	6	2	5	–	1	–	–	–
	7	1	6	–	1	–	–	–
III	8	1	2	–	–	–	–	–
	9	2	8	–	8	1	2	–
	10	4	11	1	4	1	2	<i>1</i>
	11	3	7	1	5	1	1	<i>1</i>
	12	2	3	–	1	–	–	–
IV	13	3	5	1	4	–	–	–
	14	–	7	–	<i>10</i>	–	–	–
	15	–	4	–	2	–	–	–
Total	–	27	94	3	51	7	11	2

Legend: In italics, the highest score in each column.

In scientific texts that rely essentially on DNPs, the logical thread can be preserved simply by following the sequence of those propositions. In Cusanus' *DDA*, the number of DNPs (94) is so high that they plausibly represent the logical backbone of the 124 total propositions. This hypothesis is reinforced by another observation: parts II and III (together spanning about two pages) include 39 and 31 DNPs, more than twice as many as parts I (8) and IV (16). These two middle parts are, accordingly, the most argumentative sections of the dialogue.

It is remarkable that the Pagan never uses DNPs (except in the final section 15, where he expresses agreement with the Christian's thesis and even employs four DNPs himself). Rather, he raises questions or states straightforward facts. His logic, therefore, is essentially classical. Two striking examples of his application of the classical double negation law are:

“If He is not nothing, then He is something”²⁸.

“[If] being [= non-nothing] would not befit God... He is nothing”²⁹.

²⁸ Cusanus 1440-45/2001b, beginning of sect. 9.

²⁹ Cusanus 1440-45/2001b, sect. 11.



All other DNPs are uttered by the Christian, who only rarely uses affirmative or purely negative propositions (for instance, in sect. 14, where a dozen such propositions describe his analogy). In particular, section 5—a key passage concerning how Truth is known—contains 18 DNPs within just 21 lines, confirming that the DNP structure is essential to his argumentation.

These findings show that only the Christian employs intuitionist logic, and that he does so in a systematic and deliberate way. His reasoning (and thus Cusanus' own) may be seen as a rejection of both *positive theology* and *negative theology* (which, based on classical logic, attribute affirmative or negative predicates to God, such as “infinite” or “ineffable”). Instead, Cusanus applies an “eminential” theology, which implicitly operates through DNPs.

The dialogue thus represents *a dispute between two interlocutors, each reasoning according to a distinct kind of logic—classical and intuitionist.*

Consequently, the entire exchange can be summarized in a few key propositions. The dialogue begins with the Pagan's implicit affirmative thesis: “God is knowable.” The two then discuss whether “God is not knowable.” Yet the Christian does not seek to prove the negation of this thesis (“God is not knowable”) but rather to express, through Vasiliev's kind of propositions, that God transcends all logic. He ultimately conveys this through an analogy illustrating that distance. The Pagan, finally, agrees—restating the analogy in his own words, affirming that God surpasses both kinds of logic and even their combination.

In short, each discussant argues consistently within his own logical framework—and notably, the Christian employs propositions belonging to unconventional, not yet formalized systems of logic.

6. The Initial Provocative Questions on the Irrationality of Worshipping the Unknown

Let us now examine in detail the logical unfolding of Cusanus' dialogue. The crucial issue is whether *DDA*'s reasoning, expressed largely through DNPs, can be regarded as rational. Upon first reading the Christian's statement: “Because I am without knowledge [of Him], I worship”³⁰ the reader may reasonably doubt its rationality.

³⁰ Cusanus, 1440-45/2001b,1, p. 300.



Section 1 opens with the Pagan's question: "What are you worshipping?"³¹ and "What are you worshipping?". The above quoted Christian's answer to the latter surprises the Pagan, who implicitly assumes that "A person worships what he knows":

"I don't know [what I worship]."

This prompts the Pagan's next question:

"How is it that you worship so seriously that of which you have no knowledge?"³².

The Christian's reply is the negative counterpart of the Pagan's assumption. The Pagan immediately interprets it as a contradiction: given his tenet *A*, the Christian asserts *not-A*—the mirror opposite, as classical logic would dictate. Accordingly, at the start of section 2, the Pagan politely accuses the Christian of absurdity:

"I marvel [\approx it is absurd] that a man is devoted to what he does not know."³³

From the Pagan's perspective, the Christian should admit: "Yes, it is absurd." His argument, however, is *ad personam*, and thus impolite.

The Christian responds by redirecting the charge of absurdity to a widespread belief—including the Pagan's—that one can know what one worships:

"It is more amazing [\approx absurd] that a man is devoted to that of which he thinks he has knowledge."³⁴.

Here the Christian shifts the focus from his interlocutor to a general human assumption ("everyone"), avoiding any personal attack. Moreover, his use of the word "amazing" softens the tone, turning it into a persuasive appeal rather than a confrontation. Logically, he opposes the Pagan's "ignorance" to his own expression "thinks to know," which, being "thinks" a modal word and hence a DNP, includes both a negation and a double negation. In intuitionist logic, such differences in the number of negations do not necessarily entail contradiction—as Cusanus frequently remarks, opposites do not always oppose.

However, adhering to classical logic, the Pagan translates the modal expression "he thinks" into a straightforward affirmative proposition:

It is absurd that a man is devoted to that of which he has knowledge.

He thus concludes that the Christian has reversed the charge of absurdity against him—and even more strongly than before.

³¹ Cusanus, 1440-45/2001b, 1, p. 300.

³² Cusanus, 1440-45/2001b, 1, p. 300.

³³ Cusanus, 1440-45/2001b, 2, p. 300.

³⁴ Cusanus, 1440-45/2001b, 2, p. 300.



The Pagan then seeks clarification through two further questions. Yet the Christian's next answers astonish him even more: he asserts not only that God is unknown but that "Nothing can be known," and that whoever maintains the opposite view is "irrational." These three statements together constitute a radical critique, effectively accusing the Pagan of irrationality. The Pagan's final reply in section 2, accordingly, is an overt countercharge: he calls the Christian "void of reason."

A reader reasoning within classical logic, as the Pagan does, will perceive this exchange as mutual insult—a breakdown in dialogue over an incomprehensible topic. Yet when interpreted through the coexistence of two logics, the dialogue reveals its full rationality. It is, in fact, a contest of reasoning strategies: each interlocutor attempts to lead the other toward recognizing an absurdity—a confrontation not of irrationality, but of two distinct rationalities.

8. The Final Logical Step in a Problem-Based Theoretical Organization: The Application of the Principle of Sufficient Reason

The high density of problems, DNP, and AAA leads one to suspect that this text was organized as a problem-based theory; the entire ideal model consists of the following logical steps: i) statement of a basic problem; ii) use of DNP; iii) use of (a chain of) AAAs; iv) application of the principle of sufficient reason to translate the conclusion of the last AAA (or possibly a chain of them) into an affirmative proposition, the only proposition that can be tested against reality and thus decide whether the theory is valid or not³⁵.

Recognizing that the first two logical steps occur in Cusanus' text and that there are also many AAAs, the question arises: are the AAAs linked together in a chain? Let's examine them. The pagan AAA in section 3 concerns the denial of knowledge of something; The remaining AAAs (in sections 1, 2, and 9) deny any knowledge of God. Therefore, there is no connection between them.

Let us now examine Christian's AAAs. The first two AAAs concern ignorance of God and ignorance of anything, respectively. The AAA in section 10 concerns the lack of a characterization of God; then the one in section 11 concerns a different subject: God as the principle of being and non-being. Only the three AAAs in sections 3, 4, and 5 are connected: at the end of section 5, the word "Therefore..." provides this logical connection between the first two AAAs (concerning the same subject, ignorance of the Truth outside oneself) and the third (the irrationality of those who claim to

³⁵ Drago, 2012.



know). In conclusion, Christian's reasoning does not systematically connect the AAAs: in only one case is there a logical consequence between the three AAAs. Here we see the first limit of the great Cusanus's ingenuousness in discovering a new way of arguing according to intuitionist logic.

The final step in organizing a problem-based theory remains to be considered: the application of the principle of sufficient reason to the conclusion of a possible chain. At the end of a single chain discovered above, this principle is not applied.

However, this principle can also be applied to a single AAA. Indeed, the principle is applied to the conclusion of the AAA in section 10; it translates as: He is "prior to any formable thought of it." A further application of the principle occurs at the end of section 11, although the last two propositions are in reverse order, namely, first the affirmative proposition and then the DNP, which is the conclusion of the AAA:

If indeed there are principles of being and non-being, God precedes them. However, non-being does not have a principle of its non-being, but only a principle of its being. For non-being requires a beginning in order to be. In this way, then, He is the Principle of Non-Being, because [absurd:] without Him there would be no non-being.

However, these applications do not address the central question of the entire theory, whether God can be known or not. Therefore, the final logical step of a problem-based theoretical organization was simply intuited by Cusanus, but not fully implemented. Rather, the arguments of his concluding dialogue drew on Vasiliev's propositions.

In conclusion, both the lack of a concatenation of all AAAs and the limited application of the principle of sufficient reason show that Cusanus's thought did not reach the decisive steps for organizing the entire question according to a clear theoretical organization. He anticipated much of this organization, but not its concluding part.

9. On the Logical Coherence of *DDA*

In conclusion, *DDA* presents a logical path to present an unknown God. The two interlocutors follow two different types of logic in an almost coherent manner.

The entire dialogue revolves around Pagan's scandal at seeing Christian pray to an unknown God. This scandal leads him to suspect Christian's irrationality and generates a confrontation that develops coherently within two logics: classical and intuitionist. Pagan is required to use subtle reasoning because of Christian's faith in a God essentially different from any fetish constructed by



human hands. According to Cusanus, reason cannot represent God because not only is He beyond the *coincidentia oppositorum*, but also because (true) knowledge of anything is impossible.

However, starting in section 3, Christian appeals to a transcendent Truth; the reasoning of sections 3-13 reveals Cusanus's Platonism: he presents two ideals, Truth and God: to both he attributes a metaphysical nature free from any approximation. Because of this idealistic approach, it is obvious that Truth and God are concerned with perfect knowability, only in themselves; while relative knowledge is also taken into consideration, it is denied its relevance to the question under discussion.

But this Platonism is appropriate to the pagan who uses classical logic and therefore conceives the distinction between ideality and reality as a dichotomy, since one is the negation of the other; that is, exactly as Cusanus presents the distinction between the knowledge of God and common knowledge. However, it is not appropriate to Christian thought, which uses DNP and therefore must apply the notion of truth as *alétheia*; that is, it conceives the approach to God as a process of discovery.

This Platonism of Cusanus obviously hindered his discovery of the possible connection between the AAAs and the application of the PSR to the conclusion of the AAAs. Indeed, in the concluding parts III and IV, he fails to skillfully use the AAAs and conclude them with an application of the PSR; He does not present a complete chain of AAAs nor a correct way to reach a conclusion from their reasoning. However, it must be remembered that the model of an idealistic theory was unknown to him; therefore, his partial approximation to this model stems from his lucidity in reasoning within the then-unknown intuitionist logic.

Finally, Cusanus presents an analogy that compares the separation of man from Truth (and from God) to the separation of colors from sight. The analogy is suggested as if it were the product of an argument; in reality, it is drawn from a fanciful etymology of the name "God" from the Greek word "*théoro*" (to see). This analogy is not, as Cusanus presents it, a strong logical argument like a direct or indirect proof; otherwise, it could have been placed at the end of section 3, and thus the dialogue could have ended there without mentioning idealistic Truth.

Perhaps Cusanus wanted to demonstrate that his hypothesized type of non-classical logic is superior to classical logic. However, the final steps in the logical development of his theory are lacking, and the comparison is incomplete.

10. Conclusions

In section 5, I mentioned Miller's (2003) analysis of *DDA*, which introduces the distinction between *dianoia* and *noesis* in Cusanus's thought; the current analysis, which attributes classical logic to the



former and intuitionistic logic to the latter, represents an improvement on his analysis, suggesting explanations for all 104 propositions.

Cusanus makes extensive use of several DNPs and many AAAs. Therefore, Cusanus's text has come very close to the alternative model of theoretical organization. This partial adherence to this model, however, is exceptional, since the formalism of this logic was unknown to him, as was the model of this theoretical organization. It would take five centuries before his type of reasoning was improved.

A remark on Cusanus's theology. The concept of an absolute God is inherent in the Jewish and Islamic faiths, while the Christian faith suggests the role of Jesus Christ as an intermediary. An unknown God is not the Christian God, because in this religion, the Son of God is born on Earth, lives, is killed, and is resurrected, and the Gospels narrate his story. Cusanus seems to forget this mediation of Jesus Christ.

The *DDA* represents an application of the notion of God as situated beyond a coincidentia oppositorum, which he presented in his previous book, *De Docta Ignorantia*. God is beyond this insurmountable coincidence for reason understood as ratio. However, his final analogy, like every analogy whose meaning is equivalent to a DNP: "It is not true that it is not...", namely it expresses a conjecture of the intellectus: In fact, Cusanus would understand this point twenty years later, when he discovered his own way of reasoning, which would later be illustrated both in *De Possesit*³⁶, which attributes a modal name to God, and in *De Non-Aliud*³⁷; and better yet, its synthesis in *De Venatione Sapientiae*³⁸, which attributes a double negation to God.

In conclusion, in Cusanus's intellectual growth, the *DDA* constitutes a preparatory phase for the new names for God discovered in the last years of his life; they correctly relate to Him through the ancient meaning of *alétheia*; that is, through a process of discovery, non-classical logic is better practiced and his Christian faith in an accessible God is reestablished.

³⁶ Cusanus, 1460/2001e.

³⁷ Cusanus, 1662/2001f.

³⁸ Cusanus, 1463/2001g, chap. 14.



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