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UMANISTICA**

**THE PHILOSOPHICAL-THEOLOGICAL METHOD OF NICHOLAS OF
CUSA IN HIS *DE BERYLLO***

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Introduction

Nicolaus Cusanus is an extraordinary figure in the history of Western thought, and particularly in the history of the Christian and Neoplatonic tradition. A relatively «isolated figure» as a thinker in the context of his time¹ (in spite of his extensive and close ties to mid-15th century Roman and Florentine Renaissance circles²), he has been the object of ever-increasing scholarly interest over the past century³, yet there are still a number of outstanding issues regarding which scholars have not yet found any general agreement, and intellectual disputes are common. One of the most prominent issues about which there is a great variety of interpretations of Cusanus' thought (and likely one that is paradigmatic for many others) is the problem of the status of 'philosophy' and 'theology' in his works⁴. The *De Beryllo*, a smaller treatise, much less known and studied than his 'major' works, is in fact able to help us shed light on this problem in Cusanus' thought in a new way.

It is a remarkably synthesis between a highly structured, almost formalized method and a clear focus on theological themes. Arguably, it shows signs that it was a work written in the midst of the *Wegestreit*, the struggle between the *via antica* and the *via moderna* which also affected his intellectual milieu, involving his friends at the Tegernsee monastery (Caspar Aindorffer and Bernard of Waging)—and in this context, Cusanus' own 'intellectualized' understanding of the *mystica theologia* and his interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius came under attack from an intellectual opponent, the Carthusian

¹ As Eugenio Garin has argued about Cusanus viewed particularly in the context of the contemporary Neoplatonic tradition: E. GARIN, *Cusano e i platonici italiani del Quattrocento*, in *Die Toleranzidee bei Nikolaus von Kues und in der Neuzeit, in Nicolò da Cusa. Relazioni tenute al Convegno Interuniversitario di Bressanone nel 1960*, ed. G. Flores d'Arcais, Florence 1962, pp. 75-100, esp. p. 86. There are problems even calling him a 'humanist'; see M. SIEDLMAYER, *Nikolaus von Kues und der Humanismus*, in *Humanismus, Mystic und Kunst in der Welt des Mittelalters*, ed. J. Koch, Leiden, 1953, pp. 1-38.

² On the complex intellectual network of connections centered around Florence and Rome in the early fifteenth century that Cusanus was a part of, see T. MÜLLER, *Der "Florentiner Stammtisch", eine frühe "Akademie" der Wissenschaften und der Künste*, in *Das europäische Erbe im Denken des Nikolaus von Kues: Geistesgeschichte als Geistesgegenwart*, ed. H. Schwätzer, Münster 2008, pp. 89-128. Müller describes the network of informal connections as a *Stammtisch*, approximately translated as a «regulars' table».

³ On the development of scholarship on Cusanus through the past century, see e.g., M. WATANABE, *An Appreciation, in Introducing Nicholas of Cusa: A Guide to a Renaissance Man*, ed. C. M. Bellitto – T. M. Izbicki – G. Christianson, New York 2004, pp. 3-19; also, ID., *The Origins of Modern Cusanus Research in Germany and the Establishment of the Heidelberg Opera Omnia*, in *Concord and Reform: Nicholas of Cusa and Legal and Political Thought in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. M. Watanabe, Burlington (VT) 2001, pp. 35-60.

⁴ On the widely varying positions taken on this question, ranging from seeing Cusanus as a radically innovative 'philosopher' (e.g. Cassirer and his tradition) to, in essence, a theologian and essentially 'medieval' figure in continuity with the tradition (e.g. Rudolf Haubst, Jasper Hopkins or David Albertson), see the excellent overview of the massive existing literature in K. M. ZIEBART, *Nicolaus Cusanus on Faith and the Intellect: a Case Study in 15th-century Fides-Ratio Controversy*, Leiden 2013, pp. 33-52.

monk Vincent of Aggsbach—a controversy that saw its most important developments between 1453 and 1459, the years of Cusanus writing *De Beryllo*⁵. Behind the optimistic focus in *De Beryllo* on a philosophical and theological method which could be used by anyone and help them ascend to a mystical *visio intellectualis*, one can hear clear echoes, in how Cusanus interacts with his sources and focuses on ‘integrating’ the *philosophi* and *theologi*, of needing to justify and defend, in effect, his life’s work as a thinker. Yet, he chose in the end to not engage directly in the controversy with Aggsbach, unaccountably delayed completing *De Beryllo* for years, and it is likely that the Tegernsee monks did not even receive a copy of it during his lifetime.

This thesis will investigate the method that is the main focus of *De Beryllo* in great detail, using an approach of the *Strukturanalyse* type, developing a system of notation to analyze and reconstruct Cusanus’ remarkably consistent and powerful mode of thought. It will be structured as follows: in Chapter 1, I will examine briefly the history of *De Beryllo* and its existing manuscripts and editions, and I will do a thorough review of the existing literature on this work and the outstanding problems yet to be addressed. In Chapter 2, I will perform a detailed analysis of the methodologies used in the literature (focusing on Flasch’s influential ‘genetic’ analysis, Platzer’s *Strukturanalyse* and the issues involved in close reading), and develop an account of the ‘B-notation’ system as well as the main form of the ‘beryllus’ method it will be used to represent (Chapter 2.3). In Chapter 3, I will turn to the analysis of the text of *De Beryllo*: the title, with a detailed analysis of its meaning and significance in the tradition (Chapter 3.1); the ‘Introduction’ section, i.e. paragraphs 1-2 (Chapter 3.2); the ‘Methodological’ section, i.e. paragraphs 3-8 (Chapter 3.3); and an extended analysis of the passages featuring geometrical constructions that Cusanus employs, paradigmatically, in the application of the method (Chapter 3.4). Chapter 4 will focus on the notion of hierarchy in the application of the method, featuring an extended analysis of the passages featuring the paradigmatic ‘political’ image of *rex/princeps/imperator* (Chapter 4.1), an analysis of the issue of how to hierarchize ‘divine names’

⁵ See ZIEBART, *ibid.*, pp. 137-200 for a detailed account of this controversy and the events surrounding it, which offers an excellent background for some of the intellectual issues preoccupying Cusanus during the long period of writing *De Beryllo* (although *De Beryllo* receives little mention in the text).

obtained through the method (Chapter 4.2), and an analysis of the Neoplatonic ontological framework of *simplicitas* guiding Cusanus' application of the method in the text, though independent from it (Chapter 4.3). Finally, in Chapter 5 I will focus on the Christological character that *De Beryllo* ultimately shows, examining the powerful Christological image of a (precious) stone in a little-studied 1453 sermon, Sermon CXXVI (Chapter 5.1), then exploring the ontological role of Christ as mediator for bridging the gap between finite creature and infinite creator in Sermon CLXXXVIII from 1455 (Chapter 5.2), and introducing an 'update' to the 'B-notation' described in Chapter 2.3 to account for the characteristics of such an ontological structure (Chapter 5.3); then, I will do a close reading of the 'Christological passages', 69-70, with the newly-developed notation, as well as of the final paragraph, 72, showing ultimately that if one uses Cusanus' rigorous approach for employing the method of the *beryllus*, 'theology' (even what we would call of the 'revealed' or 'dogmatic' type) is not only not in conflict with 'philosophy', but, in a strikingly innovative and original synthesis, they ultimately coincide. Then, in Chapter 5.5, I will examine what this means for the title image of the *beryllus* (*intellectualis*), what its ontological status is within Cusanus' construction, and will offer a conjecture as to why Cusanus, in the end, chose not to send this treatise, unfinished for years, to his friends in Tegernsee, and not engage in the ongoing Aggsbach debate, even though his new synthesis in *De Beryllo* might seem to be a perfect defense.

Accordingly, the present work hopes to further our understanding of this unfairly neglected work, conduct the most detailed study and close reading of the *De Beryllo* attempted so far, and integrate the conclusions of the existing literature (highly fragmented, in five different languages, within traditions that often do not cite each other), avoiding as much as possible any one-sidedness and always aiming to pursue the path which seems most intellectually fruitful for understanding the text. It will propose and argue for an overall method of interpretation that attempts to bridge the extremes in interpretations, and which might help deepen our understanding of Cusanus' thought overall.

CHAPTER 1 – Background, editions and secondary literature on *De Beryllo*

1.1 Circumstances of the development and writing of the text

The treatise *De Beryllo*⁶ was developed, from its initial conception, over a long gestation period of more than 6 years, most likely from June 1452 until August 18, 1458, the date on which it was completed⁷. We first encounter a mention of this project—a work titled after the *beryllus* or beryl stone, clearly meant to be understood as a ‘lens’ to help with obtaining a certain kind of knowledge (under an overarching metaphor of knowledge as vision)—in Cusanus’ correspondence with the monks of the Benedictine monastery at Tegernsee at the beginning of 1454. The term *beryllus*, in clear reference to a (yet unwritten) new work by Cusanus, first appears in a letter to him by Caspar Aindorffer, the Abbot of Tegernsee, written sometime between January 15 and February 12, 1454, in which Aindorffer, speaking on behalf of the Tegernsee monks, asks Cusanus to send them, among other works they were interested in, a certain *beryllus*⁸. The term also appears in a letter by Bernard de Waging of the same Tegernsee monastery, written around the same time, i.e. before February 12, 1454: «we desire before all other things the new translation of [Pseudo-]Dionysius, Eusebius and the *Beryllus*»⁹. These passages are found within the context of a list of works that the Tegernsee monks were asking Cusanus to send them, and representing a clear mention of a very specific object assumed to be immediately familiar to Cusanus. Thus, they appear to reflect prior face-to-face conversations between Cusanus and the Tegernsee monks on the topic of a prospective work by Cusanus that would be called *Beryllus/De Beryllo*. These initial conversations likely took place on the occasion of the previous visit by Cusanus

⁶ All references to Cusanus’ works will be to the Heidelberg critical edition: NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Opera omnia, Iussu et auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita*, 22 vol., Leipzig – Hamburg, 1932-2010. Individual passages will be referenced using the name of the work, the number of the book with Roman numerals and the chapter with Arab numerals (where these exist), then the number of the paragraph, the page number and the line number with Arab numerals. Accordingly, references to *De Beryllo* will be exclusively to *De beryllo*, XI/I, ed. H. G. Senger - K. Bormann, Hamburg 1988. All Biblical references are to the Vulgate. All translations are mine unless otherwise specified.

⁷ For a thorough overview of the existing evidence, see Senger and Bormann’s introduction to the critical edition of *De Beryllo: De beryllo*, pp. XI-XIII.

⁸ E. VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour de la Docte Ignorance. Une controverse sur la Théologie Mystique au XV^e Siècle*, Münster 1915. See pp. 119-121, esp. p. 120: «specialiter mustum *beryllum*».

⁹ VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, pp. 123-125. See in particular p. 123: «Translationem novam Dionysij, Eusebium et *Beryllum* prae omnibus habere desideremus».

to the Tegernsee monastery in June 1452¹⁰. Our information about the idea for the work comes from the mentions of it in Cusanus' correspondence. Aindorffer, in his letter, adds a short sentence explaining why the monks want this work from Cusanus: «in order that we might see in the *De Docta Ignorantia* and in other places where many obscure things are seen to lie, most of all about the coincidence of contraries, about the infinite sphere, etc.»¹¹ From this passage we may conclude that Cusanus' initial idea involved writing a work titled *Beryllus/De Beryllo*¹² centered on the notion of the image of a beryll stone (*beryllus*) conceived as an aid for better understanding (conceptualized as «vision», with the implicit metaphor of the *beryllus* as an aid to a certain type of 'sight' associated with knowledge, which is in some way deficient¹³), mainly of certain passages in Cusanus' other works, particularly in *De Docta Ignorantia*, concerning, in particular, the coincidence of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*)¹⁴, and the «infinite sphere», one of the paradoxical objects constructed according to it¹⁵.

¹⁰ VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, p. 108, note 1. This point is underlined by Senger and Bormann in their introduction to the critical edition of the work: see *De Beryllo*, p. XIII.

¹¹ VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, p. 120: «ut videamus in docta ignorantia et alibi que multis obscura videntur, precipue de coincidentia contradictoriarum (*sic*), de spera infinita, etc.»

¹² On the ambiguity of the title of the work between these two options, see the in-depth discussion of the title in Chapter 3.1. At this point, it is sufficient to note that both titles for the work are used in the correspondence from the beginning – while in Aindorffer and de Waging's letters the work is referred to as *beryllus*, Nicholas' reply to Aindorffer refers to the work as *De Beryllo*.

¹³ A theme explicitly confirmed in a later letter by Bernard de Waging to Cusanus, written before March 18, 1454: «Et quoniam visus eorundem obtusus est, lippus et obscurus, necesse haberent uti Beryllo [...]» (VANSTEENBERGHE, *ibid.*, p. 133).

¹⁴ In the context of the correspondence between Cusanus and the Tegernsee monks, the *coincidentia contrariorum* can be safely interpreted as referring to the notion of *coincidentia oppositorum*, the coincidence of opposites, a central notion recurring throughout Cusanus' works, which roughly consists in the simultaneous affirmation of logically contrary propositions about an object considered as having in some way inherently paradoxical properties – most importantly, for Cusanus, God. For a general account of this theme in Cusanus, see T. LEINKAUF, *Nikolaus Cusanus: Eine Einfuehrung*, Münster 2005, pp. 89-102; K. FLASCH, *Nikolaus Cusanus*, München, 2001, pp. 46-70. For an account of the origins of this notion in the tradition, see Senger and Bormann's extended and well-sourced note in *De Beryllo*, pp. 93-100; with particular focus on the sources within the theological tradition, see R. HAUBST, *Streifzüge in die cusanische Theologie*, Münster 1991, pp. 117-141. For the context of the discussion in the letters, see the letter by Cusanus to the abbot and monks of Tegernsee of September 14, 1453 (VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, pp. 113-117), which discusses this as a methodological issue for the possibility of the highest form of (philosophy-)theology, *mystica theologia*, with a focus on the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius, the most prominent of Cusanus' sources – a theme that will be highly prominent in *De Beryllo*, which Cusanus had already conceived at least on a theoretical level. It must be noted that there is a more general longstanding problem in Cusanus scholarship concerning how to interpret Cusanus' *coincidentia oppositorum*, with some older (particularly neo-Thomistic) approaches trying to eliminate paradoxes in Cusanus' thought by interpreting it as something other than a coincidence of logical opposites, thus rendering the paradoxical formulations common in Cusanus as merely rhetorical – for a thorough criticism of such approaches and a strong argument for the need to take seriously the paradoxical and irreducible character of the *coincidentia oppositorum* that Cusanus himself insists on, see K. FLASCH, *Nikolaus Cusanus: Geschichte Einer Entwicklung: Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Cusanische Philosophie*, Frankfurt am Main, 1998, 2008 (3rd ed.), pp. 57-70.

¹⁵ The «infinite sphere» refers to a series of arguments in *De docta ignorantia* regarding the coincidence of all infinite geometrical figures: line, triangle, circle and sphere. Cf. *De docta ignorantia*, I, 17, 40-56, pp. 29, 5 – p. 38, 12; I, 10, 27, p. 20, 7; I, 13, 35, p. 25, 17 – p. 26, 2. This topic is not mentioned in *De Beryllo*.

Aindorffer and de Waging continued to ask Cusanus for the *De Beryllo*, with the apparent implicit assumption that Cusanus would complete the work in a short time—thus showing that the initial idea for the work was undoubtedly of a short one. However, Cusanus only managed to complete the work over 4 years later, on August 18, 1458 at Andraz Castle (Buechenstein), where he lived in the period between July 10, 1457 and September 14, 1458 in self-imposed exile from his bishopric in Brixen due to the continuing political conflict with Duke Sigismund of Austria and the Tirol, convinced, apparently, that his life was in danger¹⁶. In his letters to Caspar Aindorffer from 1454 to 1456, Cusanus excuses himself for not having been able to complete the *De Beryllo* because of «eye pain»¹⁷ and later (repeatedly, in 1454 and 1455) due to not having time, particularly because of his bishop duties¹⁸. While in the context of the correspondence we can interpret the ‘eye pain’, as we will see in the analysis of the title in Chapter 3.1, as not (only) a physical affliction but (also) one involving the special sense of

¹⁶ *De Beryllo*, p. XII. For a more in-depth account of the circumstances of Cusanus’ exile to Andraz Castle, see E. MEUTHEN, *Die letzten Jahre des Nikolaus von Kues. Biographische Untersuchungen nach neuen Quellen*, Köln - Opladen 1958, pp. 15ff; and, by the same author, ID., *Nikolaus von Kues 1401-1464. Skizze einer Biographie*, Münster 1964, pp. 98ff.

¹⁷ In the letter from Cusanus to Aindorffer of February 12, 1454, cf. VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, p. 122: «propter oculorum dolorem».

¹⁸ This theme of his lack of time and respite in order to complete the work recurs, with small variations, in his answers to the monks’ repeated requests. In his letter to de Waging on March 18, 1454 (VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, p. 134), Cusanus writes: «activitas illa, que me totum occupant, speculativam suspendit».

On August 16, 1454, he writes to Aindorffer: «Petijt missus *De Beryllo* compilacionem atque dubiorum certorum solucionem. Nondum complevi opus, nam sctractus per pontificiales curas, non potui totus illi operi prout res ipsa petit adesse; non desistam tamen quin data oportunitate quoad potero perficiam» (*ibid.*, p. 139). One may note that it seems that at this stage he was thinking about the *De Beryllo* as a *compilatio* or accompanied by a *compilatio* of solutions to theoretical problems (which fits the pattern of the work’s final form in 1458, with a short main part accompanied by an extended set of applications).

On the same date, August 16, 1454, he also writes to de Waging with similar words: «Librum *De Beryllo* nondum complevi; indiget enim longa explicatione, ut videatur praxis in aliorum dictis. Utinam possem esse vobiscum, liberates de cura pastorali! tunc in illo proficerem.» (*ibid.*, p. 140). This description of the work also fits perfectly with its final version with its focus on *praxis* and the *sententias* and *opiniones* of the *doctissimi* (*De Beryllo*, 1, p. 3, 6-7; p. 4, 10).

To the monks’ renewed requests, he answers again on September 9, to Aindorffer: «Habete nunc pacienciam; distractus, non adsum totus ad componendum opus quod me totum deposcit» (VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, pp. 142-143), and to de Waging, on the same date, that «the eyeglasses are not yet finished»: «Ocularia non sunt polita; requirunt enim ocium sacrum» (*ibid.*, p. 150). There is no more mention of the *De Beryllo* in the correspondence until July 1455, when de Waging asks him again for the *beryllus*: «oculus doleo, beryllum non habeo» (*ibid.*, p. 158). Cusanus answers him on July 28: «Applicui ingenium ad opus quod petistis; non possum recollecte proficere; nisi liberer perdam meipsum. Parcite pater se nichil mitto, quod nichil dignum habeo» (*ibid.*, p. 160). Finally, on January 9, 1456, Cusanus promises the monks a volume of his sermons, «et habebitis in quibus omnia que ex parvulo meum intellectu, sive *De Beryllo*, sive alias» (VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, p. 162). This passage is interesting because it explicitly connects the project of *De Beryllo* to the sermons he wrote and had collected around the same period, where we can find interesting correspondences with the final form of *De Beryllo* (see Chapter 3.1).

This is the last mention of *De Beryllo* in his correspondence with the Tegernsee monks; the work would not be completed until more than two years later, and the date at which a copy finally reached Tegernsee is uncertain, but likely later, possibly even after Cusanus’ death (see Senger and Bormann’s theory in *De Beryllo*, p. XVIII, that the monks only received a copy in 1469).

sight involved in the *beryllus* image, and thus reflecting Cusanus' theoretical difficulties in composing the treatise, the unexpected (at least on the part of the Tegernsee monks) delay of more than four years until the completion of the *De Beryllo* in August 1458 seems to defy any easy explanation.

In the background of this correspondence and exchange, an important theological dispute was taking place involving the Tegernsee monks regarding the true meaning of mystical theology and the way to achieve mystical union with God¹⁹. It was a typical local manifestation of the ongoing *Wegestreit* between the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna*, and ultimately at stake were different conceptions of the relationship between faith and reason; in the monastic realm, this manifested in particular as a conflict between an 'intellectualized' idea of mystical ascent and a Gersonian one which based itself entirely on *affectus*. Cusanus' *De Docta Ignorantia* was decidedly on the side of the former approach, and its 'mathematizing', methodical theology came under attack by the Carthusian Vincent of Aggsbach, who, taking issue in particular with Cusanus' interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius in his Letter of September 14, 1453 to Aindorffer and de Waging, wrote a letter to John Schlitpacher (of Weilheim) on Dec. 19, 1454, a part of which would become famous for his criticism of Cusanus (among others) as the *Impugnatorium laudatorii Doctae Ignorantiae*²⁰, taking as his aim, in particular, a summary of Cusanus' doctrines written by Bernard de Waging, who in turn, in 1459, wrote his *Defensorium laudatorii Doctae Ignorantiae*, a defense of Cusanus against Aggsbach's criticism, also in letter form. At issue, on the theoretical level, seemed to be precisely the interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius, in particular whether Cusanus' view of an intellectual ascent via the *coincidentia oppositorum* was correct; in reality, the participants divided into camps based on old loyalties to the conciliarist movement that Cusanus had rejected at the Council of Basel, and scorn aimed at his Papal loyalties²¹. It was in the middle of this dispute, and, likely not coincidentally, in connection to the matter

¹⁹ For a detailed account of the events and texts surrounding this controversy, see ZIEBART, *Nicolaus Cusanus on Faith and the Intellect*, pp. 137-200.

²⁰ For an edition and translation of this text, see ZIEBART, *Nicolaus Cusanus on Faith and the Intellect*, pp. 295-301.

²¹ Ziebart carefully underlines this dimension of political conflict and underlying loyalties in this dispute, which, while not negating the substantive theological differences between the participants, arguably made reconciliation between them implausible, if not outright impossible, since Aggsbach «was an opponent of Cusanus long before this exchange began» (see ZIEBART, *ibid.*, p. 137).

being disputed (the role of the intellect and the possibility to use the *coincidentia oppositorum* for mystical ascent), that Cusanus tried, and failed, to complete the *De Beryllo*. Aindorffer and de Waging stopped asking after 1455, and their correspondence gradually shifted to Cusanus' unsuccessful efforts at local ecclesiastical reform. Cusanus would complete *De Beryllo* in 1458, on the run from the fallout of these unsuccessful efforts, and (likely) left for Italy shortly thereafter while never even sending a copy to Tegernsee during his lifetime at all²².

One cannot help but read Cusanus' mysterious failure to complete a relatively small work such as *De Beryllo* as a decision to not get involved in the philosophical-theological dispute at hand, even though he would have had an opportunity to explain the way he wanted his thought to be interpreted—which is, as we will see in the analysis of the text, one of his main concerns in *De Beryllo*. By examining the particular philosophical-theological synthesis he achieved in *De Beryllo*, one might be able, in the end, to offer a conjecture as to why he would have chosen not to complete it and not to send it to his Tegernsee friends for whom (at least in the beginning) he planned to write it in the first place.

1.2 Circumstances of the transmission of the text. Editions

The text of *De Beryllo* has been preserved in 4 manuscripts (Codex Cusanus 219, Cusanus' own copy still held today at the Cusanusstift library in Bernkastel-Kues; Codex Monacensis 18621, likely dating from 1469, which was found at the monastery of Tegernsee; Codex 166 Domgymnasium Magdeburg, a manuscript put together by Thomas Hirschberg after Cusanus' death in 1464, containing a number of his later works; and the earliest known copy, Codex Yale 343, which seems to have been made in Rome at the beginning of 1459), the autograph manuscript being presumed lost. For a more in-depth account of the manuscripts and the transmission history of the text, see Bormann and Senger's excellent introduction to the critical edition²³ and my own analysis in Chapter 3.1 on the issue of the title of the work.

²² According to Senger and Bormann, the Tegernsee monks only received a copy no earlier than 1469 (*De Beryllo*, p. XVIII).

²³ *De Beryllo*, pp. XVI-XXIV, particularly the genealogical chart on p. XXIV.

Up until the third decade of the 20th century, the only editions of Cusanus' works available in print were the 1488 Strasbourg edition, the Milan edition of 1502, the 1514 Paris edition by Faber Stapulensis and the Basel edition of 1565, which all included the text of *De Beryllo*. Together with the increase in scholarly interest regarding Cusanus' works, particularly after the important role Ernst Cassirer assigned to him in his *Individuum und Kosmos* (1927)²⁴, the critical edition by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences was inaugurated in 1932 with the publication of the *De Docta Ignorantia* and the *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*²⁵. The *De Beryllo* was first published in a critical edition in 1940, in volume XI of the Heidelberg *Opera Omnia*, edited by L. Baur²⁶. That critical edition, however, was rendered outdated by the later discovery of the earliest known manuscript of the *De Beryllo* in Codex Yale 334, a manuscript found at the Beinecke Rare Books Library of Yale University²⁷. A new critical edition was prepared by Bormann and Senger and published in 1988 as volume XI, I of the Heidelberg edition²⁸. This highly valuable and authoritative edition, featuring a full discussion of the manuscript tradition, the previous editions, as well as valuable interpretive notes and references, is the edition of reference for the Latin text of the work, and is still one of the most useful, or even the essential authoritative source for studying the *De Beryllo* for a scholar today, 30 years after its publishing, since none other of the small number of scholarly works focused at least in part on the *De Beryllo* manages to gather a comparable breadth of sources. However, the fact that a 30-year-old critical edition written in Latin maintains such an outsized importance in the realm of secondary sources on the *De Beryllo* is itself a sign of an unsatisfactory situation: there is a need in the scholarship for resources that are up-

²⁴ E. CASSIRER, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*, Leipzig 1927. Cassirer influentially claimed Cusanus was the first modern thinker, «de[r] erst[e] modern[e] Denker» (p. 10), triggering both great scholarly interest in Cusanus' works and pushback against Cassirer's arguably too-reductive, systematizing, Kantian-influenced reading of Cusanus' thought. Eugenio Garin argued forcefully against Cassirer's reading of Cusanus in E. GARIN, *Cusano e i platonici italiani del Quattrocento*, in *Die Toleranzidee bei Nikolaus von Kues und in der Neuzeit*, in *Nicolò da Cusa. Relazioni tenute al Convegno Interuniversitario di Bressanone nel 1960*, ed. G. Flores d'Arcais, Florence 1962, pp. 75-100.

²⁵ For an in-depth account of the development of Cusanus research in the 20th century focusing on the German scholarly space and the genesis of the Heidelberg *Opera Omnia*, see M. WATANABE, *The Origins of Modern Cusanus Research in Germany and the Establishment of the Heidelberg Opera Omnia*, in *Concord and Reform: Nicholas of Cusa and Legal and Political Thought in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. M. Watanabe, Burlington (VT) 2001, pp. 35-60.

²⁶ *De Beryllo*, XI, vol. I, ed. L. Baur, Hamburg 1940.

²⁷ Cf. K. BORMANN, *Eine bisher verschollene Handschrift von De Beryllo*, in «Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft» 10 (1973), pp. 104-105.

²⁸ *De Beryllo*, XI/I, ed. K-H. Senger - K. Bormann, Hamburg 1988.

to-date with the research published on *De Beryllo* and more accessible. This thesis hopes to offer a contribution in this regard.

1.3 Translations of *De Beryllo*

This section recounts the main existing translations of *De Beryllo* into the five languages corresponding to the five scholarly traditions that the present work attempts to bridge: English, German, Italian, French and Spanish. Generally, *De Beryllo* has only rarely been translated as a standalone work, and most often only as part of a collection of multiple texts by Cusanus, which has resulted in it receiving less focus in terms of extended introductions and commentaries to the translations. Fortunately, in recent years translations have begun to be published which remedy these deficiencies (particularly in Italian, Spanish and French).

In English, *De Beryllo* is available as part of Jasper Hopkins' translation of Cusanus' collected philosophical and theological works published in 2001, under the title *On [Intellectual] Eyeglasses*²⁹, which, while not having its own dedicated introduction, boasts detailed and reference-rich endnotes, according to Hopkins' usual detail-oriented scholarly approach.

In German, *De Beryllo* is found in the 1964 translation of the collected works of Nicholas of Cusa by Wilhelm and Dietlind Dupré³⁰, and also as a standalone work in a newer translation by Karl Bormann³¹, who is also one of the editors of the critical edition, with a short but notable Introduction³² where Bormann recapitulates the fundamentals of the method developed in *De Beryllo*, identifying the systematic use of *coincidentia oppositorum* as an innovative element which allows Cusanus to formulate innovative conclusions and a criticism of the philosophical tradition.

²⁹ NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Complete philosophical and theological treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, tr. by J. Hopkins, 2 voll., Minneapolis 2001, vol. 2, pp. 791-838.

³⁰ NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, tr. by D. - W. Dupre, ed. L. Gabriel, 3 voll., Vienna 1964, 2002 (8th ed.), vol. 3, pp. 1-91.

³¹ NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Über den Beryll*, tr. by K. Bormann, 1977, 2002 (4th ed.).

³² K. BORMANN, *Einleitung des Herausgebers*, in N. CUSANUS, *Über den Beryll*, pp. VII-XIII. His extensive and detailed notes to the translation also offer interpretive insights: *ibid.*, pp. 92-134.

In Italian, *De Beryllo* can be found in two older translations of Cusanus' collected works, by Giovanni Santinello³³ and Graziella Federici-Vescovini³⁴, and, most notably, in a new 2017 translation of the Cusanian corpus by Enrico Peroli³⁵, which includes a commentary, presented in the form of extensive annotations added to his notes to the translation³⁶. Peroli's detailed notes and commentary, after Corrieras' book and Senger and Bormann's *Annotationes* to the critical edition (which Peroli follows to a great extent), is one of the richest resources available for a study of this text, valuable particularly for its thoroughness and a relatively up-to-date bibliography³⁷.

In French, the *De Beryllo* was first translated as *Le béryl* in an older translation by Maurice de Gandillac of a collection of Cusanus' works³⁸. Recently, the standalone translation by Maude Corrieras, *Le traité du béryl. Tome I*³⁹ has been a highly notable contribution to the scholarship, accompanied later by a second volume⁴⁰ featuring her extended introduction to *De Beryllo*, which remains the only book-length scholarly interpretive work on *De Beryllo* in the literature so far.

In Spanish, *De Beryllo* is available as a standalone work in González's recent Spanish translation⁴¹ with a general introduction by the same author that touches on broadly the same general themes⁴².

1.4 Early research on *De Beryllo* before the works of Kurt Flasch

The history of the modern reception of *De Beryllo*—a comparatively much less studied work—begins with Johannes Übinger, a German scholar active in the late nineteenth century who introduced,

³³ NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Opere filosofiche*, tr. by Graziella Federici-Vescovini, Turin 1972, pp. 641-687.

³⁴ NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Nicolò Cusano, Scritti filosofici*, tr. by Giovanni Santinello, 2 voll., Bologna 1980, vol. 2, pp. 382-459.

³⁵ NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Opere filosofiche, teologiche e matematiche*, tr. by Enrico Peroli, Florence - Milan 2017, pp. 1155-1240.

³⁶ NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Opere filosofiche, teologiche e matematiche*, pp. 2700-2751.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 3019-3066. Notably, however, like almost all other scholars, Peroli also omits Katrin Platzer's work.

³⁸ NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Oeuvres choisies de Nicolas de Cues*, tr. by Maurice de Gandillac, Paris 1942, pp. 474-490.

³⁹ NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Le traité du béryl. Tome 1. Texte, traduction et notes*, tr. by Maude Corrieras, Paris 2010.

⁴⁰ M. CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl, Tome 2: Introduction au traité de Beryllo de Nicolas de Cues*, Paris 2012.

⁴¹ NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *El Berilo*, tr. by Á. L. González, Pamplona 2007. González's translation of *De Beryllo* has been republished more recently as part of his translation of a collection of works by Cusanus: NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Dialogus de deo abscondito ; De quaerendo Deum ; De dato patris luminum ; Apologia doctae ignorantiae ; De Beryllo ; De aequalitate ; De principio ; Directio speculantis seu de non aliud*, tr. by Á. L. González, Pamplona 2013.

⁴² Á. L. GONZÁLEZ, *Introducción*, in NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *El Berilo*, pp. 5-17.

as part of his studies on Cusanus, the concept of periodization and of a gradual development of his thought⁴³, which is a methodological perspective that has been adopted (if not also the conclusions of Übinger's analysis, overly generalizing and less focused on detail compared to today's studies) by the most important scholars working on *De Beryllo* today. Übinger devotes some pages to *De Beryllo*⁴⁴ in particular, and identifies it as the place where Cusanus presents his fully-developed philosophy of mathematics, a topic of high importance for the issue of his philosophical method generally⁴⁵. In addition, the German scholar identifies an important aspect of the work: in *De Beryllo*, the recurring theme of the use of the coincidence of opposites, and in particular the use of the maximum and minimum of any particular property, leads to a reevaluation (*Verwertung*) of the minimum that is not found in Cusanus' previous works⁴⁶, which hints at the interesting and problematic status of the theme of hierarchy, a recurring issue in later scholarship on *De Beryllo*.

The next scholar who devoted at least one chapter to *De Beryllo* was Karl-Heinz Volkmann-Schluck in 1957, in his book *Nicolaus Cusanus. Die Philosophie im Übergang vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit*⁴⁷. Volkmann-Schluck, in the broad tradition of Ernst Cassirer, identifies the thought of Cusanus as the transition to a type of 'modern' thought. However, Volkmann-Schluck criticizes Cassirer's reading, as well as 'systematizing' readings in general⁴⁸. His own work traces the development of Cusanus' thought through three stages: the first based on the insight of the incommensurability of human knowledge and absolute truth, represented by *De Docta Ignorantia*, then the acknowledgment of the human mind as image of God in the *Idiota* dialogues, and finally the 're-thinking of the whole of

⁴³ J. ÜBINGER, *Der Begriff der docta ignorantia in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, in «Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie» 8 (1895), 1- 32, 206-240; ID, *Die mathematischen Schriften des Nicolaus Cusanus*, in «Philosophisches Jahrbuch» 8 (1895), pp. 301-317, 403-422; 9 (1896), pp. 54-66, 391-410; 10 (1897), pp. 144-159.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-52.

⁴⁵ ÜBINGER, *Die mathematischen Schriften des Nikolaus Cusanus*, in «Philosophisches Jahrbuch» 10 (1897), pp. 144-159. For the German scholar, *De Beryllo*, along with the earlier *De Mathematica perfectione*, together form the 'perfection' («Die Vollendung») of Cusanus' thought concerning mathematical philosophy (p. 149), elaborating on the fourth of the 'premises' from the beginning of the *De Beryllo*, i.e. man being a *secundus Deus* as creator (p. 151). We note that the accounts of Cusanus' method inevitably deal with his regular use of mathematical and geometrical images, which he indeed presents as paradigmatic, as we will see in Chapter 3.

⁴⁶ ÜBINGER, *ibid.*, p. 151.

⁴⁷ K-H. VOLKMANN-SCHLUCK, *Nicolaus Cusanus. Die Philosophie im Übergang vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit*, Frankfurt 1958.

⁴⁸ VOLKMANN-SCHLUCK, *ibid.*, pp. X-XI.

metaphysics' according to this insight in the *De Beryllo*⁴⁹, with a conception of being itself as infinite unity⁵⁰. In addition, in the same year 1957, the German scholar published an article on the Cusanian doctrine of species, which refers exclusively to *De Beryllo*⁵¹. According to Volkmann-Schluck, by the peculiarities of Cusanus' method as reformulated in *De Beryllo*, Cusanus manages to reformulate his old considerations on the problem of *species* from *De Docta Ignorantia* into a new form, an «enigmatic ontology» of specific forms, or *species* («*aenigmatische Ontologie der species*»⁵²), which allows him to also maintain the irreducibility of particular objects as unique reflections of the One Creator, thus offering an alternative to the conception of the Aristotelian tradition. Obviously, this problem of *species* is tied to the fundamental problem of the ontological or metaphysical hierarchy, which is rendered even more interesting, and problematic in the special case of Christ—two crucial aspects that the analysis of Volkmann-Schluck does not directly address.

In the English-speaking world, the American scholar Pauline Moffit-Watts, in her 1982 book *Nicholas of Cusa: A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man*, a study of the philosophical anthropology of Nicholas of Cusa in the context of the Renaissance in the fifteenth century, devotes one chapter to *De Beryllo*⁵³. According to her, this work is already (along with, and completing, the 1453 *De Visione Dei*) an «almost complete account of Cusanus' mature conception of man»⁵⁴. Moffit-Watts points out that the anthropological thought of Cusanus is basically derived from his philosophical method of the *beryllus*, which gives the work its fundamental unity⁵⁵. The centrality of man in Cusanus' argument, which is the result of man's similarity with God in terms of creative power, and particularly the presence of this similarity as the foundation for the structure itself and for the possibility of knowledge, are, together with the rest of Cusanus' results in this work, obtained by the systematic application of the

⁴⁹ VOLKMANN-SCHLUCK, *ibid.*, pp. XV: «durchdenkt er dann das Ganze der Metaphysik in der Schrift *De Beryllo* noch einmal».

⁵⁰ VOLKMANN-SCHLUCK, *ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵¹ K. VOLKMANN-SCHLUCK, *Die Lehre des Nicolaus von Cues von der species*, in «Kant-Studien» 48 (1957), pp. 235-246.

⁵² VOLKMANN-SCHLUCK, *ibid.*, p. 242.

⁵³ P. MOFFITT-WATTS, *Nicholas of Cusa - A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man*, Leiden 1982. The chapter on *De Beryllo* is at pp. 153-188.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-187.

method *De Beryllo* presents (because, as Moffit-Watts very perceptively notes, the four ‘premises’ at the beginning of *De Beryllo*⁵⁶ are not in fact assumptions to be accepted without proof before one can use the *beryllus*; rather, they are applications of the *beryllus* which can be used to prove them⁵⁷). What is left out of her account is how all this reflects on the question of hierarchy, and particularly the status of Christ in the Cusanian construction—issues that Moffit-Watts also leaves open.

In 1988, the new authoritative critical edition of *De Beryllo*⁵⁸ in the *Opera Omnia* published by the Heidelberg Academy, with Hans-Georg Senger and Karl Bormann as editors, included also a number of extended notes on important themes and passages in *De Beryllo*, presenting a wealth of information, particularly as to the sources within the tradition of many of Cusanus’ formulations, and adding up, in the end, to a small ‘interpretive treatise’ on *De Beryllo* – a valuable resource, and the only such attempt so far with the exception of Flasch and Corrieras’s work⁵⁹.

1.5 The influential account of Kurt Flasch

Among the scholars who have written recently in the context of Cusanus studies, Kurt Flasch has had an enormous influence with his book proposing to track the development of Cusanus’ thought throughout his works: *Nikolaus Cusanus: Geschichte Einer Entwicklung: Vorlesungen zur Einführung in seine Philosophie*⁶⁰, which is an indispensable addition to the bibliography, particularly regarding the interpretation of *De Beryllo* and its significance⁶¹. Flasch’s chapter on the *De Beryllo* assigns a special importance to it in the context of the development of Cusanus’ thought, and as the most suitable

⁵⁶ *De Beryllo*, 4-7, pp. 6, 1 – 10, 2.

⁵⁷ MOFFITT-WATTS, *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Updated after the discovery of the oldest manuscript, the so-called Codex Yale 334 (Ms. 334, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven, CT., fol. 1r-22r), unknown to the editor of the first 1940 critical edition, Ludwig Baur.

⁵⁹ *De Beryllo*, pp. 87-117. The language of the interpretive notes is, of course, Latin.

⁶⁰ K. FLASCH, *Nikolaus Cusanus: Geschichte Einer Entwicklung: Vorlesungen zur Einführung in seine Philosophie*, Frankfurt am Main 1998, 2008 (3rd ed.).

⁶¹ FLASCH, *ibid.*, pp. 445-479. The strong influence of Flasch’s reading (which constitutes the implicit framework of Corrieras’ work as well) in today’s scholarship can be seen, for instance, in J. MARENBNON, *Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy*, New York 2012, where Marenbon writes that *De Beryllo* is «the treatise written by Nicholas himself to introduce his thinking» (see *ibid.*, endnote 46 to the short account of Cusanus’ thought found at pp. 225-226) – a near-verbatim reiteration of Flasch’s interpretation, presumably seen by Marenbon as such a commonplace view as to not even require particular attribution.

introduction for his mature thinking⁶². According to Flasch, it is meant by Cusanus especially for all those who have trouble understanding his most important works such as *De Docta Ignorantia* and *De Visione Dei*⁶³ and a decisive text for guidance from Cusanus on his philosophy, in which he tells how he would like his philosophy to be interpreted⁶⁴. The main idea of Flasch is that Cusanus' thought, especially with *De Beryllo*, turned decisively toward the nature of mind and the human faculties (*mens*; *intellectus*, *ratio*) to develop, with the help of the notion of *coincidentia oppositorum*, a formulation of a universal method⁶⁵ which led him to make a radical critique of the philosophical tradition (particularly Aristotle). After the publication of *Geschichte einer Entwicklung*, the next book by Flasch on Cusanus pursued and put into practice his view on the special role of *De Beryllo* for introducing Cusanus'

⁶² FLASCH, *ibid.*, p. 446: «die geeigneteste Einführung in die Cusanische Philosophie in ihrem reifen Stadium. Wer die in Denkwelt des Cusanus Eintreten will, sollte, meine ich, beginnen mit *De beryllo* [...]».

⁶³ FLASCH, *ibid.*, p. 433: «Cusanus *De beryllo* geschrieben hat für Leser von *De docta ignorantia* und *De Visione Dei*, die nicht mit diesen Büchern zurecht kamen. Wir sollten diese Gelegenheit nutzen». This statement could be seen as problematic in light of the letter exchange between Cusanus and Aindorffer and de Waging, as briefly examined in Chapter 1.1 and examined in more detail at the beginning of Chapter 3.1, which gives a precise timeline: the letter by Aindorffer of before February 12, 1454 which is the first to ask Cusanus for the *Beryllus* is also the letter in which Aindorffer expresses gratitude on behalf of the Tegernsee community for the *De Visione Dei* that they had just received. Thus, as we have seen, it is clear from the terms of Aindorffer's request that, at least as regards Cusanus' original plan for *De Beryllo/Beryllus* likely elaborated starting from June 1452 and still held as valid at the beginning of 1454 when the Tegernsee monks were expecting the work to be delivered in the near future, it was supposed to be a work which would help those who were familiar with *De docta ignorantia* in particular but had difficulties with certain doctrines – in particular, the coincidence of opposites and the *sphaera infinita*, as Aindorffer writes to Cusanus. *De Visione Dei* seems to have been developed to a significant degree separately from these concerns, as seen in Cusanus' letter of 13 September 1453 (VANSTEEBERGHE, *Autour*, pp. 113-117) to the Tegernsee community on *mystica theologia* more generally. The Tegernsee monks do not mention, in subsequent letter, any particular difficulties they had with *De Visione Dei*, nor does this work seem to meet their needs for which they keep requesting *De Beryllo*. Thus, one would be justified in maintaining a fundamental separation between the scope of the two works, given the context outlined by the letters. However, Flasch's observation casting *De Beryllo* as, in the end, a broader introductory work to Cusanus' thought, is plausible if we take into account the fact that Cusanus took more than 4 years to finish the work, so that we cannot restrict its final scope to being merely an explanatory work in relation to (primarily) *De docta ignorantia*, as the initial plan seems to have been at the beginning of 1454. Furthermore, the final version of *De Beryllo* does not take up the issue of the *sphaera infinita*, the second point of difficulty mentioned by the Tegernsee monks, which suggests that Cusanus' thinking as regards the scope of the work must have changed significantly in the years he spent working on it until 1458.

⁶⁴ FLASCH, *ibid.*, pp. 467-468: «*De beryllo* ist für die Selbstorientierung der Philosophie Cusanischen entscheidendes ein Dokument. Hier Cusanus sagt zum ersten Mal ohne Versteckspiel, wie er seine Philosophie interpretiert sehen will». On this issue, Hopkins accuses Flasch of «subjectivism», noting that nowhere does Cusanus explicitly say any of this in *De Beryllo* (J. HOPKINS, *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysical Speculations*, vol. II, Minneapolis 2000, p. 113), and indeed that Cusanus says how he wants his works interpreted already in the *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae* (HOPKINS, *ibid.*, pp. 110-111). However, that is not a very strong criticism, as Flasch's interpretation takes into view the whole of Cusanus' corpus; thus, even if Cusanus had said this explicitly at the beginning of *De Beryllo*, this would not prove it to be valid overall; nor can it be settled by Cusanus' claims in the *Apologia* or, indeed, in *De Apice Theoriae* where he gives his own 'developmental account' of his thought. My close reading of the introductory paragraph of *De Beryllo* will offer some further circumstantial evidence to support of Flasch's reading, to the effect that, at least at the moment of finishing *De Beryllo*, Cusanus thought of it such terms. The truth of Flasch's claim, of course, requires formulating a broad account of Cusanus' thought throughout his corpus, which is outside the scope of this thesis. However, the influence and fruitfulness of Flasch's account as a starting point for the interpretation of *De Beryllo* can be pointed to as circumstantial evidence towards its ultimate validity.

⁶⁵ FLASCH, *ibid.* p. 475: «Universalverfahren», «Methode» - with the appropriate warnings as to avoiding Cartesian-type anachronisms.

thought. His 2001 book *Nicolaus Cusanus*⁶⁶ is his attempt at an introductory exposition of Cusanus' thought, structured no longer chronologically, like *Geschichte*, but following in large part the structure of *De Beryllo* itself as outlined in *Geschichte einer Entwicklung*, and adding up to an extended interpretation of the *De Beryllo* itself. The fundamental idea remains the same: Cusanus develops a method based on the *coincidentia oppositorum* that is universal in scope⁶⁷, according to which man and the characteristics of his knowledge, and the boundaries of the same, become fundamental in order to obtain the most certain knowledge possible, also, paradoxically, from the unknowable. Inevitably, the radical critique of the philosophical tradition from this perspective problematizes the notions of ontological-cosmological hierarchy in the tradition, arguably having as a result a «dehierarchization» (*Ent-Hierarchisierung*) of the world⁶⁸, which is followed by an attempt at re-founding them according to his method⁶⁹.

The Flasch approach has showed itself to be very fertile, and his remarks on *De Beryllo* are particularly perceptive and have had great influence (e.g. as we will see, Corrieras bases her approach explicitly on his). However, there is one element that is constantly overlooked and not an object of focus for Flasch: namely, the role of Christ as a particular type of element within Cusanus' theoretical construction, and, as a consequence, the issues encountered by Cusanus in integrating these highly distinct aspects of his thought. This shortcoming is connected to what seems to be a latent 'rationalistic' tendency in Flasch's approach when it comes to interpreting the explicitly Christian elements in Cusanus' thought, especially in his later period – as identified e.g. by Karen Ziebart⁷⁰. My account in Chapter 5 of Christology in *De Beryllo* aims to provide a useful corrective towards this deficiency.

⁶⁶ FLASCH, *Nicolaus Cusanus*.

⁶⁷ FLASCH, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, p. 58: «Die Koinzidenzlehre wird dadurch zu einem universalen Erkenntnisverfahren».

⁶⁸ FLASCH, *Geschichte einer Entwicklung*, p. 100.

⁶⁹ FLASCH, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, pp. 58-61, esp. p. 58.

⁷⁰ K. M. ZIEBART, *Nicolaus Cusanus on Faith and the Intellect: a Case Study in 15th-century Fides-Ratio Controversy*, Leiden 2013, p. 7.

Flasch's approach, while highly influential, has also been the object of serious criticism, e.g. by Hopkins⁷¹ and Albertson⁷² – particularly as regards aspects of his methodology in his interpretation of particular passages in Cusanus, which, they contend, end up too much informed by (and neatly fitting into) his overall account and its presuppositions (these criticisms will be analyzed in more detail in the discussion of his methodology in Chapter 2.1). Notwithstanding some particular deficiencies, however, his work has become and remains essential, and even central, for any discussion of the development and periodization of Cusanus' thought, and undoubtedly so for any discussion of *De Beryllo*. Even the critics who criticize Flasch harshly (e.g. Hopkins) admit that his work is a «monumental effort»⁷³, and it forms the implicit background, as we will see, of later work on *De Beryllo*.

1.6 Katrin Platzer and *scientia aenigmatica*

Katrin Platzer's 2001 work *Symbolica venatio und scientia aenigmatica: eine Strukturanalyse der Symbolsprache bei Nikolaus von Kues*⁷⁴ is an interesting work on these two notions in Cusanus' thought and their connection to his identifiable 'methods' more generally, which has been unfairly neglected in subsequent Cusanus research⁷⁵. She takes on a wide subject matter, i.e. the development of Cusanus' method throughout his entire corpus, focusing on his characteristic modes of using specific terms, particularly in his own account of his method(s)⁷⁶. Via statistical analysis of word usage throughout Cusanus' works, she finds that Cusanus used *symbolum* and *symbolica venatio* much more in his works before *De Visione Dei*, and he seems to have changed to using *aenigma/scientia aenigmatica* in the later works as a preferred way of talking about his overall method⁷⁷. Accordingly, her account (in dialogue with that of Volkmann-Schluck) says that Cusanus' thought develops in a

⁷¹ HOPKINS, *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysical Speculations*, pp. 79-121.

⁷² D. ALBERTSON, *Mathematical Theologies. Nicholas of Cusa and the Legacy of Thierry of Chartres*, New York, 2014, pp. 18-19.

⁷³ HOPKINS, *ibid.*, p. 120. «Monumental» is also, in fact, the adjective chosen by Albertson, another strongly critical voice, in order to characterize Flasch's *Geschichte*: see ALBERTSON, *ibid.*, p.18.

⁷⁴ K. PLATZER, *Symbolica venatio und scientia aenigmatica: eine Strukturanalyse der Symbolsprache bei Nikolaus von Kues*, Frankfurt am Main 2001.

⁷⁵ This work is almost never cited, or even mentioned, in subsequent literature. One of the only articles mentioning it is Ü. ZAHND, *Nikolaus von Kues und die virtus verborum*, in *Die Modernitäten des Nikolaus von Kues*, ed. T. Müller – M. Vollet, Bielefeld 2014, pp. 107-143.

⁷⁶ PLATZER, *Symbolica venatio und scientia aenigmatica*, p. 22ff.

⁷⁷ PLATZER, *ibid.*, p. 93, 195ff.

movement from a method based on the *symbolum* (understood as a basic notion of ‘object that stands for something else’, and corresponding to his early employment of geometrical illustrations in *De Docta Ignorantia*), described as *symbolica venatio*, in his earlier works, to a method of *scientia aenigmatica*, based on the *aenigma* (broadly speaking, an object ‘in which’ we are able to see, in a coincidental and inseparable way, an infinite object – such as the *beryllus*⁷⁸), in his later works starting from the period of *De Visione Dei* around 1453. She devotes considerable space to *De Beryllo*, seeing the *beryllus* as a paradigmatic case of *aenigma*⁷⁹, and offers a complex and innovative account of the various aspects of light metaphysics and *Lichtsymbolik* in Cusanus, crucially connected to his development of the *scientia aenigmatica*⁸⁰.

A particular merit of Platzer’s account is the methodological application of the notion of ‘structural analysis’ (*Strukturanalyse*), accomplished by means of both careful interpretive reading and computer-aided text processing⁸¹, by which she endeavors to prove the central thesis of her book: the development in Cusanus’ thought from an emphasis on *symbolum* in the earlier works as a means to developing names for God to a focus on *aenigma* (itself a particular form of *symbolum*, characterized by a dynamic quality and always ultimately referring to the infinite/unnameable, representing in fact an encapsulation of Cusanus’ three-step method⁸²) in the later works, starting from *De Visione Dei*. This type of analysis, which finally aims at an inventory/’concordance’ of the most important uses of the method⁸³, represents a foundation for developing the method of interpretation used in the first part of this work.

The main deficiency in Platzer’s work, however, is the too-broad scope of her subject matter. Because of the number of highly complex works involved (*De Docta Ignorantia*, *De Conjecturis*, the

⁷⁸ PLATZER, *ibid.*, p. 93, 110. It is to be emphasized, however, that both *symbolum* and *aenigma* represent, in the end, different ‘steps’ in a three-step account of Cusanus’ overall method (which Platzer names as that of *transcensus*), in an account which is in fundamental agreement with Volkmann-Schluck and Jacobi; see PLATZER, *ibid.*, pp. 48-50, 94, 205.

⁷⁹ PLATZER, *ibid.*, p. 93.

⁸⁰ PLATZER, *ibid.*, pp. 127-194.

⁸¹ For her defense of the methodology, see PLATZER, *ibid.*, pp. 26-31.

⁸² PLATZER, *ibid.*, pp. 45-50, 195.

⁸³ PLATZER, *ibid.*, pp. 201-205. Here one may note, in particular her analysis of the deficiencies inherent in a previous attempt at a concept-focused concordance of Cusanus’ thought, that of Zellinger.

Idiota dialogues, *De Visione Dei*, etc.), her word-frequency analysis cannot engage in sufficient detail with the issues posed by the use of the respective terms in each passage of these works, which results in an overly bold interpretation of a passage from *symbolum* to *aenigma* in Cusanus' thought, especially as, in the end, this seems to be not so much a radical 'change' in the initial method but rather a matter of emphasizing different steps of a single 'unifying' method of *transcensus*. Furthermore, more than a third of the work⁸⁴ is devoted to an investigation of light metaphysics and imagery in Cusanus, a highly interesting topic in itself (and one for which she offers a very interesting account, unfortunately mostly overlooked by later scholars) but one which doesn't necessarily pair well with her account of a passage from *symbolus* to *aenigma* in the first part of the book. Notwithstanding these deficiencies, the fact remains that this is a valuable work that has been unjustly neglected in the scholarship, particularly on *De Beryllo*, for which she provides a highly interesting analysis. In Chapter 3, with the analysis of the text, this work will aim at giving Platzer's often highly perceptive remarks their deserved place among the work of the most important interpreters of Cusanus who have worked on *De Beryllo* and on these issues in Cusanus' thought.

1.7 Maude Corrieras and the first book-length treatment of *De Beryllo*

The most extensive work on *De Beryllo* so far is due to the French scholar Maude Corrieras. After publishing her French translation of *De Beryllo* in 2010 as *Le traité du béryl. Tome 1*⁸⁵, she followed it up in 2012 with her *Le traité du béryl, Tome 2: Introduction au traité de Beryllo de Nicolas de Cues*⁸⁶, meant to be taken as 'volume two' in conjunction with her translation of the work into French, and representing her extended Introduction for her translation as well as her commentary on the whole of *De Beryllo*, as shown by the (additional) subtitle found in the printed edition of this book: *Le De Beryllo: une ars cognoscendi*. This has the distinction of being the only book ever published so far that is devoted to a commentary on *De Beryllo*. This highly relevant and useful work, continuing in

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-194.

⁸⁵ CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl, Tome 1*.

⁸⁶ CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl, Tome 2: Introduction au traité de Beryllo de Nicolas de Cues*.

the tradition of Flasch's interpretation, provides a background for my interpretation in this work, one of whose goals is to fill in the gaps and incompleteness remaining in (what has by now become) the 'standard' interpretation Corrieras offers.

The work of Corrieras fills an important gap in the scholarship by providing an interpretive-focused introduction to *De Beryllo* as a whole, something that was lacking not only in the French language but in Cusanus studies generally, since no other book-length works dedicated to *De Beryllo* exist in any language. Corrieras' work, presenting itself (according to its second subtitle) explicitly as an introductory study, is by far the most detailed introduction to *De Beryllo* published so far, undertaking to reconstruct the main parts of Cusanus' argument, performing close readings of some of the most important passages, and emphasizing three general topics which form the main divisions in her book: the method of the *beryllus* as the focus of the work, the use of mathematical images/analogies, and Cusanus' criticism of Plato and (particularly) Aristotle.

Corrieras' highly valuable contribution does show, however, clear signs of its admitted origin as an extended version of her introduction to her French translation of the work, visible in certain aspects of the argumentation which, if one is to consider the work as a free-standing scholarly interpretive work on *De Beryllo*, would have to be judged as in various ways deficient. First and foremost, the discussion of the scholarly bibliography is highly limited⁸⁷ and fails to mention some important authors (e.g. Platzer) and a number of more recent contributions to the scholarship. Furthermore, her analysis remains on a fairly general level, trying to cover all the important aspects of the method presented in the text, but inevitably not dedicating the full space needed for a more complete and exhaustive treatment (or to the close reading of more than just the most relevant passages). The main theme of her interpretation is Cusanus' method itself, and she underlines the particular importance of the *De Beryllo* as a methodological and introductory work within in the context of Cusanus' works,

⁸⁷ The discussion of the previous literature is confined to a few remarks within the first few pages: CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl*, Tome 2, pp, 10-11, and the section of scholarly works on the *De Beryllo* in her bibliographical section only mentions the two works by Kurt Flasch that we have mentioned above (CORRIERAS, *ibid.*, p.133). From the pattern of citations throughout the work, Corrieras seems to rely almost exclusively on Flasch for issues of interpretation in *De Beryllo*.

following the arguments of Kurt Flasch and offering a more powerful defense of them by means of a closer reading of passages of *De Beryllo*, to an extent that Flasch's general account of the development of Cusanus' thought did not pursue (and could not have been realistically expected to, given its enormous scope).

The main merit of Maude Corrieras' work is indeed the fact that she makes a powerful argument, with an overwhelming amount of textual support, for speaking of Cusanus' (philosophical-theological) «method» in *De Beryllo*. In this, she cites and endorses Flasch's own outlining of an *Universalverfahren* formulated by Cusanus in *De Beryllo*, and his explicit caution not to impose the notion of «method» in an anachronistic sense and avoid introducing any modern Cartesian-style premises as regards the reductibility of all philosophy to a «method»⁸⁸. Corrieras demonstrates convincingly, using a great quantity of textual support, the existence of a well-defined method and its applications throughout *De Beryllo*, and traces the development of the main elements of this method with reference to Cusanus' earlier works (*De Docta Ignorantia*, *De Conjecturis*, the *Idiota* dialogues and *De Visione Dei*)⁸⁹. One of her stated goals is framing the method of *De Beryllo* in the context of a Flasch-inspired account of the development of Cusanus' thought, taking into account the interests and problems that preoccupied him in this period and that led him to compose *De Beryllo* with a strong 'educational' focus, aimed at meeting a need to explain his proposed mode of thought simply and systematically and demonstrate its applications, particularly (but not exclusively) intended for the use of his friends, the monks of Tegernsee⁹⁰. Crucially, Corrieras underlines that the method has the character of a *praxis*, something that by its very nature (and the nature of its ultimate object, God) has not (only) the form of an intellectual exercise but also that of a «spiritual exercise» or discipline⁹¹.

⁸⁸ FLASCH, *Geschichte einer Entwicklung*, p. 475, CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl*, Tome 2, p. 10, note 7.

⁸⁹ CORRIERAS, *ibid.*, pp. 15-27.

⁹⁰ To whom, however, he likely failed to send it during his lifetime (see note 18 for the timeline), which leaves open the question of why, and how, Cusanus changed his mind between 1454 and 1458. Corrieras here follows Flasch, who also does not explore this question in any further detail. I argue throughout that proposing a possible answer to this question requires an examination of the contemporary Aggsbach controversy—which, not coincidentally, is an element that goes unexamined in both Flasch and Corrieras.

⁹¹ CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl*, Tome 2, pp. 33-34; cf. p. 48: «exercice spirituel».

However, Corrieras' account is not (and does not claim to be) a definite and exhaustive account of all the aspects of the method Cusanus presents in *De Beryllo*. Beside the scarcity of the bibliography, some theoretical issues remain underdeveloped. In particular, this is the case for the notion of hierarchy and Flasch's account of its problematic status, a topic which is not taken up by Corrieras directly⁹², and for the issue of Christology and the role of Christ, which is overlooked in Corrieras's work⁹³. These deficiencies do not invalidate her important results as to the importance, role and main characteristics of Cusanus' method in *De Beryllo*, but remain to be addressed.

1.8 *De Beryllo* in Italian scholarship

Italian scholars working on Cusanus have not, as a rule, given much attention to *De Beryllo* as a standalone work. For instance, Graziella Federici-Vescovini, in her comprehensive and influential *Il Pensiero di Nicola Cusano*⁹⁴, aimed at an overview of Cusanus' thought and the development of themes throughout his works, makes very little mention of this particular work. Giovanni Santinello, in his *Introduzione a Nicola Cusano*, devotes a few pages to *De Beryllo*⁹⁵, particularly noting the important point of the highly recurring 'political' image of the *rex/princeps/imperator*, which is ultimately connected to Cusanus' insistence on God's absolute freedom, and his innovative criticism of Aristotle where he proposes *intentio conditoris* as the solution for the problem of *substantia*⁹⁶. Davide Monaco has also written recently about this topic, underlining it as a key development in *De Beryllo*, crucial for understanding the development in Cusanus' later thought of a theology of absolute freedom⁹⁷.

⁹² She does, however, approach in more speculative detail the (paradoxical-seeming) hierarchies yielded by the method in the form of the concept of *species* in *De Beryllo* in her article M. CORRIERAS, *Identité e difference dans le De Beryl*, in *Identité e difference dans l'oeuvre de Nicolas de Cues*, ed. H. Pasqua, Louvain-la-Neuve 2011, pp. 129-155, a highly concentrated and dense analysis of the mechanics of Cusanus' arguments.

⁹³ See, for instance, her interpretation (CORRIERAS, *ibid.*, pp. 116-118) of paragraphs 69-71 of *De Beryllo*, which gives no notion that the implicit and explicit invocations of Christ represent in any way a different object than the ones Cusanus usually constructs. This is an erroneous interpretation, as I will show in Chapter 5.

⁹⁴ G. FEDERICI-VESCOVINI, *Il Pensiero di Nicola Cusano*, Turin 1998.

⁹⁵ G. SANTINELLO, *Introduzione a Nicola Cusano*, Bari 1987, 2008 (6th ed.), pp. 94-98.

⁹⁶ SANTINELLO, *ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

⁹⁷ D. MONACO, *Cusano e la pace della fede*, Rome 2013, p. 56, 60, note 63; cf. ID., *Dio come libertà nell'ultimo Cusano*, in «Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft» 33 (2011), pp. 213-227. See also D. MONACO, *Deus Trinitas: Dio come non altro nel pensiero di Nicolo Cusano*, Rome 2010, pp. 284, 328, esp. pp. 290-296.

By far the most comprehensive interpretation and resource on *De Beryllo* in Italian is Enrico Peroli's recent interpretive commentary, in the form of extended annotations on his translation published in 2017⁹⁸. His goal is to give an exhaustive account of both the correspondences between terms, concepts and themes in *De Beryllo* and Cusanus' other works, as well as Cusanus' use of his sources⁹⁹, and provides a thorough and comprehensive resource.

1.9 Recent articles and further relevant works

For a relatively up-to-date and highly detailed reference work on the status of current Cusanus research, Senger's work *Nikolaus von Kues - Leben, Lehre, Wirkungsgeschichte* (2016) is a very valuable resource. Its section on secondary research devoted to *De Beryllo*, however, shows itself to be rather incomplete, failing to mention the work of Katrin Platzer and Maude Corrieras¹⁰⁰. However, it does offer a good overview of the latest research on *De Beryllo* and connected issues, which has been furthered through a series of recent articles.

In 2004, Isabelle Mandrella wrote a notable, though short, article on the basics of the philosophical method of the *beryllus* in *De Beryllo*¹⁰¹. In the same volume, Glas and Schwaetzer offered an account of precious stones in Cusanus' works, dedicating some space to the *beryllus*¹⁰² and its possible significance and meaning – a topic which will be examined in much greater detail in Chapter 3.1.

In the last 10-15 years, particularly in the field of research on Cusanus in the Spanish language, and most of all in the South American space, there has been significant interest on the part of scholars towards less-studied works from Cusanus' late period, and *De Beryllo* has also benefited from this attention, in the form of some excellent articles dealing with a number of recurring issues. Two

⁹⁸ NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Opere filosofiche, teologiche e matematiche*, tr. by E. Peroli, Florence - Milan 2017, pp. 1155-1240 (for the translation of *De Beryllo*), pp. 2700-2751 (for the notes and commentary).

⁹⁹ E. PEROLI, *Nota editoriale*, in NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Opere filosofiche, teologiche e matematiche*, p. lxi.

¹⁰⁰ H. G. SENGER, *Nikolaus von Kues - Leben, Lehre, Wirkungsgeschichte*, Heidelberg 2016, p. 133.

¹⁰¹ I. MANDRELLA, *De Beryllo - Die richtige Brille gewährt Einblick in die Koinzidenz*, in «Litterae Cusanae» 4.2 (2004), pp. 67-78.

¹⁰² M. GLAS - H. SCHWAETZER, *Beryll, Diamant, Karfunkel. Edelsteine im Werk des Nicolaus Cusanus*, in «Litterae Cusanae» 4.2 (2004), pp. 79-94.

researchers stand out in particular for their repeated contributions: Claudia D’Amico and Cecilia Rusconi. Rusconi has written a number of articles on different aspects of *scientia aenigmatica* (understood as a terms standing for the philosophical method) in *De Beryllo*¹⁰³, and a cogent article on Cusanus’ criticism of Aristotle in the same work¹⁰⁴. The criticism of Aristotle and Plato in *De Beryllo* has gotten a lot of interest from scholars in this new ‘wave’ of research in the Spanish-speaking context, as Martin D’Ascenzo¹⁰⁵ and more recently Victoria Arroche¹⁰⁶ have both written on this theme.

In turn, Claudia D’Amico has written on the role of geometric illustrations for the *scientia aenigmatica* in *De Beryllo*¹⁰⁷, as well as two articles with the theme of the Intellect as ultimate principle, the coincidence of opposites and the One-multiple relationship, which are crucial themes in Cusanus’ ontological-structural account of his method at the start of *De Beryllo*¹⁰⁸.

One of the most interesting recent contributions to the scholarship is a 2012 article by Klaus Reinhardt, a scholar who emphasizes the theological dimension of Cusanus’ thought, focusing here on the conception of the *intellectus* in *De Beryllo* (itself crucial for the foundations of Cusanus’ method) by way of connecting it with a sermon Cusanus composed in 1455, Sermon CXXVII («Spiritus autem paraclitus»)¹⁰⁹. Although Reinhardt’s article is short and chooses to focus primarily on the sermon and

¹⁰³ C. RUSCONI, *The nature of the mirror in the light of the scientia aenigmatica in De Beryllo*, in *Spiegel und Porträt. Zur Bedeutung zweier zentraler Bilder im Denken des Nicolaus Cusanus*, ed. I. Bocken - H. Schwaetzer, Maastrich 2005, pp. 95-112. C. RUSCONI, *Annäherung an die cusanische ‘Scientia aenigmatica’ im Licht aus seiner Lektüre des Aristoteles in De beryllo*, in *Das Europäische Erbe im Denken des Nikolaus von Kues. Geistesgeschichte als Geistesgegenwart*, ed. H. Schwaetzer - K. Zeyer, Münster 2008, pp. 315-324, which is a translation into German of C. RUSCONI, *Aproximación a la “Ciencia enigmatica” de Nicolás de Cusa a la luz de su lectura de Aristóteles en el opúsculo De beryllo*, in *De memoria y silencio en la Filosofía medieval*, Buenos Aires 2006, pp. 215-224.

¹⁰⁴ C. RUSCONI, *La Crítica a Aristoteles en De Beryllo de Nicolas de Cusa*, in «Principios» 9, vol. 11-12 (Jan/Dec 2002), pp. 203-218.

¹⁰⁵ M. D’ASCENZO, *La crítica a Aristóteles en el De Beryllo de Nicolás de Cusa*, in *A recepção do pensamento greco-romano, árabe e judaico pelo Ocidente Medieval*, ed. L. A. de Boni – H. Pich, Porto Alegre 2004, pp. 705-15.

¹⁰⁶ V. ARROCHE, *Acerca de las críticas a Platón y Aristóteles en el De beryllo*, in *La dimension simbolica del Pensamiento de Nicolas de Cusa. Genealogia y Proyeccion*, ed. J. González Ríos, Buneos Aires 2015, pp. 41-58.

¹⁰⁷ C. D’AMICO, *Die Rolle der geometrischen Figur in der Zusammensetzung der Scientia aenigmatica*, in «Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft» 29 (2005), pp. 265-278.

¹⁰⁸ C. D’AMICO, *Principle intelectual y coincidencia dei oppositi a la luz de las tradiciones filosóficas en el De Beryllo. In Coincidencia dos opostos and concórdia: Caminhos do pensamento em Nicolau de Cusa*, ed. J. A. Maria – M. Á. Gómez, Coimbra 2002, pp. 101-117. D’AMICO, *El Principio Uno-Intellecto en Nicholas de Cusa. A lectura de De Beryllo y De Principio*, in *Nicolaus Cusanus: Perspektiven seiner Geistphilosophie*, ed. H. Schwaetzer – K. Reinhardt, Regensburg 2003, pp. 15-33.

¹⁰⁹ K. REINHARDT, *Der Intellekt als Prinzip des Seins in De Beryllo und Sermo CLXXXVII Spiritus autem Paraclitus*, in «Verbum» 14 (2012), pp. 5-16. On the unfortunate relative neglect of theology in Cusanus studies generally, see his cogent argument in K. REINHARDT, *Die Rolle der Christologie im Denken des Cusanus*, in «Das Mittelalter» 19/1 (2014), pp. 61-71.

less so on *De Beryllo* and the method it proposes, it still manages to show the extraordinarily fruitful (and largely otherwise unexplored) field of examining connections between *De Beryllo* and contemporary sermons from the (highly prolific) period of 1453-1458, which brings to light the inescapably philosophical-theological background and significance of the apparently abstract elements of the ‘method’ in *De Beryllo*.

1.9.1 Other notable accounts of Cusanus’ late works (giving less importance to *De Beryllo*)

In contrast to the importance given to *De Beryllo* in Flasch’s account and those within its broad sphere of influence, there have also been a number of important accounts of the ‘late period’ of Cusanus’ thought which have not given it a significant role. For instance, Dirk Cürsgen starts his account of Cusanus’ late works, focused on negative theology and the development of a ‘logic of negation’, from *De Aequalitate* (1459)¹¹⁰. Thus, Flasch’s account of the importance of *De Beryllo* cannot be said to be uniformly shared among all scholars working on the late period of Cusanus’ thought, and depends fundamentally on the type of development one sees in Cusanus’ late works and on which aspects thereof are judged most important¹¹¹.

The approach taken in this thesis will focus on the *De Beryllo* starting from the framework outlined by Flasch and developed in further detail by Corrieras, focusing on the method that is the focus of Cusanus’ text and paying particular attention to the theological-Christological aspects (thus following the lead of Reinhardt), seen as a particular aspect of the method that has not hitherto been carefully studied. While this work will not deal directly with the question of what importance *De Beryllo* has in the wider context of the development of Cusanus’ thought, it will add an important

¹¹⁰ D. CÜRSGEN. *Die Logik der Unendlichkeit: die Philosophie des Absoluten im Spätwerk des Nikolaus von Kues*, Frankfurt am Main 2007. For further work in this direction of research on the late works of Cusanus, again skipping over *De Beryllo*, see ROHSTOCK, *Der negative Selbstbezug des Absoluten: Untersuchungen zu Nicolaus Cusanus’ Konzept des Nicht-Anderen*, Berlin 2014, which applies this framework, ultimately, to *De Non Aliud*.

¹¹¹ It is clear that Cürsgen’s approach develops a very different account of the development of Cusanus’ thought than Flasch’s own – simplifying, one might say that Flasch (and most scholars influenced by him) posits a progression from ‘darkness’ (focused on some form of negative theology) to ‘light’ (a new foundation for what would be some form of ‘positive’ theology) culminating in *De Apice Theoriae*, whereas Cürsgen focuses on the development of the particular structures of the ‘logic of negation’ that, in the end, he argues, underlies such apparently ‘positive’ names as *posse ipsum*. Rohstock complains that Cürsgen’s interpretation has been mostly ignored by the scholars of the so-called ‘positive’ tradition («fast völlig ungeachtet geblieben» - *ibid.*, p. 4). The problem of these two ‘competing’ account of Cusanus’ intellectual development in his late period is interesting and yet to be played out in the literature.

consideration pointing to its particular importance that Flasch/Corrieras do not mention: namely its development of the issue of incarnational Christology on many levels (including the significance of the title image of the *beryllus*), to the point that *De Beryllo* can justly be described not only as a ‘methodological’ and philosophically-focused work but also as a Christological one. If this suggestion holds, this would be a further argument that *De Beryllo* deserves recognition as a highly interesting synthesis in any account of the development of Cusanus’ thought.

1.10 Conclusions and outstanding scholarly problems

1.10.1 A conjectural pattern of development in Cusanus scholarship

There is an interesting pattern which seems to recur in Cusanus research, found in many disparate contexts and regarding most problems that issue in longstanding scholarly controversies, which shows the recurring form of two ‘stages’. The first ‘stage’ is an initial investigation of (a certain aspect of) Cusanus’ thought, most often identifying his thought as being in some way or another ‘modern’, or at least containing some form of innovation that one would not expect for his intellectual context, which interpretation brings Cusanus’ thought to a new level of interest and scrutiny on the part modern scholars. Then, the ‘second stage’ is a scholarly reaction against this initial ‘paradigm’, insisting on a better intellectual-historical contextualization of Cusanus’ thought, based on a closer reading and/or one with a greater focus on his sources and his immediate intellectual influences and environment, which most often aims to ‘recover’ the nuances of his thought in its context, and most often characterized him as a thinker working firmly within the established traditions and intellectual context of his time. Thus, such scholars reject the ‘stage one’ interpretation as generalizing, overinterpreting, and even distorting Cusanus’ thought to make it fit with the particular (usually modern) school of thought to which the scholar who initially made the ‘stage one’ appraisal belongs. Thus, while at ‘stage one’ Cusanus’ thought comes into view as extraordinarily interesting precisely as an anachronistic ‘precursor’ of the school of thought favored by that scholar himself, ‘stage two’, which comes as a reaction to the heightened scholarly interest in the issue and in Cusanus more generally as a result of the ‘phase one’ interpretation, pushes back against this interpretation, arguing, implicitly and

explicitly, that Cusanus is not that ‘extraordinary’ within his context after all. However, the ‘stage two’ accounts turn out to have their own shortcomings, and do not represent the end of the scholarly debate, as there simply is ‘something about’ Cusanus’ peculiar mode of thought¹¹² (which might be his development and constant use of the ‘paradoxical’ *coincidentia oppositorum*) that ultimately motivates the ‘stage one’ interpretations, which are not reducible to mere scholarly carelessness and overinterpretation. Indeed, ‘stage two’ scholars end up criticized for imposing their own ideological presuppositions on the text, and can then be treated themselves as the ‘stage one’ to another application of the same pattern. The result is a dialectical back-and-forth which recurs with surprising constancy throughout the modern reception of Cusanus’ thought, and tends to yield no ‘definitive answer’ to the most pressing questions regarding how Cusanus’ thought can be understood and how it fits within the context of his time.

This pattern can be found more or less clearly present at any moment in the development of Cusanus research that we choose to examine, and most prominently in what can be characterized as the important moments, or turning points, of its development: from Übinger in the late 19th century, introducing the idea that Cusanus’ works should be examined from the perspective of a development in his thought (fighting against the ‘totalizing’ and reductive interpretations of nineteenth-century Thomists), to Cassirer’s highly influential highlighting of Cusanus as the first modern thinker and the many subsequent writers who criticized this reading, such as Volkmann-Schluck and, influentially, Jacobi (who dedicates a long discussion to the types of misreading Cusanus in his influential *Die Methode der cusanischen Philosophie*¹¹³); then, later on, Hopkins’ thorough criticism of Cusanus’ twentieth century interpreters in the English-speaking world (to which he dedicates a large part of his 1983 book *Nicholas of Cusa’s Metaphysic of Contraction*¹¹⁴) as, fundamentally, too reductive, like all

¹¹² Arne Moritz, for instance, gives an interesting account of this overall dynamic in A. MORITZ, *Was kann Cusanus dafür, das wir Ihn modern Interpretieren*, in *Die Modernitäten des Nikolaus von Kues*, ed. T. Müller – M. Vollet, Bielefeld 2014, pp. 467-485.

¹¹³ K. JACOBI, *Die Methode der cusanischen Philosophie*, Freiburg 1969.

¹¹⁴ J. HOPKINS, *Nicholas of Cusa’s Metaphysic of Contraction*, Minneapolis 1983, pp. vii-16 *et passim*.

interpretations that try to present Cusanus as ‘modern’¹¹⁵, and his attempt to reach a more historically informed understanding of Cusanus’ thought, faulting Jacobi as well for an interpretation that was too much in line with the ‘functional ontology’ of Rombach, his teacher¹¹⁶; then Haubst, with his studies on Cusanus from a ‘traditional’, theology-focused perspective, also arguing against the interpretive excesses of his forebears, particularly in the German tradition¹¹⁷; then Bond and Casarella in the English-speaking sphere, putting further emphasis (against Hopkins) on the importance of the coincidence of opposites as such in Cusanus’ thought (not as mere rhetorical device, as Hopkins at times argues¹¹⁸). The same pattern can also be seen in the groundbreaking work by Kurt Flasch, who put together an impressive account of the evolution of Cusanus’ thought in his 1998 *Geschichte einer Entwicklung*, dedicating long passages to criticizing the previous, reductive approaches, whether by neo-Thomists or modernizing interpreters¹¹⁹—only to be criticized in turn by Hopkins, at great length, for committing the same sin of reductionism himself, by, in effect, being too attracted to ‘novelty’ in Cusanus’ thought and casting him into a story of ‘modernizing’ philosophical development¹²⁰. In another way, Albertson seeks to overturn Flasch’s conclusions in his attempt at a radical ‘historicization’ of Cusanus’ thought, emphasizing the ‘traditional’ element to such an extreme effect that he removes, in effect, any and all ‘original’ elements from it, considering them, in essence, accidental¹²¹—which interpretation, in turn, seems to be guilty of the same fundamental sin it accuses (as we will see in Chapter 2.2.1 in the account of Albertson’s own methodological problems). The dialectic continues, leaving the fundamental issues ‘unsettled’¹²²—yet in a movement that is itself highly fertile and productive. We know and understand much more of Cusanus himself and his works

¹¹⁵ See J. HOPKINS, *Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464): First Modern Philosopher?*, in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XXVI (2002): Renaissance and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. H. French - P. Wettstein, Malden MA 2002, pp. 13-29.

¹¹⁶ Hopkins criticizes Rombach’s reading at length in HOPKINS, *Nicholas of Cusa’s Metaphysic of Contraction*, pp. 59-90.

¹¹⁷ R. HAUBST, *Streifzüge in die Cusanische Theologie*, Münster 1991.

¹¹⁸ J. HOPKINS, *Faith and the Rhetoric of Religious Paradox*, unpublished, available online at www.jasper-hopkins.info/FaithAndParadoxJune2007.pdf (accessed 20.04.2018).

¹¹⁹ FLASCH, *Geschichte einer Entwicklung*, pp. 44-70.

¹²⁰ J. HOPKINS, *Nicholas of Cusa’s Metaphysical Speculations* vol. II, Minneapolis 2000, pp. 79-119.

¹²¹ ALBERTSON, *Mathematical Theologies*, p. 169ff. on the ‘accidental triumph’ of *De docta ignorantia*.

¹²² For a paradigmatic example of this pattern as it applies to the state of Cusanus research, on the particular topic of the relationship between *fides* and *ratio* (but with much wider applicability), see Karen Ziebart’s overview of, and commentary on the state of, the existing literature in ZIEBART, *Nicolaus Cusanus on Faith and the Intellect*, pp. 11-47.

through each ‘iteration’ of this pattern, as his life and works are being studied in more and more detail¹²³. The lack of a ‘definitive’ interpretation of Cusanus’ thought on the most important issues, whatever reason one gives for it, is proving to be an exceptionally fertile terrain for scholarship. The present work, an examination in greater detail of a work by Cusanus that has received comparatively little attention and focusing on challenging the consensus on an element (theology in *De Beryllo*) that has been overlooked, inevitably fits within such a ‘movement’, responding, as it inevitably must, to the insufficiencies and over-reductiveness of some in the tradition before it, and advancing the state of our knowledge of this fascinating thinker in the process.

1.10.2 Particular issues in the scholarship on the *De Beryllo*

First of all, it must be underlined that the secondary literature is in near-unanimous agreement that Cusanus has a «method» in general terms¹²⁴, indeed a «philosophical-theological method»¹²⁵, and that it is precisely such a method that is the focus of *De Beryllo*¹²⁶. Thus, it is not a particularly controversial issue that *De Beryllo* presents something that can indeed be called a philosophical-theological method. What still remains to be done, however, is to analyze this method in exhaustive detail (in both its philosophical and theological aspects) and give an appropriately in-depth interpretation of *De Beryllo* as a whole.

Beside the ‘dialectical’ dynamic of development of scholarly positions outlined above, and the fact that there are rather few ‘data points’ in terms of articles and books devoting significant space to

¹²³ A fundamentally similar view of the developments in Cusanus scholarship can be seen, for instance, in D. ALBERTSON, *Mystical Philosophy in the Fifteenth Century. New Directions in Research on Nicholas of Cusa*, in «Religion Compass» 4/8 (2010), pp. 471-485, who describes the same dynamic I am outlining here in terms of successive «waves» of scholarship.

¹²⁴ A term used often in the literature. For an influential older account, see e.g. JACOBI, *Die Methode*, pp. 174-240. Platzer, herself using this term, inventories its widespread deployment in the literature on Cusanus, in such authors as Leo Gabriel («translative Methode»), Stephan Otto («transsumptive Methode»), Maurice de Gandillac («symbolische Methode»), and Volkmann-Schluck («aenigmatische Methode») (PLATZER, *Symbolica venatio*, p. 195). For a more recent and highly influential defense of the notion of ‘method’ for interpreting Cusanus’ thought, particularly in *De Beryllo*, see FLASCH, *Geschichte einer Entwicklung*, pp. 474-475, who also underlines the need to avoid anachronism in using this term.

¹²⁵ For this precise expression, see SENGER, *Nikolaus von Kues*, pp. 153-154, who speaks in the context of the whole of Cusanus’ corpus of his «philosophisch-theologischen Methoden». Senger’s view is that of a *Methodenpluralismus*, i.e. that there are several identifiable ones, corresponding mainly to the various stages of development of Cusanus’ thought, which in the end can be reconciled, or rather should «function without conflict» («konfliktfrei funktionieren sollen», p. 154).

¹²⁶ Suggested explicitly by FLASCH, *Geschichte einer Entwicklung*, pp. 474-475; Corrieras explicitly and convincingly defends this view of the scope of *De Beryllo* as the focus of her work in CORRIERAS, *Le traité du beryl*, Tome 2, pp. 10-11 *et passim*.

the *De Beryllo*, one of the greatest deficiencies in the existing literature on *De Beryllo* is simply that some of the most important works in the literature fail to mention and cite each other, creating different ‘strands’ of research that do not effectively communicate. Certainly, this is at least partly due to the different languages in which the works have been published: German for Flasch and Platzer, French for Corrieras, Spanish for D’Amico/Rusconi, English for Hopkins. More than anything else, this deficiency must be remedied if we are to make clear progress in the scholarly discussion on *De Beryllo* and establish more conclusively its importance within Cusanus’ work. Accordingly, one of the chief aims of the present work is to reunite these different strands of research, something that has not been achieved in the research on *De Beryllo* so far. Existing research at the moment offers us a working paradigm with the highly useful interpretation of Flasch, but neither Flasch nor Corrieras, the arguable continuator of his work on the *De Beryllo*, offer a sufficiently comprehensive bibliography, particularly of sources in languages other than their own. The closest thing to a ‘reference work’ that a scholar working on *De Beryllo* can use today is still Senger and Bormann’s critical edition in the Heidelberg Opera Omnia, dating from 1988 and written entirely in Latin. One aim of this thesis is to fill the gap in the existing literature by providing a unified resource, which could serve researchers interested in *De Beryllo* or in issues in Cusanus’ late thought as a useful tool for furthering scholarship in the field of Cusanus studies.

A further deficiency of the existing research lies in the fact that Platzer’s proposal for a structural analysis (*Strukturanalyse*), although rendered even more promising by the development of electronic means of access to the text of Cusanus’ works¹²⁷, has not been taken up in the research published in the intervening years (very little of which, indeed, acknowledges the existence of Platzer’s research at all). But it is precisely such a methodological approach that would be most fruitful for properly investigating Cusanus’ method in all its aspects in a given work, while addressing possible objections such as

¹²⁷ In particular, the entirety of the text of the Heidelberg critical edition of Cusanus’ Opera Omnia is available online at <http://urts99.uni-trier.de/cusanus/content/werke.php> (last accessed 22.04.2018), with a powerful search function that allows anyone to perform testing of various ‘structural’ hypotheses similar to Platzer’s own for any subset of Cusanus’ works. This resource can be of particularly great value for interpretations that would attempt to formulate a type of *Strukturanalyse* in the vein of Platzer’s own attempt.

Hopkins' (and those of Platzer herself¹²⁸), to the effect that an interpretation is being imposed from outside on the text. This deficiency is only partly addressed by Corrieras' close reading (limited, unfortunately, to only certain passages of the *De Beryllo*) and Platzer's own attempt at a *Strukturanalyse*, which takes on a scope that is arguably too great and complex for the space available to her (i.e. the question of Cusanus' method in *all* his works). However, a framework powerful enough to account for all the instances of the use of the (proposed formulation) of Cusanus' 'method' in the *De Beryllo* would—to the extent that it would prove to be a simple and powerful enough approach that would show itself able to help our understanding of different passages and their commonalities within Cusanus' intended project—offer a much stronger way of arguing for the nature of Cusanus' method in the *De Beryllo*, much less vulnerable to the Hopkins type of criticism (i.e. the pointing out of particular passages which can be invoked, through close reading, in order to contradict the main overall interpretive thesis). Resolving this vulnerability would indeed constitute progress, particularly in the context of the universally acknowledged great diversity of opinions and interpretations within Cusanus scholarship, and might even be able to show a way out of the mire of apparently irresolvable interpretive conflicts.

In an attempt to address this issue, I will propose an approach similar at its core to the *Strukturanalyse* suggested by Platzer¹²⁹ as applied to a particular object, i.e. the philosophical-theological method of the *beryllus*, in that it identifies a particular recurring argument structure (the 'method') in the *De Beryllo*, catalogues its main uses in the text (in the form of the two most used types of images, which make up the vast majority of the images employed by Cusanus as 'material' for his method: the geometrical images, analyzed in Chapter 3.4, and the political images, analyzed in Chapter 4) and proposes a simple type of formal notation (the 'B-notation') for distinguishing it. By undertaking such an approach, which is shown to be highly fruitful in practice, and narrowing the scope to a

¹²⁸ See her cogent criticism of the earlier attempt by Zellinger towards constructing a philosophical 'concordance' for Cusanus' works, in PLATZER, *Symbolica venatio und scientia aenigmatica: eine Strukturanalyse der Symbolsprache bei Nikolaus von Kues*, p. 201ff.

¹²⁹ For her arguments in favor of this methodology, see PLATZER, *ibid.*, pp. 26-31. For a more in-depth justification, see my arguments in Chapter 2 below.

manageable one (thus avoiding the problems Platzer runs into), this work hopes to achieve tangible progress that would prove beneficial for future scholarship on this highly interesting treatise.

CHAPTER 2 – Methodology

2.1 Methodologies used in the literature on *De Beryllo*

a) Flasch – ‘genetic analysis’

One of the most important and influential aspects of Kurt Flasch’s account is undoubtedly the methodology he uses in order to arrive at his developmental of Cusanus’ thought. He does not formulate it in extensive detail, but outlines a set of principles and desiderata, calling it ‘genetic analysis’ – *genetische Analyse*¹³⁰. There are four main features of this highly influential methodology: 1) the rejection of claims to present Cusanus’ thought as a unified, unchanging system, something to be deduced from first principles; 2) while the developments in Cusanus’ personal circumstances are taken into account, Cusanus’ thought is not reduced to a biographical account of his life, but allowed its own course of development according to its own internal logic; 3) the interpretation keeps a balance between ‘constant elements’ and ‘novelty’ in such a developmental account; and 4) Cusanus’ works are seen as part of a development in his thought which is not assumed to be teleological, moving towards a predefined end¹³¹. At the core of his method lies the close reading of the individual texts, avoiding as much as possible the use of wider, abstract historiographical categories such as ‘medieval’ or ‘modern’¹³². The characteristics of the type of close reading proposed are not systematically outlined; Flasch says, however, that it should be based on an attempt to «immerse ourselves in the inner problematic, in the immanent development of faultlines within Cusanian thought»¹³³. Flasch’s highly influential approach lies to a great extent behind the current interpretations of *De Beryllo* in the scholarship, since Flasch’s thesis about the importance of *De Beryllo* generally in the context of Cusanus’ thought has been highly influential¹³⁴. Subsequent scholars have taken it as their aim to improve upon the basic framework of this methodology, as we will see below.

¹³⁰ FLASCH, *Geschichte einer Entwicklung*, pp. 11-12. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 121-123.

¹³¹ These four principles are outlined in FLASCH, *Geschichte*, p. 12.

¹³² FLASCH, *Geschichte*, p. 11.

¹³³ FLASCH, *Geschichte*, p. 43: «Dazu müssen wir uns vertiefen in die innere Problematik, in die immanenten Verwerfungen des Cusanischen Denkens». The question of how to achieve this lies at the core of the methodological debate here outlined.

¹³⁴ See e.g. J. MARENBNON, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy*, New York 2012, pp. 225-226, note 46: «[De Beryllo is] the treatise written by Nicholas himself to introduce his thinking», which is a straight-up restatement of Flasch’s position, not being seen as even requiring attribution.

Several imperfections and deficiencies in Flasch's approach have been pointed out by critics. The first problem is the fact that due to the enormous scope of his work (the whole of the Cusanian corpus), he does not spend much space dealing explicitly with Cusanus' sources and instead refers the reader to other scholars for more in-depth treatment¹³⁵. This issue, however, does not much affect Flasch's treatment of *De Beryllo*, which (in line with Cusanus' own focus in the work itself) is strongly geared towards Cusanus' treatment of his sources: almost half of Flasch's account of *De Beryllo* in *Geschichte einer Entwicklung* is devoted to Cusanus' relationship with his tradition, Aristotle and Albert the Great¹³⁶.

Another issue with Flasch's method, also connected to its wide scope spanning multiple works and a lengthy time period, is that, by necessity, only a small number of passages can be chosen for close reading in order to support his overall interpretation, and, furthermore, these are inevitably interpreted focusing on their place in the argument constructed by his book overall. This raises the risk of readings distorted by the overarching presuppositions of the author—and this charge lies at the core of the most important criticism made of Flasch's method, which we will now examine.

b) Hopkins' criticism of Flasch and his method

In his extended critique of Flasch's *Geschichte einer Entwicklung* in volume II of his *Nicholas of Cusa – Metaphysical Speculations*¹³⁷, Hopkins attacks Flasch's overall interpretive framework and, in particular, the results of his close reading of selected passages to support his highly ambitious account. Ultimately, these passages—Hopkins argues—end up distorted by the presuppositions behind this overall account.

The core of Hopkins' lengthy critique concerns a large number of readings of particular passages by Flasch: he accuses Flasch of «misleading' readings, «half-truths», «subjectiveness» and «unevenhandedness», and of readings that are «highly impressionistic as well as unscholarly»¹³⁸, as

¹³⁵ See FLASCH, *Geschichte*, pp. 14-16 for his justification of this part of his approach. Cf. also Flasch's criticism of excessive *Quellenforschung* in *ibid.*, pp. 291-292, 307-308.

¹³⁶ FLASCH, *Geschichte*, pp. 465-479.

¹³⁷ J. HOPKINS, *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysical Speculations*, vol. II, pp. 79-121.

¹³⁸ HOPKINS, *ibid.*, p. 120.

well as simply wrong¹³⁹. He identifies the source of the problems as, in the end, Flasch's presuppositions in laying out his overall developmental account, which leads him to an overemphasis on the «newness» of particular passages in Cusanus' works¹⁴⁰. One must point out, however, that Hopkins has his own longstanding presuppositions which determine his preferred readings (which include, in particular, seeing Cusanus as constantly preoccupied with giving an appearance of «novelty», and, on the other hand, interpreting him as, in the end, highly «traditional», to the point that any apparently novel notion, both in the development of his thought across his works and in relation to the traditions he is a part of, is merely an appearance¹⁴¹). However, the problem he points to is a valid one: a work of wide enough scope will inevitably rely on the close reading of only some passages, and the resulting readings run the risk of being miscontextualized and misinterpreted to fit the 'narrative' of the whole. Another way of putting this would be that Flasch's third and fourth methodological principles (maintaining a balance between constancy and novelty and avoiding a 'teleological' account) become that much harder to maintain the wider the scope of the work is, and the more one is forced to remain 'distant' from the texts.

c) Albertson's critique of Flasch and attempt at a methodological correction

In his 2014 book *Mathematical Theologies – Nicholas of Cusa and the Legacy of Thierry of Chartres*¹⁴², David Albertson seeks to give a very different account of Cusanus' overall intellectual development—based, first and foremost, on an updated methodology, in turn explicitly based on

¹³⁹ HOPKINS, *ibid.*, p. 121: «many of the interpretations can be shown *bei frontaler Bestreitung* to be wrong».

¹⁴⁰ HOPKINS, *ibid.*, p. 99: «We are now beginning to see what goes wrong with *Nikolaus von Kues. Geschichte einer Entwicklung*: viz., that its author, being far too intent upon portraying the newness of Cusan thought, eagerly pounces upon unusual-sounding passages that he finds in Cusa's works. These passages are then given unusual interpretations that make the passages into novel expressions of unprecedented thought—thereby signaling an alleged Cusan tendency toward a new physics, an alleged new Cusan conception of *Geist überhaupt*, alleged new metamorphoses of the doctrines of coincidence-of-opposites and of negative theology, and so on». See also p. 120: «He does not give us a close reading of the texts but records for us the ways in which Nicholas's writings have struck him in his quest to ferret out their newness»

¹⁴¹ Hopkins's own interpretive approach is a constant throughout his works, and is always centered on the notion that any 'radical' or unusual-seeming pronouncements by Cusanus are not so after a closer examination of his sources in the tradition. See e.g. his extended criticism of other readings in HOPKINS, *Nicholas of Cusa's Metaphysics of Contraction*, esp. pp. 3-17; or his Translator's Introduction to his translation of *De Docta Ignorantia* in NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance - A Translation and an Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia*, tr. by J. Hopkins, Minneapolis 1981, 1985 (2nd ed.), pp. 1-50; or his article against 'modernizing' interpretations of Cusanus' thought, J. HOPKINS, *Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464): First Modern Philosopher?*, in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XXVI (2002): Renaissance and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. H. French - P. Wettstein, Malden (MA) 2002, pp. 13-29.

¹⁴² ALBERTSON, *Mathematical Theologies. Nicholas of Cusa and the Legacy of Thierry of Chartres*, New York 2014.

Flasch's own, but «intensifying»¹⁴³ or making «more rigorous» Flasch's «genetic method»¹⁴⁴. Albertson clearly endorses Flasch's methodological prescriptions—in particular, the four principles we have examined¹⁴⁵. However, he identifies an interpretive bias in Flasch's overall account, namely claiming that Flasch is under the influence of what Albertson calls the «mathesis narrative»: a «Neo-Kantian narrative of modernity's origins» that «often continues to inform, sometimes unconsciously, contemporary accounts of European modernity», which speaks of «the dramatic leap into a mathematized or geometrized vision of the cosmos by Galileo and Descartes», and which is «not so much incorrect as gravely incomplete»¹⁴⁶. He aims to correct for this systematic bias in applying the 'genetic method'—a bias which, he alleges, leads Flasch to a privileging of «moments when the Cusan mind was temporarily freed of its medieval theological limitations» (thus one can see that the 'philosophical' vs. 'theological' conflict lies just beneath the surface of Albertson's criticism). This leads Albertson to instead try to fit Cusanus into a conjectural tradition of «Christian Neo-Pythagoreanism», which paints a different picture of Cusanus' overall intellectual development, not at all moving towards an overcoming of the traditional doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation and becoming a «true philosopher» (as Flasch's account, according to Albertson, would have it), but rather developing, in its culmination, «a theology of Trinity and Incarnation»¹⁴⁷.

Another aim of Albertson's is to correct for the relative de-emphasis of *Quellenforschung* in Flasch's work, claiming that, ideally, one would have to perform 'genetic analysis' on Cusanus' sources as well¹⁴⁸. Apparently in order to remedy this deficiency, he chooses to apply the method to one

¹⁴³ ALBERTSON, *ibid.*, p. 227: «not in retreat from Flasch's genetic method but by way of intensifying it».

¹⁴⁴ ALBERTSON, *ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁴⁵ ALBERTSON, *ibid.*: «it is especially crucial for our study of mathematical theology to follow Flasch's prescriptions with care».

¹⁴⁶ ALBERTSON, *ibid.*, p. 8. His account of this systematic bias has, in fact, great similarities to that of Hopkins, indicting the idea of radical change, i.e. novelty: that «an altered (modern) vision of nature has discredited (medieval) religious cosmologies, the way is freshly cleared for an autonomous new foundation unhindered by the habits of the past». As an aside, one might also remark that this is a perfect illustration of a particular 'stage' in our conjectural account of the development of Cusanus scholarship in Chapter 1.10.1.

¹⁴⁷ ALBERTSON, p. 20; see also *ibid.*, p. 228. It must be noted that Albertson's criticism of Flasch in this regard appears well-justified; see, for instance, Flasch reducing Cusanus' 'theology', particularly in *De Beryllo*, to «ancient natural theology» (FLASCH, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, p. 140) in his summarizing account of Cusanus' thought (*ibid.*, p. 138-140); this is simply not an accurate reading of *De Beryllo*, as I will shown in Chapter 5.

¹⁴⁸ ALBERTSON, *ibid.*, p. 19, where he notes this would «double scholarly burdens», but in the end applies it to only one possible source for Cusanus, the so-called *Fundamentum*, as we see below. However, the problem is that this principle,

particular source, an anonymous text from the tradition of Thierry of Chartres, thus identifying a «Neopythagorean» tradition into which he places Nicholas. Why does he choose this particular source? The answer comes down to one particular scholarly controversy in Cusanus studies: that of Maarten Hoenen's discovery of an anonymous text, *Fundamentum naturae*, within the tradition of Thierry of Chartres, which bears an uncertain relationship to *De Docta Ignorantia*, as it contains the same text as a part of its cosmological section in Book II¹⁴⁹. This has led to a debate on whether the anonymous text copied from Cusanus' work or the other way around, or whether they both drew from some third, unknown source¹⁵⁰. Albertson is of the strong opinion that Cusanus must have discovered this preexisting treatise and been so fascinated by it that he build the entirety of *De Docta Ignorantia* around it¹⁵¹, and in fact devoted his entire career to solving various problems within the Chartrian tradition (involving other, unknown sources that Cusanus is supposed to have known) that the *Fundamentum* raises¹⁵².

The source of Albertson's rather surprising account of Cusanus' development thus seems to be the inclusion of the *Fundamentum naturae* in the 'genetic method' itself, with the fundamental

applied consistently, would lead not to a doubling of efforts but to an exponentially larger investigation, as ideally one would have to do this at least for Pseudo-Dionysius, Proclus, Plato, Albert the Great, etc., to name just some of the sources much prominently invoked by Cusanus, and, of course, the various intermediaries through which Cusanus would have had access to them; thus a genetic analysis would have to encompass, in the end, a great part, if not all of, the most important figures in the Western tradition. In order for it to be usable in practice, genetic analysis must be given limitations, with some inevitable risk of distorting the overall image.

¹⁴⁹ M. HOENEN, *Ista prius inaudita. Eine neuentdeckte Vorlage der De docta ignorantia und ihre Bedeutung für die frühe Philosophie des Nikolaus von Kues*, in «*Medioevo: Rivista di Storia della filosofia medievale*» 21 (1995), pp. 375–476.

¹⁵⁰ For the wider debate on the proper dating of the *Fundamentum*, the possible common source between it and *De Docta Ignorantia* and the role (if any) which it could have played for the development of *De Docta Ignorantia*, see e.g. I. MANDRELLA, *Rara et inaudita. Erneuerungsansprüche in der Philosophie des Nicolaus Cusanus*, in *Isti moderni: Erneuerungskonzepte und Erneuerungskonflikte in Mittelalter und Renaissance*, ed. C. Kann, Düsseldorf 2009, pp. 239–258, esp. pp. 247–248; W. BEIERWALTES, *Nicolaus Cusanus: Innovation durch Einsicht aus der Überlieferung—paradigmatisch gezeigt an seinem Denken des Einen*, in «*Herbst des Mittelalters*»? *Fragen zur Bewertung des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, ed. A. Speer, Berlin 2004, pp. 351–370; A. MORITZ, *Explizite Komplikationen: Der radikale Holismus des Nikolaus von Kues*, Münster 2006, pp. 234–235; C. RUSCONI, *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), pp. 247–290.

¹⁵¹ For his argument stated in a comprehensive form, see D. ALBERTSON, *A Learned Thief? Nicholas of Cusa and the Anonymous Fundamentum Naturae: Reassessing the Vorlage Theory*, in «*Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales*» 77 (2010), pp. 351–390.

¹⁵² ALBERTSON, *Mathematical Theologies*, p. 17: «the [*Fundamentum*] is no pedestrian source but a crystalline recapitulation of long-term controversies over the role of number in Christian theology reaching back to antiquity. Were it anything less, how could it have fascinated the erudite Cusanus for over twenty years?»; *ibid.*: «[the *Fundamentum* contains] a map of the missing Neopythagorean landscape within medieval Christian theologies. Captivated by its unexplored territories, Cusanus could not look away». This is an effective rhetorical strategy to counter what is clearly the weakest part of his argument, namely justifying why Cusanus would place such importance (without ever acknowledging it explicitly) on such a text.

assumption that the *Fundamentum naturae* was Cusanus' source which he used to build the whole of *De Docta Ignorantia* around. From this starting point, the broadening of the 'genetic method' places the Chartrian tradition at the core of Cusanus' entire thought-development. Rather predictably, the attempt to move away from the «mathesis narrative» (and thus to mitigate a too-modernizing, or indeed a too-'philosophical' as opposed to 'theological' reading of Cusanus' development) by placing a high emphasis on one particular (possible) source (the *Fundamentum*), and including this source within the 'genetic analysis' method while attempting to give it the same importance and level of attention as Cusanus' own works, resulted in a reduction of the latter to developments of the problematic of the former, with differences being classed as «accidental»¹⁵³—an interpretation which seems to drift inexorably further and further away from the plain meaning of the texts¹⁵⁴.

Albertson's approach shows in stark relief an important danger and limitation of the genetic method, which appears particularly when another criterion is chosen for reading passages instead of close reading. Albertson argues against Flasch's method of «immanent» analysis of the «inner problematic» of Cusanus' thought, able to be analyzed in its «self-questioning» without necessarily depending on an analysis of its sources, calling such a task of remaining close to the text «arbitrary positivism»¹⁵⁵. This is because, in Albertson's view, sometimes «the meaning of a passage is inescapably codetermined by its source», which, «in [his] experience, [...] occurs frequently in Cusanus, particularly when he is depending on Thierry of Chartres.»¹⁵⁶ But this plainly begs the question of how one can know that this 'overdetermination' and 'depending' is actually there, and how one can guard against a judgment of 'this passage is overdetermined by this source' becoming a cover for introducing a reading extraneous to the passage itself but amenable to the author's overall argument—which is precisely the deficiency that Hopkins and Albertson, as we have seen, accuse in Flasch's reading, a trap into which Albertson seems to have fallen himself.

¹⁵³ ALBERTSON, *Mathematical Theologies*, esp. pp. 169-190 and *passim*.

¹⁵⁴ This becomes particularly obvious in the case of *De Beryllo*: see ALBERTSON, *ibid.*, pp. 151-152 and my account below.

¹⁵⁵ ALBERTSON, *ibid.*, p. 18. Cf. FLASCH, *Geschichte*, p. 43.

¹⁵⁶ ALBERTSON, *ibid.*

The validity of any method lies in the results it can produce when applied to the actual texts. The result of Albertson's interpretation is an image of Cusanus which is, in the end, historically implausible, not to say unrecognizable (as no solid evidence exists that he actually possessed a «dossier of Chartrian sources»¹⁵⁷ that he was thoroughly preoccupied with reconciling for two decades, as Albertson's narrative would have it). Reading a work such as *De Beryllo* within this interpretive framework, one is struck by how far removed Albertson's account appears to be from the surface meaning of the text¹⁵⁸: everything must be seen as a constant dialogue with the *Fundamentum*, while Albertson has to contrive an explanation to the effect that Cusanus' explicit criticism of the Pythagoreans¹⁵⁹ does not mean what it appears to be: a (rather characteristic) denial of any special ontological status for number, rendering Cusanus' 'Neopythagoreanism' problematic¹⁶⁰. Inevitably, Albertson also has to argue that behind doctrines that Cusanus ostensibly assigns to «Plato» or «Aristotle» are actually doctrines of Thierry, about whose provenance Nicholas might have been perhaps «sufficiently confused»¹⁶¹. Even if it seems possible to 'translate' from a more mainstream interpretation of the text (i.e. one built without needing to 'translate' all references such as 'Plato', etc., to references to doctrines from the Chartrian tradition) to Albertson's 'pan-Thierry' theory and back¹⁶², it is unclear what interpretive benefit the supposition of mysterious and always unacknowledged Chartrian sources can bring that is superior to Flasch's close reading of the text¹⁶³. Most of all, there is

¹⁵⁷ ALBERTSON, *Mathematical Theologies.*, p. 201. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 175: «When Nicholas sat at his desk to compose the final version of *De docta ignorantia*, he evidently had several Chartrian sources before him». Albertson's entire account hinges on the existence of such a «dossier», for which the main evidence is his interpretation, and which in fact might be merely an artifact of his methodological overemphasizing of Chartrian sources in his attempt to correct Flasch's 'genetic analysis'.

¹⁵⁸ ALBERTSON, *ibid.*, pp. 251-252. Very little space is devoted to *De Beryllo* in his developmental account, which Albertson justifies by classing it under the category of «works focused on Proclian philosophy», which makes them much less important in his account (as opposed to Flasch's) than those (he conjectures are) devoted to Chartrian-tradition-specific issues (*ibid.*, p. 227).

¹⁵⁹ *De Beryllo*, 56, p. 63, 22-26: «Et si sic considerassent Pythagorici et quicumque alii, clare vidissent mathematicalia et numeros, qui ex nostra mente procedunt et sunt modo quo nos concipimus, non esse substantias aut principia rerum sensibilium, sed tantum entium rationis, quarum nos sumus conditores».

¹⁶⁰ ALBERTSON, *ibid.*, pp. 251-252 and p. 383, note 9. This is clearly one of the weakest points in Albertson's argumentation, although he devotes great effort to mitigating it.

¹⁶¹ ALBERTSON, *ibid.*, p. 252: «even if he remained sufficiently confused about [Thierry's modal theory's] provenance to hope that it represented the universal philosophy of Plato and Aristotle alike».

¹⁶² Albertson himself seems to claim this is possible, and he gives a very cogent parallel between his interpretation of Cusanus' development and the one of Flasch: ALBERTSON, *Mathematical Theologies.*, pp. 226-228.

¹⁶³ Albertson does point out, importantly, that the «mathesis narrative» which casts intellectual history as a movement towards modern conceptions predisposes us to privilege certain elements over others: he claims accordingly that there are «modern prejudices against Neopythagoreanism» (p. 227), and accuses Flasch's «suspicion of Neopythagoreanism and

something radically unsatisfying about a reading that assumes it is impossible for a reader to understand a work such as *De Beryllo* (for which we know in various ways that Cusanus wrote for the specific purpose of being better understood) without knowledge of an utterly obscure work such as the *Fundamentum*, a work whose relationship to Cusanus is highly debatable to start with.

One may note also that Albertson's method, although in its divergence from Flasch it claims to be able to give a better picture of Cusanus as a theologian, particularly in the late works¹⁶⁴, seems to completely miss the theological and Christological resonances of *De Beryllo*, which he says is a «rigorously philosophical» work¹⁶⁵. It does no better in this than Flasch's own account, which also failed to note the pervasive theological aspects informing, as we will see, crucial aspects of this work.

While it is outside the scope of this thesis to make a judgment on which is, in the end, the most plausible view on the development of Cusanus' thought, Albertson's paradigm seems to be particularly problematic and hard to support when reading *De Beryllo*. The point to be noted here is that a crucial part of the 'genetic method' is the choice of focus (and of which sources to give most weight to), and a crucial danger is overemphasizing the import of any particular source (work, author or tradition) to the text one is reading, so that the unique nature of the text one is examining is lost (as particular passages end up 'overdetermined' by the source one has identified for them, possibly on considerations

Chartrian sources as so many impediments to the cardinal's philosophical maturation to be overcome» (p. 226). But one suspects that what underlies Albertson's forceful dissent from the 'standard' reading is a choice of emphasis, or of what one considers important. Accordingly, for instance, Albertson declares that instead of the «apophatic mysticism» and the «[discovery of] epistemological and ontological models in the language of Christian revelation» that Flasch and others deem as the central aspects of *De Docta Ignorantia*, «the essential event in *De docta ignorantia* is rather Nicholas's struggle to deploy his conflicting Chartrian sources» (p. 226). This methodological point is at the core of the dispute: most scholars indeed deem Cusanus' innovative epistemology/ontology/negative theology to be *the* interesting elements, and assume that Cusanus thought the same; Albertson, however, tries to argue for a view of Cusanus for whom most important throughout his career was his attempt to reconcile some sources he had found, and not (for instance) to develop new ways of speaking and thinking about God. However, all the historical evidence we have regarding Cusanus seems to point to him considering his usual subject matter in his philosophical-theological works (ways of talking and thinking about God) as more important than reconciling the thought of other philosophers (particularly, in *De Beryllo*, the *doctissimi* such as Aristotle and Plato, which in Albertson's account seem to be reduced to different positions taken in the *Fundamentum* and other supposed Chartrian sources), which comes across as merely a secondary goal—see e.g. *De Beryllo*, 1, p. 3, 5 - p. 4, 10. It seems to be the most plausible interpretation that developing ways of thinking about God would be more important (particularly to a Christian monastic who, in *De Beryllo*, appears to be developing a philosophical-theological method focused on *praxis*) than reconciling sources, however important these might be. It is thus arguable that Flasch's supposed 'bias' towards philosophical-theological issues is fully appropriate here.

¹⁶⁴ ALBERTSON, *ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁵ ALBERTSON, *Mathematical Theologies.*, p. 251. He identifies the theological developments of the late period as starting with *De Aequalitate* and *De Principio* (p. 256).

completely extraneous to the text itself). Accordingly, a remedy for this danger would be performing the closest reading possible, while 1) remaining close to the particular text one is reading (and not taking on an overly large scope, a problem from which Albertson ends up suffering even more than Flasch), and 2) noting influences and references to other sources without pre-judging that any one of them is the ‘crucial’ or fundamental one that would explain the whole. This involves a fundamental assumption of the integrity of the text one is reading as a whole, and a willingness to consider all possible ramifications, references and meanings, as much as possible without pre-judging what the account of its ‘ultimate meaning’ would be – which includes not assuming from the start where the overall development of Cusanus’ thought will lead.

One must acknowledge, at the same time, the valuable contributions to Cusanus research brought by Albertson’s work. He focuses on «mathematical theology» and the influence on Cusanus of the Chartrian tradition, which, as he shows through a thorough engagement with the literature, have been relatively undervalued, particularly in developmental accounts such as Flasch’s—and the tracing of a «Neopythagorean» tradition through Thierry to Cusanus is itself an important result. He is right to draw attention to the limitations of Flasch’s account due to his view of what is truly important in Cusanus’ development, which tends towards privileging ‘philosophy’ as opposed to ‘theology’. Accordingly, Albertson’s view that, even in his late works, Cusanus’ thought is still, as always, explicitly Trinitarian and Incarnational¹⁶⁶ is an important result (and, arguably, a welcome corrective). At the same time, Albertson’s account and its pitfalls caution us against attempting to remedy deficiencies in Flasch’s methodology by falling into another extreme, and concluding that an overemphasis of the role of Cusanus’ sources, to the detriment of Flasch’s more ‘traditional’ close reading, offers by itself the key for understanding the development of Cusanus’ thought¹⁶⁷.

d) Maude Corrieras – a mixed approach

¹⁶⁶ ALBERTSON, *ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁷ As a sidenote, this scholarly dispute seems to fit precisely into the speculative scholarly ‘dialectic’ mentioned in Chapter 1.10.1.

Maude Corrieras does not enter into an explicit discussion of methodology in her *Le traité du béryl, Tome 2*¹⁶⁸ – however, her framework is clearly Flasch-influenced, as she cites Flasch exclusively as an interpretive authority on *De Beryllo*¹⁶⁹. Starting from Flasch’s considerations on the method Cusanus develops in *De Beryllo*, she undertakes to prove it exists and to show its characteristics, as well as its ancestry within Cusanus’ previous works and, to some extent, within the overall tradition he is a part of.

Compared to Flasch, her methodology includes more extensive close readings of passages (yet still of only a limited selection thereof), and a more developed *Quellenforschung* with deeper analyses of Cusanus’ sources within the tradition, particularly as regards Pseudo-Dionysius and Aristotle. She inserts her account of Cusanus’ method within a ‘genetic analysis’ of the development of his thought that is entirely compatible with Flasch’s general account, here narrowed down to the issue of the development of the method itself—a highly useful result (mostly limited, though, to pre-*De Beryllo* development, with little mention of how it plays out in the later works). However, her account is limited by the fact she does a close reading of only a small number of passages, and vulnerable (although arguably to a lesser extent) to a number of the same criticisms as Flasch’s account: most importantly, that the close readings of various passages are removed from their context and placed within her overall interpretative ‘narrative’, which might distort and limit our understanding of them. One can point to a clear example of this deficiency in the form of the absence of Christology in her account of *De Beryllo*: her reading of the final paragraphs, as we will see in our analysis, is reductive and deficient¹⁷⁰, (mirroring precisely the latent ‘rationalism’ that Albertson, as we have seen, identifies in Flasch in the form of a latent form of the «mathesis narrative»¹⁷¹).

Thus, we can conclude that Corrieras’ work, a highly valuable effort for *De Beryllo* scholarship, represents an incremental improvement over Flasch’s account and method. While an excellent step

¹⁶⁸ CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl, Tome 2: Introduction au traité de Beryllo de Nicolas de Cues*.

¹⁶⁹ CORRIERAS, *ibid.*, pp. 10-11, 132, *et passim*.

¹⁷⁰ CORRIERAS, *ibid.*, pp. 116-118.

¹⁷¹ ALBERTSON, *Mathematical Theologies*, pp. 18-20.

towards a better understanding of *De Beryllo*, it points to the need of an even more thorough, detailed and exhaustive account in order to place our view of the text on a surer footing.

e) Katrin Platzer and ‘structural analysis’

In her account of her own methodology, Platzer endorses the desideratum of a ‘structural analysis’, *Strukturanalyse*, of Cusanus’ works¹⁷², a notion originally proposed by Stephan Otto¹⁷³ and Michael Stadler¹⁷⁴, precisely as a possible solution to the problem of the «irresolvable immanent aporetic»¹⁷⁵ of performing close reading while employing, in particular, a ‘genetic’ method for interpreting Cusanus’ thought. A ‘structural analysis’ would identify recurring patterns and structures in Cusanus’ use of language, including regarding the manner he employs his sources and uses them in different ways across his works¹⁷⁶. According to this argument, an identification of recurring patterns would offer a better perspective on how particular issues develop in Cusanus’ thought, and would approach Cusanus’ own proposal for an ‘interpretive method’ in the later work *Compendium*¹⁷⁷.

The most important result of using this method in Platzer’s work is her thorough examination of the metaphysics of light throughout Cusanus’ works¹⁷⁸, capped with an exhaustive index of passages mentioning *speculatio* and *speculum*¹⁷⁹. However, the rest of her work, comprising a highly ambitious attempt at analysing Cusanus’ method(s) throughout his whole corpus, is more problematic due to the enormous scope of the project. She identifies a three-step «universal method» of «*transcensus*»¹⁸⁰ and

¹⁷² Cf. PLATZER, *Symbolica venatio und scientia aenigmatica: eine Strukturanalyse der Symbolsprache bei Nikolaus von Kues*, pp. 26-31.

¹⁷³ S. OTTO, *Nikolaus von Kues (1401-1464)*, in *Klassiker der Philosophie*, ed. O. Höffe, Munich 1981, vol. I, pp. 245-261, esp. pp. 259.

¹⁷⁴ M. STADLER, *Rekonstruktion einer Philosophie der Ungegenständlichkeit: zur Struktur des Cusanischen Denkens*, Munich 1983.

¹⁷⁵ STADLER, *ibid.*, p. 18: «einer unauflösbaren immanenten Aporetik».

¹⁷⁶ STADLER, *ibid.*, pp. 8-20. Interestingly, Albertson refers to this argument in Stadler approvingly (ALBERTSON, *ibid.*, p. 288, note 89), and he suggests that he developed his own method in an attempt to fulfill this desideratum and accomplish, himself, a *Strukturanalyse*.

¹⁷⁷ *Compendium*, 10, 28, p. 22, 1 - 23, 14. Cf. also *Idiota de mente*, 67, p. 103, 1-3: «Hae omnes et quotquot cogitari possent modorum differentiae facillime resolvuntur et concordantur, quando mens se ad infinitatem elevat», and Platzer’s commentary, PLATZER, *Symbolica venatio*, pp. 90-91.

¹⁷⁸ PLATZER, *ibid.*, pp. 127-195.

¹⁷⁹ PLATZER, *ibid.*, pp. 275-302.

¹⁸⁰ She formulates this with reference to the *Complementum Theologicum* (PLATZER, *ibid.*, pp. 48-50), but it goes back, in the end, to a reading of *De Docta Ignorantia: ibid.*, p. 94: «Das Stufenmodell des *transcensus*, das eine universale Methode darstellt, wird in der Schrift DDI darum als eine Methode der mathematischen Symbolik dargestellt».

proceeds to analyze what are, in the end, two different ways of formulating it, which emphasize different parts of what remains one fundamentally unified mode of thought: the *symbolum* (before *De Visione Dei*) and the *aenigma* (afterwards, starting particularly with *De Beryllo*)¹⁸¹. At the end, she adds a collection of all passages containing relevant terms connected with the *transcensus* method (*symbolum, aenigma, manuductio, transcensus, translatio, transsumptio, transfusio*)¹⁸². While her interpretation is highly interesting, it remains in the end at the level of a speculative hypothesis, as space constraints¹⁸³ only allow her to do a close reading on a limited number of passages, and the reproduced passages in her final index do not come with individual interpretations¹⁸⁴. Thus, while certainly an interesting result and a step in the right direction proposed by Stadler, Platzer's account arguably remains at a too general level for a fully developed *Strukturanalyse* of these complex themes in Cusanus' thought¹⁸⁵.

2.2 The proposed methodology – ‘genetic analysis’/close reading/*Strukturanalyse*

We have analyzed the major methodological approaches by the scholars who have worked on the *De Beryllo* overall so far. As we have seen, recent research builds upon Flasch's highly influential ‘genetic analysis’ while criticizing its various methodological shortcomings and attempting to overcome them and provide a more solid basis for its conclusions. Corrieras chooses a methodology that improves incrementally upon Flasch's, remaining in continuity with it and its ‘immanent’ type of close reading, but vulnerable to some similar criticism. At the same time, paradigmatic for recent efforts to improve on Flasch's methodology is Albertson, who pursues a good-faith and valuable attempt to

¹⁸¹ Cf. PLATZER, *ibid.*, pp. 90-91, 93-94; «[D]ie symbolica venatio und die aenigmatica scientia als metodische Ansätze cusanischen Philosophierens» (*ibid.*, p. 205).

¹⁸² PLATZER, *ibid.* pp. 233-274.

¹⁸³ The chapter on the issue of the development of this method in all of Cusanus' works is at *ibid.*, pp. 33-126, which gives Platzer too little space to develop it in detail.

¹⁸⁴ To a certain extent, this problem could have been mitigated had she developed a formal system of notation for the *transcensus* method, as I propose with the ‘B-notation’ in the present thesis, which would have made possible a wide-scope inventory of the details of each application of the method, and which would be much stronger proof for her case than simple keyword identification.

¹⁸⁵ One other problem with Platzer's work that needs to be mentioned is her decision not to cite the Heidelberg Opera Omnia for Cusanus' texts, not even providing paragraph or page numbers from the critical editions, but instead citing passages exclusively via page numbers referencing one particular German-Latin edition. There does not appear to be a good reason for this decision, and one might speculate that it had a lot to do with later scholars' reluctance to cite and make use of her work.

improve on Flasch's methodology but which falls into another extreme, featuring an overreliance on Cusanus' sources which ends up 'overriding' close reading and producing a highly implausible image of Cusanus and his works. An interesting and promising suggestion for mitigating the problems posed by Flasch's type of reading is Stadler's *Strukturanalyse*, which Platzer attempted to employ for a (too) wide-ranging account of Cusanus' development of methods in his works.

The methodology I propose to use is one that tries to fulfill Flasch's desiderata while managing to avoid the previously identified shortcomings inherent in Flasch's methodology. Ideally, it is, therefore, a combination of 'genetic analysis' and *Strukturanalyse*. It cannot be itself fully-developed 'genetic analysis', as it deals fundamentally with only one work, *De Beryllo*, and even though it will offer correspondences and conjectures regarding similar structures in other works by Cusanus, these will be offered only as working hypotheses, in the absence of a similar close reading/*Strukturanalyse* done on each of those particular works (which is required in order to have strong evidence of an actual structural similarity). Such a method would arguably be a helpful precursor of an even more comprehensive 'genetic analysis' of Cusanus' thought, which could only be completed after the methodology is applied to the whole corpus. This would result in an 'expansive version' of Flasch's original project (which would require, of course, many thousands of pages, and perhaps even lead to different conclusions than his). The 'B-notation' I propose in this work, useful for the categorization and indexing of structures and terms in *De Beryllo*, also aims to fulfill Stadler's desiderata for a true *Strukturanalyse*, furthering Platzer's own attempt. Indeed, if Flasch's account of *De Beryllo* as having a central importance within Cusanus' corpus turns out to be broadly true on deeper analysis, the 'B-notation' (or something like it) may serve as a tool for conducting similar *Strukturanalyse*-type investigations on other works by Cusanus as well.

The methodology of the present thesis will be based on a version of the 'immanentist' close reading that Flasch proposes, trying to follow the inner logic of the text, using clearly-laid-out presuppositions. For interpretive purposes, two interpretive perspectives will generally be employed: of a 'novice' reader and of a reader with thorough knowledge of Cusanus' sources and other works: the

first perspective will allow for a full and exhaustive ‘immanent’ reading, while the second will allow for a well-developed examination of correspondences with Cusanus’ other works and with his sources, without either one negating or overriding the other.

Furthermore, the analysis will aim to develop a version of a *Strukturanalyse* regarding the *beryllus* method, by proposing a simple system of formal notation, the ‘B-notation’, which aims to mark the presence of the structures of the method which arise from our interpretation (even when Cusanus does not explicitly say he using them).

2.2.1 The issue of ‘close reading’ – principles and presuppositions

Regarding the criticism by Albertson directed at «arbitrary positivism» of the «immanent»¹⁸⁶ type of close reading that Flasch proposes, one can remark that the crucial assumption at stake is that the passage being read is a certain type of ‘whole’, with clear enough internal logic so that we are able to reconstitute a certain intellectual structure, for which the sources and external references would be ‘inputs’, but which would not fundamentally change it—as if we were deciphering the proof of a certain mathematical or logical theorem. The question is how we can know that the passage we have chosen to analyze possesses such a structure, and how we can determine it without distortion.

One point to note, however, is that even if this might be debatable for particular passages taken out of context, a text taken as a whole seems to fit these preconditions, as it is reasonable to suppose it would have been intended by the author to be basically comprehensible even for someone who is not familiar with some particular external source or another. This points towards a ‘structural analysis’ of the whole, by identifying clearly repeating patterns, as a way to overcome the problems that a close reading of only some select passages would pose.

In light of the methodological insufficiencies previously examined, it is of high importance to lay out explicitly the presuppositions that will lie at the basis of the close reading of the text:

¹⁸⁶ ALBERTSON, *Mathematical Theologies*, p. 18.

1. The text as a whole is meant by Cusanus to be understandable to a reader of Latin (whether or not this reader is already familiar with any of Cusanus' previous works or with other works in the tradition)

Thus, the text is assumed to be understandable to a reader at a basic level, prior to assuming any knowledge of Cusanus' works or Cusanus' implicit and explicit sources and references¹⁸⁷. Indeed, if this presupposition is not satisfied, Cusanus' project in *De Beryllo* has clearly failed, according to his own proposals in the first two paragraphs (analyzed here in Chapter 3.2). While that is indeed possible, we will start out with the default assumption that he did not. This should not be a controversial assumption, as a) it is inevitably the assumption we must make whenever we start studying a text of any kind, and b) it is fundamentally falsifiable: it is entirely possible that having made the assumption in the beginning, the text will be found at the end to be e.g. incomplete, off-topic or nonsensical. We must remain open, as much as possible (certainly a difficult task, as we inevitably already have our own expectations about the text), to any of these possibilities, and let the text guide us in making our determinations. As with all ideal standards, we will inevitably fall short of achieving this to the fullest in practice – although the exact degree of our success or failure depends on us, and it is what our resulting account must be judged on. But if this type of close reading is dismissed as 'arbitrary positivism' (as Albertson seems to want to do), it is hard to see how studying any written text would still be possible.

The resulting methodology must also be the most appropriate for the fundamental object of the thesis: the in-depth analysis of the nature and applications of the method developed in *De Beryllus*, for which Cusanus has various names (*beryllus*, *visio intellectualis*, *visio per speculum et aenigmate*, *scientia aenigmatica*) in the text; since the *De Beryllo* as a whole (as we will see) seems to be aimed first and foremost at presenting this method, and there is no section of the book where the method is not used at least implicitly, my analysis throughout the book focuses on it, while taking into view the

¹⁸⁷ This criterion fits particularly well for *De Beryllo*, as in the first paragraph Cusanus sets up such a scope in explicit terms: *De Beryllo*, 1, p. 3, 6: «cuiusque intellectus»; 1, p. 4, 12-13: «in cuiusque potestate».

book as a whole, given that the fundamental concept around which it is structured, the *beryllus intellectualis*, reproduces in certain ways the central structure of the method (as we will see as a result of the reading), and we even have reason to believe that Cusanus meant the entire text as an image, or illustration, of said method (as we will note in Chapter 3.2 with the analysis of the title). For this, the existence of this method as the object of *De Beryllo* is a necessary, if uncontroversial, starting assumption:

2. There is a philosophical-theological method in *De Beryllo*, which forms the main object of the work (and is, indeed, what the titular *beryllus* refers to). It is aimed, at least in part, at developing particular ways of thinking and talking about God.

As detailed in the previous chapter, this is an uncontroversial claim, backed by all scholars who have worked on *De Beryllo* specifically, for which Corrieras argues thoroughly and persuasively as the main object of her book. Furthermore, Cusanus' own words in introducing *De Beryllo*, together with his correspondence with the Tegernsee monks¹⁸⁸, suggest, in their plain meaning, that this is indeed his aim in this work as a whole. It is thus a perfectly reasonable presupposition to start with in reading the text. Of course, the possibility that this assumption is wrong should be taken into account, and the issue should be decided by the reading of the text itself—which will offer, as we will see, extensive confirmation of this hypothesis at every stage. No matter how skeptical the reader might be, there seems to be no grounds for an interpretation that would contradict this basic presupposition, and none has yet been argued for in the literature. We are thus on very firm ground, and the fruitfulness of the reading can only bring further circumstantial evidence to strengthen this basic interpretive framework.

The proposed close reading of the main 'methodological' part of *De Beryllo* (paragraphs 1-8), and that of all geometrical images used in the text, will be conducted in Chapter 3. The analysis will then make possible the investigation of two major questions connected to the method in *De Beryllo*:

¹⁸⁸ With the caveat that this correspondence takes place several years before he actually completes the work. See note 18 above for the timeline.

1. The presence of a cosmological and ontological hierarchy in *De Beryllo* (Chapter 4). The traditional notion of hierarchy, particularly in the cosmological context, is, as Flasch argues, in certain ways undermined by the focus on the *beryllus* method. At the same time, a ‘hierarchy-like’ structure is an essential structural element of the same method, which is based on the identification of two distinct ontological levels in each use (and which can become a whole series of ontological levels, given the possibility for repeated applications of the method – which makes possible, as we will see, the Cusanian reconstruction of a hierarchy of *species*), and thus offers a way in which Cusanus seems to believe that he can preserve without any fundamental problems the notions of hierarchy inherent in the Christian-Neoplatonic tradition within which he works. This investigation will take the form, in Chapter 4, of examining all the uses in *De Beryllo* of a paradigmatically ‘hierarchical’ image: the ‘political’ image of the *rex/princeps/imperator – res publica*. The hierarchical ontological premises which Cusanus is presupposing and which guide the application of his method (while themselves independent from it) will be examined separately (Chapter 4.3) and their use analyzed in the context of the application of the method itself, in order to make possible a balanced view of the character of the method itself and its external ‘inputs’, i.e. Cusanus’ underlying Proclean metaphysics of *simplicitas*.

2. The role of Christ and Christology in *De Beryllo* (Chapter 5), an issue less previously examined, but highly important in light of the structural features of the application of the *beryllus* method: the incarnate Christ presents a different type of structure than the one described by Cusanus’ regular *beryllus*-informed account of ontological-gnoseological hierarchies, and poses particular interpretive issues when introduced clearly and explicitly at the end of the book, in paragraphs 69 and 70. Even more, there are striking structural parallels in the construction of the *beryllus intellectualis* and the Incarnation, bolstered by Christological resonances of the *beryllus* stone in the tradition, which Cusanus was most likely aware of (Chapter 3.1), connotations evident in the analysis of a sermon from the same time period of the early conception of the *De Beryllo* project, Sermon CXXVI («Tu es Petrus», 1453), which explicitly offers the image of Christ as a precious stone, *lapis/calculus*. All these combine to offer a new way to look at *De Beryllo* as a Christologically-focused work.

2.2.2 The two perspectives for close reading – ‘novice reader’ and ‘expert reader’

The reading of the text will, accordingly, proceed, for each passage, according to two distinct perspectives (though not always explicitly distinguished): that of a ‘novice’ reader, not already familiar with Cusanus, who would be trying to interpret the text as well as possible strictly according to its own internal logic, and that of the reader familiar with both other works of Cusanus and his various sources, the ‘expert’ reader (while the particular works that such a reader would have to be familiar with are noted where appropriate). The necessity for this ‘double perspective’ (i.e. the necessity of the ‘novice reader’ perspective to be added, as the ‘expert reader’ perspective is simply the default expected one for a scholarly work dealing with close reading) is suggested, first of all, by the important fact that this is the first non-dialogical work by Cusanus not addressed to one specific reader (i.e. not addressed or dedicated to anyone in particular) but to a general one¹⁸⁹, and which clearly shows the signs of being aimed (also) at a reader unfamiliar with his other works, as will be shown in the analysis of paragraph 1 in Chapter 3.2.1. This implicit rhetorical commitment by Cusanus will be shown to have had influence on the text, in the form of carefully considered word choices and a careful manner of referring to his previous works and to his sources, aspects which can easily be overlooked if we adopt exclusively the ‘expert reader’ perspective. The particular challenge faced by Cusanus to speak to an ‘uninitiated reader’ is one he evidently approached with great care, and the details of his chosen rhetorical solutions,

¹⁸⁹ This aspect, not previously remarked upon in research on *De Beryllo*, hints that Cusanus is doing something fundamentally new in his approach to writing, at least on the rhetorical level. All his previous works which are not dialogues are dedicated to particular persons, who often also come up in the text as the rhetorical addressee: the *De Docta Ignorantia* is dedicated/addressed to Cardinal Cesarini, as is the *De Conjecturis*; the *De Patris Dato Luminum* is dedicated to Father Gerard, bishop of Salone; *De Filiatione Dei* is dedicated to Conrad de Wartberg (*De filiatione Dei*, 51, p. 39, 1-2); *De Quaerendo Deum* is dedicated to an unknown but specific person (*De quaerendo Deum*, 16, p. 13, 1-2). *De Deo Abscondito*, *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*, the three Idiota dialogues, *Dialogus De Genesi* and *De Pace Fidei* are dialogic works, to which this consideration would not in any case apply, since Cusanus does not have the rhetorical opportunity to speak directly to the reader. This holds also for the mathematically-themed works: *De geometricis transmutationibus* and *De arithmetiis complementis* were dedicated to Paolo Toscanelli; the *De circuli quadratura* was dedicated to an unknown friend, probably Cardinal Bessarion; and *De theologicis complementis*, *De mathematicis complementis* and *Caesarea circuli quadratura* were dedicated to Pope Nicolaus V. For an inventory of the addressees of Cusanus’ works, see WATANABE, *Nicolaus Cusanus, A Companion to His Life and Times*, pp. xx-xxvi.

While *De Beryllo*, as we have examined (cf. note 18 above), was conceived first as an aid for the benefit of Cusanus’ friends, the monks of Tegernsee, there are no signs of this in the finished work (and indeed, it is possible, as Senger and Bormann argue, that Cusanus did not even send a copy to Tegernsee at all, and that they only received the work after his death in 1464, cf. *De Beryllo*, p. XVIII). Therefore, this is the first Cusanian work not dedicated to any particular addressee, in which Cusanus, however, makes extensive use of first-person address. This aspect certainly also informs the ‘introductory’ quality that Flasch assigns to this work.

as we will see, will clarify how Cusanus intends such a reader to understand his text, and how he has constructed it carefully for this purpose—a crucial aspect for interpretation, which would otherwise be easy to omit.

Clearly, the perspective of the ‘expert reader’ is also crucially important, not only because the question of the location of *De Beryllo* and its method in the context of Cusanus’ works is a very important issue to examine, but also for the fact that it is also unquestionable that Cusanus conceived the text (at least in the beginning) for his friends, the monks of Tegernsee, with whom he likely discussed the initial idea for *De Beryllo* around 1452. They were already familiar with some of his previous works, particularly *De Docta Ignorantia*, regarding which they had problems and unclarity, for which explicit reason they asked him repeatedly to write *De Beryllo* in their correspondence¹⁹⁰. This complex developmental history of the work strongly suggests using a ‘double perspective’ as I have adopted in my analysis. The ‘expert reader’ will allow us to make connections with previous/contemporary works by Cusanus (evidently including the sermons, and also, where appropriate, other relevant documents, such as his letters from this period). His extensive use of secondary sources (in particular Pseudo-Dionysius, Proclus, Plato, Aristotle) will be carefully examined in this perspective; however, it will not be an aim of this work to perform a similar type of close reading of each of these identified secondary sources, as this would, of course, increase the scope of this work exponentially. The perspective adopted will be always that of a reader focusing on *De Beryllo* and at most identifying parallels in Cusanus’ sources and closely examining those particular passages – but not turning to them for a close reading of those works as they stand by themselves according to the same in-depth methodology. Due to the various constraints inherent in this proposed methodology, or any similar one, it must always remain focused on a particular work by a particular author—although it can, and should be, a starting point and building block for a more general and rigorous ‘genetic analysis’ in the vein of Flasch’s own.

¹⁹⁰ For a good account of their relationship in this context, see e.g. FLASCH, *Geschichte einer Entwicklung*, pp. 445-446. For the correspondence covering the *De Beryllo*, cf. VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour de la Docte Ignorance*, pp. 120ff, discussed in note 18 above. Cf. Chapter 1.1 and 3.2.1 for a more detailed analysis.

2.3 The ‘B-notation’ and the schematization of Cusanus’ method – towards a *Strukturanalyse*

During the reading of paragraph 3 of the text (i.e. as soon as the method is explicitly introduced and applied for the first time), a simple form of notation will be introduced as an interpretive device to mark specific applications of the method. The notation is meant to be the simplest and easiest to apply, and is meant to be understood as a formal device to help us analyze the recurring structures in the text, and not as introducing any anachronistic or ‘modernizing’ assumptions into it.

This ‘B-notation’ (evidently named after the titular *beryllus*) takes the following form, to be understood in the most general way possible that does not contradict the context where it is applied:

B[Level II objects, ordering criterion X] -> Level I object

- relation *a* holds between the Level I object and the Level II objects

- relation *b* holds between the Level I object and the Level II objects

...

The ‘B-notation’ is a way of marking Cusanus’ recurring expression «let us apply the beryl» (*applicemus beryllum*) and other equivalent formulations in the text, which indicate to the reader that the particular method Cusanus outlined in the beginning paragraphs should be applied, and with what parameters. It can be translated in plain words as meaning: ‘We look through the *beryllus* at the Level II objects, considered as ordered by criterion X, and we see the Level I object.’ To apply this, one must distinguish between two distinct ontological levels¹⁹¹, Level I and Level II. For some illustrative examples, the three most commonly used Level I-Level II pairs in *De Beryllo* are: ‘the Infinite’ (Level I) and ‘finite things’ (Level II); ‘one-dimensional objects’ (Level I) and ‘two-dimensional objects’ (Level II – a distinction on which Cusanus’ geometrical images are mostly based); and the monarchical ruler (*rex/princeps/imperator*) (Level I) and the subjects/elements/laws etc. of a kingdom (Level II).

After identifying these elements, one must apply to some objects of Level II type a particularly defined criterion X which is applicable to them, in relation to which an object on Level I can be

¹⁹¹ The notion of ‘ontological level’ should be understood with as little content as possible: it could be explained as ‘a particular type of thing, which is different from another type of thing and not reducible to it’. An example would be one used often in *De Beryllo* and throughout Cusanus’ works: one-dimensional objects (a line) and two-dimensional objects (angles, triangles, etc.) are a paradigmatic example different ontological levels. The framework in which these distinctions are made is always Cusanus’ own, and we will analyze the extra ontological presuppositions he brings to bear where appropriate.

considered (in some way) as ‘the most-X Level II object’ and at the same time ‘the least-X Level II object’, thus the *maximum* and the *minimum* for that particular property X. This leads us to be able to draw various relationships (*a*, *b*, ...) between the Level I object and the Level II objects considered, based on this identification of the Level I object as, in effect, an instance of *coincidentia oppositorum* from the point of view of Level II objects, namely that in which the ‘most X’ and ‘least X’ coincide. These relationships, effectively ‘new ways of speaking’ about Level I objects in terms of Level II objects, are always noted below the B-structure in the notation, with a larger indent.

The method of the *beryllus* in its full development, which, as we will see, Cusanus claims can solve *quaeque indaganda* («anything to be investigated»), consists of two of these B-structures which are compared/placed in parallel, so that the ‘new ways of speaking’ obtained from the application of the first structure can be ‘transferred’ to the second B-structure, which features different objects and different ontological levels altogether – we may call them Level III and Level IV, which again need to be identified as ontologically distinct, together with another ordering criterion Y applicable to them:

B[Level II objects, ordering criterion X] -> Level I object

- relation *a* holds between the Level I object and the Level II objects
- relation *b* holds between the Level I object and the Level II objects

...

SICUT

B[Level IV objects, ordering criterion Y] -> Level III object

- relation *a* holds between the Level III object and the Level IV objects
- relation *b* holds between the Level III object and the Level IV objects

...

The two structures are usually connected by a conjunction in the Latin, usually *sicut* (also *ut*, *tam...quam*, etc.), although sometimes Cusanus leaves the parallel as implicit. We will mark the connection between two such structures by means of the Latin connective word actually present in the text (‘*sicut*’ in the above example), unless it is missing but implicit, in which case we will add **[SICUT]** in square brackets for clarity. As a general principle, if any of the elements of this structure are not explicitly present in Cusanus’ text but the structure itself clearly suggests they should be understood implicitly to be there, they will be inserted and clearly marked in the B-notation preceded by an **asterisk**

(*). The B-notation for a particular passage will attempt to include only the Latin words in the text which refer to each of the elements of the structure, both as regards the ‘ontological levels’ as well as the relationships identified. When, for instance, there is no explicit criterion X named in the text and none is clearly implicit, the B-notation will specify ***gradus**, intended to mean ‘the most general possible ordering criterion for which one could construct the argument in the context’¹⁹².

Cusanus’ method in *De Beryllo* is based (as all scholars who have investigated the matter agree) on the fundamental principle of *coincidentia oppositorum*¹⁹³ and the notion that it could help ‘bridge the gap’ between things found at different ontological levels (by effectively describing one as an instance of another with contradictory properties), and that the novel relationships which can be described between such objects in this way (e.g. a two-dimensional line can be said to be the ‘minimum and maximum angle, the absolute angle, the cause/principle of all angles’, etc.) can be ‘transferred’ to any other types of objects also identified as being at different ontological levels: most importantly ‘Infinite’ (the level of *Deus/principium*) and ‘finite’. Thus, for example, whatever ‘names’ for a line in relation with angles might be found in this way, these can become ‘names for God’ in relation to finite things—no more and no less than ‘divine names.’

¹⁹² Cf. Cusanus’ own use of the term at *De Beryllo*, 32, p. 36, 18.

¹⁹³ For the *coincidentia oppositorum* see also the discussion and sources in note 14. In the case of *De Beryllo*, all interpreters agree explicitly that Cusanus’ method is based on an application of *coincidentia oppositorum*: e.g. FLASCH, *ibid.*, pp. 449-450; Bormann in his introduction to his translation, NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Über den Beryll*, p. IX; cf. also Peroli in his interpretive note, NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Opere filosofiche, teologiche e matematiche*, p. 2701, note 5, etc. The notion that some objects of thought manifest *coincidentia oppositorum* is in fact the only conceptual prerequisite for my account of the method, or any similar one, since the only issue remaining after one accepts this basic principle is to describe how Cusanus makes use of the relationship between ‘regular’ objects and objects that manifest *coincidentia oppositorum* in order to derive new ways of speaking, in particular about God—which is uncontroversially a highly important goal for Cusanus. Scholars who have researched the characteristics of the method in *De Beryllo* in detail are in agreement on its main features, which are entirely compatible with my formulation: CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl, Tome 2*, pp. 15-28; PLATZER, *Symbolica venatio*, pp. 48-50, 195ff; D’AMICO, *Die Rolle der geometrischen Figur in der Zusammensetzung Scientia aenigmatica*, pp. 265-278.

For scholars proposing a general account of precisely such a method in Cusanus’ thought overall (all favoring similar accounts of a ‘three-step’ method and referring it explicitly to Cusanus’ interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius) see e.g. L. BOND, *Nicolaus Cusanus: Selected Spiritual Works*, New York 1997, p. 33 («affirmative», «negative», «coincident theology»); C. L. MILLER, *Reading Cusanus: Metaphor and Dialectic in a Conjectural Universe*, Washington D.C. 2003, pp. 19-26 («affirmation», «negation», «hyper-negation/eminence»); N. HUDSON, *Becoming God: the Doctrine of Theosis in Nicholas of Cusa*, Washington D.C. 2007, pp. 115-117 («supereminence»); E. BRIENT, *The Immanence of the Infinite: Hans Blumenberg and the Threshold to Modernity*, Washington D.C. 2002, pp. 188-200, and ID. *How can the infinite be the measure of the finite?*, in *Cusanus: The Legacy of Learned Ignorance*, ed. P. Casarella, Washington D.C. 2006, pp. 210-225.

This way of interpreting Cusanus' method is not meant to be controversial, as it is entirely compatible with (and, in the end, a restatement of) the main scholarly attempts to describe Cusanus' method in *De Beryllo*. A clarification, however, is due: most accounts speak of a 'three-step' process, which corresponds to the account just presented as follows: the 'first step' represents the identification of Level I, Level II, and the X criterion for the first application of the B-structure; the 'second step' would be the construction of the B-structure itself, which results in the relationships *a, b*, etc.; and the 'third step' is the second B-structure (typically involving the infinite vs. finite distinction in order to transfer the *a, b, ...* relationships to 'names for God')¹⁹⁴. Thus, Cusanus' *sicut* (and equivalent connective words) marks the passage between steps 2 and 3. Of course, whether one chooses to describe the method by identifying B-structures in the way I propose, or by identifying each of the 'three steps', etc., the result of the analysis is ultimately the same, and different choices might be more appropriate (in the sense of making the interpreter's job easier) in different contexts.

This notation is therefore a 'heuristic' part of the approach to the text, which tries to make available the benefits of a *Strukturanalyse*, making it easier in particular for the modern reader, more used to this type of abstract notation, to understand that Cusanus' various formulations have the same underlying structure, and to classify all Cusanus' formulations and deployments of his method in *De Beryllo* accordingly. The notation should not be taken as implying any anachronism imputed to Cusanus himself, and the interpretations I develop in the reading of each individual passage should be valid even if the B-notation was completely removed and the argument was presented exclusively in 'narrative' form. In effect, the B-notation is simply meant to be a standardized shorthand for a certain type of interpretation that identifies a particular recurring structure in Cusanus' text, meant to make interpretation of common recurring structures easier and to offer a new perspective on the 'higher-level' structure of Cusanus' text.

¹⁹⁴ See note 193 above. This is also in line with the three-step process described in *De Docta Ignorantia* for geometrical images: *De docta ignorantia*, 1, 12, 33, p. 24, 10-25.

CHAPTER 3 – Textual Analysis

3.1 The title: *De Beryllo* / *Beryllus*

a) *De Beryllo* or *Beryllus*? A close look at the sources

According to the methodology outlined, we will start with the title, and assume for ourselves the perspective of a reader who would not have read other works by Cusanus, but who would have the required inclination to try to parse the text in its depth¹⁹⁵. What would such a reader be able to think about the work from looking at its title alone?

The first issue to be examined is what the title of the work actually is. This investigation leads us immediately to an interesting problem, because among the manuscripts we find two variants of the title: *De Beryllo* and *Beryllus*. An additional question (although secondary and pertaining more to the ‘expert’ reader’s perspective) would be: what was the title of Cusanus’ autograph manuscript (now presumed lost), which would presumably be the exact title that Cusanus himself had decided on?

We will now examine the four extant manuscripts in this regard, as well as the printed editions of the Latin text up to the Heidelberg critical edition¹⁹⁶. Since some manuscripts in fact contain the *De Beryllo* without a title¹⁹⁷, we will add both the beginning (*incipit*) and the final sentence (or *explicit*) to our analysis, given that this is also a common place where the title of a work might be found, and easily accessible to a reader.

Manuscripts

Codex Cusanus 219

Incipit - *De Berillo*

Explicit - *Deo laus. 1458, 18a augusti in castro sancti Raphaelis (alio vocabulo dicto boechensteyn - added)*

¹⁹⁵ The characteristics of the prospective reader are a crucial underlying factor in understanding Cusanus’ construction of his text. See the analysis of paragraphs 2 (Chapter 3.2.2) and 72 (Chapter 5.4.3) for a discussion of the nature of the reader presupposed in Cusanus’ conception, which is reflected, of course, in his approach to the book – however, as we will see in paragraphs 1 and 2, Cusanus is by no means assuming that his prospective reader will be similar to the ‘best’ reader, and is structuring the text accordingly.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. *De Beryllo*, pp. XIV-XXIV.

¹⁹⁷ In particular, this is true for Codex Yale 334, which was obviously a factor in it being discovered so late.

Codex Yale 334

Incipit - (no title)

Explicit - *Finis 1459, 8uA Ianuarii. Deo laus*

Codex Monacensis 18621

Incipit - *Ihesus* (addition by another hand: *Tractatus domini nycolai cardinalis de Cusa qui ab eo intitulator Berillus*)

Explicit - *Finis 1458, 18 augusti In castro sancti Raphaelis*

Codex Magdeburg 166

Incipit - *Ihesus. De berillo*

Explicit - *Explicit Berillus per quem videtur deus et omnia eius [...]*

Printed editions:

Strasbourg edition (1488)

Title - *De berillo*

Explicit - *Explicit tractatus de berillo*

Milan edition (1502)

Title - *De Berillo*

Explicit - *Explicit tractatus de berillo*

Basel edition (1565)

Title - *REVEREND. P. Nicolai de Cusa Cardinalis, liber, qui inscribitur De Beryllo, incipit. Cap. I.*

Explicit - *Libelli de Beryllo, finis.*

Paris edition (1514)

Title - *R. P. NICOLAI DE CVSA CARDINALIS, LIBER QUI INSCRIBITVR DE BERYLLO INCIPIT, CAP. I*

Explicit - *LIBELLI DE BERYLLO SAPIENTISSIMI ET OPTIMI REVERENDISSIMIQUE PATRIS NICOLAI DE CVSA CARDINALIS. FINIS.*

We can observe that all the printed editions are in agreement in choosing to render the title of the book as *De Beryllo* (with minor spelling variations), which was also the choice made by Bormann and Senger for the Heidelberg critical edition¹⁹⁸. However, in the manuscript tradition we also find another possibility: *Beryllus*, as seen in the Codex Monacensis 18621 and in the *explicit* of Codex Magdeburg 166.

This alternative name for the book would be known to any reader familiar with the correspondence between Cusanus and Caspar Aindorffer, the abbot of the Benedictine monastery at Tegernsee, during the (early stages of the) composition of *De Beryllo*: both Cusanus and Aindorffer refer to the book as *Beryllus* (sometimes without capitalization, as if referring to the common name of the stone)¹⁹⁹, while Cusanus also uses the name *De Beryllo*²⁰⁰. Furthermore, Cusanus uses *beryllus* as a name for the work in the *De Beryllo* itself²⁰¹ and in *De Aequalitate*, written around 1458-1459²⁰², while he refers to it as *De Beryllo* in his Sermon CCLXXXVIII, preached in September 1458²⁰³. There does not seem to be any pattern to these usages, and it appears the two names are simply

¹⁹⁸ A choice made without particular discussion by Senger and Bormann, which is reasonable, since the greatest part of the manuscript sources, and particularly the oldest manuscripts, are concordant with this choice. However, it is important to discuss the ambiguity inherent in referring to the book, as we will see that Cusanus does, not only as a book 'about the *beryllus*' but indeed as if it were a *beryllus* itself.

¹⁹⁹ See the analysis of the correspondence in Chapter 1.1, esp. note 18.

²⁰⁰ E.g. VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, p. 122.

²⁰¹ *De Beryllo*, 2, p. 4, 2.

²⁰² *De Aequalitate*, 3, p. 6, 1.

²⁰³ Sermon CCLXXXVIII, in *Sermones* XIX/7, 5, p. 648, 11: «in libello *De Beryllo*» (preached on September 8, 1458).

interchangeable. We can thus say that Cusanus must have considered both *beryllus* and *De Beryllo* as valid names for this book.

As for the title of the work in the original manuscript, or in the master copy conjectured as the ultimate source of all extant manuscripts²⁰⁴ (with the possible exception of Codex Magdeburg 166), it was likely *De Beryllo*. The Codex Monacensis 18621 was copied from the same source as Codex Cusanus 219 (owned by Cusanus and featuring his corrections), but it is highly likely that it was copied without a title, and that the title *berillus* was added by a later hand, likely in reference to the passage in *De Beryllo* where Cusanus himself calls it *beryllus*²⁰⁵. Then, the *explicit* in Codex Magdeburg 166 likely has more the character of a gloss or marginal note on the content of the work (perhaps also with implicit reference to the same passage), while the title remains *De Beryllo*, the most likely title for the book in the original manuscript.

So, the hypothetical reader would most likely have encountered the text titled *De Beryllo*, or *beryllus* in the Tegernsee Codex Monacensis 18621, and we note the ambivalence about the title, which would be familiar to a reader who knew the correspondence mentioned above with the Tegernsee monks, and also for a reader familiar with Cusanus' later works, e.g. *De Aequalitate* («*Beryllus*»), Sermon CCLXXXVIII («*De Beryllo*»), and also the latest work that mentions it, *De Venatione Sapientiae*²⁰⁶, these being the only places where Cusanus refers explicitly to the book by name.

²⁰⁴ See the discussion on the transmission of the work and the genealogy chart of manuscripts in *De Beryllo*, p. XXIV.

²⁰⁵ *De Beryllo*, 2, p. 4, 12. We can however point out that the Codex Monacensis (found at Tegernsee) was copied sometime after 1459 and before 1476; according to Senger and Bormann, likely around 1469. One might imagine that Cusanus would have wanted to send a copy to Tegernsee as early as 1459, given the great importance of the work for the monks of Tegernsee evidenced by the correspondence with them, but Senger and Bormann believe this close relationship ended up counting for little: in their argument, Cusanus' move to Rome immediately after finishing *De Beryllo* in 1458 made him unable to find the opportunity to send a copy of it to Tegernsee, which he equally failed to do even when he returned to the region in 1460: «affermare vix possumus...occasione nactus esse» (*De Beryllo*, p. XVIII); according to this interpretation, *De Beryllo* only reached Tegernsee in 1469, 5 years after the death of Cusanus. While the question of the most likely date remains open, Senger and Bormann's account is highly plausible given the evidence, although they offer no explanation for why Cusanus decided not to send this work to Tegernsee during his lifetime.

It is possible, in any case, that among the monks of Tegernsee who knew Cusanus and his correspondence with Aindorffer and de Waging a tradition was preserved to name this book *beryllus* (while Aindorffer himself died in 1461). In this case, the added title by another hand in the Codex Monacensis 18621 would not be merely a reference to Cusanus' own words in paragraph 2, given a lack of knowledge of the original title from the manuscript from which the text was being copied (conjectured by Senger to be the same master copy which was also the source for Codex Cusanus 219 and for Codex Yale 554 – which, interestingly enough, ended up untitled as well), but rather a correction based on an oral tradition preserved in Tegernsee.

²⁰⁶ Here the book is named as the «*libellus De Beryllo*» (*De venatione sapientiae*, 18, p. 19, 8).

b) *Beryllus* in medieval sources

What would a ‘novice’ reader have thought about the title? On the significance of the beryl stone and the traditions surrounding it, Senger and Bormann add a very useful extended note in the critical edition²⁰⁷. Furthermore, the issue has been briefly examined more recently in an article by Glas and Schwaetzer²⁰⁸. Let us examine the main sources and interpretations, expanding greatly upon the findings (limited in scope) of both Senger and Bormann and, in turn, Glas and Schwaetzer.

We will first examine the various traditions concerning the beryl stone which focus on its physical properties. The most important major reference works for someone interested in the properties of the *beryllus* in Cusanus’ time would have undoubtedly included the widely-known *Etymologiarum* of Isidore of Seville²⁰⁹, where one can read that the *beryllus* is a stone from India, similar to the emerald but pale (*cum pallor*), of which there are nine varieties. Isidore largely follows the account in the *Naturalis Historia* of Pliny the Elder²¹⁰, which, in a chapter on how to distinguish precious from false gems, distinguishes eight types of *beryllus* of various colors, describing it as a valuable stone which can be imitated by colored *crystallum*; the least valuable is the colorless variant, which contains imperfections²¹¹. In another source, the *Mineralium libri V* of Albert the Great²¹², the *beryllus* is described as pale in color and transparent, probably indeed referring to colorless *beryllus* (the one to which Cusanus is referring)²¹³. The colorless variety was, furthermore, often assimilated and confused

²⁰⁷ *De Beryllo*, pp. 89-93.

²⁰⁸ GLAS - SCHWAETZER, *Beryll, Diamant, Karfunkel. Edelsteine im Werk des Nicolaus Cusanus*, pp. 79-94, about the *beryllus* at pp. 86-90. This short but useful account is limited to Albert the Great’s *Liber mineralium* (identified as Cusanus’ likely source for the colorless beryl stone), which is contrasted with the tradition of the *Speculum Naturae* featuring colored *beryllus*. However, the full image of the traditions involved is vastly more complicated, as we examine here below.

²⁰⁹ ISIDORE OF SPAIN, *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum libri xx*, 2 voll. Oxford, 1911, XVI, 7, 5: «Beryllus in India gignitur, ventis suae lingua nomen habens, viriditate similis smaragdo, sed cum pallore. Politur autem ab Indis in sexangulas formas, ut hebetudo coloris repercussu angulorum excitetur; aliter politus non habet fulgorem. Genera eius novem».

²¹⁰ PLINY THE ELDER, *Naturalis Historia*, ed. K.-F.-T. Mayhoff, Leipzig 1906, XXXVII, 76-79.

²¹¹ PLINY THE ELDER, *ibid.*, XXXVII, 77, 5-7: «...postremi [beryllos] crystallo similes. hi fere capillamenta habent sordisque, alioqui evanidi, quae sunt omnia vitia» («... and, last, the [beryl] similar to the crystal. These generally have filaments and dirt, and others have faded color, which are all imperfections»).

²¹² ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Mineralium libri V*, in ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Borgnet, vol. V, Paris 1890, book II/2, chapter 2, p. 32: «Beryllus autem est lapis coloris pallidi, lucidi, transparentis».

²¹³ Glas and Schwaetzer propose the identification of Cusanus’ source as this passage of Albert’s *Mineralium* (GLAS - SCHWAETZER, *ibid.*, p. 83).

with *crystallus* in the Middle Ages²¹⁴. Vincent of Beauvais, in his *Speculum naturale*²¹⁵ (an encyclopedic work, bringing together a great wealth of other sources), writes about the *beryllus*, citing a certain Dioscorides, that it is a «*lapis lucidus .. et clarus*»; then he recounts verbatim the words of Isidore and Pliny that we have already examined, adding further interesting information: for instance, the claim that, if given a round shape, the *beryllus* could be used to light a fire from the sun²¹⁶. But the most interesting source that Vincent records verbatim is certainly the Anglo-Normano lapidarium *De Natura Rerum* by Thomas of Cantimpre, where, in addition to another mention of the power of the *beryllus*, if round in shape, to light fires, the original lapidarium²¹⁷ records a very interesting anonymous poem on the properties of the *beryllus*:

*Deinde vedit insignem virtus quae format in ignem
Solis splendorem non ignis passa calorem
Sic lux eterna descendit ab arce superna
Et incarnata: non matre tamen violata*

These verses can be translated as follows:

«From this, one can see the sign of the power that takes shape in fire
It is not sunlight that gives heat to the fire
This is how the eternal light descends from the celestial citadel
And it is incarnated, without corrupting its mother»

²¹⁴ Cf. e.g. ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *De mineralibus et rebus metallicis*, ed. J. Birckmann – T. Baum, Cologne 1569, I, 1, p. 12, cf. p. 19; or another source available at the time, the *Liber lapidum / De lapidibus / Liber de gemmis* of Marbode of Rennes: MARBODE OF RENNES, *Liber lapidum*, XII, PG 171, p. 1747, col. 1649-50 (on the *beryllus*); cf. (the modern edition of the same text) MARBODE OF RENNES, *De lapidibus: considered as a medical treatise*, ed. J.-M. Riddle, Wiesbaden 1977, p. 123 (on the *crystallus* confusion issue), p. 49 (on the *beryllus*). Cf. *De Beryllo*, p. 90, where Senger and Bormann comment that we cannot precisely know whether Cusanus had thought of *crystallus* rather than *beryllus*, because both possibilities are concordant with his text. But instead, as we see later, Cusanus probably also thought of the powers (*virtutes*) associated with the *beryllus* when he made his choice for the name of the book and its central image.

To note: references to the *Patrologia Latina* and *Patrologia Graeca* will be made to *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 voll., Paris 1844-1864 (heretofore abbreviated as PL [volume number]) and *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 161 voll., Paris 1857-1866 (heretofore abbreviated as PG [volume number]).

²¹⁵ VINCENT OF BEAUVAIS, *Bibliotheca mundi Vincentii Burgundi, ex ordine praedicatorum venerabilis episcopi Bellovacensis, speculum quadruplex, naturale, doctrinale, morale, historische. In quo totius naturae Historia, omnium scientiarum Encyclopaedia, moralis philosophiae Thesaurus, temporum et actionum humanarum Theatrum amplissimum exhibetur*, ed. B. Bellerus, Douai 1624 (reed. Graz 1964), vol. I (*Speculum naturale*), VIII, 47-48, col. 517ff on the *beryllus*. Cf. Bormann and Senger, *De Beryllo*, pp. 89-91. Cusanus also knew this source around 1455, having consulted it for a number of 1455 sermons, as we examine below.

²¹⁶ VINCENT OF BEAUVAIS, *ibid.*, where he cites to this effect ARNOLD THE SAXON, *Die Encyclopaede des Arnoldus Saxo*, Erfurt 1905, *De finibus rerum naturalium*, III, IV, 8, p. 70, 85: «si oculo soli opponitur ac rotundatur ignem accendit», and then Aristotle: «comburenda facile attrahit et accendit». Plus, according to Vincent, Aristotle is said to have written that the *beryllus* «attracts the rays of the sun», i.e. changing their path.

²¹⁷ THOMAS OF CANTIMPRE, *De Natura Rerum*, in P. STUDER - J. EVANS, *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, Paris 1924, p. 363. For the poem, see Appendix D, p. 226. The text on the *beryllus* is: «Berillus si formam sexangularem habeat, arcus celestis colores efficit in radio solis. Si rotunde forme sit velut pomum, humectatus aqua in calore solis carbones mortuos vel pannum lineum nigrum combustum vel bullituram arboris siccam accendit».

We have found here an explicitly Christological meaning given to the *beryllus*, particularly mentioned in connection with its property of lighting fires when it has a circular shape²¹⁸. This is a highly important passage, due to the fact that Cusanus seems to have known this work by Vincent of Beauvais, as we show in the analysis of Sermon CXXVI below.

A fundamental aspect of the conception of stones in this period is the fact that gemstones were conceived as each having particular powers (*virtutes*), including curative or magical effects. For the *beryllus*, in the sources we have examined, these are the main ones mentioned: as a remedy for eye diseases²¹⁹, as generating love between spouses²²⁰, as ‘magnifying’ the one who wears it (i.e. in the perception of others)²²¹, and generally as bringing good fortune²²². Another recurring element is the notion that the *beryllus* heats or burns the hand when held²²³.

One element that might seem surprising is the absence of any mentions of the *beryllus* used for the purpose that Cusanus seems to be most interested in: as a material for lenses. There are few sources to be found on lenses generally, and nothing in Latin which mentions the *beryllus* in particular as a material for this type of use, despite the fact that the *beryllus* in a circular shape is mentioned as

²¹⁸ Another explicit use of *beryllus* as an ‘Incarnational’ image is in GERARDUS MORESENIUS SEU CSANADIENSIS, *Deliberatio supra hymnum trium puerorum*, ed. G. Silagi, Turnhout 1978, VI, 841: «... berillus, qui duos colores habet, uiridem et palentem, per quem demonstratur ille, qui ex forma Dei uiridis, id est robustissimus, mansit, et ex forma hominis pallidus, id est mortalis, est factus». Some interesting similarities (although no proof of a direct connection) with the Christological image of the *lapis* in Sermon CXXVI by Cusanus, which we analyze below.

²¹⁹ E.g. MARBODE OF RENNES, *De lapidibus*, p. 103: «ad oculorum vitia valet»; BARTHOLOMEUS ANGLICUS, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, ed. Koberger, Nuremberg 1492, XVI, 21, p. 727: «humidos oculos»; ARNOLD THE SAXON, *De Finibus rerum naturalium*, *ibid.*; ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Mineralium libri V*, *ibid.*

²²⁰ VINCENT OF BEAUVAIS, *ibid.*, «amorem coniugis facit».

²²¹ MARBODE OF RENNES, *De lapidibus*, *ibid.*; ARNOLD THE SAXON, *ibid.*, p. 17, BARTHOLOMEUS ANGLICUS, *ibid.*, VINCENT OF BEAUVAIS, *ibid.*

²²² «ingenium bonum adhibere seu dare», in BARTHOLOMEUS ANGLICUS, *ibid.*, cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Mineralium libri V*, *ibid.*

²²³ Sources that speak of it «burning» the hand: VINCENT OF BEAUVAIS, *Speculum quadruplex*, vol. I, VIII, 47-48, col. 517ff: «dextra stringens adurit», then, quoting Arnoldus, «gestatem adurit», and citing Aristotle: «Manum quoque se tenentis ad urere dicitur»; MARBODE OF RENNES, *Liber lapidum*, XII, PG 171, p. 1747, col. 1649-50: «Dicitur et sese stringentis adurere dextram»; ANSELM OF LAON, *Enarrationes in Apocalypsim*, 21, PL 162, col. 1580A: «urit manum tenentis»; BEDE THE VENERABLE, *Explanatio Apocalypsis*, PL 93, III, 21, col. 200BC: «manum adurere dicitur», cf. RABANUS MAURUS, *De universo sive de rerum naturis*, XVII, 7, *De Gemmis*, PL 111, col. 468BC; PSEUDO-THOMAS (-14c.), *Super Apocalypsim expositio*, II («Vox Domini»), in THOMAS AQUINAS, *Opera Omnia*, ed. P. Fiaccadori, Parma 1869, vol. XXIII, p. 705: «lapis urit manum tenentis se». Sources that say it «warms» the hand: DENIS THE CARTHUSIAN, *Enarratio in Exodum*, in DENIS THE CARTHUSIAN, *Opera Omnia*, vol. I, Cologne 1896, p. 79: «calefacit manum tenentis»; PSEUDO-HUGH OF ST. CHER, *Super Apocalypsim expositio I* («Vidit Iacob»), in THOMAS AQUINAS, *Opera Omnia*, ed. P. Fiaccadori, Parma 1869, vol. XXIII, p. 504: «Qui etiam tantae caliditatis dicitur esse, ut calefaciat manum tenentis».

something that can start a fire, as we saw above, and something that ‘attracts’ sunlight (probably referring to its refractive effects)²²⁴; or we might see a hint of this in the notion that it ‘magnifies’ the bearer. This situation is, in the end, due to the fact that this use of *beryllus* simply was not known when the vast majority of the sources already examined were being written: we know of the existence of lenses as vision aids only from the 13th century. In the Germanic world in particular, we have clear evidence that the *beryllus* was being used as a material for lenses: the first mention dates from around 1270, in the poem *Jüngerer Titurel*, where we find: «*Sam der berillus grozzet die schrift ...*» («just like the beryl magnifies the writing»)²²⁵. It is thus not at all unexpected that 150 years later, Cusanus and his Tegernsee friends would think of this use of the *beryllus* as common knowledge²²⁶.

Beside the physical and ‘supernatural’ properties of the *beryllus*, the sources mention many symbolic, allegorical, and indeed theological interpretations, particularly traceable to the fact that it is mentioned in Revelations (21:19-20), where there are 12 walls of the divine Jerusalem and *beryllus* is the material that adorns the eighth: «*Et fundamenta muri civitatis omni lapide pretioso ornata. Fundamentum... octavum beryllus*». On the basis of this text, many commentators on Revelations have also written on the *beryllus*, particularly giving it symbolic or allegorical meanings. Let us analyze the most important interpretations of this kind which could have been known to a contemporary reader (and to Cusanus himself).

Among the commentaries on Revelations who have considered the meaning of the *beryllus*²²⁷, the symbolic interpretations, even when made by very different authors, almost always follow a very recognizable pattern: the *beryllus* has a combination of two distinct aspects, which are seen as contrasting, or even as opposites: either its color (i.e. at the same time *viridus* and *pallidus*), or the way in which it reflects light, «like water pierced by the rays of the sun» («*aqua a sole/solis fulgore percussa*»

²²⁴ Cf. Vincent of Beauvais, who reports (attributing this to Aristotle) that the *beryllus* «*radius solis ad se trahit*»: VINCENT OF BEAUVAIS, *ibid.*, XLVIII, 1. For this tradition, see also the PHILIPPE DE THAON, *Bestiary*, ed. T. Wright, London 1849, lines 1516-17: «*Li Beriz at vertu en sei / Le rai del soleil trait a sei*».

²²⁵ Cf. *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. II, Munich 1983, 689-692. See also further sources in *De Beryllo*, p. 90.

²²⁶ Cf. VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, p. 158: «*oculus doleo, beryllum non habeo*» (de Waging). Several other uses are found in our examination of the correspondence in note 18 to Chapter 1.1 above.

²²⁷ It should be noted that the great majority of the sources cited speak of the *beryllus* in the context of the interpretation of the book of Revelations.

- the water and the sun being the contrasting elements)²²⁸. Among the interpretations which make use of the duality of color, we find in *De XII Lapidibus*, by an unknown author, previously attributed to Augustine²²⁹, and in the *Expositio in Apocalypsim* of Autpert Ambrose, an interpretation which makes the *beryllus* into a symbol for the saints: the green color signifies their vitality in the contemplation of God/eternal things (playing with all senses of *viriditas*), while the paleness (*pallor*) signifies their disinclination to judge and regulate the lives of others, especially in a monastic context (*fraterna administrationis*, with a possible meaning of simply admonishing them towards the right path). Connected to this, Ambrose adds the fear (*timor*) experienced by the apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 15:9 («Not sum dignus uocari Apostolus, quoniam persecutus sum Ecclesiam Dei»), due to his *virtus contemplationis*²³⁰. This is, therefore, an opposition between *contemplatio* and *administratio*, which would serve to illustrate the dual nature of the saints²³¹. In addition, we must make mention of a

²²⁸ An often recurring formula among authors, with small variations, apparently originating from Bede as the oldest source: «lucet quasi aqua sole percussa» (MARBODE OF RENNES, *Liber lapidum*, p. 1774, col. 1682); «ut enim aqua sole percussa refulget» (ANSELM OF LAON, *Enarrationes in Apocalypsim*, *ibid.*); «ut sol in aqua limpidus» (*Cives caelestis patriae*, in *Analecta hymnica medii aevi*, ed. G. M. Dreves – C. Blume, Leipzig 1888, vol. II, p. 94ff.); «Berillus est quasi consideres aquam solis fulgore percussam» (BEDE THE VENERABLE, *Explanatio Apocalypsis*, III, 21, PL 93, col. 200BC, found identically in RABANUS MAURUS, *De universo sive de rerum naturis* XVII, 7, *De Gemmis*, PL 111, col. 468BC, a fragment which we know Cusanus possessed; see note 233 below); «cujus color similis est aquae coloris a sole re percussae» (BRUNO OF SEGNA, *Expositione in Apocalypsim*, VII, PL 165, col. 727AB); «limpidi et aliquantulum pallidi est coloris, similis aquae a sole percussae» (DENIS THE CARTHUSIAN, *Enarratio in Exodum*, in DENIS THE CARTHUSIAN, *Opera Omnia*, Cologne 1897, vol. II, p. 79, col. 2, line 33), «lucet, quasi aqua a sole percussa» (PSEUDO-HUGH OF ST. CHER, *Super Apocalypsim expositio I* («*Vidit Iacob*»), in THOMAS AQUINAS, *Opera Omnia*, ed. P. Fiaccadori, Parma 1869, vol. XXIII, p. 504).

²²⁹ PSEUDO-AUGUSTINE, *De XII Lapidibus*, PL 40, col. 1230: «Beryllus viridis et palidus designat sanctos, contemplatione Dei virides, sed fraternae administrationis actione quasi pallentes».

²³⁰ AUTPERT AMBROSE, *Expositio in Apocalypsim*, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuation Mediaevalis*, vol. 27A, ed. R. Weber, Turnhout 1975, 10, 21, v. 19b, line 128: «Berillus, lapis colore uiridis, sed pallorem habens, octauus in ordine inuenitur, per quem illorum uita designatur, qui et aeternorum contemplatione bonorum ad tempus inherent, et tamen cura fraternae administrationis ab illa uiriditatis refectione pallescunt, uel certe uiriditas in eis contemplationem, pallor ostendit timorem. Hinc est forte quod Paulus, qui unum quod retro oblitus, ad ea quae in ante sunt per contemplationis uirtutem extendebatur, timore pauidus dicit: Castigo corpus meum et in seruitutem redigo, ne forte aliis praedicans, ipse reprobus efficiar. Et rursum cum ex uirtute contemplationis diceret: Siue mente excedimus Deo, pauidus tamen atque suspectus de transacta conuersatione loquitur dicens: Non sum dignus uocari Apostolus, quoniam persecutus sum Ecclesiam Dei».

²³¹ A somewhat similar use of *beryllus*, using the same opposition *pallens* - *virens*, is found in the *Speculum virginum*, a 12th century work attributed to Conrad of Hirsau and written in Andernach (CONRAD OF HIRSAU, *Speculum virginum*, in *Corpus Christianorum Continuation Mediaevalis*, vol. 5, ed. J. Seyfarth, Turnhout 1990, *Epithalamium A*, 74):

«Extra pallenti formula
uirens intus per merita,
Talis berillus ponitur,
Qui ce+sus fulgens redditur.

symbolic use of the *beryllus*'s 'color duality' in Gerardus Moresenus to illustrate the two natures of Christ: «ex forma Dei viridis ... ex forma hominis pallidus»²³².

A much more widespread type of symbolic interpretation for the *beryllus* is one connected to the recurrent description of it as «aqua a sole/solis fulgore percussa». For this we can find a highly prominent tradition, which has its origin with Bede the Venerable and his *Explanatione Apocalypsis*, and is copied, in almost identical words, in the *De universo sive de rerum naturis* of Rabanus Maurus²³³, and, in abbreviated form, in Anselm of Laon's *Enarrationes in Apocalypsim*²³⁴. According to this interpretation, the water signifies intelligent men (*homines ingenio sagaces*) or particularly their faculties (*sensus hominis* in Anselm, while Bede and Rabanus cite a passage from Proverbs²³⁵ to argue that the water would mean «*sensus altitudinem*»). Then, the light of the sun which «pierces through» is the light of the *divina gratia*, also associated with the *sapientia*, divided into *divina* and *humana* – although never, in the end, *perfecta*²³⁶. This interpretation, reporting verbatim the words of Bede and Rabanus, is found in the hymn *Cives caelestis patriae*²³⁷, mistakenly attributed to Anselm but rather

²³² GERARDUS MORESENIUS SEU CSANADIENSIS, *Deliberatio supra hymnum trium puerorum*, VI, 841: «berillus, qui duos colores habet, uiridem et palentem, per quem demonstratur ille, qui ex forma Dei uiridis, id est robustissimus, mansit, et ex forma hominis pallidus, id est mortalis, est factus».

²³³ RABANUS MAURUS, *De universo sive de rerum naturis*, XVII, 7, *De Gemmis*, PL 111, col. 468BC. Cusanus possessed books XII-XXII of this work in what is now British Museum Ms. Harley 3092, where this passage is found on fol. 15rb, line 40ff.

²³⁴ ANSELM OF LAON, *Enarrationes in Apocalypsim*, 21, PL 162, 1580A-1579D.

²³⁵ Prov. 18: «Aqua profunda verba ex ore viri». This is found in Bede and Rabanus, but no longer in Anselm.

²³⁶ BEDE THE VENERABLE, *Explanatione Apocalypsis*, III, 21, PL 93. col. 200BC: «amplius supernae gratiae lumine refulgentes .. Sed non est perfecti fulgoris vel humana vel etiam divina sapientia, nisi operum quoque et consummatio subnectatur». RABANUS MAURUS, *De universo sive de rerum naturis*, XVII, 7, PL 111, col. 468BC: «amplius supernae gratiae lumine refulgentes ... sed est perfecti fulgoris vel humana vel etiam divina sapientia, nisi operum quoque consummatione subvertatur». ANSELM OF LAON, *Enarrationes in Apocalypsim*, 21, PL 162, col. 1580A summarizes the passage: «Aqua sensum hominis significat; splendor solis, divinam sapientiam, qua amplius fulget; sed non perfecta divina vel humana sapientia, nisi operibus consummetur».

²³⁷ *Cives caelestis patriae*, in *Analecta hymnica medii aevi*, ed. G. M. Dreves – C. Blume, Leipzig 1888, vol. II, p. 94ff., with the subtitle «De XII lapidibus pretiosis in fundamento caelestis civitatis positis»:

«Figurat vota mentium
ingenio sagacium
quod (quis) magis libet mysticum
summae quietis o[s]tium».

Note that in the manuscript where it has been found, among the works of Anselm of Laon (cf. PL 162, 1580D and the editor's note found there), the hymn is somewhat different, but it records Bede's words in a very similar way:

«Berillus est lymphaticus
Ut sol in aqua limpidus
Figurat vota hominum
Ingenio sagacium
Quibus pius libet sumere
Pulchrae quietis otium».

attributable to Amatus of Monte Cassino²³⁸. In the same interpretive category we can also class the interpretation by Bruno of Segnia, according to which we should understand the similarity of the *beryllus* to water pierced by solar rays as an image of «the true and sensible interpretation (*siceram, sanam*) of the doctrines of Scripture», illuminated by the *sol justitiae*. Then, the *beryllus* signifies, in analogy with the manner in which Christ «gave form» to Scripture, the manner in which the «*intellectus sanus et sincerus*» must be formed (*formatus*)²³⁹. We find a similar interpretation in Marbode of Rennes: human beings are weak, but «pierced by the ray and the grace of the true sun, who is Christ, they shine in their good deeds»²⁴⁰. We can also identify in this category the interpretation of an anonymous author previously attributed to Hugh of St. Cher, in which the divine *gloria* shines in the physical form of the *beryllus*, connected to its appearance «as water pierced by the sun»²⁴¹. This is an interpretation which links the *beryllus* to «those who contemplate God» because of its «purity» and «clarity»²⁴². One should note this recurrent theme of the conjunction of the divine and human in the dualities identified in the *beryllus*, particularly with respect to the *contemplatio*, and also to the *scientia/intellectus/intelligentia* of divine matters.

Such an interpretation we also find in Pseudo-Hildefonsius Toletanus, *Libelli de corona virginis*, where the *beryllus* is compared with the Virgin, its clarity and reflectivity associated with knowledge, particularly of mysteries (*mysteria*) and divine matters (*divina*)²⁴³.

²³⁸ Attributable to Amatus of Monte Cassino, according to Lentini (cited in *De Beryllo*, p. 92).

²³⁹ BRUNO OF SEGNA, *Expositione in Apocalipsim*, VII, PL 165, col. 727AB: «beryllus, cujus color similis est aquae coloris a sole repercussae, per quem sinceram intelligentiam, et sanam doctrinam Scripturarum intelligimus, quae nisi a sole justitiae illuminata fuerit, facile erroris deformitate tenebrescit. Sole igitur in aquis relucente, berylli color efficitur, quia Christo Domino nostro Scripturarum aquas illustrante, sanus et sincerus formatur intellectus».

²⁴⁰ MARBODE OF RENNES, *Liber lapidum*, XII, PG 171, p. 1774, col. 1682 (under the title «Lapidum pretiosorum de quibus in praecedenti prosa, Mystica seu moralis applicatio»): «Notat eos qui sunt fragiles, sed percussi radio et gratia veri solis, id est Christi, lucent bonis operibus».

²⁴¹ PSEUDO-HUGH OF ST. CHER, *Super Apocalypsım expositio I («Vidit Iacob»)*, in THOMAS AQUINAS, *Opera Omnia*, ed. P. Fiaccadori, Parma 1869, vol. XXIII, p. 504: «Hic lapis in se primo gloria formae politus lucet, quasi aqua a sole percussa».

²⁴² JOACHIM OF FIORE, *Expositio in Apocalypsım*, Venice 1527 (reed. Frankfurt 1964), p. 220: «similes esse perhibentur: quia corda contemplantium deum: munda sunt et perspicua».

²⁴³ PSEUDO-HILDEFONSIUS TOLETANUS, *Libelli de corona virginis* 24, PL 96, col. 316CD: «offerō tibi Beryllum lapidem pretiosum ... Tu enim, Domina, hunc lapidem quodammodo repraesentas; nam per donum sapientiae fuisti clara et splendida... clara ad discernendum ambigua, clarior ad cognoscendum mysteria, clarissima ad intelligendum et speculandum divina».

Another major interpretive approach is concerned with the fact that the *beryllus* (according to the sources we have examined) heats or burns the hand that holds it. This is taken to signify the way in which association with a holy person would lead someone to renew their ‘fire’ for living religiously (cf. Bede, Rabanus, Anselm of Laon²⁴⁴, Pseudo-Thomas²⁴⁵)—or, in particular, the virtue of *miseriordia*, which, when exercised, «warms the heart of the infirm with regard to the love for God and men»²⁴⁶.

Another particular aspect of the *beryllus*, remarked upon since Pliny, is also to be considered: that this stone reflects light in the strongest manner when it is cut into a hexagonal form²⁴⁷ (as we know now, this is because of its crystalline structure). This is reported in the symbolic interpretations of Bede, Rabanus and Anselm (who reports it incorrectly: «heptagonal»), as connected to the fact that God had accomplished the creation of the world in six days, a number «often» considered to mean «perfection in practical matters»²⁴⁸.

²⁴⁴ BEDE THE VENERABLE, *Explanatio Apocalypsis*, PL 93, III, 21, col. 200BC: «Quodque tementis manum adurere dicitur, procul dubio patet quia quisquis sancto viro conjungitur, eius nimirum bonae conversationis igne recreatur». This passage is identical in RABANUS MAURUS, *De universo sive de rerum naturis*, XVII, 7, PL 111, col. 468BC. ANSELM OF LAON, *Enarrationes in Apocalypsim*, 21, PL 162, col. 1580A has: «urit manum tenentis, quia qui sancto jungitur, ejus conversatione accenditur».

²⁴⁵ This anonymous author repeats the same interpretation but connects ‘heat’ with ‘light’, citing a passage in Matthew: PSEUDO-THOMAS (-14c.), *Super Apocalypsim expositio*, II («Vox Domini»), in THOMAS AQUINAS, *Opera Omnia*, ed. P. Fiaccadori, Parma 1869, vol. XXIII, p. 705: «Hujusmodi lapis urit manum tenentis se; et per hoc designatur, quod qui talis ac tantus est, eos qui sibi conjunguntur, per sui conversationem ad justitiam accendit. sic luceat lux vestra coram hominibus, ut videant opera vestra bona, et glorificent patrem vestrum qui in caelis est» (cf. Matt. 5:16).

²⁴⁶ PSEUDO-HUGH OF ST. CHER, *Super Apocalypsim expositio I («Vidit Iacob»)*, in THOMAS AQUINAS, *Opera Omnia*, ed. P. Fiaccadori, Parma 1869, vol. XXIII, p. 504: «Qui etiam tantae caliditatis dicitur esse, ut calefaciat manum tenentis: et significat virtutem misericordiae, quae sex operibus se exercet, corda frigida hominum infirmorum calefaciens in amorem Dei et proximi».

²⁴⁷ PLINY THE ELDER, *Naturalis Historia*, XXXVII, 76, 1: «poliuntur omnes sexangula figura artificum ingeniis, quoniam hebes unitate surda color repercussu angulorum excitetur. aliter politi non habent fulgorem». This important passage is reported and paraphrased by very many later authors. For example: MARBODE OF RENNES, *Liber lapidum*, XII, PG 171, p. 1747, col. 1649-50: «Conspicuos reddit sexangula forma beryllos / Qui nisi fiat hebes, his pallor inesse videtur».

One should particularly note a rather unique passage from the *De natura rerum* of Thomas Cantimprensis, reported by Vincent of Beauvais (and thus likely known to Cusanus), which says that «if the beryllus has a hexangular form, it shows the colors of the rainbow in the ray of the sun», i.e. works as a prism («si forma sexangulare habuerit: arcus celestis colores in radio solis efficit», in VINCENT OF BEAUVAIS, *Speculum quadruplex*, I, VIII, 47-48, col. 517ff.

The Bede-Rabanus-Anselm tradition reports this descriptive passage, drawing from Pliny while adding the clarification that «The reflexes due to the angles make its shine stronger» («Sed non fulget, nisi in sexangulam formam poliendo figuretur. Repercussus enim angulorum splendor illius acuitur» in BEDE THE VENERABLE, *Explanatio Apocalypsis*, PL 93, III, 21, col. 200BC; cf. the identical text in RABANUS MAURUS, *De universo sive de rerum naturis*, XVII, 7, PL 111, col. 468BC; cf. ANSELM OF LAON, *Enarrationes in Apocalypsim*, 21, PL 162, col. 1580A, who, clearly committing an error, refers to the form as «seven-cornered»: «Ut enim aqua sole percussa refulget : qui non aliter nisi septangula politur forma, quia ex angulorum percussione splendor acuitur».

²⁴⁸ BEDE THE VENERABLE, *Explanatio Apocalypsis*, PL 93, III, 21, col. 200BC: «Nam senario saepe numero perfectio designatur actionis, maxime cum in hoc numero mundi hujus sit opus consummatum». RABANUS MAURUS, *De universo sive de rerum naturis*, XVII, 7, PL 111, col. 468BC is identical. ANSELM OF LAON, *Enarrationes in Apocalypsim*, 21, PL

We have thus inventoried what a scholar from Cusanus' time would be able to know about the *beryllus* stone²⁴⁹ if one were to conduct an exhaustive search of available sources, both those in the tradition of the *Naturalis historia* and biblical commentaries (particularly to Revelations). But which of these sources can we say with some certainty that Cusanus himself would have known?

We know with certainty that Cusanus already owned a manuscript with the relevant part of the *De universo sive de rerum naturis* of Rabanus Maurus, i.e. books XII-XXII²⁵⁰. Then, we have compelling evidence from a passage in Sermon CXXVI that Cusanus had consulted the *Liber lapidum* of Marbode of Rennes around 1453²⁵¹. Furthermore, we know from a number of sermons from 1455 that he seems to have repeatedly consulted the section on stones of the *Speculum naturae* of Vincent of Beauvais²⁵². If we limit ourselves only to these works for which we have evidence of Cusanus' access to them, with the assumption (probably much too restrictive) that Cusanus did not know any of the others, we can say with a high degree of plausibility that Cusanus must have been familiar with nearly all of the interpretations we have inventoried above, due to the comprehensiveness of the sources cited in each of these works, of which Vincent of Beauvais in particular is the best example. The only strand of interpretation of those we have mentioned that is not included in these works that we know Cusanus consulted, and thus one which Cusanus might not have been familiar with, is the one dealing with the 'dual color' of the *beryllus*, because we do not know whether Cusanus knew the *De XII lapidibus* of Pseudo-Augustine or the *Expositio in Apocalypsim* of Autpert Ambrose. However, it remains the case that the *beryllus* mentioned by Cusanus in *De Beryllo* is colorless, as one might expect from an aid to

162, col. 1580A has the error mentioned above (seven- instead of six-sided): «perfectio operum per septem intelligitur, cum hoc numero opus mundi factum sit».

²⁴⁹ For completeness, we should also mention some interpretations recorded without explanation, in a list, in DENIS THE CARTHUSIAN, *Enarratio in Exodum*, found in DENIS THE CARTHUSIAN, *Opera Omnia*, vol. I, Cologne 1896, p. 79: «Per quam gemmam, timor Dei filialis, consolatio spiritualis, gratitudo seu poenitentiae virtus intelligi potest».

²⁵⁰ Now British Library Ms. Harley 3092; the passage on *beryllus* is at fol. 15rb, lin. 40ff. Cf. *De Beryllo*, p. 92.

²⁵¹ Sermon CXXVI, in *Sermones* XVIII/1, 10, p. 25, 3 – p. 26, 8, which is analyzed below. See the apparatus in *Sermones* XVIII/1, pp. 20-27 and the index of citations in *Sermones* XVIII/0, p. 490.

²⁵² These are Sermons CLXX (January 1, 1455), CLXXI, CLXXII, CLXXIV, CLXXXIV, CXCVIII (July 31, 1455). Cf. *Sermones* XVIII/0, p. 490.

vision that is «*clarus*» and «*lucidus*», and thus the significance of colored *beryllus* might indeed be deemed irrelevant for our purposes²⁵³.

c) The *beryllus* in previous works by Cusanus

We will investigate now the *beryllus* as used in the previous works of Cusanus, and thus what a reader familiar with his previous books would have thought when encountering a text entitled *De Beryllo* (or indeed *Beryllus*, as we have seen). This investigation is highly interesting for our task to examine the *De Beryllo* (particularly keeping in mind the properties and interpretations of the *beryllus* we have highlighted and shown that Cusanus was likely familiar with from the tradition), because the *beryllus* was indeed used in very specific contexts by Cusanus before *De Beryllo*. These bring into play issues that will show themselves important for the use he puts it to in the work we are concerned with: i.e. *beryllus* as a medium for light, *beryllus* as something shiny that can mimic diamond according to its appearance, and *beryllus* as an aid for vision.

The first mention of *beryllus* in the works of Cusanus is found in *De Conjecturis* (written between 1441-1442): «*Si enim medium diaphanum, per quod alteritas lucis in visum ascendit, est alteratum colore rubeo vel alio, huius coloris res visa apparet, quoniam ipsa non attingitur in unitate simplici, puta luce pura, sed in luce alterata in diaphano, puta beryllo aut vitro aut flamma vel radio colorato vel alterato*»²⁵⁴. In this passage, Cusanus speaks of seeing the way in which the light passes through a «medium» and changes its characteristics due to its properties: this results in an alteration of the pure light («*lux pura in unitate simplici*» in contrast to «*lux alterata in diaphano*»). We have here an argumentative structure (here applied to light) of a type used often in Cusanus, and, as we will see, one of the crucial ones for *De Beryllo*: the opposition between a thing as it is ‘in itself’ and ‘in another’, i.e. altered in some way, as an image of the former, etc. We can observe that the main point of the

²⁵³ This is the contrast drawn by Glas and Schwaetzer between the «zwei Berylli», one colorless and one colored, in the tradition; cf. GLAS - SCHWAETZER *ibid.*, pp. 84-85. However, their account is much too simplifying and restricted, as they do not consider all the sources that Cusanus likely knew which reported the great variety of interpretations and properties of the *beryllus* that we have inventoried.

²⁵⁴ *De conjecturis*, 170, p. 172, 3-8.

illustration here, i.e. the cause of the alteration, is color: «*colore rubeo vel alio*», «*colorato vel alterato*». Thus, the type of beryl which is referred to in this passage seems to be one of the colored variants, and not the colorless («*albus et lucidus*») of *De Beryllo*. In this passage, the alteration of visible things seen through a *medium* makes their image further away from their true nature than their image viewed without any *medium*²⁵⁵: an almost opposite interpretation, therefore, to that of *beryllus* as an aid for vision.

Later on, in his dialogue *Idiota de staticis experimentis* (1450), we find a mention of «*beryllus aut cristallus*», opposed to «*lapides pretiosi*» and «*diamantus*»: «ut, si quae sophisticationes in berillo aut cristallo colorato fierent, deprehendi possent»²⁵⁶. In this passage, the *beryllus* is clearly presented as a stone of lesser value, which can be used to imitate precious stones; accordingly, only by means of the titular «weight experiments»²⁵⁷ can someone detect this kind of fraud, by measuring their respective weights. Interestingly, in this passage Cusanus seems to use interchangeably, at least for the purpose of the argument, «*beryllus*» and «*crystallus*» (at least *coloratus*), perhaps a reflection of the common identification of colorless *beryllus* with *crystallus*²⁵⁸, or a modified reference to Pliny via Vincent of Beauvais²⁵⁹, as we have seen. In this passage, they are both treated as transparent and reflective stones, which can be distinguished from the more precious *pretiosi lapides* not through any visual means but only with a special kind of non-visual investigation (i.e. the measurement of weights).

Later on, in 1454, we find a mention of *beryllus* in a very different key, in a sermon that was preached in the period in which Cusanus was already working on *De Beryllo*, and indeed corresponding

²⁵⁵ This theme remains of interest for Cusanus. See the similar argument made in the *De Visione Dei* (1453), but at this point using colored glass as an example, and not *beryllus*: *De visione Dei*, 17, p. 20, 11-16: «Sicut enim oculus iste carneus per vitrum rubeum intuens omnia, quae videt, rubea iudicat et, si per vitrum viride, omnia viridia, sic quisque oculus mentis obvolutus contractione et passione iudicat te, qui es mentis obiectum, secundum naturam contractionis et passionis. Homo non potest iudicare nisi humaniter».

²⁵⁶ *Idiota de staticis experimentis*, 174, p. 228, 23-25.

²⁵⁷ On the significance of these 'experiments' within the general concept of Cusanian *proportio*, see eg P. PICO ESTRADA, *Weight and proportion in Nicholas of Cusa's Idiota. De Staticis Experimentis*, in *Nicolaus Cusanus: ein bewundernswürdiger historischer Brennpunkt: philosophische Tradition und Wissenschaftliche Rezeption*, ed. K. Reinhardt – H., Schwaetzer – O. Dushin, Regensburg 2008, pp. 135-146.

²⁵⁸ See note 214 above.

²⁵⁹ Vincent reports the words of Pliny in paraphrase, saying that the *beryllus* (considered a precious stone, similar with the *smaragdus*) is imitated with less-valuable colored *crystallum*: «Indi et alias quidem gemmas Crystallum tinguendo adulterare invenerunt, sed praecipue berillos» (VINCENT OF BEAUVAIS, *Speculum quadruplex*, *ibid.*).

with the Tegernsee monks about it: the Sermon CLIII, preached on April 7, 1454²⁶⁰. Here, in the context of a discussion of the soul and its instruments in the body, and particularly within the argument that physical defects, especially those of the senses due to old age, do not affect the soul itself, Cusanus says «*experimur per beryllos animam non senescere, sed membrum*»²⁶¹, i.e. «we see by means of the beryll-stones that the soul does not grow old, but the (bodily) organs (actually do)». The context, immediately after an example taken from Aristotle²⁶², makes clear that it is a reference to the use of *beryllus* stones (in plural, *berylli*) as an aid to vision, i.e. as lenses, the precursors at least of what we would recognize as eyeglasses²⁶³.

The context of this last usage is important to note: i.e. the *beryllus* as an aid to vision problems due specifically to old age. We know in fact that Cusanus (who was already 53 years old at this time) likely had vision problems at least as early as this period, from his correspondence with Caspar Aindorffer, the Tegernsee abbot, where he apologized for not being able to write the *De Beryllo* promised «*propter oculorum dolorem*»²⁶⁴. It is indeed likely (although we have no certain indication) that he started using lenses as vision aids from this time or earlier – which he would keep using until his death, when among his possessions was found a «*capseta cum oculariis*» (i.e. «*capsella*», a box containing eyeglasses)²⁶⁵. The fact that the sense of *beryllus* as an aid for vision appears in his works precisely from this period (after he had considered it in his previous works, as we have seen, as a kind of transparent stone that ‘alters’ vision (in a negative sense), or as a material for the imitation of more

²⁶⁰ Sermon CLIII, in *Sermones* XVIII/2, pp. 154-157.

²⁶¹ Sermon CXXVI, in *Sermones* XVIII/2, 4, p. 155, 10-11. Hereafter cited as «Sermon CXXVI».

²⁶² This is the argument: «Corpus est instrumentum animae, sicut martellus artis fabrilis, quae martello destructo non perit, ut Aristoteles exemplificat dicens: ‘Si senex haberet oculum iuvenis, videret ut iuvenis’, et experimur per beryllos animam non senescere, sed membrum etc» (Sermon CXXVI, 4, p. 155, 6-11). The reference is to ARISTOTLE, *De anima*, I, 4, 408b 21-22.

²⁶³ The use of the plural follows the etymological development of the term in German, cf. the modern German «*die Brille*» (implicitly plural) for «spectacles». Cf. *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. II, col. 690.

²⁶⁴ «Propter oculorum dolorem *De Beryllo* quem petitis scriber not potuis», cf. VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, p. 122.

²⁶⁵ Cf. the list of his possessions in G. MANTESE, *Ein notarielles Inventar von Büchern und Wertgegenständen aus dem Nachlaß des Nikolaus von Kues*, in «Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft» 2 (1962), p. 85-116; see p. 102, n. 122.

precious stones), and is at the heart of the central notion of *De Beryllo*, suggests a possible interesting connection with this detail of his biography: his own use of eyeglasses to help his eyesight²⁶⁶.

d) Christ as *lapis* – Sermon CXXVI (1453)

Before reaching conclusions about the possible meanings of the title for a reader versed in the works of Cusanus, we cannot omit a very important text, albeit never analyzed by scholars in connection with the *De Beryllo* and generally little studied²⁶⁷: a sermon preached in Brixen on June 29, 1453, the Sermon CXXVI («*Tu es Petrus*»)²⁶⁸, a text which is centered around a crucial image: Christ as a (precious) stone (*lapis*).

It is important to note that Cusanus' sermons, particularly in the period of his activities as Bishop of Brixen, were important vehicles for Cusanus to develop his philosophical-theological ideas, were recorded in written form by his secretary, Peter of Erkelenz (in Latin, although preached in his native Mosel Germanic dialect), and were edited by Cusanus himself in the period 1454-1459 into a collection²⁶⁹, as he had decided to do by 1454²⁷⁰, and to which *De Aequalitate* and *De Principio*, completed a short time after *De Beryllo*, would be added. Therefore, Cusanus would have considered these sermons by this time to be part of his works, one of his *libri*, and thus equally available to the prospective reader he is addressing in *De Beryllo*.

²⁶⁶ Note that in *De Beryllo* Cusanus describes (for the first time in any written source) a *beryllus* lens of a concave shape, thus suitable for correcting myopia, cf. *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. II, col. 690-691. If perhaps this *beryllus* is modelled after the lenses on his own eyeglasses that he had already likely been using in the period of writing *De Beryllo*, we would thus have a conjectural diagnosis for his own vision problems: myopia, due to age and to the fact that he was an avid reader and writer, writing in his own hand for the entire period of his maturity. See, for example, the article by C. BIANCA, *Niccolo Cusano e la sua biblioteca: note, notabilia, glosse*, in *Bibliothecae selectae. Da Cusano a Leopardi*, ed. E. Canone, Florence 1993, pp. 1-11, for an account of Cusanus' practices as a writer and reader.

²⁶⁷ This sermon seems to have been relatively neglected so far in the literature, and it should be investigated more in the context of Cusanus' intellectual development between *De Visione Dei* and *De Beryllo*.

²⁶⁸ Found in *Sermones XVIII/1*, ed. Haubst, Pauli, Hamburg 1995, pp. 20-27. Hereafter cited as «Sermon CXXVI».

²⁶⁹ See R. SERINA, *Nicholas of Cusa's Brixen Sermons and Late Medieval Church Reform*, Leiden 2016, pp. 47-49; also W. A. EULER, *Entwicklungsgeschichtliche Etappen und schwerpunktmäßige Themenverschiebungen in den Sermones?*, in «Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft» 30 (2005), pp. 71-91.

²⁷⁰ See Cusanus' letter to the Tegernsee monks of August 14, 1454: «de sermonibus meis propono librum facere» (VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, p. 140).

In the quest to uncover what an ‘expert reader’ familiar with Cusanus’ works would understand of the title and its significance, a short analysis of the text of this sermon will be undertaken here, which is highly interesting in connection with the problematic of the *beryllus* stone, the central image of the *De Beryllo*. This sermon will be considered again in Chapter 5, which will analyze the extraordinary structural-Christological resonances of this sermon together with the latent Christology of *De Beryllo* and the central image of the *beryllus* itself.

The sermon is built around two gospel passages: Matt. 16:18: «*et ego dico tibi quia tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam et portae inferi non praevalent adversum eam*», and Rev. 2:17: «*qui habet aurem audiat quid Spiritus dicat ecclesiis vincenti dabo ei manna absconditum et dabo illi calculum candidum et in calculo nomen novum scriptum quod nemo scit nisi qui accipit*». Cusanus makes clear from the beginning the conceptual link he is developing between them: the image of the stone²⁷¹, evidently connected to the name of the apostle Peter, which immediately connects to the notion of *nomen novum*; furthermore, the Church and its ‘adversary’ (cf. *vincens*) recur in both passages. This makes for highly fertile ground for Cusanus to develop his favorite themes, and he follows a very concentrated argumentative thread: *calculus-calculare-numerus-ratio-nomen*²⁷². Then, Cusanus invokes the image of Christ as *lapis vivus* and *lapis angularis* of the *domus spiritalis* from the famous passage in the first Epistle of St. Peter, 1 Pet. 2: 4-6²⁷³. After an excursus on the errors of the Jews and pagans (paragraph 4), Cusanus presents Christ as the solution, as a coincidental mediation between the two positions, in which is combined, in the Incarnation, «the [abstract] nature that the Jews worship, and the deified nature, through those [sc. the pagan gods] who pagans worship»²⁷⁴. Then he returns to the image of the stone and the «construction» of the Church

²⁷¹ Sermon CXXXVI, 2, p. 20, 1: «*Petrus a petra, petra calculus*».

²⁷² Sermon CXXXVI, 2, p. 20, 7 – p. 21, 29.

²⁷³ Sermon CXXXVI, 3, p. 21, 1ff. Cf. 1 Peter 4-6: «*ad quem accedentes lapidem vivum ab hominibus quidem reprobatum a Deo autem electum honorificatum / et ipsi tamquam lapides vivi superaedificamini domus spiritalis sacerdotium sanctum offerre spirituales hostias acceptabiles Deo per Iesum Christum / propter quod continet in scriptura ecce pono in Sion lapidem summum angularem electum pretiosum et qui crediderit in eo non confundetur*».

²⁷⁴ Sermon CXXXVI, 5, p. 22, 1-4: «*in quo est unita natura, quam colebant Judaei, scilicet Dei, et natura deificata per eos, quam colebant gentiles*». Cf. *ibid.*, 5, p. 22, 14-19: «*Si Deus colendus, quia creator, Christus colendus, quia ipse est, ‘per quem facta sunt omnia’; si homo colendus est, quia in eo relucent divinae operationes, Christus maxime colendus est, quia in eo maxime relucent. Nam in eo ‘habitat divinitas corporaliter’ [Col 2:9]*».

(paragraph 6)²⁷⁵. In paragraph 7, Cusanus returns to the errors of the Jews and *gentiles*, i.e. those who do not accept Christ, who represents the *veritas*, *perfectio* and *complementum* of any religion²⁷⁶. Then, he identifies Christ with the *verbum* and the *veritas* of God, something that makes him also *manna absconditum* for the intellect to «taste» *quoniam dulcis Dominus*²⁷⁷. Cusanus then returns to the passage from 1 Peter on the *lapis vivus*²⁷⁸, and builds a crucial image: the *lapis* that has all conceivable powers, and precisely reflects the attitude towards it of the *intellectus*²⁷⁹ - thus it is a stone that is clear / transparent / reflective like a mirror (*lapis candidus specularis*)²⁸⁰. We note here the transition from stone to mirror, and the recurrence of the same theme of mirror applied to *visio* in *De Visione Dei*²⁸¹, a work on which he may have been already working on. This sermon provides what appears to be an important connection point between *De Visione Dei* and the *De Beryllo*.

However, the most interesting part of this sermon for our purposes begins with paragraph 10, where Cusanus engages in what he calls «the sweetest speculations»²⁸². First of all, he says that stones each have their own power, *virtus*, of «unspeakable» variety: they can make someone love, win, stay healthy, they can remove an illness or an evil spirit, and they can direct the sailors on their route (referring here to the compass)²⁸³.

²⁷⁵ At the end of the paragraph, Cusanus adds a Christological-hierarchical image on a model of the faculties: the incarnation of Christ as a parallel to the intellectus-sensus relationship: «ita quod in Christo absoluta divina natura assumpsit humanam contractam in unitate suppositi, sicut in homine intellectualis natura unitur sensibili» (6, p. 22, 13-15).

²⁷⁶ Sermon CXXVI, 7, p. 23, 20-23. Cusanus adds that everyone who believes in eternal life necessarily believes in Christ, «whether one wants to or not»: «Credit igitur, sive velit sive nolit, Christum» (7, p. 23, 43).

²⁷⁷ Sermon CXXVI, 8, p. 23, 1 – p. 24, 55. Cf. 1 Pt 2:3. Cf. also *De visione Dei*, 91, p. 72, 17.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Eph. 2:20: «superaedificati super fundamentum apostolorum et prophetarum ipso summo angulari lapide Christo Jesu».

²⁷⁹ Sermon CXXVI, 9, p. 25, 20-23: «Et non est virtus, quae appeti possit per intellectum extra hunc lapidem, Quidquid impendis ei, recipies». Cf. lines 35-39: «Hinc prout tu te ei repraesentas, sic tibi respondet. Sicut, si sensibile speculum foret rectum et vivum, tunc eo modo te respiceret, quo modo tu te eidem repraesentares». There is an interesting parallel with the *virtus absoluta* as a divine name in *De visione Dei*, 24-25, p. 25, 1 – p. 27, 17, from the image of the *virtus* of a seed.

²⁸⁰ Sermon CXXVI, 9, p. 25, 34-35, because it is a «speculum sine macula», cf. Wisdom 7:26: «candor est enim lucis aeternae et speculum sine macula Dei maiestatis et imago bonitatis illius». One can also note an interesting correspondence with the *oculus specularis* of God in *De visione Dei*, 30, p. 30, 1 – 31, 19.

²⁸¹ Cf. e.g. *De visione Dei*, 14-15, p. 18, 1 – 19, 19; 17, p. 20, 1-13; 30, p. 30, 1 – 31, 19; 48, p. 41, 1 – 42, 19.

²⁸² Sermon CXXVI, 10, p. 25, 2-3: «circa lapidem illum plura occurrunt dulcissime speculanda»

²⁸³ Sermon CXXVI, 10, p. 25, 3 – 26, 8: «Nam virtus inest lapidibus. Alius enim lapis reddit hominem omnibus amorosum, alius victoriosum, alius sanum custodit, alius pellit morbum: alius phantasma pellit, alius spiritum malignum, alius dirigit nautas per viam ad intentum, et sunt indicibiles virtutes lapidis.»

The crucial observation to be made here is that Cusanus accepts without doubt that the stones have *virtus* according to the sources known in his time²⁸⁴. He appears to have consulted the *Liber lapidum* of Marbode of Rennes for the formulations given as an example²⁸⁵: a source which, as we have seen, also speaks of the *beryllus*. Cusanus goes on: not only do specific *virtutes* for each stone exist, but he affirms they have *virtus* according to their appearance, as we find in them, he says, the «*virtutes caeli*» or «images of herbs, trees, men, fish, lions and other animals with extraordinary *virtutes*», which means that Cusanus believes that stones, if one sees in them such images, also possess the specific *virtus* of the object which the image represents. Indeed, it is for this reason that «the value of precious stones infinitely exceeds that of gold»²⁸⁶. In the end, Cusanus concludes that «there is a power (*vis*) in the stones, which is above all that is perceptible (*super omnem sensum*, an unmistakable reference to Phil 4:7²⁸⁷), and which we perceive from their effects (*ex operibus*)»²⁸⁸. Therefore, this is a power nothing short of divine, inherent in precious stones (among whom, in this context, the *beryllus* also belongs).

Then, Cusanus builds what is (to a reader familiar with his works) a very familiar construction (and which also lies at the core of his method in *De Beryllo*): he constructs a theoretical ‘maximal stone’, which would have all the *virtutes* of all the stones, he examines the properties of this construction, then compares the relationship between this ‘maximal stone’ and ordinary items of that kind (i.e. stones) with the relationship between God and finite objects, seen in various ways²⁸⁹; this is, in summary, the topic of the last paragraphs of the sermon, paragraphs 11-14. We note at this point certain highly interesting aspects of the construction: in paragraph 11, the ‘maximal stone’ is described as «a small, bright or clear stone» («*calculus parvus candidus sed lucidus*») ²⁹⁰. Then, Cusanus says that

²⁸⁴ Cf. also *De visione Dei*, 110, p. 84, 1-10, which has «spiritus lapidis».

²⁸⁵ The reference to «pellit morbum» is traceable to MARBODE OF RENNES, *Liber lapidum*, XII, PG 171, p. 1758, col. 1638ff; cf. *ibid.*, p. 1743, col. 1643-44 about jasper («phantasmata noxia pellit») (Cf. MARBODE OF RENNES, *De lapidibus*, ed. J.-M. Riddle, p. 41).

²⁸⁶ Sermon CXXVI, 10, p. 25, 9-14: «Reperiuntur in lapidibus virtutes Caeli, imagines herbarum, arborum, hominum, piscium, leonum ceterorum animalium et cum mirabilissimis virtutibus. Unde valor lapidum pretiosorum excedit valorem auri in infinitum».

²⁸⁷ Cf. Phil. 4:7: «et pax Dei quae exsuperat omnem sensum custodiat corda vestra et intellegentias vestras in Christo Iesu». This is presented as a *vis* described as something divine.

²⁸⁸ Sermon CXXVI, 10, p. 26, 20-21: «Deinde est vis in lapide, quae est super omnem sensum, quam ex operibus experimur».

²⁸⁹ See the discussion of the basic form of the method in Chapter 2.3.

²⁹⁰ Sermon CXXVI, 11, p. 26, 1-4: «Considera igitur, si foret calculus parvus candidus seu lucidus, qui haberet in se complicate omnem omnium lapidum pretiosorum virtutem ...». Cf. *De Beryllo*, 3, p. 5, 1.

such a stone, despite having all the *virtutes* of all the stones, would be ignored and deemed «as nothing» (*pro nihilo haberetur* – implicitly, by people judging it by its appearance alone); however, «if someone were to believe some great and erudite teacher (*magno et doctissimo magistro*), who showed the stone and announced its power (*virtutem eius*), [the one who believed], after he believed, would see that [the stone] is indeed such (*reperiret ita esse*), and would place it above all the stones (*super omnes lapides*), in Zion»²⁹¹. Thus Cusanus ties back to the image of the stone «*in caput anguli*» in 1 Pt. 2:7²⁹². We should note this remarkable epistemological structure for the examination of paragraph 2 of *De Beryllo*.

In paragraph 12 of the sermon, Cusanus builds, with the help of the small stone (*calculus*), an image for the body-soul relationship and the relationship between them and God²⁹³. In this, the Incarnation is represented by the creation of the stone, combining matter with «the shining or rational soul, because the light is *ratio*, from the most resplendent sky»²⁹⁴. Then, in paragraph 13, he characterizes this small «perfect» stone as also unnameable, connecting this image to the «new name written on the pebble» of Revelations 2:17²⁹⁵. Interestingly, this makes the notion of accepting «the white stone on which is written a new name that no one knows except he who receives it» into a general metaphor for knowledge, at least *intellectualiter*²⁹⁶: the mystical experience of Paul of being «caught

²⁹¹ Sermon CXXVI, 11, p. 26, 6-11: «Sed si quis crederet alicui magno et doctissimo magistro, qui ostenderet calculum et annuntiaret virtutem eius, ille postquam crederet, reperiret ita esse. Talis poneret lapidem illum super omnes lapides in Sion». Cf. Rm. 9:33, 1 Pt. 2:6.

²⁹² 1 Peter 2:7: «vobis igitur honor credentibus not credentibus autem lapis quem reprobaverunt aedificantes hic factus est in caput anguli».

²⁹³ Sermon CXXVI, 12, p. 27, 18-19: «Et sic habes corpus, animam et deitatem optime figurari in calculo».

²⁹⁴ Sermon CXXVI, 12, p. 26, 7-10: «Et habet calculus ille materiam ex terra virginea, candorem seu animam lucidam seu rationale, quia lux ratio, de caelo lucidissimo». Note the similarity, at least structural or implicit, between this image and that of the *beryllus* in the symbolic interpretations that we have examined, for example in the *Liber lapidum* of Marbode (a source which, as we saw above, seems to have been consulted by Cusanus for this sermon), where the *beryllus* «lucet quasi aqua sole percussa», like «eos qui sunt fragiles, sed percussi radio et gratia veri solis, id est Christi, lucent bonis operibus» (MARBODE OF RENNES, *Liber lapidum*, XII, PG 171, p. 1774, col. 1682).

²⁹⁵ Rev. 2:17: «in calculo nomen novum scriptum quod nemo scit nisi qui accipit».

²⁹⁶ Sermon CXXVI, 13, p. 27, 11-17: «Nomen enim est omnibus rebus inscriptum, et quicumque intellectualiter accipit quamcumque rem, ille reperit nomen eius in re, quia nomen est notitia. Intellectus si accipit, cognoscit seu intelligit. Simul igitur cum re recipit nomen; alias non accipit, nisi simul nomen videat in re, quam accipit». The theme of «nomen est notitia» seems to show an influence from Meister Eckhart, as it is a theme often present in his work, cf. e.g. MEISTER ECKHART, *Expositio in evangelium secundum Ioannem*, in MEISTER ECKHART, *Lateinische Werke*, ed. K. Christ – B. Decker – J. Koch – H. Fisher – L. Sturlese – A. Zimmerman, vol. III, Stuttgart 1994, p. 110, 1, 12-13, a work that Cusanus owned (found in Cod. Cusanus 21).

up to the third heaven» becomes an explicit example of «accepting the pebble» (i.e. the «perfect» or, one may say, ‘Christological’ stone)²⁹⁷.

We should keep in mind this series of arguments written around June 1453, centered around a small stone «*candidus seu lucidus*» and its resonance as Christological image, in our analysis of *De Beryllo*, a work likely already conceived in discussions with the Tegernsee monks a year prior, in June 1452²⁹⁸. After the analysis of the *De Beryllo*, we return to this sermon in Chapter 5.1 to examine the various structural parallels and reflections already present in this small sermon and which also characterize the final structure of the *De Beryllo*, and how, at the end, the *beryllus* shows an interesting structural correspondence with the *lapis/calculus* as Christological image from this sermon.

Conclusions – notes on the meaning of the name ‘*De Beryllo*’ / ‘*Beryllus*’

The first thing that a reader familiar with the earlier works of Cusanus would point out when first learning about *De Beryllo* would have to be that the title is unusual for Cusanus, if we compare it with his previous works: all of them, without exception²⁹⁹, have titles that name the main issue that is dealt with in the respective work. Although Cusanus often uses images to illustrate its arguments, he has never used one of these as the title of one of his works before *De Beryllo*³⁰⁰. A reader familiar with his works would thus be likely to think that he is trying to do something different and new with this work, structuring it around an explicit image, evidently one of unique importance.

Then, the reader familiar with the passages mentioning *beryllus* in his previous works, as we have examined them above, when confronted with a title like *De Beryllo/Beryllus* for a new Cusanian work, could, from its use in the title, start thinking about a transparent (or possibly colored, but

²⁹⁷ Sermon CXXVI, 13, p. 27, 7: «Sicut Paulus, quando in tertium caelum raptus, accepit calculum». Cf. 2 Cor. 12:2.

²⁹⁸ The *beryllus* was mentioned for the first time in the letters of Caspar Aindorffer and Bernardus de Waging from before February 12 1454, as something known to both writers, and likely developed as an idea in discussions with Cusanus from around June 1452. See the analysis in Chapter 1.1.

²⁹⁹ The titles of his theoretical works written before finishing *De Beryllo*, in chronological order: *Concordantia Catholica*, *De Docta Ignorantia*, *De Conjecturis*, *De Deo abscondito*, *De Quaerendo Deum*, *De Dato Patris Luminum*, *De Transmutationibus Geometricis*, *De Arithmetiis Complementis*, *De Filiatione Dei*, *Dialogus de Genesi*, *Apologia Doctae ignorantiae*, *Idiota de Mente*, *De Visione Dei*, *De Pace Fidei*, *De Theologicis Complementis*, *De Mathematicis Complementis*. It is clear how *De Beryllo* stands out in this series from the outset.

³⁰⁰ This observation remains valid also for the later works, with the sole (partial) exception of *Triologus de Possess* (1460) and *De Non Aliud*, which both, like *De Beryllo*, contain their central innovative theoretical construction in the title.

translucent) stone, which would be a ‘medium’ for light, and which, if it is to be considered less valuable than diamond³⁰¹, it still could not be differentiated from such a precious stone by any optical properties; finally, one might suppose it could serve as an aid to vision. Given the familiar patterns of Cusanus’ investigations, which always seem to be directed in one way or another towards knowledge about God, one might be able to predict, e.g., that the *beryllus* has to do with the intellect, and thus with a type of *visio intellectualis*, being most likely a reformulation of Cusanus’ old divine-name-deduction patterns (including geometrical ones) from *De Docta Ignorantia*, etc. Therefore, it is not hard to see how one might deduce, just from the title, the presence of a great part of the elements we actually find in *De Beryllo*. Obviously, it would be a highly unexpected result if Cusanus were to do something fundamentally different in a work with the title *De Beryllo* (for example, a treatise on actual mineralogy). Taken from this point of view, one might even be inclined to agree with Senger and Bormann’s terse opinion in the Preface to the critical edition of *De Beryllo* that in this work Nicholas «*rem non magnam not novam tractavit*»³⁰². However, the issue about the relative importance of what Cusanus achieves in *De Beryllo* can only be settled after a thorough interpretation of the text.

Furthermore, if the reader were to be familiar with some of the sources discussed above on the known properties and powers of the *beryllus* stone, and especially with the interpretations of *Revelations* which interpret the ‘dual’ aspects of the stone as an ‘incarnational’ image, in combination with the *lapis* used as Christological image in Sermon CXXVI, one could expect an occurrence of the titular *beryllus* as a Christological image. At this point, we can remark that what seems to be surprising in the text is rather the lack of prominence of Christology in *De Beryllo*, which is certainly reflected in the lack of study of this issue among scholars. This analysis will be taken up again in Chapter 5.

³⁰¹ One may note that in *Idiota de staticis experimentis* there is a clear hierarchy among the stones, and *beryllus* is not included among the *lapides pretiosi*; however, in Sermon CXXVI, written more or less three years later, and after clearly having consulted a lapidarium (most likely Marbode’s), the stones, each manifesting a specific power, are not hierarchized, and all receive the adjective «*pretiosus*» (cf. Sermon CXXVI, 10, p. 26, 12 and 15). One may surmise that in the meantime, Cusanus abandoned the ‘low’ status he had assigned to *beryllus* in *De Conjecturis* and the *Idiota de staticis experimentis*, after consulting relevant sources as to its *virtus* and that of other stones.

³⁰² *De Beryllo*, p. XI.

3.2. Analysis of the ‘Introduction’ section (paragraphs 1-2)

3.2.1 Text Analysis: Paragraph 1 (p. 3, 1 – p. 4, 13)

Qui legerit ea, quae in variis scripsi libellis, videbit me in oppositorum coincidentia crebrius versatum quodque nisus sum frequenter iuxta intellectualem visionem, quae excedit rationis vigorem, concludere.
(*De Beryllo*, 1, p. 3, 1-4)

The first sentence begins directly with a reference to the activity and previous works of Cusanus (*ea quae in variis scripsi libellis*), which makes obvious to the reader that the topic of the reader’s understanding of his previous works, and thus his thought generally, is urgent in Cusanus’ mind.

As we have noted, *De Beryllo* has no dedication and there is no sign of it being rhetorically addressed to a particular person as addressee, as it is the case for all his previous non-dialogic works³⁰³. Cusanus starts with an indefinite construction: «who[ever] reads» (cf. *cuiusque intellectus, in cuiusque potestate* later in the paragraph) – suggesting a basic ‘universality’ (or indifference) as regards the prospective reader. In addition, explicit reference is made to previous writings, in an undifferentiated way (*in variis libellis*). This suggests that, from the perspective of Cusanus at this time (i.e. presumably, the moment when he finished the book: August 18, 1458), his previous works, at least in the manner he chooses to present them to ‘whoever’ might read them, are to be considered as containing the same type of exercise or activity³⁰⁴.

What is the nature of this activity? Two aspects are mentioned, both introduced with *me videbit* – «[the reader] will perceive me doing ...»³⁰⁵. The first is that he often «turns to the coincidence of opposites» (*in oppositorum coincidentia crebrius versatum*); second, that he often tries to reach

³⁰³ See Chapter 2.2.1 and the analysis of the rhetorical situation. As we will see, Cusanus will use direct address extensively in *De Beryllo* as well. A quantitative study of this aspect (and others) of Cusanus’ rhetoric throughout his works would be interesting to undertake.

³⁰⁴ Expressed as actions with *me videbit* + verbs, thus not at all necessarily issuing in the same opinions or doctrines. But as Cusanus presents matters here, the activity itself is what is given as most important in this context.

³⁰⁵ However, is this meant as an ‘accurate’ perception on the part of a reader, or does Cusanus mean that a reader would in fact misunderstand his works in this manner? As we will see below, the context overall suggests Cusanus views this account of his activities in the other works as accurate, although not necessarily complete.

conclusions in accordance with «intellectual vision» (*nisus sum frequenter iuxta intellectualem visionem concludere*). Again, it must be emphasized that the ‘content’ of his conclusions in these earlier works is not the focal point here, but the manner of his activity, i.e. what one might call his ‘methodology’. What a reader unfamiliar with Cusanus’ other works would understand from this first sentence is that in these works, Cusanus will be seen to «turn to» or «try to» (*versatus sum, nisus sum* – these are not ‘achievement’ verbs and nothing is said of whether he actually ‘succeeds’) perform a particular type of intellectual activity, about which only two aspects are mentioned: the coincidence of opposites³⁰⁶ and «intellectual vision», *visio intellectualis*³⁰⁷. Then, the *visio intellectualis* is mentioned here as having a ‘instrumental’ role or as a criterion for achieving results (*juxta intellectualem visionem concludere*), more than the coincidence of opposites, which is referred to as something like a broad

³⁰⁶The theme of the coincidence of opposites is recurring in most of his previous works, and of crucial importance in *De Beryllo*. For additional sources on this notion in Cusanus, see note 14 above (Chapter 1), and the other sources in *De Beryllo*, p. 93-100. For the centrality of the *coincidentia oppositorum* for Cusanus’ method, see Chapter 2.3, note 193. The passages in Cusanus’ previous works where it is explicitly invoked as a principle are: *De docta ignorantia*, I, 4, 12, p. 11, 16-18; 16, 43, p. 30, 19ff; 19, 57, p. 38, 22ff; «Epistola Auctoris», 264, p. 163, 14-16); *De Genesi*, I, 145, 8-13; *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*, 13, p. 6, 8-9; 21, p. 10, 3-7; 23, p. 15, 10-16, p. 16, 7ff.; *Idiota de sapientia* 32, p. 64, 10 – 65, 24; *De conjecturis* I, 6, 24, p. 30 1-3; *De visione Dei*, 36, p. 35, 1-9; 75, p. 60, 1 – 61, 14; *De theologicis complementis*, 13, p. 76, 1 – p. 80, 60. See also the letter by Cusanus to the Tegernsee monks of September 14, 1453 (VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, pp. 122ff), where Cusanus discusses this theme at length while giving his interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius’ *De Divinis Nominibus*.

³⁰⁷ The theme of *visio intellectualis* is also used recurrently in previous works by Cusanus as a specific way of perceiving, non-discursively, a *coincidentia oppositorum*, which can be (indirectly) turned into a certain type of knowledge. It does not name the regular activity of the intellect (*intelligere, intelligibilia*), but rather is itself a certain type of ‘coincidence of opposites’, combining the immediacy and non-discursivity of sight (which allows one to ‘see’ opposites coinciding even as reason, *ratio*, cannot grasp them) with objects constructed by the intellect, which include ultimately all *aenigmata*. This does not need to be understood in a particularly elevated or ‘mystical’ sense; a paradigmatic example of *visio intellectualis* would be, for example, simply ‘seeing’ that the minimum and maximum angle coincide in the line in the geometric construction provided in *De Beryllo*, paragraph 9. Cusanus’ method in *De Beryllo* can be accurately characterized as a way of using the *visio intellectualis* to derive knowledge from *aenigmata* featuring the coincidence of opposites. The ‘B-notation’ described in Chapter 2.3 is another way of conceptualizing precisely this process.

This theme is often treated at length in Cusanus, as it is essential to his various ‘methods’ for deriving knowledge about paradoxical objects, i.e. those featuring the *coincidentia oppositorum*. In works previous to *De Beryllo*: *De conjecturis*, II, 1, p. 72, 1 – p. 73, 11; *De quaerendo Deum*, 19, p. 15, 5-14; *De filiacione Dei*, 52, p. 39, 4 – p. 40, 5 (*visio intuitiva*); *Apologia Doctae ignorantiae*, 9-10, p. 7, 10-26; 20-21, p. 14, 14-15, p. 15, 13 (*visus mentis*); *Idiota de sapientia*, 47, p. 79, 1-4; *De visione Dei*, 40, p. 36, 1 – 42, p. 38, 19 (a work where it is particularly central); *Sermo CCLXXXVIII*, XIX/7, 5, p. 648, 8-14.

In *De Beryllo*, as we will see, it is also named *visus subtilissimus* (7, p. 9, 11-12).

In the later works, it recurs under different names: *De possesset*, 15, p. 19, 2 (*visio mystica*), 38, p. 44, 6 (*visio intellectualis*), 57, p. 68, 13 (*aenigmatica visio*), 74, p. 87, 19 (*visio in tenebra*); *De Li Not Aliud*, 24, p. 16, 12-14; 33, p. 19, 28-30; 87, p. 46, 12-13; *De ludo globi*, II, 65 p. 77, 1 - 66, p. 79, 22; *De theologicis complementis*, 14, p. 81, 1 – 83, 40.

For *De Beryllo* in particular, some scholars overemphasize the *ratio – intellectus* distinction as the key to understanding the place of the *visio intellectualis* (e.g. CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl*, Tome 2, pp. 16-21, esp. pp. 20-21). However, *ratio* appears only rarely in *De Beryllo* and the *visio intellectualis* is implied to be distinct from and ‘above’ the *intellectus*; see Chapter 3.3, the analysis of paragraphs 6 and 7, as well as Chapter 5.

On *visio intellectualis* in Cusanus’ thought generally, see in particular B. HELANDER, *Die visio intellectualis als Erkenntnisweg und -ziel des Nicolaus Cusanus*, Uppsala, 1988; W. BEIERWALTES, *Visio facialis: Sehen ins Angesicht: zur Coincidenz des endlichen und unendlichen Blicks bei Cusanus*, Munich 1988; G. CUOZZO, *Esperienza religiosa e pensiero speculativo in Cusano*, Trauben, 2012.

field or direction of research (*in oppositorum coincidentia versatum*). As we will see further below, this account of his earlier works by Cusanus seems to reinterpret them in terms of the themes of *De Beryllo*, which proposes precisely a philosophical-theological method which has at its basis a type of *visio intellectualis*, always invoking the coincidence of opposites as its crucial characteristic. This *visio intellectualis* is further described as going beyond the power of *ratio* (*excedit rationis vigorem*)³⁰⁸. Already in this first sentence we have a hierarchical account of the faculties, *intellectus* and *ratio*, which will be a basic framework used throughout the work: the aim is to surpass the limits of *ratio*, which is to be done using a type of vision³⁰⁹, connected to the *coincidentia oppositorum*. The aim of this type of effort described by Cusanus is clearly not (only) not only an experience such as the *visio intellectualis* in itself, but judging, or formulating conclusions – implicitly, about some questions or problems of a kind that can be put into writing (a novice reader will not know at this point to what they refer, but they must pertain to matters that exceed ‘the power of *ratio*’), and about which Cusanus has written in his earlier works. At the same time, the process described implies an essential ‘experiential’ component³¹⁰ (at least at the level of how it is spoken about) – i.e. the *intellectualis visio*, as Cusanus’ words suggest in this first paragraph that it is the proper way to proceed in these matters: in no way does Cusanus hint that his approach in the previous works was wrong or inappropriate. Thus we have the outline of a method that exhibits a certain fundamental duality, emphasized by the two sub-clauses chosen by Cusanus: namely involving the *coincidentia oppositorum* and the *visio intellectualis*.

We also note that Cusanus is putting particular focus on the experiential aspect of the reader who might read his other works: if he/she reads, he/she «will see me» (*videbit me*) doing these activities. There is a ‘theatrical’ aspect invoked with this formulation: the reader will see (and should see) Cusanus

³⁰⁸ See the analysis in CORRIERAS, *ibid.*, pp. 16-21, concerning the distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus*. We interpret, at this point, the adjective *intellectualis* as meaning (at least) ‘above the realm of *ratio*’ and connoting the scope of the ‘coincidence of opposites’.

³⁰⁹ The *visio intellectualis*, in all its formulations and terms, is always distinguished by Cusanus from regular ‘knowledge’ as such. See, e.g., Cusanus’ marginal note to Albertus Magnus’ commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius’ Fifth Letter to Dorotheus (ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super Dionysii epistolam V*, in ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Borgnet, vol. XXXVII, 2, p. 493, 58-60): «cognitio refertur ad scienciam conclusionum. Visio ad intellectum principiorum» (Cod. Cusanus. 96, fol. 236rb).

³¹⁰ Corrieras highlights the *praxis* element, which is essential for how Cusanus conceives of his method in *De Beryllo*: CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl*, Tome 2, pp. 13, 22-24, 116.

working (or trying to work) in this way (i.e. «drawing conclusions», while the actual topics he was working on in these other works are de-emphasized)³¹¹.

At the same, as we have examined in previous, the *De Beryllo* was, at least in the beginning, planned to be a work written for the benefit of the monks of Tegernsee, who had specific difficulties about his previous works. From the exchange of letters between Cusanus and Aindorffer and de Waging³¹², the work about which the monks specifically had difficulties and needed the help of the *beryllus* is *De Docta Ignorantia* «and other places» (*alibi*); they did not know other works, such as, for example, the *De Conjecturis*³¹³, and no specific problems are mentioned about the *De Visione Dei* that they had just received³¹⁴—as we see in the letters by Abbot Aindorffer³¹⁵ and prior Bernard de Waging³¹⁶. Specifically, the two issues they mention is the «*coincidentia contrariarum*» (i.e. the coincidence of opposites) and the «*spera infinita*», a geometrical image from *De Docta Ignorantia*³¹⁷. Even though several years passed until the completion of the work, there is no sign of it being dedicated specifically to the Tegernsee monks, and it is likely that they did not even receive a copy of it within Cusanus' lifetime³¹⁸, we should still consider the Tegernsee monks as particular possible addressees³¹⁹, if certainly not the only. Clearly, Cusanus had different possible audiences in mind, with various levels of familiarity with his previous works: the *qui legerit ea* does not seem to either exclude a reader completely unfamiliar with Cusanus' other works, or require such familiarity as a prerequisite for

³¹¹ This setup brings to mind the dialogic form, which Cusanus indeed used in some of his previous works; he himself appears as a character in *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae* and *De Genesi*. One may note that after *De Beryllo*, he makes much more regular use of the dialogic form with himself as character, employing this form for some of his major late works: *De Possessio*, *De Non Aliud*, *De Ludo Globi*, *De Apice Theoriae*. Speculatively, we might identify here a further turn in *De Beryllo* towards how others perceive his works and how he himself wants to be perceived.

³¹² See Chapter 1.1, note 18 for the discussion of the correspondence and timeline.

³¹³ Cf. VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, p. 110ff. Cf. the analysis in FLASCH, *Geschichte*, p. 446, which emphasizes that Cusanus does not offer *De Conjecturis* to the monks to clear up their difficulties, because they would have considered «zu abstrakt-prinzipiell».

³¹⁴ Nor does it seem to make any difference to their particular difficulties.

³¹⁵ «Beryllum pre omnibus habere desideramus» (VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, p. 123).

³¹⁶ See Caspar Aindorffer's letter: «specialiter mustum berillum, ut videamus in docta Ignorantia et alibi que multis obscura videntur, precipue de coincidentia contradictoriarum (sic), de spera infinita, etc.» (VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, p. 120).

³¹⁷ This particular geometrical image, as we noted in the discussion in Chapter 1.1, does not appear in *De Beryllo* at all.

³¹⁸ Cf. Chapter 1.1, note 18.

³¹⁹ Flasch, for instance, seems to take it for granted that the monks were the primary addressees of the work (FLASCH, *Geschichte*, p. 445); see also the discussion in note 63 above. One should not overlook the years that passed between the Aindorffer/de Waging/Cusanus correspondence and the actual completion of this (rather short) work. It is thus most reasonable to consider a more diverse type of audience that Cusanus could have had in mind. Corrieras follows Flasch in this; see note 90 above.

understanding the *De Beryllo*. While he does not say explicitly that a reader would not understand his other works properly without the help that *De Beryllo* provides, it is clear that the present work is aimed at least at making this understanding easier in some way³²⁰: first of all, one might conclude, by his short summary of his *varii libelli*, that it sets the stage for *De Beryllo* to account, in detail, for how he wants the crucial notions of *visio intellectualis* and *coincidentia oppositorum* understood³²¹. We will note the implicit duality and ambiguity (left explicitly unresolved by the hypothetical grammatical structure of ‘whoever reads...’), addressing both a specific audience (someone who knows his previous works) and a general reader (who might not know them, and who might end up reading them or not³²²)—a duality we are also maintaining at a methodological level between a ‘novice’ reader and an ‘expert’ one.

According to this account of Cusanus’ ‘dual’ intended audience, it is crucially important to always follow his argument from the perspective of the ‘novice reader’ as well³²³, even when it seems to contradict (our notions of) what Cusanus does and says in his other works. As such, this first sentence leaves us with a clear and complex view: Cusanus has in his other works put effort into certain speculations in the realm of the coincidence of opposites, for which the *visio intellectualis*, something involving the *intellectus*, is the most appropriate as it possesses a higher ‘power’ than *ratio*; yet he has not achieved an exhaustive investigation in his (implicitly many and various) works, and something must be now added; indeed, as we will see, it is possible that the other works are imperfect precisely *because* ‘whoever reads them’ would only manage to ‘see’ Cusanus himself attempting to work in the way he describes.

Unde ut quam clare legenti conceptum depromam, speculum et aenigma subiciam, quo se infirmus cuiusque intellectus in ultimo scibilium iuuet et dirigat, et graviores doctissimorum in difficilibus ponam paucas sententias et opiniones, ut applicato speculo et aenigmate visione intellectuali iudex fias, quantum quisque propinquius ad veritatem accedat. (De Beryllo 1, p. 3, 4-12)

³²⁰ Flasch underlines the fittingness of *De Beryllo* as an introduction to Cusanus’ thought overall: FLASCH, *Geschichte*, p. 446: «geeigneteste die Einführung in die Philosophie Cusanische in ihrem reifen Stadium. Wer die in Denkwelt des Cusanus Eintreten will, sollte, meine ich, beginnen mit De beryllo [...]».

³²¹ Cf. FLASCH, *Geschichte*, p. 467-468: «*De beryllo* ist für die Selbstorientierung der Philosophie Cusanischen entscheidendes ein Dokument. Hier Cusanus sagt zum ersten Mal ohne Versteckspiel, wie er seine Philosophie interpretiert sehen will».

³²² Pursuing this line of thought, one might even conclude that *De Beryllo* provides, in Cusanus’ view, a full-on substitute for reading any of his other works, implicitly viewed as imperfect attempts; but this seems excessive to base solely on the structure of the initial if-clause.

³²³ Cf. the discussion of the methodology in Chapter 2.2-3.

The second sentence clarifies the basic framework already built by the first. It starts with a consecutive conjunction (*unde*) and a purpose clause answering the unspoken question of why Cusanus wrote this particular book, in the context of his account of his previous activities in his prior works. Indeed, the purpose clause suggests the first sentence described a situation that was in some way problematic and needed resolving. By describing his previous works in this way, it is implicitly suggested that this particular book, the *De Beryllo*, will (in some crucial way) not be the same.

That there is a need for something different than he has done before has been suggested already by his choice of words: *versatus sum*, *nisus sum*, which suggest that Cusanus has not, in some ways, successfully completed the activities involved. The current sentence, with its purpose clause, clarifies what exactly this previous failure was: *quam ut clare legenti conceptum depromam*, «to develop the concept/notion as clearly as possible for the reader». This work, therefore, achieves the development of a certain *conceptus* in a (finally) clearer way³²⁴.

Let us examine the argumentative structure here. The particle *unde* indicates that the purpose clause can be taken as a consequence of what has been said, and therefore that the fact that the reader would see Cusanus do these things (*nisus sum*, *versatus sum*) leads directly to the fact that the *conceptus* (whatever it actually is) has never been developed clearly enough for the reader (i.e. the present reader, whoever he/she is). Thus, we might interpret this to say that, according to Cusanus³²⁵, there is in fact a single *conceptum*, recurrent in his work, which he has not succeeded so far in making as clear as possible/needed (but he should have, and failed). It is left unspecified here what the *conceptus* is, but

³²⁴ Corrieras remarks on this introductory section that the verbs are mostly in the indicative, inasmuch as grammar allows, giving the text the greatest immediacy and clarity, until the text to the appearance of «un maître che dirige il son eleve» (CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl*, Tome 2, p. 13, footnote 19).

³²⁵ This seems to be his view at least circa August 1458, when he completes the work. It is very interesting to consider the fact that Cusanus, since he likely did not believe *De Beryllo* would be his last book (although he did appear to be worried about possible assassination around the time of its completion), seems to be willing to offer this framework for the reader of any of his *future* works as well: i.e. that they will all be seen in the same way by the reader, that they will all involve the same *conceptus* and that they will all have the problem of the *conceptus* not being clear enough.

In any case, a close reading of this first paragraph seems to confirm Flasch's notion of *De Beryllo* as an introduction for all Cusanus' works. It is possible, however, that Cusanus could have changed his mind about some aspects of this, for instance that he wouldn't have characterized his later works with the same scheme of *nisus...versatus...* and an unclear *conceptus*. We have no direct evidence of this, as he hardly ever mentions *De Beryllo* later on.

the reader who has read *De Beryllo* can plausibly identify this as referring to the method which is the main focus of the work, like *modus, beryllus, speculum et aenigma, visio intellectualis*. This completes the situation described in the first sentence, describing Cusanus as visible to the reader as *nisus sum, versatus sum*: this might be in fact a misperception (or somehow a deficient perception) on the part of the reader, as they will ‘see’ (*videbit*) Cusanus engaged in these activities, but at the same time will not understand the *conceptus* involved, which is clearly a problem that *De Beryllo* is aimed at fixing. The problem might therefore be that of misperception: an error in ‘seeing’, or a failure to see ‘clearly’ (because, implicitly, Cusanus himself failed in making the *conceptus* clear enough). The first two sentences thus set up a duality of ‘appearance vs. reality’ (which corresponds below, as we will see, with *aenigma/visio*), playing on the senses of the verb *videre*, i.e. to see and to understand. This will be a recurring structure, characteristic for *De Beryllo*.

Then Cusanus says what he intends to do to (finally) achieve the desideratum of presenting the *conceptus* in the most clear way to the reader: he will «propose a mirror and symbolism» – «*speculum et aenigma*», a direct reference to 1 Corinthians 13:12³²⁶, and an expression Cusanus employs often as

³²⁶1 Cor. 13:12: «videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate tunc autem facie ad faciem nunc cognosco ex parte tunc autem cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum».

a technical term³²⁷, used in *De Beryllo* to describe precisely the method that is its focus³²⁸. Thus, the (first part of the) purpose clause shows that the *speculum et aenigma* is to be the object that *De Beryllo* now offers, and which will have to fix the problem of developing the *conceptus* in the clearest possible way³²⁹—since the second part of the sentence, after *et*, clearly refers to applying it.

In this long sentence full of purpose clauses, Cusanus also clarifies what should be, grammatically and logically, the ‘end goal’ of this type of investigation proposed—i.e. why indeed he was (seen to be) *versatus* and *nisus concludere* in his earlier works. He is now proposing (*subiciam*) a

³²⁷ This passage has been crucial for epistemological reflection in the Christian tradition, cf. PLATZER, *Symbolica venatio*, p. 103: «kann...als Leitwort dienen» (citing Gerda von Bredow). It refers to the inability to ‘see God’, i.e. (in the common interpretation that parallels knowledge with vision) a contrast between the limited way in which we have access to the knowledge (or vision) of God in this world, *nunc*, versus the future world, *tunc*. A reader versed in the tradition might remember, at this point, the interpretation of this passage by Augustine in *De Trinitate*, which identifies the *aenigma* as a *similitudo*: «Proinde quantum mihi videtur sicut nomine speculi imaginem voluit intellegi, ita nomine aenigmatis quamvis similitudinem tamen obscuram et ad perspicendum difficilem. Com igitur speculi et aenigmatis nomine quaecumque similitudines ab apostolo significatae intellegi possint quae accomodatae sunt ad intellegendum deum eo modo quo potest, nihil tamen est adcommodatius quam id quod imago eius non frustra dicitur. Nemo itaque miretur etiam in isto videndi modo qui concessus est huic vitae, per speculum scilicet, in aenigmate, laborare nos ut quomodocumque videamus» (AUGUSTINE, *De trinitate libri XV*, PL 42, XV, 9, 16, 41-51, col. 1069, lines 22-33). Cf. CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl*, p. 22-24, who cites the same passage from Augustine, just as Senger and Bormann also do in their extended note in *De Beryllo*, p. 101. Cf. also the analysis of paragraph 5 in Chapter 3.3 below.

In previous works, Cusanus often mentioned *aenigmata*, *symbolus*, *similitudo* in a similar sense, in fundamental agreement with Augustine’s interpretation, in the context of knowledge of God, even appealing to the «consensus» of the *doctores*: cf. *De docta ignorantia*, I, 9, 30, p. 22, 4-6: «Consensere omnes sapientissimi nostri et divinissimi doctores visibilia veraciter invisibilium imagines esse atque creatorem ita cognoscibiliter a creaturis videri posse quasi in speculo et in aenigmate»; I, 11, 32, p. 24, 6-9: «cum ad divina non nisi per symbola accedendi nobis via pateat»; 33, p. 24, 23-25: «Et tunc nostra ignorantia incomprehensibiliter docebitur, quomodo de altissimo rectius et verius sit nobis in aenigmate laborantibus sentiendum»; *Idiota de sapientia*, II, 47, p. 44, 2-4: «ut intuearis omnia in simplicissima rectitudine verissime ... licet medio aenigmatico, sine quo in hoc mundo dei visio esse nequit»; *De visione Dei*, 2, p. 5, 1-2: «Si vos humaniter ad divina vehere contendo, similitudine quadam hoc fieri oportet», 12, p. 16, 1-3: «Contemplor nunc in speculo, in eicona, in aenigmate vitam aeternam»; 21, p. 23, 12 («velate et in aenigmate»): «In omnibus faciebus videtur facies facierum velate et in aenigmate. Revelate autem non videtur».

In *De Aequalitate*, a small work written immediately after the completion of *De Beryllo*, Cusanus continues adding references to *aenigma*, a theme that was clearly a prominent focus for him in this period: *De aequalitate*, 2, p. 4, 23-25: «cuius modus, licet sit inexpressibilis et incomprehensibilis, tamen in figura et aenigmate comprehensibilium describitur» (for «figura» cf. Hebr. 1:3); 13, p. 18, 22-25: «ita de reliquis, ad sui principium quod est aeternum transsumit, ut in se tamquam in speculo et aenigmate suum principium aliquantulum possit intueri»; 16, p. 22, 7-9: «In hoc ut in aenigmate anima videt in aeternitate principium creationis aeternum per rationem suae notitiae omnia creabilia creare». This all suggests, in particular, that the *De Beryllo* and *De Aequalitate* stand in some kind of continuity, and that the type of *Strukturanalyse* proposed here for *De Beryllo* would also give interesting results when applied to *De Aequalitate*.

Platzer’s work has an interesting interpretation of Cusanus’ overall intellectual development in terms of his method: according to her account, starting after *De Visione Dei*, i.e. with *De Beryllo*, he changes from a focus on *symbolum* to *aenigma* (itself a different type of *symbolum*, characterized by a dynamic quality and always ultimately referring to the infinite/unnameable, representing in fact an encapsulation of Cusanus’ three-step method; cf. PLATZER, *Symbolica venatio*, pp. 45-50, 195).

³²⁸ As we will see later, *aenigmatica scientia* is given as an explicit name for the method (*De Beryllo*, 7, p. 9, 11). Cusanus refers explicitly to *aenigmata* in paragraphs 9, 15, 21, 23, 27, 31, 32, 33, 44, 53, 60, 61, 63, and this word occurs in *De Beryllo* much more often than in any other one of Cusanus’ works. This aspect was noted by Platzer’s quantitative analysis, which she uses to support her thesis as to the change to a focus on *aenigma* and *scientia aenigmatica* in the method used by Cusanus in his late works (PLATZER, *ibid.*, esp. pp. 45-50, 195-205).

³²⁹ Crucially, the *conceptus* is implied to be the same, both for the ‘not clear enough’ previous works and for *De Beryllo*. The *speculum et aenigma* is merely meant to be how Cusanus explains it «as clear as possible» for the reader.

speculum et aenigma as a tool with which the *intellectus* (which is, interestingly, the active subject) can help itself (*iuvet*) and direct itself (*dirigat*) «to the final level of knowable things» (*in ultimo scibillium*). A question immediately arises concerning the *intellectus infirmus cuiusque* – does this imply that all intellects are *infirmi*? The universal scope of the addressee/reader in these sentences suggests that yes, this is indeed the case³³⁰, and it justifies why the ‘failure of perception’, and of presentation (not clear enough) of the *conceptus* by Cusanus have occurred, and why there is a need for a specially constructed resource, which *De Beryllo* shall provide: namely, the *speculum et aenigma*.

The ‘directionality’ of the expression Cusanus used to speak of *in coincidentia oppositorum* (*in* + Acc.) is now paralleled with the *in* + Abl. of *ultimo scibillium*, defining, it seems, a ‘domain’ which is difficult to navigate and in which the intellect must «assist» and «orient» itself (*dirigere*)³³¹. Interestingly, the ultimate goal of Cusanus’ activities, both in the previous works as in *De Beryllo*, thus appears to be not the reaching of a final stage, or doctrine, but rather simply helping the intellect work (properly) in the ‘realm’ of the «*ultimo scibillium*», which might be interpreted as something like an inexhaustible ‘domain’ of activity³³². For a novice reader, Cusanus still has to justify why this is the ultimate goal.

The second goal of the book is described in the second part of the sentence, connected by an *et* which puts the two goals on a grammatically equal footing: Cusanus also wants to «place» (i.e. in the work, in front of the reader) «certain propositions and important opinions of the most learned (*doctissimorum*) in difficult matters (*in difficilibus*)» – again a formulation with ‘*in* + Ablative’. Here Cusanus brings into play the adjective *doctus*, substantivized to refer to the authors of these «judgments and opinions»—an adjective which he has used with a special meaning since *De Docta Ignorantia*, where the term is redefined as measuring the level of ‘education’ of a person in Cusanus’ doctrines of

³³⁰ This is clearly Cusanus’ own view; see an analysis of this insufficiency in Chapter 5.2, in the examination of Sermon CLXXXVIII (1455).

³³¹ CORRIERAS, *Le traité du beryl*, p. 20, points out that Cusanus develops prior to *De Beryllo* a longstanding conception of *intellectus* as a *regio*, thus something like an ‘ontological realm’ rather than an instrumentalizable faculty.

³³² Cf. CORRIERAS, *ibid.*. However, it is important to note that the «ultimo», «final/ultimate [thing]», might also be (speculatively) interpreted otherwise, namely Christologically. This fits well with the latent Christological structural themes throughout this work, which will be brought into cohesive view in Chapter 5.

«learned ignorance», *docta ignorantia*³³³. Here, however, as in *De Visione Dei*, the term can be understood in its usual meaning of ‘famous figures in the tradition’, the views of which will be analyzed not in order to argue that they are not «learned» at all, but instead to see «how close» (*quantum propinquius*) they have come to the truth. The result may imply their ‘reordering’ (in a hierarchy of the *docti*) but not an exclusion, and Cusanus’ methodology, as we will see later in the criticism of Aristotle and others who «were lacking the beryl» (*beryllo caruerunt*), merely says that they did not get as close to the truth as they could have³³⁴.

The following purpose clause (*ut applicato speculo... - 1, p. 3, 7 – p. 4, 9*) clarifies what role these *sententias et opiniones* will have, and why they will be brought into the work at all. They are there so that ‘you’, the reader (Cusanus’ first use of the second person singular verb to address the reader, a mode of address that will recur throughout the work), «may become a judge (*iudex fias*) of how close (*quantum propinquius*) each of these [learned persons] (*quisque*) approaches the truth». We see here a construction with ‘*ad* + Accusative’ and the verb *accedere*, which must be understood as implying a degree (because *propinquius* is obviously quantifiable): this does not denote a static condition, but suggest an active work of ‘approaching’ (performed by the thinkers themselves, *quisque*, not by their opinions). This *quisque*, while referring primarily in this context to the *doctissimi* already mentioned,

³³³ *De docta ignorantia*, I, 1, 4, p. 6, 19-22: «Nihil enim homini etiam studiosissimo in doctrina perfectius adveniet quam in ipsa ignorantia, quae sibi propria est, doctissimum reperiri; et tanto quis doctior erit, quanto se sciverit magis ignorantem.» As remarked by Flasch, in the period of writing *De Beryllo* Cusanus criticizes again the *doctissimi* (without naming names), particularly for their inability to make correct use of the coincidence of opposites, in his letter of September 14, 1453 to Caspar Aindorffer (VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, pp. 114-116); Flasch gives an excellent analysis of the content of this letter, which explores the theme of *mystica theologia* and the interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius, explicitly linking it with the coincidence of opposites and criticizing philosophers for failing in this (a theme continued and developed in the *De Beryllo*, as we will see), in FLASCH, *Geschichte*, pp. 440-443; cf. also the very similar analysis of the same letter in CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl*, pp. 90-92. According to Flasch, after having avoided confronting specific figures and doctrines in the tradition (e.g. in *De Visione Dei*), Cusanus in *De Beryllo* sees the necessity of «naming friend and foe», «Freund und Feind zu benennen» (FLASCH, *Geschichte*, p. 448).

³³⁴ Cf. *De Beryllo*, 32, p. 36, 1. Corrieras points out that in *De Beryllo* Cusanus choose not to bring «unilateral criticism», but instead recognizes the merits of the thinkers he is criticizing, only showing their limitations (CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl*, p. 83), so that the use of *doctissimi*, at least in *De Beryllo*, is not «ironic». Furthermore, Cusanus’ conception of ‘closeness to the truth’ seems to enclose an inherent concept of ‘progress’, implicitly tied to the way in which Cusanus treats his sources and ‘authorities’ in this text: see the analysis of how he quotes such ‘authorities’ in the ‘four premises’ section (paragraphs 4-7). For an analysis of the concept of ‘novelty’ in Cusanus, to which these aspects of his methodology in *De Beryllo* are connected, see the article by Isabelle Mandrella, I. MANDRELLA, *Begriff und Funktion der Neuheit in der Philosophie des Nicolaus Cusanus*, in *Die Modernitäten des Nikolaus von Kues. Debatten und Rezeptionen*, ed. T. Müller – M. Vollet, Bielefeld 2014, pp. 23-42.

could also have a more general sense: i.e. how close to the truth *anybody at all* comes (in a precise parallel with the *cuiusque intellectus* above).

De Beryllo seems to be divided into two parts, corresponding to the two purpose clauses separated by *et*: one proposing the *speculum et aenigma*, the other analyzing the *sententias et opiniones*³³⁵. As this complex sentence suggests, the two are fundamentally ‘separable’ – however, both together seem to be required in order to achieve the overall goal of presenting the *conceptus* in a way that is «as clear as possible». The second part of *De Beryllo*, according to how it is described here³³⁶, does not have an inherently fixed size but could be enlarged or shrunk according to what size one would wish to assign to *paucas*, «a few»; the number of «judgments and opinions» does not seem to be in itself relevant, as the goal of the second part is for the reader to judge them (i.e., grammatically, the *doctissimi*, not the doctrines) using the *visio intellectualis* and having «applied the mirror and symbolism» introduced in the first part; or, indeed, in another reading, to judge *anyone whatsoever* as to how closely they approach the truth³³⁷. Highly interesting here is also the juridical language and imagery: the proposed method, Cusanus says, can make any person (*quisque*) a judge (*judex* – and one who, implicitly, would judge correctly). The parallelism of *sententias* (which can also mean a judge’s sentence) and *iudex*, suggests that the reader will be put in the position of ‘re-judging’ the «sentences» passed by previous ‘judges’, those considered to be «most learned»³³⁸. Cusanus thus promises that the

³³⁵ One may note again the striking parallelism of dual structures that will recur throughout the work, in which it is not too much to say that Cusanus shows a certain (previously unremarked upon) poetic sensibility. It is possible that Cusanus chose an expression such as *sententias et opiniones* precisely in order to parallel *speculum et aenigma*, the fixed expression taken from 1 Cor. 13:12.

³³⁶ Also according to Cusanus’ plan for the work circa August 1454, as he says in a letter to de Waging: «Librum *De Beryllo* nondum complevi; indiget enim longa explicatione, ut videatur praxis in aliorum dictis» (VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, p. 140).

³³⁷ The fact that the people are the ones judged (based on the doctrines), and not the doctrines themselves, gives a particularly dynamic quality to *ad veritatem accedat*, implying that people are able to move ‘closer’ or ‘further away’ from the truth, and indeed that the whole process of judging is not meant to be an evaluation of abstract philosophical doctrines but a sort of guiding towards truth (cf. *intellectus...se dirigit*) for *quisque* – both for ourselves and others.

³³⁸ It is highly interesting to note the juridical language and imagery, which will reoccur in *De Beryllo* and ties in with the ‘political’ imagery, the main object of our analysis in Chapter 4. Cusanus was himself a jurist trained in canon law, but juridical language is relatively rarely found in his theoretical works: of the 189 occurrences of the word *judex* in the corpus, around half are found in his early conciliar theory treatise *De Concordantia Catholica*, then most of the other occurrences are in an explicitly theological context of the Last Judgment, mostly found in his sermons.

We note, in connection with this image implying some kind of a ‘legal-political context’, the recurring image in *De Beryllo* of a polity (*res publica*) in which all the elements are the image/creation/likeness etc. of the *rex*. It is interesting to consider these in the same context, because in Cusanus *rex* and *iudex* are usually found connected: cf. the image of the *regnum* of the *intelligentia* in *De conjecturis* (135, p. 132, 1-10), where *iudex* also appears; cf. *De quaerendo Deum* (25, p. 17, 6):

reader will themselves become a ‘judge’ (implicitly, just like the «most learned») and pass their own ‘sentences’ regarding (any) difficult questions.

The last part of the clause talks about the means by which this ‘becoming a judge’ will be accomplished. Two means, or (grammatical) ‘instruments’, are mentioned for this purpose: *applicato speculum et aenigmate* and *visione intellectuali*. Both have already been mentioned in the first part of the sentence, i.e. the ‘first goal’ of the work. There, it was said that the intellect could ‘help’ and ‘orient itself’ by means of this *speculum et aenigma* proposed by Cusanus. Here, he puts in in different terms: it must be «applied» or ‘put to use’³³⁹, underlining the dynamic and ‘experiential’ aspect - only having done this (precisely how will be discussed later) can you become a *judex*. As for the second ‘instrument’, it is again the *visio intellectualis*, after Cusanus said in the first sentence of the book that he has been (seen by the reader as) trying to reach conclusions (*concludere*) according to it (*juxta visionem intellectualem*). Now this is spoken about differently, not as a ‘criterion’ (possibly ‘external’) for evaluating conclusions (suggested by the formulation *juxta* + Acc.), but rather as a means or instrument used directly (a noun in the Ablative case), a formulation which seems to suggest that here the *visio* is supposed to be more ‘immediate’, or ‘nearer’ to its user. If this is intentional, we can identify

«intellectus ... iudex rationum» (cf. Sermon CXXX, 5, p. 44, 14-15; Sermon CCXLIII, 18, p. 259, 5); *ibid.*, 25, p. 18, 14: «regem et iudicem»; cf. later, in *De Ludo Globi*, the image of man as *regnum*, having *intra se regem et iudicem* (58, p. 65, 6-7); or cf. Sermon LI, 14, p. 44, 5: «*rex et iudex*», Sermon LXXXV, 6, p. 497, 10-11: «*rex qui constitutus est iudex*».

Only in one particular passage, in the dialogue *De Genesi*, do we find the expression «*me iudice*» meaning «in my opinion, in my view» (184, p. 128, 1), and not in a line said by Cusanus but by his interlocutor, Conrad de Warburg.

³³⁹ The verb *applicare*, recurring in *De Beryllo* specifically in reference to applying the method (8, p. 10, 5 «*applicemus beryllum*»; 27, p. 31, 16 «*applicas oculare*»), usually has in Cusanus the abstract sense of ‘to apply some proposition, premise, conclusion, pattern of thought’, as pointed out by Senger and Bormann in an interpretive note (*De Beryllo*, pp. 102-103), cf. *De docta ignorantia*, 34, p. 25, 1-2; 4, p. 6, 9; 66, p. 44, 15; 94, p. 62, 25; *De conjecturis*, 4a, p. 6, 16, 34, p. 40, 12, 86, p. 83, 15, etc. However, in two particular passages in *De Beryllo*, this verb seems to be used with another possible connotation, deriving from medical language: ‘to apply a remedy’ (cf. e.g. WILLIAM OF SALICETO, *Ars chirurgica*, Venice 1546, I, 4, p. 305: «ante localium applicationem»), a meaning with which it is also used in *Idiota de staticis experimentis*: «*dosis applicationis*» (164, p. 223, 8), «*medelas applicare*» (166, p. 224, 18). Senger and Bormann insist (*De Beryllo*, p. 102) that the verb should be understood only with the ‘abstract’ meaning in the current passage we are examining; however, there may be a good argument to interpret it in the ‘medical’ sense, if we take into account the facts that: 1) Cusanus believed that stones have specific powers, *virtutes* (cf. Sermon CXXVI, 10, p. 25, 3ff; see our analysis in Chapter 3.1), and 2) that Cusanus most likely knew the *virtutes* of the *beryllus* as well, from the same lapidary he consulted for that sermon (probably the *Liber lapidum* of Marbode of Rennes, where we can read about the *beryllus* that it treats «infirm eyes»: «*Infirmis oculis in qua jacet unda medetur*», cf. MARBODE OF RENNES, *Liber lapidum*, XII, PG171, p. 1747, col. 1649). It is highly tempting, and fits perfectly with Cusanus’ argument, to identify a very interesting parallel: the *beryllus intellectualis*, applied (like a medical treatment) to the *oculus intellectualis*, i.e. the *intellectus infirmus* in this paragraph, has the ability (cf. the *virtus* of the regular *beryllus*) to cure it, like the physical *beryllus* cures infirm eyes. In this way, we can identify a medical ‘resonance’ for all the instances of *applicare* in our text, which is used several times with *beryllus* in a typical ‘technical’ usage signifying the application of the method: *applicemus beryllus*.

a type of ‘progression’ implicit in Cusanus’ words which fits very well with what he seems to be trying to describe: thus, if one were to look at the ‘other books’, Cusanus would be seen, at least in the perception of the reader, in a distorted way, as merely making use of the *visio intellectualis* as an external criterion, whereas in *De Beryllo* the reader himself gets to have ‘access’ to Cusanus’ true way of working (the *conceptus* which was not clear enough), which lets the reader make use of this *visio* directly. In this reading (and seeking, in the spirit of Cusanus own goal, to clarify as much as possible Cusanus’ message to the reader), we might then paraphrase the first paragraph so far as follows: ‘If you read my other writings, you will see that I try to reach conclusions according to *visio intellectualis* – but you might not be able to clearly understand, since in those works you are only seeing me do it but you do not have access to this *visio* yourself. Here, using what I write in *De Beryllo*, it will be made as clear as possible, so you can use this *visio* and become yourself a judge in difficult matters (as I did). This clarity will be achieved by presenting you with the method and helping you use it to judge the opinions of the most learned’. Such an ‘instrumentalization’ of the *visio intellectualis*, reflected in the grammatical usage, would indeed fit with the promise of a method which can be used, in principle, by *quisque*³⁴⁰.

Et quamvis videatur libellus iste brevis, tamen dat sufficientem praxim, quomodo ex aenigmate ad visionem in omni altitudine possit pertingi. (De Beryllo, 1, p. 4, 9-11)

The third sentence of the paragraph adds to the same structure built up by the first two sentences, with a focus on the role of the book *De Beryllo* in the Cusanian proposal of a *speculum et aenigma* and the manner of its use. Cusanus begins with an adversative clause: «Despite the fact that this little book

³⁴⁰ However, we can also ask: is the use of the *speculum et aenigma* absolutely necessary? It is not said that this particular *speculum et aenigma* that Cusanus offers in *De Beryllo* is essential (implicitly there could be others; and it remains an issue whether ‘some’ *speculum et aenigma* would be always necessary to reach the *visio intellectualis*), and one can even ask if what he offers in *De Beryllo* is (in any definable way) the *best* one to reach the *visio intellectualis* – as Cusanus seems to have chosen to provide it according to his intention to «make the *conceptus* as clear as possible» for the reader, and not necessarily because of any of its ‘objective’ merits, however one would judge those. Clearly, Cusanus himself must have reached the same *visio intellectualis* without the help of the *beryllus*, otherwise he could not have created it and now be offering it as a means for the reader.

(*libellus*³⁴¹) might seem short»³⁴², thus anticipating here an objection by the reader. The possible objection to his project that Cusanus considered so important and urgent that it had to be countered immediately, before even presenting the project in detail, is, therefore, an objection concerning the size of the book: namely, that it would be implausible that a book with such extensive ambitions (i.e. to offers some means by which anyone can solve any issue «in difficult matters») would be so small. Cusanus' response to this implicit objection, encapsulated in a *quamvis ... tamen* adversative structure, is a response to an issue of misperception on the part of the reader: the book is paradoxically 'small' while the reader would expect it to be 'large', which in fact echoes the paradoxical nature of the *coincidentia oppositorum* used in Cusanus' method itself, in one of his favorite formulations: a coincidence between maximum and minimum. Cusanus' answer to the reader's puzzlement that, contrary to their expectations, the (very) 'small' coincides with the (very) 'large', is: if the reader believes that the book must be bigger, they don't yet understand that the method proposed will involve *coincidentia oppositorum* as a matter of course, which fact derives from its very simplicity. Indeed, this objection by the hypothetical reader seems to illustrate the essence of the objections a reader would have when confronted with the counterintuitiveness of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, which is likely what results (if we follow this speculative thread) in the insufficient 'clarity' in his other works – a big problem that the *De Beryllo*, a paradoxically small work, is meant to solve.

³⁴¹ Regarding this diminutive, *libellus*, combined with *brevis*, Corrieras stresses «la redondance, and donc la insistence» (CORRIERAS, *Le traité du beryl*, p. 13, footnote 17), and points out that it is also used in the final paragraph (72, p. 84, 1-2, p. 85, 10), and that it is connected with the Platonic saying cited by Cusanus at 72, p. 84, 1-2: «scientia brevissima est». However, Jasper Hopkins in the notes to his English translation (NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Complete philosophical and theological treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, pp. 792-827) argues that *libellus* (which Cusanus also variously uses to refer implicitly to *De Docta Ignorantia* and *De Conjecturis*) is probably just a sign of rhetorical modesty, thus not «redundant» at all (*ibid.*, footnote 2, p. 830). The interpretation of Corrieras seems more promising though, because she seeks to preserve to the maximum all the possible meanings of the text, compared with the 'reductionism' of Hopkins, a problematic aspect of his methodology, as noted in Chapter 2.1 on his critique of Flasch. Accordingly, the play on the expectations of the reader that Cusanus invokes in this paragraph, and the implicit hint at a *coincidentia oppositorum*, only remain visible for us if we take seriously the nuances of the words Cusanus uses.

³⁴² On the problem of 'brevity' of the book and the word *libellus*, we can notice a possible connection, albeit rather speculative, with Sermon CXXVI and the discussion of the *lapis clarus et lucidus* and then of the *calculus* (by definition, a *lapis* which is very small) as an image, which we can speculatively connect to the *beryllus* made into a lens (which would certainly be small as well). In this way, we would have a recurring image of a 'small stone', the name of which is applied also to the book (named *Beryllus* as well, as we have seen) which is, in turn, surprisingly small—and which hides, as such, a *coincidentia oppositorum* and (speculating further) belongs, like the Christ-stone, *in caput anguli*.

The second part of the structure *quamvis ... tamen* says, then, that the book offers (*dat*) to the reader «sufficient practical instruction (*praxim sufficientem*)³⁴³ for the way in which one can reach any height (*in omni altitudine*), going from image (*ex aenigmate*) to vision (*ad visionem*)». We can remark here the hierarchizing metaphor of «height» (*altitudo*) of types of objects (or domains) of *visio*, correlated with the previous expression *in ultimo scibilium* (*in* + Ablative case, used for what appears to be a ‘domain’ of objects or knowledge). One could say that we have here a ‘downward’ extension of the domain of application of the method, which not only helps the intellect guide itself in the field of «the last/ultimate thing that can be known», but it works, indeed, ‘at all levels’, high and low, where it can make ‘vision’ possible. But what is this *visio*? Obviously, we have here a reference to *visio intellectualis*, already mentioned two times in the first two sentences. But instead, at the same time, we can interpret the *visio* mentioned here in a more general way: the book therefore offers «practical instruction» on how to proceed from *aenigma* to *visio* not only for *visio intellectualis* but also for ordinary vision, e.g. in the case of a paradigmatic geometrical example to explain the use of the method, such as the line-angles image that Cusanus includes in paragraph 9. The ambiguity between ordinary *visio* and *visio intellectualis*, parallel but conjoined in the scope of the method, defines, we can say, the method itself: in the same way in which we ‘see’, in the illustration in paragraph 9, that the line is the origin of the angle and is, in fact, the maximum and minimum angle, we can also ‘see’ through the

³⁴³ The word *praxis* is rare in Cusanus, as there are only 15 occurrences of the lemma in the entire corpus. Two are in the *De Beryllo*, here and at 2, p. 5, 8. In some places it clearly means simply ‘doing’ something, e.g. *De pace fidei*, 60, p. 56, 18, *Reformatio generalis*, 19, p. 40, 11. But we find it in *De Conjecturis* with a ‘dual’ sense, always referring to something that Cusanus does in the book, i.e. an application of theoretical considerations (70, p. 71, 6-7: «ea, quae dixi, in praxi partim explicare curabo»), and even an application for the soul, almost a «spiritual practice» (4, p. 6, 16-19: «fructuosam applicatoriam praxim in gratissimis quibusdam resolutionibus adiciens veri famelicis animas reficere curabo»). In *De visione Dei*, Cusanus uses it in a clear way to join together the theoretical aspects and the ‘devotional’ ones (again with the same verb in the future tense, *conabor*; note that there are two possible readings in the critical edition of this passage, and the other is different only in word order and verb: instead of *conabor, propono*; see the editors’ note, *De visione Dei*, p. 7): «primo conabor vos, amantissimos fratres, per quandam praxim in mysticam theologiam elevare» (4a, p. 7, 11-14); then at 77, p. 61, 6: «Et hoc experior hac praxi» (sc. the love of God); then, Cusanus sends the famous image together with the *De visione Dei* so that «ne tamen deficiatis in praxi, quae sensibilem talem exigit figuram» (2, p. 5, 10-11), here in a more theoretical-applicative sense—but we must take into account the fact that the image is, after all, an icon of Christ. Senger and Bormann, in their commentary (*De Beryllo*, p. 103, note 7), emphasize that this word means *exercitationem, functionem, usum seu experitiam*, and either «makes use of experience», or «is itself perceptible experience in a sensible way», citing the passages in *De visione Dei* examined above. and also Cusanus’ letter to Bernard de Waging (VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, p. 140). Corrieras also emphasizes *praxis* as an essential element in Cusanus’ proposal in *De Beryllo*, at the same time theoretical research and spiritual practice (CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl*, p. 116).

beryllus/*speculum et aenigma* that God is the origin of all things, being their absolute *maximum* and *minimum*.

We observe here that this most fertile ambiguity introduced by Cusanus between different types of ‘vision’ can be also applied to the dual parallelism of the same structure *quamvis...tamen*, because the first verb is precisely *videre* (*videatur*), used in the abstract sense of ‘to seem’. At the same time, the *aenigma* (as in 1 Cor. 13:12) is a substitute, an inferior image of the original³⁴⁴, and (in the instrumental sense preferred by Cusanus in his account of his method) a means through which, in some way, we could access the reality behind it. Thus, the book itself, because it is ‘seen as small’, serves at the same time as an *aenigma* in the way in which it appears to the reader, and the second part of the *quamvis...tamen* features the *visio* itself, removing the misguided objection of the reader and recalling precisely the movement ‘from *aenigma* to vision’ that the reader has to perform in order to gain access to the promised *visio intellectualis*.

We can find another very similar textual structure on this pattern if we return to the first sentence of the text, where Cusanus also uses the verb *videre*. It seems that here we have a possible parallelism as well, outlining an opposition between 1) what seems to be the case to the reader (i.e. seeing Cusanus *in oppositorum coincidentia versatum* and *iuxta intellectualem visionem nisus concludere*), described in an almost theatrical way, without implying a vision of the same things that Cusanus is seeing on the part of the reader, and 2) the truth of this same *visio intellectualis*, experienced by the reader him/herself. It is precisely this ‘barrier’ between ‘seeing Cusanus do it in his books’ and ‘doing it oneself’ that makes a help such as *De Beryllo* necessary. Thus, Cusanus promises in *De Beryllo* to make it possible (in a way that he has not succeeded to do before, or at least not to such an extent) for the reader, by making the *conceptus* as clear as possible, that the reader themselves will have this kind of *visio* – enabling them to go, therefore, *ex aenigmate* (from the image—which might also be the book *De Beryllo* itself, in its too-small appearance and its ‘theatrical’ account of Cusanus’ activities as the protagonist) *ad visionem* (to that which Cusanus is actually using in his other books, while his readers

³⁴⁴ In Cusanian terms, also a «*similitudo*», as we will see in the analysis paragraph 5 below.

are not able to go beyond appearances and understand). To make this movement possible, Cusanus says that the book offers *praxis sufficiens* – but one must still overcome the same fundamental difficulty: how to go beyond the ‘talk about *praxis*’ and reach ‘*praxis* itself’? As we see, Cusanus thinks he has found a solution, encapsulated in the fertile ambiguity of seeing and *visio*, and later he will try to explain the way to accomplish this passage, from ‘seeing’ a geometric example to the *visio intellectualis* of an object that exceeds the domain of *ratio*. This is the fundamental structure of his method, and the proposal of Cusanus in *De Beryllo* is based on the premise that the reading and understanding of his arguments must be able to give exactly this *praxis*: that the reader, if he is willing to put in the effort to follow the argument fully, will stand to gain the benefits this *praxis* promises. It is on this basis, as we will see, that the apparently extravagant promises made by Cusanus in his introduction might be perfectly justifiable.

Erit etiam in cuiusque potestate modum qui subicitur applicandi et extendendi ad quaeque indaganda.
(*De Beryllo*, 1, p. 4, 11-13)

In this last sentence of the first paragraph, Cusanus formulates a comprehensive and generalizing conclusion. The *-que* generalizing suffix, as already seen twice in this paragraph, makes manifest the universality of his proposal: *quisque* for the user, *quaeque* for the object of application; but there are also new qualifications added in this sentence, important to complete the theoretical framework of the method as Cusanus defines it. The method that will be further introduced in the following paragraphs is referred to here as a *modus*³⁴⁵, an important term beside *speculum et aenigma* and *visio intellectualis*, a way of speaking that describes the method as something that is to be ‘applied’³⁴⁶ and ‘extended’ to anything to be investigated (with *ad* + Accusative, the same ‘directional’ structure as the *ad visionem* just used). The verb in the future tense, the gerunds describing actions to

³⁴⁵ A term that echoes *modus ratiocinandi*, one of the names for his methodological proposal in *De Docta Ignorantia* (1, 19, p. 2, 7).

³⁴⁶ On the word *applicatio*, see note 339 above on *applicare*.

accomplish in the future (*applicandi, extendendi, indaganda*), and the introduction of the *potestas*, all create the image of a situation not currently present and which must be actualized in practice, continuing implicitly the theme of *praxis* already introduced (cf. also the subjunctive mood of *possit* in the previous sentence). The actualization of this possibility depends therefore on the reader, but if he/she fulfils all the conditions (which include, at least, the reading of the book, and which are specified further in the second paragraph), applying the *modus* will be in their power, *in <sua> potestate*³⁴⁷. Here we find the first clear instance of what will be the recurring image of the *res publica* and *rex*³⁴⁸. The fact that Cusanus has just used an image from a general ‘political-type’ context (the *judex*)³⁴⁹ cannot be ignored, and it is not a large leap to connect the two images: the reader becomes *judex* of the ‘sentences’ of the *doctissimi*, and this ability to investigate and judge will exist in their *potestas* as a ‘magistrate’. But in this implicit image, who would be the *rex/princeps*? The answer to this question, which will become interesting especially at the end of *De Beryllo*, will inevitably be Christological, as we will see in the analysis of paragraphs 69, 70 and 72 in Chapter 5 of the thesis.

Remarkable here is also an interesting asymmetry within this image of the reader as ‘magistrate-in-training’: in the second proposition, the reader is referred to in the 2nd person singular (*iudex fias*), but instead here we have the third person, impersonal and universalized: in the power (*potestas*) of any person (*in cuiusque potestate*). Although it seems to refer to the readers of the book, one can interpret this last expression in a generalized way, which changes the meaning of the proposition as a whole: in this interpretation, it would refer to all human beings, and would almost take the character of a ‘prophecy’, with a ‘subjunctive of wish’ translating roughly to: ‘Let it be so in the future, then, that it will be in the power of every human being to apply...’. This might be an overly speculative and ambitious interpretation, but at the same time the ambitions of Cusanus with this book, as stated by himself, also seem extraordinary, if we take seriously the universalizing promises already made in the

³⁴⁷ Cf. Col. 2:10 «et estis in illo repleti, qui est caput omnis principatus et potestatis». The word, at least in our context, clearly suggests a ‘juridical’ resonance.

³⁴⁸ An image that recurs in paragraph 36, p. 40, 1-2.

³⁴⁹ Cf. note 338 above. See the further analysis of the ‘juridical images’ in Chapter 4.1.

first paragraph. We will see immediately, in paragraph 2, that Cusanus indeed intends to put in play something new, in his view, relative to the tradition, as he expands on the scope of the ‘promises’ made to the reader.

3.2.2 Text Analysis: Paragraph 2 (p. 4, 1 – p. 5, 12)

Causa autem, cur tam Plato in Epistulis quam Dionysius magnus Areopagita prohibuerunt haec mystica his, qui elevationes intellectuales ignorant, propalari, est quia illis nihil magis risu dignum quam haec alta videbuntur. (De Beryllo, 2, p. 4, 1-5)

After the introductory paragraph, which makes highly ambitious claims for *De Beryllo*, Cusanus chooses not to go directly into the topic of the book, but instead to include another paragraph, seemingly in order to clarify the relationship of his work with the intellectual tradition: here we find references to Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius. The mention of both the philosopher Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius, a (presumed) Church Father³⁵⁰, in a dualistic *tam ... quam* structure, seems to suggest in particular the universal philosophical-theological scope of his proposed method—and Cusanus, as we will see, puts in great effort to maintain this equal-status duality throughout the work.

In this construction, Pseudo-Dionysius gets a ‘privileged’ position by being described with the epithet *magnus*³⁵¹, an early signal to the reader of the importance that Pseudo-Dionysius will have in

³⁵⁰ Cusanus notably had some doubts, which he expressed to his friends, about the attribution of Pseudo-Dionysius’ texts to the character mentioned in Acts of the Apostles 17:34, noticing the verbatim correspondences between passages in Pseudo-Dionysius and passages in Proclus, likely pointed out to him by Pietro Balbi, a skeptic of this attribution who translated works by Proclus for him; he also wondered why the other early Church Fathers did not mention him. However, like a number of prominent intellectuals (including Cardinal Bessarion), he did not reject this attribution despite his puzzlement (see e.g. W. BERSCHIN, *Greek Letters and the Latin Middle Ages: From Jerome to Nicholas of Cusa*, Washington DC 1988, pp. 276-280, and especially P. MOFFITT-WATTS, *Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Three Renaissance Neoplatonists, Cusanus, Ficino and Pico on Mind and Cosmos*, in *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. J. Hankins – J. Monfasani – F. Purnell Jr, 1987, pp. 279-298). *De Beryllo* shows no signs of any problematic status given to Pseudo-Dionysius’s works. This was a topic of debate and disagreement in scholarly circles at the time, and the first prominent argument against the attribution published during Cusanus’ time was Lorenzo Valla’s 1457 commentary to the New Testament. Given all this, we will take the reasonable position, given the contents of *De Beryllo* and its apparent ‘universal’ target audience, that Cusanus assumed the reader would accept Pseudo-Dionysius’s works unproblematically as those of the first-century saint. In any case, Pseudo-Dionysius’s works can clearly stand for the Christian tradition in the ‘dualistic’ reading we propose.

³⁵¹ The influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on Cusanus is evident and extensive, in *De Beryllo* and elsewhere, representing a constant factor in Cusanus’ work. He refers to Pseudo-Dionysius often (and more than to any other author) using epithets such as *magnus*. An excellent account of the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on Cusanus is found in W. BEIERWALTES, *Der verborgene Gott: Cusanus und Dionysius*, Trier 1997. See also, more recently and from a more prominently theological perspective, P. CASARELLA, *Cusanus on Dionysius: The Turn to Speculative Theology*, in «Modern Theology» 24/4 (2008), pp. 667-678.

Cusanus' account in *De Beryllo*, and to the fact that in Cusanus' appraisal, his doctrines will be seen as superior to those attributed to Plato. At the same time, this passage cannot be unproblematically called an appeal to 'authorities' in the tradition; instead, it seems that Cusanus mentions Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius here just to answer an implicit objection to his project, and not, in particular, as sources supporting it. Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius will be, of course, among the *doctissimi* whose views are to be examined in the 'second part' of his proposed account. This makes Cusanus' approach quite remarkable as regards his relationship to authorities in the tradition, as he seems to have pre-emptively asserted that no one of the *doctissimi* is exempt from criticism and evaluation according to his method. However, he does invoke authorities in support of it, in an implicit way, by his use of the words *haec mystica*, 'these mystical matters', which seem to refer to (some of) the contents of *De Beryllo*, not clearly specified (we do not know what the relationship – identity or inclusion – would be between the *modus/speculum et aenigma* and *haec mystica*). In this way, Cusanus implicitly asserts (without making any strong direct claim) that in fact Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius wrote about the 'same things' as he is doing now, and thus implicitly agreed, at least in general terms, with Cusanus' own positions.

This seems to be the main reason for this second paragraph: for Cusanus to carefully locate his own work within the tradition. He starts directly by addressing an objection by the reader, an implicit question (i.e. a 'why' question that *causa* would answer). Recall that the first implicit objection which

In particular, especially for *De Beryllo*, Cusanus studied the works of Pseudo-Dionysius (mainly *De Divinis Nominibus* and *De Mystica Theologia*) through Albertus Magnus' commentaries, which he owned in Codex Cusanus 96 and for which he left a wealth of marginalia that are a priceless resource for studying how he interprets and makes use of Pseudo-Dionysius. These notes were collected by L. Baur in *Cusanus-Texte III. Marginalien. 1. Nicolaus Cusanus und Ps.-Dionysius im Lichte der Zitaten und Randbemerkungen des Cusanus*, ed. L. Baur, Heidelberg 1941 (hereafter cited as CT III.1), which includes also an extensive and detailed study by Baur on the citations and influence of Pseudo-Dionysius in Cusanus (CT III.1, pp. 9-96).

Cusanus' other main source for *De Beryllo* is Proclus' commentary on Plato's Parmenides, to which he also leaves copious notes. These have been collected in: *Cusanus-Texte III. Marginalien 2. Proclus Latinus. Die Exzerpte und Randnoten des Nikolaus von Kues zu den lateinischen Übersetzungen der Proclus-Schriften. 2.1 Theologia Platonis. Elementatio theologica*, ed. H.-G. Senger, Heidelberg 1986; and *Cusanus-Texte III. Marginalien 2. Proclus Latinus. Die Exzerpte und Randnoten des Nikolaus von Kues zu den lateinischen Übersetzungen der Proclus-Schriften. 2.2 Expositio in Parmenidem Platonis*, ed. K. Bormann, Heidelberg 1986. I will hereafter cite these works as CT III.2.1 and CT III.2.2 respectively.

For Proclus, a crucial resource is Steel's editing of the Moerbeke translation of the commentary to Parmenides that Cusanus uses, together with Cusanus' own marginalia: PROCLUS, *Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon, Traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke*, ed. C. Steel, 2 voll., Leuven 1982, 1985. As a result, I will generally refer to Proclus both by the page number in the Cousin edition as well as by the page number in the Steel edition (which reproduces Moerbeke's translation that Cusanus owned and worked on), in round brackets, as follows: (Cousin xxx, Steel p. yyy).

Cusanus answered in the third sentence of the first paragraph was: ‘why is this book so short (as one would expect it to be longer according to the nature of the subject matter)?’. Here, in the first sentence of the second paragraph, the implicit reader’s objection would be something like: ‘Why has no one else in the tradition proposed what you are now proposing, a *libellus brevis* with a *modus* that anyone could apply to judge any *sententias et opiniones* about anything that is to be investigated?’ At issue here is again the novelty of his approach, as this is, in effect, a variation of the first objection, i.e. ‘why is this book unlike what I, a reader, would expect given how you have described it?’. This is an important objection to be addressed, as there does not seem to be any parallel, either in the Christian or the Neoplatonic tradition, for a small work that would aim to present a method so universal in scope.

Cusanus’ strategy for responding to this objection is complex, as can be seen from an analysis of the sentence. First, Cusanus uses *haec mystica*, «these sacred/mystical matters»³⁵², an expression which connects *De Beryllo* with the Neoplatonic-Christian tradition invoked by mentioning Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius, yet in a way that is not particularly defined and allows Cusanus a lot of freedom, amounting more to a sort of ‘promise’ to the reader: *haec*, ‘these things’, is a neuter plural pronoun not corresponding to any noun previously mentioned. The crucial elements mentioned so far: *speculum et aenigma*, *modus*, *visio*, have been singular nouns, and the only plurals, *sententias et opiniones*, have been feminine. Cusanus wants to communicate, without committing at the level of details, that Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius also wrote about ‘these mystical matters’, so that his proposals fit well in the context of the tradition as he interprets it. At the same time, Cusanus says that these ‘mystical things’ have remained hidden due to a voluntary choice on the part of both Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius: a choice which he is implicitly saying is not necessary (any longer). How does he describe this choice and the reasons for it? The two thinkers, he says, have ‘prohibited’ (*prohibuerunt*) the activity of

³⁵² *Mystica* always has a theological connotation in Cusanus, and is most often used as an adjective: most often in the sermons in the set expression *corpus mysticum* (of Christ, referring to the Church), then in *mystica theologia*, a crucial recurring theme in Cusanus, particularly in the period of the writing of *De Beryllo*, starting around 1453 (e.g. *De visione Dei*, 4a, p. 6, 13; see particularly the Letter of 14 September 1453 to the Tegernsee monks where he discusses *mystica theologia* in detail: VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, pp. 113-117). He also discusses *mystica theologia* in Sermon CCLVIII («Multifarie multisque», 1456), in *Sermones* XIX/5, 7, p. 380, 6: *mystica theologia*; 12, p. 383, 3, p. 384, 9-10: *modus mysticus cognitionis*.

‘making known’ (*propalari*) these hidden things to ‘those who were ignorant of intellectual heights’. We see again a use of ‘juridical’ language: the two have not only written about these things, or kept them hidden themselves, but have ‘issued a ban’ (in effect) to other knowers, prohibiting them from making them known to certain people. The ‘political-juridical’ imagery of the previous paragraph (*iudex, potestas*), seems to continue here: Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius, having some type of ‘office’ (perhaps as ‘judges’), issued some kind of ‘decree’ (describable as a ‘*sententia*’) concerning this prohibition – and Cusanus, himself a knower of such things, is obviously choosing to disobey (while not, at this point, explicitly ‘overturning’ the prohibition, but rather couching his own disobedience in terms of explaining what the ‘*causa*’ was for it³⁵³). What, in this extended juridical image, would have to be Cusanus’ own ‘authority’ here? The terms used in the first paragraph suggest an answer: everyone who uses the ‘*modus*’ presented in this book becomes *iudex* and has *potestas* (power/authority) to investigate and draw conclusions concerning every *sententia et opinio* of the *doctissimi*, including such authorities as Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius (and who, indeed, could plausibly be described by Cusanus as more *doctus* than them?³⁵⁴). Therefore, a reader, when they become such a newly-minted *iudex*, would have the authority to evaluate the previous *sententiae* of other judges and even, implicitly, judge them as lacking and formulate new ones. Implicit in this *potestas* seems to be the power to overrule such ‘prohibitions’ as that by Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius – at least Cusanus, obviously a *iudex* himself in this image, seems to claim implicitly that he has it and is intent on using it, not abiding by the ‘ban’. But is this because some *sententiae* by both Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius are mistaken? Here, at the beginning of the second paragraph, Cusanus feels tasked to explain.

The nature of the ‘prohibition’ is said to be to not distribute these ‘mystical matters’ to them who do not know the ‘intellectual heights’ (*elevationes intellectuales*). This very interesting expression

³⁵³ Note that *causa* also has a legal meaning: lawsuit, case, trial. The abundance of terms with juridical meaning in these first two paragraphs has not been noted before, but adds up to a remarkably coherent image. For more on the juridical imagery, see note 338 above.

³⁵⁴ In *De Beryllo* these seem to emerge as the ‘first’ and ‘second’ place in the hierarchy, with Aristotle (the only plausible competitor) relegated to a lower rung. There is, of course, also a Christological answer to this question, as for any instance where one asks about a human ‘maximum’ of some type; cf. Chapter 5.

invokes again the *intellectus* and the image of ‘height’ as describing a hierarchy of things knowable, or of theoretical activity (cf. *in omnem altitudinem* in the previous paragraph). The persons who are not subject to the prohibition should therefore already be familiar with these ‘heights’; but if the ‘hidden things’ that are the subject of the prohibition include, in fact (taking up the terms of the first paragraph), how the intellect can guide itself *in ultimo scibilium* and how to reach *visio* (likely *intellectualis*) *in omnem altitudinem*, this would be, in effect, a universal prohibition against teaching anyone how to achieve this (if one does not know already). Cusanus does not seem to understand this ‘prohibition’ as having such a large scope. The key word is *elevationes*, plural, which can be understood not just as «the high [objects/domains] that are the object of the intellect», i.e. «intellectual heights»³⁵⁵ but instead as «the different heights/levels of the things that are the object of the intellect». In this interpretation, those who are under the prohibition are those who do not know the relative ‘height’ of things pertaining to the intellectus, i.e. their hierarchy, and, by implication, the exact relationship between *intellectus* and other faculties, notably *ratio* (cf. the first sentence of paragraph 1). That Cusanus likely means something like this is indicated by the second part of the proposition, which offers the actual cause for the ‘prohibition’: the fact that nothing would seem (*videbuntur*) to these people to be more laughable (*digne risu*) than these high things (*haec alta*). The ones who do not know these *elevationes* beforehand, therefore, will misperceive them as what they are not, i.e. ‘worthy of laughter’—thus, in our interpretation, will misjudge their place in the proper hierarchy of *elevationes*.

We note that these ‘ignorant’ people see ‘high things’ as if they were ridiculous, thus as if they were actually ‘low’ – and they are, as a result, themselves laughable, as they seem (to themselves) to be at a different ‘level’ than the (low) one they are actually at. Laughter is implied by Cusanus to be associated with a perceived coincidence of high (appearance) and low (reality), which seems to be yet another form of the coincidence of opposites. The ‘ignorants’, not making the proper distinctions between the levels of *elevatio*, fail to correctly perceive (*videre*) a coincidence of opposites, in that (1)

³⁵⁵ This is Jasper Hopkins’ English translation of this term, cf. NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Complete philosophical and theological treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, vol. 2, p. 792.

they perceive that the things that others (those who would teach them) judge as ‘high’ are actually ‘low’, and (2) fail to understand that this ‘low appearance’ in fact coincides with the ‘high’ reality, as those who are not ignorant about ‘these things’ would know. Thus, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the main problem that troubled the Tegernsee monks, comes back again as the main problem: people fail to correctly grasp it, and see it, as a result, as laughable. Or, in other words, they fail to understand that the ‘high’ and the ‘low’ ultimately coincide (and thus believe that the people who take things that appear ‘low’ as ‘high’ are being ridiculous, while they are in fact closer to the truth of the matter, i.e. the coincidence of ‘high’ and ‘low’ in a *principium*). Cusanus’ method for using the *intellectus* properly and putting into practice the *visio intellectualis* must overcome this obstacle – which, he implies, Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius failed to do, since if they had found a solution they would not have issued the ‘prohibition’ after all. In his apparent attempt to downplay the ‘novel’ aspect of his work and allay the concerns of the tradition-minded reader, Cusanus is subtly asserting this novel character even stronger.

The way in which Cusanus cites and interprets his sources in this passage is of great interest, as it will be paradigmatic for the way he employs his sources in *De Beryllo* – a subtle and careful approach, often consisting in reinterpretation within his own context and always to be understood within his overall project in *De Beryllo*. It also showcases his vision of how to integrate ‘theological’ and ‘philosophical’ issues in the context of the application of his method. In this paragraph we find two explicit references, to Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius, and two non-explicit but recognizable references, to 1 Cor. 2:14³⁵⁶ and the beginning of the first book of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, I.1.980a22³⁵⁷. We will try to reconstitute the argument in the exact way in which Cusanus develops it for the reader, starting

³⁵⁶ 1 Cor. 2:14: «animalis autem homo non percipit ea quae sunt Spiritus Dei stultitia est enim illi et non potest intellegere quia spiritaliter examinatur».

³⁵⁷ Cusanus possessed both the William of Moerbeke and the Bessarion translation (which he appears to prefer in *De Beryllo*) of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*; the Bessarion translation can be found in ARISTOTLE, *Aristoteles Latine interpretibus variis*, ed. E. Kessler, Berlin 1831, repub. Munich 1995. The passage in question here, the first sentence of the *Metaphysics*, reads: «Omnes homines natura scire desiderant» (ARISTOTLE, *Aristoteles Latine*, p. 481, 980a22), cf. *sciendi desiderio* in this paragraph.

There is another similarity/reference to the beginning of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in Bessarion’s translation here, which has not yet been remarked in the scholarship: the words *causa autem*, which start the second paragraph of *De Beryllo*, are used in Bessarion’s translation to start the fourth sentence: «causa autem est quod sensuum hic vel maxime nos cognoscere quicquam facit, multasque differentias manifestat» (ARISTOTLE, *Aristoteles Latine*, *ibid.*, 980a26), where the *hic* refers to *videre*, the sense of sight, and the sentence gives the reason for why *videre prae omnibus aliis eligimus* in the previous sentence. Given the enormous importance of *videre/visio* in Cusanus’ construction, this can hardly be a coincidence.

with the first two references which are presented in parallel with the structure *tam ... quam* and characterized as having the same position on the problem of revealing *haec mystica*. Then we will see how Cusanus presents this position, we will look at the (apparently quite significant) differences between the arguments he seems to be referring to in Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius and the position as presented by Cusanus, and then try to analyze this position according to the words of Cusanus himself in order to understand his argument as to how he claims to overcome the difficulty which caused the ‘prohibition’ which has been the main topic of this paragraph so far.

We will start with Plato, for whom Cusanus also offers the source he is citing: the Letters. A reader acquainted with them can easily identify that the reference must be to a famous passage of the Second Letter, at 314a, where Plato³⁵⁸ urges the addressee of the letter, Dion II of Syracuse, to take care never to disclose doctrines (referred to only as ‘these things’ – neuter plural)³⁵⁹ to ‘the many’ i.e. those who are ‘not educated’ (εἰς ἀνθρώπους ἀπαιδευτούς)³⁶⁰. The reason offered parallels that given by Cusanus in our section: namely that «there are hardly any things, I believe, which sound more laughable (καταγελαστότερα) to the many (πρὸς τοὺς πολλοὺς) when they hear them than these, or, on the other hand, [any things that sound] more admirable and inspired to men of fine disposition (πρὸς τοὺς εὐφυεῖς θαυμαστότερα τε καὶ ἐνθουσιαστικώτερα)»³⁶¹. The first argument seems to be that these things (ταῦτα, parallel with the *haec alta/haec mystica* of Cusanus in our section) would be seen as ridiculous, which would reflect upon their author – which is therefore the problem and the justification for not divulging them, i.e. a matter of the public reputation of philosophers. To argue this, Plato

³⁵⁸ The authenticity of the Second Letter, as that of all seven Platonic Letters, is a widely debated and contentious issue in modern scholarship; for a discussion and an overview, see V. WOHL, *Plato Avant la Lettre: Authenticity in Plato's Epistles*, in «Ramus» 27/1 (1998), pp. 60-93. Cusanus, on the other hand, would have considered it authentic, as no argument against this had been presented in his time.

³⁵⁹ It is striking that in the whole argument from 312e-314c, Plato uses exclusively the neuter plural pronoun ταῦτα, «these things», to refer to (what is obviously meant to be) philosophical doctrines, and never gives any matching noun to go with it (only verbal participles). While it is unlikely that Cusanus could read Greek at a high level (Casarella has argued convincingly against Cusanus' proficiency in Greek from the lack of marginalia in Greek manuscripts he owned; quoted in K. HUDSON, *Becoming God: The Doctrine of Theosis in Nicholas of Cusa*, Washington D.C. 2007, p. 3, note 7), we note that he also does this in our passage.

³⁶⁰ PLATO, *Epistula II*, in PLATO, *Opera*, ed. J. Burnet, Oxford 1907, vol. V, 312d-314c.

³⁶¹ εὐλαβοῦ μέντοι μή ποτε ἐκπέση ταῦτα εἰς ἀνθρώπους ἀπαιδευτούς: σχεδὸν γάρ, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, οὐκ ἔστιν τούτων πρὸς τοὺς πολλοὺς καταγελαστότερα ἀκούσματα, οὐδ' αὖ πρὸς τοὺς εὐφυεῖς θαυμαστότερα τε καὶ ἐνθουσιαστικώτερα (*ibid.*, 314a).

recounts a story introduced as «to be marvelled at» (θαυμαστὸν): there are «quite a number of men», he says, who have heard Plato himself talk and discussed his doctrines for a long time, even 30 years, and their perceptions concerning the things that are «the most probable/convincing (πιστότατα)» have changed completely, so that things that seemed the most unlikely/not convincing (ἀπιστότατα) became for them the most convincing, and vice versa. So, writes Plato to Dion, «bearing these things in mind, take care that you do not repent of these things that you have disclosed recklessly»³⁶². Thus the reason for not disclosing ‘these things’ (i.e. the doctrines which seem most convincing to a philosopher at a particular time) is a matter of public reputation, in the case that a philosopher does disseminate doctrines that not only will seem laughable to ‘the many’ (which appears to be a given in any case), but might seem unconvincing to the philosopher himself if he changes opinion later, which is possible even for those who «are able to learn» (δυνατοὶ μαθεῖν) and who are obviously meant to be understood as part of the «well-disposed» (εὐφυεῖς). Accordingly, the best protection against this, according to Plato, is to «not write [about these things], but learn [them] by heart, because there is nothing written that will not be disclosed»³⁶³. Next, Plato makes the famous claim that this is the reason why he has «never yet written anything on these subjects (περὶ τούτων – same neuter plural), and no treatise by Plato exists or will exist»³⁶⁴. Earlier in the Second Letter, before discussing «the nature of the First»³⁶⁵, Plato writes that he has written in a form such as that «one who is not a knower [already], will not know» (ὁ ἀναγνοὺς μὴ γνῶ) in case the letter does not reach the intended destination³⁶⁶. After discussing the need to not write doctrines, Plato urges Dion to burn the letter (314c).

The approach of Pseudo-Dionysius to the same topic appears quite different, formulated as it is within a specifically Christian context. Two passages discuss the theme, in *De Divinis Nominibus* and

³⁶² ὁ δὲ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ γέγονεν, ἄκουσον. εἰσὶν γὰρ ἄνθρωποι ταῦτα ἀκηκόετες καὶ πλείους, δυνατοὶ μὲν μαθεῖν, δυνατοὶ δὲ μνημονεῦσαι καὶ βασανίσαντες πάντη πάντως κρίναι, γέροντες ἤδη καὶ οὐκ ἐλάττω τριάκοντα ἐτῶν ἀκηκόετες, οἱ νῦν ἄρτι σφίσι φασὶν τὰ μὲν τότε ἀπιστότατα δόξαντα εἶναι νῦν πιστότατα καὶ ἐναργέστατα φαίνεσθαι, ἃ δὲ τότε πιστότατα, νῦν τούναντίον. πρὸς ταῦτ’ οὖν σκοπῶν εὐλαβοῦ μή ποτέ σοι μεταμελήσῃ τῶν νῦν ἀναξίως ἐκπεσόντων (*ibid.*, 314a-b).

³⁶³ μεγίστη δὲ φυλακὴ τὸ μὴ γράφειν ἀλλ’ ἐκμανθάνειν. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν τὰ γραφέντα μὴ οὐκ ἐκπεσεῖν (*ibid.*, 314b-c).

³⁶⁴ διὰ ταῦτα οὐδὲν πάποτε’ ἐγὼ περὶ τούτων γέγραφα, οὐδ’ ἔστιν σύγγραμμα Πλάτωνος οὐδὲν οὐδ’ ἔσται, τὰ δὲ νῦν λεγόμενα Σωκράτους ἔστιν καλοῦ καὶ νέου γεγονότος (*ibid.*, 314c).

³⁶⁵ περὶ τῆς τοῦ πρώτου φύσεως (*ibid.*, 312d).

³⁶⁶ φραστέον δὴ σοι δι’ αἰνιγμῶν, ἴν’ ἂν τι ἢ δέλτος ἢ πόντου ἢ γῆς ἐν πτυχαῖς πάθῃ, ὁ ἀναγνοὺς μὴ γνῶ (*ibid.*, 312d-e)

*De Mystica Theologia*³⁶⁷. As Cusanus does not indicate which in particular he would like to point the reader to, one has to examine both³⁶⁸.

In *De Divinis Nominibus*, Pseudo-Dionysius, writing to his interlocutor Timothy, argues that ‘these things’ (αὐτά – again a neuter plural) should not be disclosed to the ‘uninitiated’ (τῶν ἀμύστων)³⁶⁹. The first argument is from tradition (κατά την θείαν παράδοσιν), according to which we must preserve these holy things (τα ἅγια) «from the laughter and jeers (γελώτων καί ἐμπαιγμῶν) of the uninitiated (τῶν ἀμύστων)», also acting to preserve them from (committing the sin of) «fighting against God on account of these (της ἐπί τούτω θεομαχίας ἀπολυτρούμενοι)». These are the only two arguments offered here: respecting the Christian tradition of hiding the divine mysteries (an evangelical strand³⁷⁰), and protecting ‘those who are bad’ from the sin of fighting against God – i.e. not giving the heretics ammunition.

In *De Mystica Theologia* (1000A-B), however, the reasons for concealment appear quite different³⁷¹. Here, Pseudo-Dionysius simply writes that one should be careful to «not reveal these things to the uninitiated» (Τούτων ... μηδεῖς τῶν ἀμυήτων ἐπακούση) since «principles of the divine mysteries are beyond [the understanding of] these» (ὑπέρ τούτους εἰσὶν αἱ θεῖαι μυσταγωγία). Very important, however, is the description of their mistakes and the way in which these errors can be overcome. Pseudo-Dionysius describes two categories of ‘uninitiated’: first, there are those who are «attached to

³⁶⁷ Both found in Codex Cusanus 42, in the translation of William of Moerbeke and Petrus Balbus respectively.

³⁶⁸ This is another subtle rhetorical device by Cusanus, who undoubtedly knew that the reader familiar with Pseudo-Dionysius’s works would think of both passages. The ambiguous reference is thus an implicit statement that Cusanus takes them to be referring to one and the same thing within the context he is building in *De Beryllo*.

³⁶⁹ PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, *De divinis nominibus*, ed. B. R. Suchla, Berlin – New York 1990, I, 1, 7, 8, 9-15 (597B-C), p. 121: ὡτα Ἱερά ταῖς τῶν Ἱερῶν θεωνυμιῶν ἀναπτύξεσι παραθώμεθα τοῖς ἀγίοις τα ἅγια κατά την θείαν παράδοσιν ἐνιδρύοντες καί τῶν ἀμύστων αὐτά γελώτων καί ἐμπαιγμῶν ἐξαιρούμενοι, μάλλον δε αὐτούς ἐκείνους, εἴπερ ὅλως εἰσὶ τοιοῖδε τινές ἀνθρώποι, της ἐπί τούτω θεομαχίας ἀπολυτρούμενοι. Σοι μεν οὖν τα Ὁτα φυλάξαι χρεῶν, ὡ καλέ Τιμόθεε, κατά την ἱερωτάτην υφήγησιν καί μήτε τά μήτε εκφορά τά θεῖα ποιειν εις τούς ἀμυήτους.

³⁷⁰ Cf. Matt. 7:6: «Nolite dare sanctum canibus: neque mittatis margaritas vestras ante porcos, ne forte conculcent eas pedibus suis, et conversi dirumpant vos».

³⁷¹ PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, *De mystica theologia*, in *Corpus Dionysiacum*, vol. II, ed. G. Heil – A. M. Ritter, Berlin – New York 1991, 1000A-B, p. 142, 12-16 – 143, 7: Τούτων δέ δρα, ὅπως μηδεῖς τῶν ἀμυήτων ἐπακούση" τούτους δέ φημι τους ἐν τοῖς οὖσιν ἐνισχημένους και ουδέν ὑπέρ τά ὄντα ὑπερουσίως εἶναι φανταζομένους, ἀλλ' οἰομένους εἰδέναι τή καθ' αὐτούς γνώσει τόν θέμενον «σκοτός ἀποκρυφῆν αὐτοῦ». Εἰ δέ ὑπέρ τούτους εἰσὶν αἱ θεῖαι μυσταγωγία, τί ἂν τις φαίη περί τῶν μάλλον ἀμύστων, ὅσοι την πάντων ὑπερκειμένην αἰτίαν και ἐκ των ἐν τοῖς οὖσιν εσχάτων χαρακτηρίζουσιν και ουδέν αὐτήν ὑπερέχειν φασι των πλαττομένων αὐτοῖς ἄθεων και πολυειδῶν μορφωμάτων; Δέον ἐπ' αὐτή και πάσας τάς των ὄντων τιθέναι και καταφάσκειν θέσεις, ὡς πάντων αιτία, και πάσας αὐτάς κυριώτερον ἀποφάσκειν, ὡς ὑπέρ πάντα ὑπερούση, και μή οἶεσθαι τάς ἀποφάσεις ἀντικειμένας εἶναι ταῖς καταφάσεσιν, ἀλλά πολύ πρότερον αὐτήν ὑπέρ τάς στερήσεις εἶναι τήν ὑπέρ πάσαν και ἀφαίρεσιν και θέσιν.

the [various] beings (έν τοις ούσιν ένισχημένους), and who believe there is no superessential Reality beyond (ουδέν ύπέρ τά όντα ύπερουσίως είναι), and who imagine that by their own understanding they know (εϊδέναι τή καθ' αυτούς γνώσει τόν θέμενον) It that has made darkness Its secret place».

Then, the other category of 'uninitiated' are «others still more uninitiated (τών μάλλον άμύστων), who describe the transcendental First Cause of all (την πάντων ύπερκειμένην αίτίαν) by characteristics drawn from the lowest order of beings, while they deny that it is in any way above (ουδέν αυτήν ύπερέχειν φασϊ) the images which they fashion after various designs». Interestingly, Pseudo-Dionysius appears to offer a way, even a 'methodology', to correct their error, which appears very amenable to a Cusanian interpretation: «they should affirm (καταφάσκειν) that, while it possesses all the positive attributes of all beings (πάσας τάς των όντων τιθέναι ... θέσεις) (being the Cause of all), yet, in a more strict sense (or 'a more powerful/important/valuable way' – κυριώτερον), [they should] deny of it all things (πάσας αύτάς ... άποφάσκειν), since it is above them all (ώς ύπέρ πάντα ύπερούση)». This crucial passage thus appears to describe a movement from 'positive' to 'negative' theology; however, this is not to be understood as two separate steps, but they are somehow to be conjoined—which Cusanus would be likely to interpret as an instance of *coincidentia oppositorum*—because Pseudo-Dionysius goes on to say immediately that one should not think that «the affirmations and the negations are contradictories» (μή οϊεσθαι τάς άποφάσεις άντικειμένας είναι ταϊς καταφάσεσιν), not because they are not to be understood as affirmed together (indeed they are, otherwise he would not add this clause) but rather «inasmuch as it much precedes all forms of deprivation (πρότερον αυτήν υπέρ τάς στερήσεις είναι), being beyond all positive and negative determinations alike (τήν ύπέρ πάσαν και άφαίρεσιν και θέσιν)». Thus, the problem of the 'uninitiated', Cusanus would argue here, must be that they do not grasp these arguments—which, as we will see, are structurally similar to the core of Cusanus' method.

These passages from Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius seem not to have much in common at first glance, but it is not hard to see how they would be interpreted as pointing to the same underlying cause of the 'prohibition', as Cusanus seems to see them. It is more difficult to bring together the arguments

in Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius which invoke, for the former, the reputation of the philosopher (and philosophy itself), and for the other the possibility of using the arguments ‘against God’. However, Cusanus does seem to implicitly claim that these can be brought together.

We will analyze what Cusanus says in the continuation of the paragraph, as he is put in the situation of having to explain to the skeptical reader why Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius have ‘prohibited’ that these ‘mystical matters’ should be disclosed to the uninitiated, and why Cusanus will not respect their ‘prohibition’. As Cusanus says, it is because ‘those human beings’ (named with a pronoun connoting greater distance, *illi*) will see (*videbuntur*, with the deponent verb in the future tense, indicating a very likely consequence of the ‘revelation’ to them of these ‘high things’) such things as the most ‘worthy of laughter’. So far, Cusanus seems to follow the argument of Plato even at the sentence level, reproducing its fundamental structure: the indirect construction with the superlative, i.e. saying *illi* will not see ‘anything more laughable than these higher things’. The common theme tying together the passages referred to in Pseudo-Dionysius and Plato and Cusanus’ reinterpretation of them appears to be that of laughter. But why, exactly, will these things seem ‘worthy of laughter’? We can indeed reach an answer on this, at least in the context of Cusanus’ construction. While Cusanus does not himself say anything explicit about this matter (i.e. what causes laughter, on an ontological level), looking at the nature and characteristics of the *visio intellectualis* and those things pertain to the intellect in general in Cusanus’ vision, we can identify the key constant element as being the coincidence of opposites—which seems to be fundamentally connected with what causes these doctrines to appear ‘laughable’ to some³⁷².

³⁷² Cusanus himself offers powerful confirmation that *coincidentia oppositorum* must indeed be the crucial element here: a few years earlier, in the *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae* (1449, written as a defense against Johannes Wenck’s scholastic-Aristotelian attack on *De Docta Ignorantia*), Cusanus gave an extended argument about this ‘need for secrecy’ that has striking similarities to what he offers here in *De Beryllo: Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*, 7, p. 5, 16 – 6, 12: «Si quis graviore prisci temporis sapientes attendit, comperit magno studio praecavisse, ne mystica ad indoctorum manus pervenirent. Sic Hermetem Trismegistum Aesculapio atque Ariopagitam Dionysium Timotheo praecepisse legimus, quod et Christum nostrum docuisse scimus; inhibuit enim margaritam, quam regnum Dei figurat, ante porcos proci, in quibus non est intellectus. Sic Paulus ea, quae ab hoc mundo raptus in tertium intellectibile caelum vidit, dicit revelari non licere. Undique unica huius causa existit; nam ubi non capitur, ibi non solum non fert fructum vitae, sed vilipenditur et mortem inducit. Maxime autem cavendum monuerunt, ne secretum communicaretur ligatis mentibus per auctoritatem inveteratae consuetudinis. Nam tanta est vis longaevae observantiae, quod citius vita multorum evellitur quam consuetudo, uti experimur in persecutione Iudaeorum, Sarracenorum et aliorum pertinacium haereticorum, qui opinionem usu temporis firmatam legem asserunt, quam vitae praeponunt. Unde, cum nunc Aristotelica secta praevaleat, quae haeresim putat esse

It should be noted particularly that the ‘coincidence of opposites’ is the only identifiable element of the method that has been mentioned so far (beyond the general non-specific references to the *visio intellectualis* and *speculum et aenigma*, which at this point do not have definite content for a reader unfamiliar with his previous works). If Cusanus is aiming to offer to the reader who is ‘uninitiated’ a way to reach the *visio intellectualis*, it must be highly important that the only identifiable feature associated with the *modus / visio / conceptus* so far has been the coincidence of opposites – which seems to be a perfectly fitting explanation for why, in the second paragraph, the ‘high things’ are seen as ridiculous by some people. Indeed, the claim of an object with contradictory properties can appear ridiculous. According to Cusanus, however, this is ultimately a problem of ‘vision’ and of imperfect vision (appearances) that must be overcome, as testified by his repeated use of the verb *videre* in all senses. Cusanus is carefully building a rhetorical structure directed at every step towards persuading the reader of the fact, in the end, ‘anything to be investigated’ is a matter of correct *visio*, and Cusanus’ book offers the ‘lens’, or ‘eyeglass’, to help with that.

If we can identify the theme of coincidence of opposites as the primary reason for the ridiculous character of *haec alta*, we can identify the common thread between the account of Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius. Following this interpretive thread (suggested by Cusanus’ construction), we would say that in both passages by Pseudo-Dionysius, we can identify the presence of a type of coincidence of opposites when it comes to naming God, close to and in the same context as the passages in which Pseudo-Dionysius formulates the ‘prohibition’. In *De Divinis Nominibus*, this is part of an introductory argument which puts emphasis in various forms on the paradoxical nature of language covering God,

oppositorum coincidentiam, in cuius admissione est initium ascensus in mysticam theologiam, in ea secta nutritis haec via penitus insipida quasi propositi contraria ab eis procul pellitur, ut sit miraculo simile – sicuti sectae mutatio – reiecto Aristotele eos altius transilire»; cf. *ibid.*, 30, p. 20, 16 – p. 21, 4. Here Cusanus (speaking as a character in the dramatic ‘dialogue’ with the first-person narrator who is one of his disciples) gives a clear answer to the question of why to keep away *mystica* from the hands of the *indocti*: namely the *unica causa* is that their ‘minds are bound by the authority of inveterate habit’ on the matter of the *coincidentia oppositorum*: they take it to be ‘heresy’ because of the current dominance of the ‘Aristotelian sect’ (*cum nunc Aristotelica secta praevaleat*); yet ‘only in admitting [the *coincidentia*] is to be found the start of the ascent to mystical theology (*ascensus in mysticam theologiam*)’; but to those bound by habit to ‘Aristotelian’ thinking, this way appears *penitus insipida*. The parallels to our passage in *De Beryllo* are clear and obvious. However, Cusanus is implying here that this ‘prohibition’ is not the end-all, but that he seems to have found a way around the problem it is meant to address.

whereas in *De Mystica Theologia*, as we have seen, (what appears to be) the coincidence of opposites is made into a methodological principle in the same paragraph. It is more difficult to find in Plato's Second Letter any reference to a kind of coincidence of opposites, but it would seem that Cusanus is seeing a sign of it in the 'story' reported by Plato that people capable of philosophical speculation (and thus not disqualified as 'the many') can completely change their views on which doctrines seem the most plausible/convincing or unconvincing. Cusanus would appear to see here a sign not that philosophers change their doctrines (in which case they still avoid contradiction) but rather a hint that, when examining the highest matters, one inevitably encounters contradictory statements, i.e. the coincidence of opposites. In this interpretation, Plato is indeed applying his own advice of concealing his true subject matter, so that he avoids mentioning the *coincidentia oppositorum* explicitly for exactly the same reason why philosophers should not write, and instead 'talk in riddles' (φραστῆον δὴ σοι διὰ αἰνιγμῶν³⁷³ – the Greek word that is the root of *aenigma*). This interpretation, in which Plato is deliberately (and successfully) hiding a doctrine of the coincidence of opposites in the Second Letter, might seem a stretch to a modern scholar used to the 'standard' interpretations of Plato's thought, but it fits perfectly with how Cusanus would have seen it, given his views on the nature of *intellectus* and *visio intellectualis*, as we will see later. It is likely that Cusanus had this type of interpretation in mind in quoting Plato here—which connects, by the guiding thread of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, Plato, Pseudo-Dionysius' theological remarks, and Cusanus' own conception. Therefore, Cusanus' message is that in the past, the coincidence of opposites has made 'these high things'/'these sacred things' difficult to accept or teach, as they seemed objects of laughter to most, resulting in the 'prohibition' by both Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius on 'disclosing' them—and yet, Cusanus himself is also implicitly claiming he has found a new solution to mitigate this.

Animalis homo enim haec divina non percipit, sed exercitatum habentibus in his intellectum nihil desiderabilius occurret. (*De Beryllo*, 2, p. 4, 4-6)

³⁷³ PLATO, *Epistula II*, 312d.

In this passage, Cusanus continues by structuring a parallelism between «*animalis homo*» and «(homo) *habens intellectum exercitatum in his*», following the structure of the Platonic passage examined with the contrast between (revealing things to) «*τοὺς πολλοὺς*» ('the many') and «*τοὺς εὐφροεῖς*» ('the well-disposed'). We see immediately that in his choice to 'adapt' the parallelism in Plato, Cusanus seems to offer, implicitly, a clarification and even a solution to the situation presented by Plato: the ones who are 'well-disposed' according to Plato are simply those who have their intellect 'exercised in these things' (again a plural, continuing the theme of *haec alta, haec mystica*, and indeed the neuter plural that we have seen both Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius use). The situation is much more 'optimistic', therefore, than in Plato's account: there is simply a need to exercise the intellect, something which appears to be a basic faculty that all people can be assumed to possess; as Cusanus presents it, the deficiency does not seem to be one of nature, or one that cannot be, in principle, solved. Evidently, it is no coincidence that Cusanus is promising to offer *praxis*. Cusanus also describes it at the same time as a deficiency in 'perception' (*non percipit*), which ties again together the *intellectus* and some type of perception, which brings us back to the *visio intellectualis*.

At the same time, beside all this, the first part of the sentence is quoting and adapting 1 Cor 2:14: «*animalis autem homo non percipit ea quae sunt Spiritus Dei stultitia est enim illi et non potest intellegere quia spiritualiter examinatur*» – a passage that someone familiar with the New Testament would recognize. This close juxtaposition between a clearly Platonic formulation and an explicitly Christian one is remarkable, and highly typical, as we will see, for the synthesis Cusanus offers in this work between what we would call 'philosophy' and 'theology'. Let us parse which elements correspond to which if we are to understand these references in the same context, as Cusanus intends: *haec divina* must correspond implicitly with *ea quae sunt Spiritus Dei* in the full Pauline quote, bringing us into the realm of Trinitarian theology. Then, if we go one verse further, in 1 Corinthians 2:15, we suddenly encounter a familiar 'judicial' image: *spiritalis <homo> iudicat autem omnia et ipse a nemine iudicatur*. There is a highly plausible connection to be made between the second element in the Pauline

parallel structure between *animalis homo* and *spiritalis homo*, who *iudicat omnia*, and the *iudex* which the reader is supposed to become according to the first paragraph of *De Beryllo*. This small ‘puzzle’ that Cusanus seems to have left behind for anyone who was willing to examine the texts he cites makes a connection (indeed, a possible identification) between the Apostle’s *examinare spiritualiter* and the type of investigation of *quaequae indaganda* that Cusanus says is possible with the *modus* that *De Beryllo* offers.

We also see that the explanation for the ‘laughable’ appearance of *haec alta* is put here in terms of the lack of perception: such a person *non percipit*³⁷⁴. This is an important specification for the model Cusanus is building up: the problem is not only the fact that the doctrines seem to be wrong or ridiculous, likely because of featuring in some way the coincidence of opposites, as we conjectured. Instead, here these ‘things’ are described as not being ‘perceived’ at all. How can we explain this apparent paradox: *haec ... non percipit*, but also *haec ... risu dignes videtur*? In light of Cusanus playing with duality and hinting constantly at ‘coincidences of opposites’, we should resist the temptation of concluding that the referent of *haec* must have changed³⁷⁵. Instead, what we have here is an account of an essential aspect of the method that Cusanus is proposing: the *visio intellectualis* as something experiential, a type of ‘perception’. Without this experience, certain doctrines seem ridiculous, but if one has this ‘perception’ (i.e. *visio intellectualis*), one is in the situation of the person with *intellectus exercitatus* in ‘these things’³⁷⁶. This experienced person, having had the (correct) perception of these ‘divine things’, does not see ‘anything more desirable (*desiderabilius*)’ – but more than what exactly? The missing words should be ‘*quam his*’ (‘than these things’)—or we could look at the first part of the parallel structure on the assumption that the missing words would correspond with the element present there, which is *percipit*. In this second reading, the missing implied words would be «*quam [haec*

³⁷⁴ It seems clear that the ‘*haec divina*’, from Cusanus’ uses of these words together in the same context with the same grammatical properties, must be the meant as the same thing as *haec alta* and *haec mystica*, which is not an unimportant result itself.

³⁷⁵ This would be a very difficult interpretive approach here, as there is no noun that is a referent for *haec* to begin with.

³⁷⁶ *his* is again a plural neuter pronoun of no clear referent. It could mean here an impersonal ‘these things/matters we are talking about here’, but it also calls up the *haec* which has been recurring in this section.

divina] percipere» – «than perceiving these [divine/high/mystical] things». As Cusanus, as we have seen, emphasizes ‘perception’ of ‘these things’ and not just the *«haec»* themselves, the second reading in fact seems more likely, completing the parallelism beautifully, fitting with Cusanus’ construction throughout and asserting the supreme desirability not only of ‘divine things’ in general, but of the ‘perception’ of them, for which *visio intellectualis* is the solution. The perception of desirability, however, is conditioned by this special kind of perception itself – those with their intellect not ‘exercised in these things’ are not aware even that these things are desirable, but they see *haec* as something ridiculous, precisely because they do not perceive their true nature. Optimistically, all that is missing seems to be a certain ‘training’ of the *intellectus*.

Therefore, we see that at the same time as Cusanus proclaims the universality of *quisque* who is able to use his method, there are very important qualifications introduced in the second paragraph concerning the conditions of possibility for becoming *iudex* and actualizing, one may say, one’s *potestas*—qualifications which do not, however, contradict the ambitious promises of the first paragraph. We also see here, as we have examined, in an implicit and structural manner³⁷⁷, the leitmotif of *coincidentia oppositorum*. Here, after two paragraphs, we have a construction some of whose details appear paradoxical: at the same time, one can solve all the theoretical issues (*omnia indaganda*), but the use of the *intellectus*, required for this, is caught in a ‘Catch-22’ type of situation, being only accessible to those who already have an intellect ‘experienced in these things’. And furthermore, man can be *homo animalis*, but after some specific type of exercise of the faculties the *homo animalis* already presumably has, the same man can perceive ‘divine things’. Cusanus’ anthropology, as we may expect from it being built according to the method he is describing, contains striking and notable paradoxes, but also a fundamental optimism, built on and arising from its interesting theoretical features.

Si igitur tibi prima facie haec insipida deliramenta videbuntur, scias te deficere. (2, p. 4, 6-7)

³⁷⁷ E.g. in the continuation of one of the referenced passages in *De Mystica Theologia*, or in the various subtle ‘dual’ constructions Cusanus employs to build his argument.

With *igitur* and the switch to the use of direct address to the reader in the second person, Cusanus signals the application of the foregoing considerations to the case of the particular reader. We should remember that Cusanus still has not explained and justified how he can ignore, or even ‘overrule’, the ‘prohibition’ by Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius against revealing *haec alta*, his apparent goal from the start of the paragraph.

What can one say about the generic reader Cusanus seems to have in mind? It seems it is possible that the reader is in the category of *animalis homo* and cannot perceive ‘divine things’, and doctrines advocating *coincidentia oppositorum* still seem ridiculous to him or her, being ignorant of the intellectual *elevationes*. We can assume this is the ‘worst case scenario’ taken into account for his purposes³⁷⁸.

The terms and qualifications that Cusanus uses here are crucial. Keeping to the theme of ‘*visio*’ with the verb (*videbuntur*), also keeping the reference to ‘these things’ (*haec*), Cusanus includes the term ‘*prima facie*’, ‘at first glance’. There is a very important addition, because it indicates to the reader that it is a situation that only occurs at the beginning, implicitly changeable through a more in-depth study of the ‘things’ in question.

The expression qualifying the *haec* is also different from before: *deliramenta* (‘absurdity’, literally ‘things produced by delirium’) with the adjective *insipida* (‘vapid’, literally ‘without flavor’). Thus, a characterization that would apply to doctrines (‘produced by delirium’) is combined with one relating to a type of perception, i.e. taste. We have again a conjunction of two things of apparently different natures: doctrines and perception, which ‘coincide’ in the act of predication; another structurally recurrent pattern. The interesting implication comes if we think that these two ‘conditions’

³⁷⁸ One must not, however, forget the rhetorical (but also in an undeniable connection with Christian and monastic ethos) dictates of modesty that, in particular, the Tegernsee monks employ constantly in their correspondence with Cusanus. A typical example, from a letter by Aindorffer to Cusanus before March 18, 1454: «Quia mea scripta, quamvis inculta, vestre r[everendissimo] p[ater] grata fuere, dignacio permaxima est; michi vero de mea ruditate confusionis rubor» (cf. VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, pp. 128-129). Thus it may be the case that Cusanus assumes that *any* Christian reader would (or should) identify themselves in this ‘lowest’ category, no matter how ‘experienced’ they are in such speculations – or even that, in a display of Christian modesty, Cusanus would be willing to place himself there as well.

might be separable: even things that seem ‘delirious’ (perhaps because they manifest the coincidence of opposites) might not be ‘insipid’ but have ‘taste’, or even lead to *visio intellectualis*, when ‘seen’ by a person with a properly exercised intellect. The worst-case scenario is the one in which the doctrines seem ‘delirious’ and at the same time a certain perception is missing.

We must also point out the parallel between the word *facies* in the expression «*prima facies*» and the very important passage from 1 Cor. 13:12³⁷⁹, the passage mentioning the «*speculum et aenigma*» to which Cusanus has already clearly referred. In the context of the *visio*, and particularly in that of the *haec divina* (implicitly identified, between parallelism with the passage from 1 Cor 2:14 just introduced, with the ‘things of the Spirit’), the ‘face’ has a significance that cannot be ignored. If Cusanus has thought about this implicit reference, this would be a progression from the «*prima facie*» all the way to the vision ‘*facias ad faciem*’, of the face of God, in the next world. But this remains a speculative and indirect connection.

What does Cusanus say to the reader who happens to be in this ‘worst-case’ situation? That they should «know that they are deficient / that they are lacking something» - with the subjunctive of command combined with a subjunctive required for the subclause, in an interesting parallelism with the passage from the first paragraph where Cusanus addresses the reader directly in the second person – «*ut iudex fias*». Cusanus does not abandon the reader who finds themselves in such a position, but aims to offer a solution to the reader’s problem. He has just characterized this problem as only an artifact of the lack of (a specific type of) intellectual exercise, so that the ‘prima facie’ situation is solvable. If the reader becomes aware ‘that something is missing’, following Cusanus’s instructions, being persuaded by the whole theoretical framework developed so far by Cusanus and his promises, they would find themselves implicitly on the right path.

Et hoc si aliquantulum maximo sciendi desiderio continuaveris meditationes et praxim ab aliquo, qui tibi aenigma declaret, acceperis, eo pervenies quod nihil huic luci antepones et intellectualem thesaurum repperisse gaudebis; et hoc paucissimis diebus experieris. (De Beryllo, 2, p. 4, 7 – p. 5, 11)

³⁷⁹ 1 Cor. 13:12: «Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate: tunc autem facie ad faciem. Nunc cognosco ex parte: tunc autem cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum». For the crucial epistemological role of this passage, see note 327 above.

This sentence continues with the ‘remedy’ proposed by Cusanus for the ‘worst case’ condition of the hypothetical reader. He is offering the steps that the ‘bad’ reader should follow, in a conditional structure (*si* + Subjunctive imperfect + future).

Cusanus’ ‘prescription’ is twofold: first, to «continue ones’ *meditationes*³⁸⁰ in this thing (*hoc*) for some more time (*aliquantulum*)», with «the greatest desire to know (*maximo sciendi desiderio*)». Here, Cusanus includes something that may be an allusion to the beginning of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, which will play an important role later in *De Beryllo*, namely the first words: *Omnes homines natura scire desiderant*³⁸¹.

Second, the reader should «accept *praxis* from another, who would explain to you an *aenigma*». The most obvious interpretation of this passage is that Cusanus is referring, by ‘another’, to himself offering the book to the reader; thus, he would be referring to himself in the third person by an indefinite pronoun. We can see a clear and highly interesting parallel with an important passage in the 1453 Sermon CXXVI (*Tu es Petrus*), which we previously examined above (Chapter 3.1.d). There, Cusanus constructed the image of Christ as a small stone, «transparent and clear», possessing all the powers of all particular stones³⁸², and which, as its power would not be known (*non foret cognita*), it would be «deemed as nothing» (*pro nihil haberetur*) and «would be spurned as a stumbling stone»³⁸³ (cf. 1 Pet. 2), unless «if someone were to believe (*quis crederet*) some great and most learned teacher (*alicui magno et doctissimo magistro*), who showed the stone (*ostenderet calculum*) and announced its power (*annuntiaret virtutem eius*), [the one who believed him], after he (*ille*) believed, would see that [the

³⁸⁰ *meditatio* is a rare term in Cusanus, used only 36 times in the whole corpus, with over half of these uses found in the sermons. In its use in his speculative works, it is applied both to intellectual exercise in specifically religious contexts, and as meaning ‘intellectual examination’ of a philosophical problem. Senger/Bormann, in their note ad locum, offer references to HUGH OF ST. VICTOR, *De modo dicendi et meditandi*, 8, PL 176, 879A: «Meditatio est assidua ac sagax retractatio cogitationis, aliquid obscurum explicare nitens, vel scrutans penetrare occultum», and RICHARD OF ST. VICTOR, *Beniamin maior*, I, 4, PL 196, 67D: «meditatio vero est studiosa mentis intentio circa aliquid investigandum diligenter insistens, vel sic: Meditatio est providens animi obtutus in veritatis inquisitione vehementer occupatus», which support the contention that the term means simply ‘strenuous intellectual effort’.

³⁸¹ ARISTOTLE, *Aristoteles Latine*, p. 481 (980a22).

³⁸² Sermon CXXVI, 11, p. 26, 1-4: «Considera igitur, si foret calculus parvus candidus seu lucidus, qui haberet in se complicitate omnem omnium lapidum pretiosorum virtutem».

³⁸³ Sermon CXXVI, 11, p. 26, 4-6: «quamdiu virtus eius non foret cognita, pro nihilo haberetur et quasi «petra scandali» sperneretur».

stone] is indeed such (*reperiret ita esse*), and would place it above all the stones (*super omnes lapides*), in Zion»³⁸⁴. The parallel fits to a high degree, which leads to an interesting interpretation, as in the sermon Cusanus constructs the image in explicitly Christological terms. The *aenigma* (which is likely meant to be the *beryllus*, the main *aenigma* of the book) matches, fittingly, with the Christological *lapis*, while the *magister magnus* and *doctissimus* would have to be Cusanus himself³⁸⁵. While he would certainly not describe himself directly in such terms, it would be an apt description of him according to the argument he outlines.

We will now analyze the second part of the conditional structure, describing the result the reader can expect. From the recurring structure of the second paragraph, we can expect that Cusanus will provide two elements, one that broadly stands for the ‘philosophical’ and one for the ‘theological’ aspect—and indeed the pattern is found as expected. First, the clause itself is composed of two parts, and the first, «*eo pervenies quod*», has the role of introducing the second. Let us analyze this structure chosen by Cusanus. The result is described as if it were a ‘place’, i.e. ‘you will reach this point’; therefore, a ‘movement’ of some sort will need to happen for the reader. This suggests that the *meditationes* and *praxis* have as their purpose this ‘movement’ by the reader to the point at which the two ‘results’ will be achieved. Implicitly we have a description of a ‘place’ where one must ‘arrive’, in a way that conditions the results and which must be connected to the overall *visio* paradigm. This is confirmed by the first of the two ‘results’, which not only uses the image of light, *lux*, but at the same time places it in a context of a ‘geometric’ image of vision: ‘you will not put anything in front of this light’—in a literal sense suggesting that the ‘light’ might be blocked by other things in front of it, and that the reader must ‘move to’ a particular point of vantage.

³⁸⁴ Sermon CXXVI, 11, p. 26, 6-11: «Sed si quis crederet alicui magno et doctissimo magistro, qui ostenderet calculum et annuntiaret virtutem eius, ille postquam crederet, reperiret ita esse. Talis poneret lapidem illum super omnes lapides in Sion». Cf. Rm. 9:33, I Pt. 2:6.

³⁸⁵ Or it could be Pseudo-Dionysius, who was just described as *magnus* and is certainly among the *doctissimi*. One could reasonably interpret it as ‘whichever teacher’ who would show the reader an *aenigma* (which does not necessarily have to be the *beryllus*).

In this subtle and complex image, there are a number of fertile ambiguities in the words chosen by Cusanus—particularly in the meaning of the verb *antepones*. The verb means, in its primary and etymological sense, ‘to put (something) before (something else)’ (*ante* + *ponere*). At the same time, it has a secondary meaning of ‘valuing something more than something else’—which seems to be the primary meaning in play here³⁸⁶. Both meanings work perfectly in the context: neither will the reader ‘put something in front of this light’ (blocking his vision), nor will he ‘value anything more than this light’—another piece of evidence for the complexity and subtlety of his approach to the construction of the text.

What is ‘this light’ though? *hic lux* is a new and surprising term, given the pervasive use of the neuter plural *haec* in the paragraph. Of course, light as knowledge is an important image for the Neoplatonic tradition, which Cusanus uses extensively³⁸⁷, and we expect it to serve as the counterpart to *visio intellectualis*. Rhetorically, the sudden appearance of ‘this light’ in the paragraph, never introduced but treated grammatically as if it had already been introduced (*huic*), evokes a surprising, unpredictable manifestation—not a mere static object for *visio*. This hints at a fundamental aspect of the epistemological-theological construction which will later become clearer: namely, that such a *visio* is only made possible by the active participation of its object, God.

intellectualem thesaurum reperisse gaudebis (De Beryllo, 2, p. 5, 10)

Let us examine the Biblical sources this expression calls on. Two passages appear to be particularly salient³⁸⁸: one of them is Matt. 13:44, a highly recognizable occurrence of ‘*gaudium*’ in

³⁸⁶ Other meanings include ‘to put something in front of someone’ (e.g. as an object of attention).

³⁸⁷ See e.g. Katrin Platzer’s excellent and thorough account of Cusanus’ light symbolism and light metaphysics, involving both the theoretical and the optical tradition: PLATZER, *Symbolica venatio*, pp. 127-194.

³⁸⁸ There are other recurring themes in the New Testament involving *thesaurus*: *thesaurus in caelis* and *thesaurus in vasis fictilibus*, which, however, do not seem particularly relevant here.

conjunction with ‘*thesaurus*’, and another, Col. 2:3, for the association of *thesaurus* and knowledge (Col. 2:3)³⁸⁹.

Matt 13:44: *Simile est regnum caelorum thesauro abscondito in agro: quem qui invenit homo, abscondit, et prae gaudio illius vadit, et vendit universa quae habet, et emit agrum illum.*

Cusanus clearly wants us to think of this parable, where Christ assimilates the *regnum caelorum*³⁹⁰ to a «treasure hidden in a field». This treasure, hidden and buried, is discovered by someone who then hides again, and «for joy» sells everything he has (*universa quae habet*) and buys that field. The situation described has highly interesting characteristics. For example, the one who find the treasure hides it again (as presumably it could not be taken away from the field) and takes advantage of the fact that he knows that the field is much more valuable than it seems, containing the hidden treasure. Seeing an opportunity, one might say, for a great deal, and assessing the relative value of his possessions and the risk involved (thus not forgetting to ‘hide’ the treasure again), he sells all his possessions and buys the field, thus gaining a lot more for his investment. This parable has an interesting aspect in the fact that the basic assumption is that the treasure is finite and exclusive, and only one person can have it and enjoy it; the landowner is unaware, and thus the main character must convince the landowner to sell the land at a lower price than its real value, taking advantage of the landowner’s ignorance of the treasure to get the land and the treasure for himself. This is obviously not the type of ‘treasure’ that the parable is ultimately trying to point to. For instance, if the treasure were not a finite, exhaustible, exclusive resource (take, for instance, a life-giving spring), the ending of the parable would be very different: the finder would not have to hide it, but could give everyone the ‘good news’ about the treasure and where it was.

This parable is particularly interesting because the problem of ‘hiding the treasure’ is clearly similar to the problem of ‘hiding’ the *haec alta/mystica* in Cusanus’ second paragraph. What can this

³⁸⁹ Corrieras also notes this connection, cf. CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl, Tome 2*, p. 14.

³⁹⁰ The ‘kingdom of heaven’, a fundamental theme describing Christian salvation, is an expression Cusanus uses often but almost exclusively in the sermons.

choice by Cusanus to refer to this parable mean, in the context of an implicit parallel, as we have seen, with Plato's Second Letter?

One aspect is clear: Cusanus implicitly has found the *thesaurus*³⁹¹ himself (otherwise he would not be instructing the reader about it), and has chosen not to hide it but reveal it to others. He is willing to give directions for the reader to «get there», *eo pervenire*, even if the reader at the beginning is skeptical about the possibility of finding such a treasure and unable to do so himself. It is clear that this 'treasure' must be not an exhaustible resource but something that can be shared without diminishing.

Let us analyze the second Biblical passage which Cusanus' 'solution' seems to point to, i.e. certain verses of Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, where we find together a number of key terms that Cusanus has just invoked: *intellectus*, *thesaurus*, *mysterium* and related terms: *absconditum*, *divitia*.

Col. 2:2 *ut consolentur corda ipsorum, instructi in caritate, et in omnes divitias plenitudinis intellectus, in agnitionem mysterii Dei Patris et Christi Jesu*

Col. 2:3 *in quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae absconditi.*

In these gospel passages we find *thesaurus* used in the plural, qualified with a genitive: 'of wisdom' and 'of knowledge', and described as hidden either *in* Christ himself, or *in* the *mysterium* of God the Father and Christ. The image of 'hidden treasures' suggests a deliberate parallel with Matt. 13:44, where the 'thesaurus' was the *regnum caelorum*³⁹². But the most interesting part for the reader of paragraph 2 of *De Beryllo* must be the fact that we find here the word *intellectus* used in an interesting way: Paul writes that he would want the Colossians to be «instructed in all the riches of the fullness of *intellectus*», which is paralleled (as if it was one of two similar things, or indeed it meant the same

³⁹¹ The word *thesaurus* is used quite often by Cusanus (198 occurrences in the corpus), mostly in direct reference to the New Testament passages. In *De Beryllo* it occurs only twice, here and in 53, p. 61, 17-18, where it fits well with our interpretation here: «sicut plus gaudet, qui reperit thesaurum vitae suae innumerabilem et inexhaustibilem quam numerabilem et consumptibilem» - thus, Cusanus does seem to have in mind an interpretation based on the notion of an infinite treasure. There is also an interesting occurrence of *thesaurum* in *De Visione Dei* which clearly refers to the Matthew parable as well, here connecting the (knowledge of one's) ignorance of God's magnitude as *pascentia desiderabilissima* for the *intellectus*, and this *ignorantia* is in fact the 'treasure' which he possesses 'in his field': *De visione Dei*, 67, p. 56, 12-15: «Hinc haec sacratissima ignorantia magnitudinis tuae est pascentia intellectus mei desiderabilissima, maxime quando talem reperio thesaurum in meo agro, ita quod thesaurus sit meus».

³⁹² This thematic connection might be interpreted as a reference to the Incarnation, where *agrum* and *thesaurus* would refer to the two natures of Christ, or in a more general way, the spirit and the body, or human being, also cf. 2 Cor. 4:7: «Habemus autem Thesaurum istum in vasis fictilibus». However, this is a highly speculative reading without additional evidence to back it up. We only note that it would be consonant with Cusanus' emerging Christology in *De Beryllo* and with the 'dual nature' of the *beryllus* stone in the tradition as we have examined it, etc.

thing) with the *agnitio mysterii* of God the Father and Christ³⁹³. In the context of how Cusanus uses *intellectus* as a special term, interpreting this passage with this meaning fits perfectly within Cusanus' argument, and thus appears to back up Cusanus' view, as well as assert a fundamental connection, if not identity, of the 'richness of the intellect' with the 'knowledge of the mysteries' of the persons of the Trinity. By this textual connection, Cusanus implicitly casts himself, like Paul, in an evangelizing role—something that, again, Cusanus does not admit to in explicit terms, but which is there for the reader to find when one parses the hints he leaves in his subtle referenes to his sources.

In the next verse, Paul writes that *omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae* are 'hidden' (*absconditi*) in this – *in quo* – which is an ambiguous reference that can be interpreted to mean either 'in Christ' (the most likely, as it is the last noun that would fit), or 'in the mysteries', or indeed 'in the *intellectus*', in a conscious parallel by Paul to the parable of the 'treasure hidden in a field' that we have analyzed. We will note that all three readings would work for Cusanus' purpose (as the *intellectus* is the means, the *mysterii* is its field, and Christ is the ultimate object), while *in mysterii* would in fact fit best with his focus on the method employing *aenigmata*.

In these two Biblical passages about *thesaurus* that a reader would look at in connection with this passage, we notice that the *thesaurus* is an important and recurring image (certainly used purposefully by Paul), describing something 'hidden' and with great importance for salvation: *regnum caelorum* in Mt. 13:44, connected with the *mysterii* of God/Christ in Col. 2:2. For the theological framework of *De Beryllo*, it is crucial that Cusanus appends to it the adjective *intellectualis*, implicitly relying on Col. 2:2 to back him up in asserting the centrality of *intellectus* and *visio intellectualis* in a theological context. It is important to underline that, although Cusanus' method seems to be intended to work for both theological and philosophical questions, without distinction, he is much more 'open' about touting its universal benefits in a general/philosophical sense (*quaequae indaganda*), and refuses to outright say that it would be beneficial e.g. to a Christian for salvation. The implications are clearly

³⁹³ It is beyond the scope of this argument to deal with the question of how Paul should be interpreted here, especially as this (e.g. the meaning of *intellectus* as a faculty) differs across traditions. We can point out, however, that this interpretation would fit well within Cusanus' construction.

there though, left for the reader to read between the lines of how he casually hints at crucial soteriologically-themed Biblical passages in the context of his method, and will be further analyzed in Chapter 5.

The verb Cusanus uses to refer to the ‘intellectual treasure’ in our paragraph is *reperire*, another word with a visual connotation, implicitly hinting again to the theme of vision, and at a speculative identification of the suddenly-introduced *lux* with the ‘*thesaurus intellectualis*’ (as, after all, they are two parts of describing the same condition of the successful reader). This verb shows that at stake is not a ‘possession’ of the treasure, but instead its discovery—one will ‘find the field’ where it is buried, in terms of the Matthew passage. Putting together the two parts of the description of the reader’s success, we can conclude that this *lux/thesaurus* will be appreciated as the most important/valuable thing by the reader who is now (one could say) one of the ‘initiated’. This is a crucial updating of Cusanus’ ‘promise’ in the first paragraph. The method does not only offer a way to solve ‘anything to be investigated’, but rather more than that: it literally can offer access to something the reader would consider the most important (*nihil antepones*), and the *visio intellectualis*, as hinted by the reference to the Biblical Colossians passage, could in fact serve for salvation in an explicitly Christian context. We are thus not only being introduced to a method for solving philosophical questions, but to something more: *De Beryllo* might even be described as a ‘Gospel according to Cusanus’. As we will examine further in Chapter 5, there is good reason to think that the ultimate object of the treatise, the *beryllus*, is fundamentally a Christological image, and there is solid textual evidence (for instance, the reference to Sermon CXXVI) that this was clearly Cusanus’ intention. However, it is also clear that he avoids entering into any of these matters explicitly, and leaves the reader to draw their own conclusions through allusion rather than make any strong claim directly in this regard. Cusanus is, one might say, perhaps too successful in this—as not one single in-depth scholarly reading of *De Beryllo* published so far acknowledges this Christological dimension, as we have seen in Chapter 1. One of the goals of this work is to emphasize this ‘missing aspect’ of *De Beryllo*, which becomes very easy to see when analyzing the text closely, together with its subtle use of sources.

Now that Cusanus has formulated his proposal in more detail, we will go back to the issue which opens the paragraph: why does Cusanus think these ‘high things’ should now be disclosed after all (and that Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius, in his interpretation of them, are ultimately wrong to ‘prohibit’ this)? What is the new way (i.e. *conceptum*) he has found to make possible the reader’s ‘initiation’?

et hoc paucissimis diebus experieris. (De Beryllo, 2, p. 5, 10-11)

The small final clause, a tiny coda to the large and elaborately-structured sentence, adds an even more striking claim: that the method and *praxis* that will be given in this book, if continued following the conditions already examined, will make it possible (even for the reader who was already described as in the worst-case condition of *homo animalis*) to find the *intellectualis thesaurus* in ‘very few days’ (*paucissimes dies*). This claim must again be assumed to be striking and surprising for Cusanus’ likely reader, on the same pattern as the objection regarding the book being too small (however, Cusanus chooses to not answer any objection on this matter but proceed straight to the method itself). Not only is there no comparable proposal in the tradition, but Cusanus has just referenced Plato’s Second Letter, where, in the same paragraph to which Cusanus has just made reference, Plato appears to paint a very different picture: there doesn’t seem to be any obvious way of bridging the gap between the ‘uneducated’ and the ‘well-disposed’, and in fact Plato suggests that even for those who happen to be ‘capable to learn’ (δυνατοὶ ... μαθεῖν), many years of study in examining doctrines might be expected, particularly in order to change their opinions (οὐκ ἐλάττω τριάκοντα ἐτῶν ἀκηκοότες)³⁹⁴. Cusanus’ proposal, however, asserts that with the *praxis* offered, with *meditationes* and *maximum sciendi desiderium*, even someone who is *homo animalis* but knows that he or she is ‘deficient’ will manage to reach the level of ‘initiated’ (to paraphrase Pseudo-Dionysius, also referenced by Cusanus) in ‘very few days’—indeed, literally, in ‘the fewest number of days’.

³⁹⁴ PLATO, *Epistula II*, 314a.

At the same time, this effect is carefully qualified: one will ‘find’ this *thesaurus intellectualis*, which may mean only being aware of its existence – unlike, perhaps, what comes after, i.e. obtaining it, or ‘buying the field’ in the Matthew parable, which might indeed take years of ‘*praxis*’ after all. It is not made clear whether Cusanus promises that everyone can become ‘*iudex*’ of the opinions of the *doctissimi*, or access the ‘*visio intellectualis*’ to the fullest, in these ‘very few days’: everything promised in this second paragraph is formulated with reference to ‘*haec*’, ‘these things’, the relationship of which to the *modus / aenigma / iudex* of the first paragraph is not entirely clear. This promise by Cusanus may not be as extravagant as it seems in the beginning. At the same time, it remains striking that Cusanus proposes that one can change their status from (in Plato’s Second Letter account) being among ‘the many’ to being among those who are *δυνατοὶ ... μαθεῖν*.

Moreover, it is possible to think about the terminological differences between the first and second paragraph (*modus / aenigma / visio* vs. *haec*) as being perhaps due to being written at different times – perhaps the second being added towards the end of the writing of the book, when Cusanus, aware of the wide terminological variety he has ended up using, refers to multiple things (*haec* - ‘these things’) given the diversity of the included material. At the same time, this interpretation, while possible, does not invalidate the ‘theoretical’ one, according to which this was a choice by Cusanus for theoretical and rhetorical purposes for the benefit of the attentive reader.

Nunc ad rem descendens primum exponam, cur imposui libello nomen Beryllus et quid intendam. (De Beryllo, 2, p. 11-12)

Here Cusanus signals that the introduction is over, and he will not answer any more reader’s objections (for instance, any objection referring to the striking promise he just made regarding ‘very few days’). We should examine why he believes that he has already responded sufficiently to the reader regarding the implicit objection with which he started the paragraph: why did Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius formulate a ‘ban’ to revealing *haec mystica*, and why does Cusanus consider it justified to propose another alternative? In the end, he seems to end the argument by promising something even

more ambitious: that a reader, even starting from the position of *homo animalis*, can have access to the *haec mystica / lux / thesaurus* in only ‘very few days’. It seems Cusanus’ ultimate argument against the skeptical objections of the reader is that the reader can simply try to follow what Cusanus is offering, and that the proof of the method cannot be given otherwise than in the application of the method itself.

The expression *ad rem descendens* is itself interesting, invoking again the notion of ‘height’ to classify objects or levels of intellectual activity (cf. *haec alta*). It may seem counterintuitive that Cusanus sees the beginning of his argument as a ‘descent’ and not the beginning of an ascent from the initial level; however, in context the ‘movement’ makes sense. The last elements just mentioned were the *lux* and *thesaurus intellectualis*, the situation of the ‘successful reader’ – thus, proceeding to the level of discussing the physical *beryllus* in the next paragraph is indeed a ‘descent’, only to be followed by an ascent further on.

In a more speculative way, we can also remark on the ambiguity of the word *primum*, which could be an adverb meaning ‘before / in the first place / firstly’ (the interpretation which seems to have been chosen by all translators), but also, possibly, an adjective, ‘first’ (part of, for instance, *primum principium*), which in this context would be in the accusative case, object of the verb ‘*exponam*’ - so the translation would be ‘show the First’ (*sc.* principle) - something that Cusanus will indeed proceed to discuss some lines later (in 4, p. 6, 1, also using *primum* as an adverb in the same structure).

We must also note that in this passage, Cusanus says that he has named the book *beryllus*, and not *De Beryllo*, which confirms the ambiguity of the title (cf. our analysis in Chapter 3.1) and should be kept in mind for the following passages, suggesting possible structural similarities between *De Beryllo* itself and its central image.

One particular word choice will recur later in an important sense: the verb *intendere*, ‘to intend, to mean’ with the very particular sense of ‘what the author of a book has in mind’, an image that will reoccur later in two distinct senses: in the question of the *quidditas* of all things as *intentio conditoris* in paragraph 54 (cf. our analysis in Chapter 4.1.4), and in the Christological construction of *ostensio* of the divine *intellectus* in paragraphs 69-70 (cf. our analysis in Chapters 5.4.1-5.4.2). As we will see, this

will occasion interesting reflections on the status of *De Beryllo* in the anthropological, gnoseological and soteriological framework that Cusanus is building.

Finally, as a final remark on the nature of Cusanus' two-paragraph 'Introduction', we can conjecture that Cusanus is aiming to suggest that the constructions and images he has built up and used within these two paragraphs—*visio intellectualis, speculum et aenigma, modus, haec alta/mystica, lux, thesaurus intellectualis*—are also themselves to be understood as elements of the *praxis* he is offering, and that, if the reader puts the effort into understand the framework being built up, he/she will have already made use of the *intellectus* and therefore progressed, in the sense of *elevationes*, towards the *visio intellectualis* to which the method must lead. In this way, the *praxim ab aliquo, qui tibi aenigma declaret* refers to the *aenigmata* Cusanus has already introduced, and «to accept it» means (up to this point) simply to understand these initial arguments. This highly plausible interpretation, in light of what we find out later about the method itself, points again to how carefully structured and complex *De Beryllo* truly is.

3.3 The 'Methodological' section (paragraphs 3-8)

3.3.1 Paragraph 3 – Introduction of the *beryllus* (p. 5, 1 – p. 6, 7)

Beryllus lapis est lucidus, albus et transparens. Cui datur forma concava pariter et convexa, et per ipsum videns attingit prius invisibile. Intellectualibus oculis si intellectualis beryllus, qui formam habeat maximam pariter et minimam, adaptatur, per eius medium attingitur indivisibile omnium principium. (De Beryllo, 3, p. 5, 1 – p. 6, 5).

Cusanus starts with the description of the physical beryl: a stone that is bright, clear and transparent, which is fashioned as a magnifying lens, with a form that is both concave and convex³⁹⁵ (but not at the same time in the same respect—thus we do not have here an instance of *coincidentia*

³⁹⁵ See Chapter 3.1.b for the full investigation of the sources behind this. The closest sources to which Cusanus had access seem to have been ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Mineralium libri V*, II.II, vol. 5, cap. 2, p. 32: «Beryllus autem est lapis coloris pallidi, lucidi, transparentis», and Marbode of Rennes' *De lapidibus*, in MARBODE OF RENNES, *De lapidibus*, ed. J.-M. Riddle, p. 123: «Beryllus lapis magnum et lucidus est». Cf. Senger and Bormann's commentary in *De Beryllo*, p. 89. Glas and Schwaetzer believe Cusanus' source was Albert: GLAS - SCHWAETZER, *Beryll, Diamant, Karfunkel. Edelsteine im Werk des Nicolaus Cusanus*, p. 83. Cf. also Sermon CXXVI, 11, p. 26, 1-2: «calculus parvus candidus seu lucidus» (there a Christological image).

For some short remarks on this image and an illustration of the shape (similar to modern convex-concave lenses), see R. F. GLEI, *Konkav und konvex: Die Spielkugel in Nikolaus' von Kues De ludo globi*, in «Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft» 29 (2005), pp. 261-286, esp. pp. 263-264.

oppositorum, but rather a situation similar to that of an angle that is considered as acute or obtuse by reference to a line), and «looking through it» (*per ipsum videns*) one manages to reach (*attingit*) something that was previously invisible (*prius invisible*). Cusanus, at the same time, constructs a parallel structure, transferring the properties of the physical beryl to the intellectual realm—and this is the first application of the method itself, which does not receive a ‘formal’ definition but is defined by a form of *praxis*: one needs to use it, in other words, in order to understand Cusanus’ definition of it. The adjective *intellectualis*, as in the introductory paragraphs above, marks the ontological level to which we are supposed to move: an *intellectualis beryllus* must be fitted to (*adaptatur*) the intellectual eyes (*intellectualibus oculis*³⁹⁶ – plural and impersonal, as there is no mention in this paragraph of the grammatical agent; thus, one might interpret it as generally referring to ‘anyone’s eyes’), and, by means of using it as a *medium*, one can see, in some way implicitly similar to using the physical beryl, something that must have been invisible to the *oculus intellectualis: indivisibile omnium principium*³⁹⁷. Note the parallelism between *prius invisible*, for the physical object seen through the physical beryl, and ‘*principium omnium .. indivisible*’. This parallel structure is meant to represent the manner of operation of Cusanus’ method: in essence, one compares a regular, finite image to a specially modified, ‘infinitezied’ version of it³⁹⁸, and uses the resulting relationships to characterize, for instance, the relationship between the *principium* and any finite object in a way which was not available before: this might be precisely what it means to ‘reach’ the *principium*, which is the object of the method itself. Cusanus is attempting a structure in which, in effect, analyzing the argument about what the method is leads the reader (even if unaware) to actually make use of it.

³⁹⁶ Cf. the note Cusanus makes in his copy of Albert’s commentary to Pseudo-Dionysius’ *De Mystica Theologia*, Cod. Cusanus 96, fol. 231va: «mens est oculus anime: a meciendo dicitur», and the note in his copy of Proclus’ *Theologia Platonis* in Codex Cusanus 185, fol. 39r: *oculi anime* (cf. CT III.2.1, p. 66, marginalia 101). This notion originates ultimately in Plato (PLATO, *Republica*, VII, 532d2; *Sophistes*, 254a10). It recurs repeatedly in *De Beryllo*, 3, p. 5, 3; 8, p. 10, 5, 11, p. 13, 4-5; 53, p. 60, 12.

³⁹⁷ Cf. PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem*, III (Cousin 785, Steel p. 135, 44) and Nicholas’s note to the passage in Cod. Cusanus 186, fol. 37v (CT III.2.2, marginalia 186): «ex se subsistens impartibile, et ratio huius».

³⁹⁸ This is Katrin Platzer’s useful term, cf. PLATZER, *Symbolica venatio*, p. 52. ‘Infiniteziation’ is nothing else than the creation of an object (for a criterion X) that is both a maximum and a minimum according to X (and thus has ‘infinite X’), corresponding to ‘step 2’ of the three-step method; see the further explanation and sources in Chapter 2.3.

Accordingly, here we move from seeing some physical object which was ‘previously invisible’ to the ‘principle of all things’. The ‘invisible-indivisible’ parallelism shows itself as very interesting, because with this play on words Cusanus suggests to the reader to consider the fundamental problem: what is the relationship between the invisibility of a finite thing, visible only by means of another finite object, a lens, and the indivisibility of the *principium*? Evidently, in the first case it must be something too small to be perceived by (a particular person’s) physical eye: the lens enlarges it and makes it appear to our eyes as bigger, thus adapted to the limits of our visual abilities. But what does the *beryllus intellectualis* do with the *indivisible principium*? It must somehow, in a similar way, show it in a way more fitting for the abilities of our *intellectualis oculus*, which is implicitly weak and imperfect (cf. *infirmitas intellectus* in paragraph 1) just like a physical eye. But how does this take place? The physical object is too small, so the physical lens enlarges it; but the *principium* cannot have a particular finite ‘size’, so the *beryllus intellectualis* will not in fact change it—or rather, following the method’s prescription for ‘infinetizing’ the finite initial image, it will ‘magnify’ the *principium* both maximally and minimally, while the *principium* is already itself maximal and minimal with respect to any criterion we choose (we can ‘obtain’ it by infinetizing the regular physical object in the finite image). Therefore, this *beryllus intellectualis* does nothing more than show the *principium* as it is: as the both-maximum-and-minimum version of the physical object that was described as *prius invisibile* with respect to size. Thus we can express the relationships by means of the B-notation (see Chapter 2.3) as follows:

B[*res prius invisibile, *magnitudo] -> omnium principium

This structure applies in a parallel way to the *beryllus* compared to the *intellectualis beryllus*:

B[beryllus, *magnitudo] -> beryllus intellectualis

The *beryllus intellectualis*, here a name for the ‘infinetizing’ method, is itself an infinetized version of the physical *beryllus*, which is why one will be able to use it as a *medium* in order to more clearly see the first B-structure, which connects finite objects to the *principium*. Clearly, applying the *beryllus intellectualis* does not require employing always the same criterion, i.e. size: it can apply in a

similar way, as Cusanus will show, to any finite property, given the fact that all coincide, in their maximum and minimum degree, in the *principium*.

In this paragraph, Cusanus has taken the reader only up to ‘step 2’ of the method, i.e. the application of finite properties to the infinite object, without passing to ‘step 3’, which would connect two B-structures (and would develop for example, ways of talking about the *principium* from the ways in which we speak about the finite beryl in relation to the *beryllus intellectualis*). Taking up again the question of the relationship between *invisibilis* and *indivisibilis*, we can conclude that Cusanus implicitly intends to communicate that it is precisely ‘divisibility’ which describes in the most fundamental way the difference between *principium* and the (finite) things of which it is the principle and cause³⁹⁹.

Quomodo autem hoc fiat, propono quanto clarius possum enodare praemissis quibusdam ad hoc opportunis. (De Beryllo 3, p. 6, 5-7).

In this final sentence, Cusanus shows that he knows very well that the reader will need further explanation of the implicit argument we have sketched to understand *quomodo hoc fiat*; furthermore, he has only hinted, but not explicitly said, that the construction he gave could be applied to develop ‘names for God’ (e.g. from finite objects considered according to *divisibilitas*, one could construct a B-structure to ‘see’ their *indivisible principium*). The reader might be somewhat confused at this point, so he reiterates his plan to make clear *quomodo* in the most clear way that he can (*quanto clarius possum enodare*). For this specific purpose, he adds ‘some premises’ or indeed ‘preliminary considerations’, which are ‘suitable’ or ‘favorable’ at this particular point. This passage serves as an introduction to the famous ‘four premises’ in the next four paragraphs, to which Flasch gives a structural-systematic role in his explanation of Cusanian thought⁴⁰⁰, calling them «Axiome» and «Hauptsätze» and structuring his account on the thought of Cusanus in a way that takes them as ‘fundamental principles’ of his

³⁹⁹ We must note here, however, that the method itself does not ‘privilege’ any such particular criterion, but can be applied indifferently to any criterion chosen by its user. Cusanus, however, assumes an underlying (and independent of the method as such) Proclean metaphysics of *simplicitas*, which determines his choices of terms and criteria to make use of the method—see the analysis in Chapter 4.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. FLASCH, *Geschichte einer Entwicklung*, pp. 449-456.

thought⁴⁰¹, In this he is also followed by Corrieras⁴⁰². On the other hand, it is important to note the aspects that suggest a less (arguably somewhat anachronistically) ‘systematic’ approach by Cusanus to these four ‘premises’: not as what we would call ‘fundamental philosophical principles’ for his method, but instead as paradigmatic examples and fundamental ways of applying the method itself⁴⁰³, which, in its fundamental form, does not seem to depend on any particular ‘fundamental axioms’ as we would expect in a modern sense. Thus, the words *quibusdam* and *ad hoc opportunis* do not suggest a set of general axioms, systematically developed in order to deduce, based on them, a full account of the method. Instead, we have some preliminary considerations, useful *ad hoc*—which might be interpreted as meaning the argument he outlined in this paragraph, i.e. the applications of the *beryllus* to the *indivisibilis principium omnium* and *beryllus intellectualis*, offering a still-unclear parallel between *prius invisibile* and *principium indivisibile*. Indeed, Cusanus will have as one of his goals to make the reader understand precisely the connection between these aspects and how this is a paradigmatic application of the ‘infinetizing’ method of the *beryllus*.

3.3.2 Paragraph 4 – ‘Premise 1’ (p. 6, 1 – p. 7, 9)

Oportet te primum attendere unum esse primum principium, et id nominatur secundum Anaxagoram intellectus, a quo omnia in esse prodeunt, ut se ipsum manifestet. (De Beryllo 4, p. 6, 1-3).

In paragraph 4, the first paragraph of the ‘four premises’ section, Cusanus begins his work of explaining the topic already introduced in the previous paragraph, which links and compares, in a yet-unclear way for the ‘uninitiated’ reader, the ordinary vision of objects which are too small and thus require the help of a beryl stone, and the *visio intellectualis*, which has to do with the *omnium principium*—for which it is helped by the *beryllus intellectualis*, the object of the book. As one would

⁴⁰¹ FLASCH, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, pp. 32-88: the first part of his book is structured around these four ‘principles’.

⁴⁰² CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl*, pp. 35-47: her chapter is entitled «Quatre premisses indispensables a la connaissance».

⁴⁰³ A similar interpretation has been proposed by MOFFITT-WATTS, *Nicholas of Cusa - A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man*, pp. 186-187. Enrico Peroli has a rather similar take: NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Opere filosofiche, teologiche e matematiche*, p. 2706: «La funzione di queste premesse ... e quella di spiegare in che modo si debba applicare il berillo della coincidenza all’intelletto».

expect, Cusanus turns first of all to the *intellectus* and to clarifying the unclear connection between *intellectus* and *principium*.

The way in which Cusanus explains this connection is highly interesting. The first sentence is composed of two parts, connected by *et*. In the first part, Cusanus says directly to the reader that ‘it would be useful’ to ‘you’ at this point⁴⁰⁴ that you should first of all⁴⁰⁵ pay attention to the fact that⁴⁰⁶ the *primum principium* is one (or, in another possible reading, that ‘there is a one which is the first principle’ - a consonant reading). This is a typical Neoplatonic principle, that Cusanus read and annotated earlier in the same period in Proclus’ works⁴⁰⁷, yet there is no mention at this point of Plato, Proclus or any other ‘authoritative’ source, nor any demonstration or argumentation of the unicity of the first principle⁴⁰⁸. According to Cusanus, the reader must ‘keep this in mind’ - but what if the reader is skeptical about this point, or is not entirely convinced? The theme of multiplicity, correlated with *indivisibilitas* which was assigned to the *principium* in paragraph 3, is not dealt with at this point, but is in fact treated later, in paragraph 8, when the argument in paragraph 3 is taken up again and resolved. The skeptical reader will have to wait and follow the whole of Cusanus’ explanation of the ‘premises’, on the topic of paragraph 3, with the implicit promise that the theme of multiplicity/divisibility of the first principle would become clear at a later stage. The method itself, in its application, is aimed at connecting a single object to a multiplicity of objects on a different ontological level; therefore, a logical demonstration of the existence of a first principle is (implicitly) not required in this *praxis* focused

⁴⁰⁴ Again, there is little to suggest in Cusanus’ actual textual formulations that he is introducing anything like fundamental axioms (as opposed to informative considerations, illustrative examples or useful applications).

⁴⁰⁵ *primum* with an ambiguous meaning, continuing a play on words begun in paragraph 2 above: *De Beryllo*, 2, p. 5, 11.

⁴⁰⁶ *Attendere*, a verb that suggests that the reader should pay attention to a fact already known, uncontroversial, that does not require its own proof.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. Codex Cusanus 186, fol 19v (i.e. Proclus’ *Theologia Platonis*): «Itaque quod unum quidem principium omnium et causa prima»; cf. PROCLUS, *Theologia Platonis (Procli Successoris Platonici in Platonis Theologiam Libri Sex)*, ed. E. Portus, Hamburg 1618 (reed. Frankfurt am Main 1960), II, 4, p. 90; cf. PROCLUS, *Théologie platonicienne*, ed. H. D. Saffrey, tr. by L. G. Westerink, 6 voll., Paris 1968-1997, II, 31.2. For simplicity, hereafter both editions of the *Theologia Platonis* will be cited together, where appropriate, as follows: PROCLUS, *Theologia Platonis*, [for the Portus edition] ed. Portus, book (Roman numerals), chapter (Arab numerals), page (Arab numerals) [and/or] [for the Saffrey-Westerink edition] S-W volume (Roman numerals), page.line (arab numerals).

See also PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem*, II (Cousin 726, Steel p. 88), where Cusanus writes: «non posse esse multa principia» (CT III.2.2, p. 20, marginalia 47).

⁴⁰⁸ Which one finds, for instance, in a work Cusanus worked on in the same period as the writing of *De Beryllo*, *De Principio*, 6, p. 5, 1 – p. 6, 13, which begins with an attempt at a demonstration of the existence and oneness of the *principium*. Cf. *De Docta Ignorantia*, I, 2, 5, p. 7, 1 – 6, p. 7, 25.

approach, where Cusanus is first and foremost interested in getting the reader to use the *beryllus*, whose implicit characteristics always make it possible to examine a single first principle of all things⁴⁰⁹. Cusanus' approach (aimed, as he said, at presenting the *conceptus* as clear as possible) shows clear signs of a 'practical turn', i.e. literally a turn towards *praxis*, which in Cusanus' approach seems to be, first and foremost, using the method itself, and getting the reader accustomed to the ultimate notion of employing it for the purpose of evaluating *sententias et opiniones*. To direct the reader in this 'practical' direction, Cusanus offers, as he promised, a *praxis* that is also present in his direct instructions here: 'attendere', 'pay attention' to *primum principium* being *unum*.

The second part of the sentence contains an explicit reference to a source, but a rather surprising one if one was expecting an appeal to authority: Anaxagoras, according to whom the *primum principium* was named *intellectus*⁴¹⁰. It is interesting, however, to examine Cusanus' sources for this doctrine: one seems to be Plato's *Phaedo*⁴¹¹, but another⁴¹² is in fact Aristotle's *Metaphysics*⁴¹³ in the new translation by Bessarion that Cusanus had been studying during the writing of *De Beryllo*. This is the second implicit reference to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, a book which clearly had a great influence on him during this period, an influence not limited to the extended criticism he makes of it in later passages but also visible, in subtle ways, in these introductory paragraphs. At the same time, however, Cusanus'

⁴⁰⁹ Corrieras, trying to avoid the anachronism of reducing metaphysics to 'method' that Flasch also warns against, remarks on the necessity of 'belief' here (CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl*, p. 31). I can only agree in a qualified way: of course, as Corrieras argues, Cusanus addresses «how we obtain knowledge» assuming that «knowledge is possible», but there is little in these paragraphs that must be taken on faith; the method seems to be based on a common structure that is being applied, and other metaphysical premises are, in the end, parallel to it; see the analysis in Chapter 4.2-3 for these premises.

⁴¹⁰ For Anaxagoras' doctrine, see *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. H. Diels - W. Kranz, 3 voll., Berlin 1951-1952, fr. 12-14.

⁴¹¹ Cf. PLATO, *Phaedon*, 97b. Cf. the note in Cusanus' copy of his translation of Plato's *Phaedo* (at paragraph 97b), in Cod. Cusanus 177, fol. 19r: «anaxagoras. mentem omnium causam».

⁴¹² Another possible source, or likely influence, is Meister Eckhart, as Klaus Reinhardt suggests in his article REINHARDT, *Der Intellekt als Prinzip des Seins in De Beryllo und Sermo CLXXXVII Spiritus autem Paraclitus*, p. 5. See e.g. MEISTER ECKHART, *Quaestio Parisiensis I (Utrum in deo sit idem esse et intelligere)*, in ID., *Lateinische Werke*, V, 27-83. Another place where Eckhart's influence seems to be visible is in Sermon CXXXVI regarding the notion of *nomen est notitia*: see note 296 above.

⁴¹³ See the note in his copy of Bessarion's translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (at 984b, 15-18), in Cod. Cusanus 184, fol. 4r: «anaxagoras. et laudat anaxagoram qui dixit in naturam intellectum esse» (the Aristotelian passage is found at ARISTOTLE, *Aristoteles Latine*, p. 483).

assertion of *intellectus* as the ontological *principium*, and the comprehensive uses he makes of this name according to the *beryllus*, are strikingly innovative⁴¹⁴.

The two relative clauses after the reference to Anaxagoras, on the other hand, present a doctrine that clearly cannot be attributed to Anaxagoras: an ontological/cosmological clause, *a quo omnia in esse prodeunt*, and a teleological clause: *ut se ipsum manifestet*. These are typical Cusanian formulations⁴¹⁵, and Cusanus has a good reason for including them here: they connect *intellectus* and *principium*, and are in fact another example of *praxis*, as they are easy to derive from the application of the method to the finite and infinite *intellectus* – which is what Cusanus seems to do immediately afterwards. Let us examine his argument, constituting the second application of his method:

Intellectus enim lucem suae intelligentiae delectatur ostendere et communicare. Conditor igitur intellectus, quia se finem facit suorum operum, ut scilicet gloria sua manifestetur, creat cognoscitivas substantias, quae veritatem ipsius videre possint, et illis se praebet ipse conditor modo quo capere possunt visibilem. (De Beryllo, 4, p. 6, 2 – p. 7, 9).

We start with the (regular, finite) intellect: according to Cusanus, it delights in showing and communicating (thus, to other intellects) the ‘light’⁴¹⁶ of its ‘intelligence’. Let us therefore examine the scenario for a finite intellect: it is a simple observation to the effect that (at least sometimes) a finite intellect finds pleasure in showing and communicating, to other finite intellects, the ‘light’ of its intelligence (understood in the most general way, as some kind of creation or unmistakable sign of the intellect that produced it). In preparing to apply the method, we take note of all the elements of the

⁴¹⁴ Klaus Reinhardt, in particular, calls this Cusanian doctrine «astounding» («eine erstaunliche Aussage», cf. REINHARDT, *Der Intellekt als Prinzip des Seins in De Beryllo und Sermo CLXXXVII Spiritus autem Paraclitus*, p. 5).

⁴¹⁵ Cf. *De Beryllo*, 54, p. 62, 15-16; 64, p. 75, 16-17. For the theme of the divine intellect creating the world for the purpose of manifesting itself and creating other intellects in order to know it, see *De conjecturis*, I, 1, 5, p. 8, 10-13; *De dato patris luminum*, II, 103, p. 77, 1-6. A theme that is particularly prominent and recurring in Cusanus’ sermons; see K. REINHARDT, *L’intellect come principe de tout*, in *Intellect, sujet, image chez Eckhart et Nicolas de Cues*, ed. M. A. Vannier, Paris 2014, pp. 164-168. Cf. also the structurally similar and very interesting explicitly Christological formulation in Sermon XXII (an early work, written around 1440), in *Sermones XVI/4*, 32, p. 351, 2-10: «Deus creavit omnia propter se ipsum, et non maxime et perfectissima, nisi universa ad ipsum, sed nec ipsa ad ipsum uniri potuerunt, cum finiti ad infinitum nulla sit proportio. Sunt igitur omnia in fine, in Deo, per Christum. Nam nisi Deus assumpsisset humanam naturam, cum illa sit in se ut medium alias complicans, totum universum nec perfectum, immo nec esset».

There does not seem to be any clear antecedent for Cusanus’ formulations in other sources; from the passage in *De conjecturis*, it appears that Cusanus developed this theme on the basis of Prov. 16:4: «Universa propter semetipsum operatus est deus».

⁴¹⁶ Cf. *De Beryllo*, 21, p. 25, 5; *De Dato Patris Luminum*, 4, 108, p. 79, 1 – p. 80, 11; Sermon CIL («Hic est verus propheta», 1454) in *Sermones XVIII/2*, 9, p. 140, 1 – p. 141, 35. For the image of intelligible light, see PROCLUS, *In Theologiam Platoniam*, ed. Portus, V, 12, p. 268 (cf. Cod. Cusanus 185, fol. 172v-173r), and ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super de Divinis Nominibus*, 4, 61ff., cf. Cod. Cusanus 96, fol. 129va, where Cusanus adds the note: «De lumine».

finite situation: a finite intellect, at least one other finite intellect, the ‘light’, i.e. something that indicates the presence/activity of the first intellect, and the pleasure (*delectatio*) which the first intellect gets by showing the other finite intellect its manifestations, or creations, i.e. the ‘light’. The finite intellect is thus considered as creative and relational.

At the ‘second stage’ of the method; one needs to ‘infinite’ (some elements of) the situation of the finite intellect just examined—and this is precisely what Cusanus appears to be doing in the following sentence. In the next sentence—introduced by *igitur*—we no longer have a situation featuring the finite intellect or the finite domain, but rather an ‘infinite’ setup, exactly as expected.

To see how this is done, we will analyze Cusanus’ complex grammatical construction, full of subclauses, one subclause at a time, not in the order of the text but in the most ‘logical’ order: *creat...que...et illis...quia...ut scilicet*.

a) [*Conditor igitur intellectus*] *creat cognoscitivas substantias, quae veritatem ipsius videre possint* (*De Beryllo*, 4, p. 7, 1-2)

The ‘infinite’ intellect is named from the beginning as *intellectus conditor*⁴¹⁷ (implicit parallel: just as the finite *intellectus* is creator of the things it communicates, i.e. its ‘light’, an infinite *intellectus* will be the creator of all things). It creates ‘knowing substances’, parallel to the ‘light’ of the finite intellectus. But why do they need to be *cognoscitivas*? Let us analyze the finite situation: a finite intellect shows its ‘creation’ to another finite intellect. In the ‘infinite’ picture, instead, there is only the *intellectus conditor*; after all, the *principium* is one, and it is not clear how two distinct infinite intellects could possibly exist. We see here an evident possibility of constructing a Christological and Trinitarian argument in order to solve this issue, but Cusanus evidently chooses not to pursue such an argument here (he will do so later – see the analysis of the argument in Chapter 3.4.4). At this point, he is pursuing

⁴¹⁷ Cf. *nous demiourgikos*: PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem* III (Cousin 807, Steel p. 151), VI (Cousin 1096, Steel p. 381), with marginal notes by Cusanus, cf. *CT* III.2.2 p. 49, marginalia 166; p. 118, marginalia 474: «conditor deus»; PROCLUS, *Theologia Platonis*, ed. Portus, V, 17, p. 281, 19, p. 288; VI, 3, p. 346, with Cusanus’ marginal notes, cf. *CT* III.2.1, marginalia 358, 366, 372, 386-388, all mentioning *conditor/deus conditor*. Cf. also *De Principio*, 21, p. 29, 7 – p. 30, 17 for a similar construction.

the clarification of the relationship between finite intellects and the *principium*, and the way in which this relation explains the fundamental framework of the possibility of using the *beryllus intellectualis* that he outlined in paragraph 3. As a result, Cusanus chooses to place other intellects, which are (part of) the *intellectus conditor*'s creation, in the role that other finite intellects played in the scenario of the finite intellect. These created intellects, indeed, are part of the 'light' created by the *intellectus conditor*, but their main role in the parallel construction is that of 'recipients' for said light.

According to their role, the following relative clause (*quae...*) is certainly to be expected, but the terminological choice communicates even more: these 'cognitive substances' can 'see' the *veritas* of the *intellectus conditor*. Let us compare this construction to the finite intellects in the initial, finite image: they certainly must be able to appreciate the *lux intelligentiae* of a finite intellect when such an intellect shows it. In the 'infinite image', the «knowing substances» (which, implicitly, must have some resemblance to the *intellectus conditor*, that is, they need to be intellects themselves in order for the image parallelism to be preserved), they can (*possint* – and here Cusanus introduces, with the subjunctive, the element of uncertainty, i.e. the possibility that they may fail to do so; indeed, this possibility makes the *beryllus* possible and necessary) see (and here we connect to the *lux* as a metaphor used in the 'finite' construction, involving here an implicit *visio intellectualis*) the *veritas* of the creator intellect, in a structural parallel with the *lux intelligentiae suae* in the finite image, which gives us an implicit identification of 'veritas + Genitive' with a type of *lux*⁴¹⁸. We observe that the substances are *cognoscitivae*, so they are defined as having the ability to know, but their role is formulated in terms of *videre*, correlated with the *lux* of the finite image: here Cusanus has given us another striking illustration of the *visio intellectualis*, and introduced a place for the *beryllus* (the uncertainty implied in *possint*).

b) *et illis se praebet ipse conditor modo quo capere possunt visibilem* (*De Beryllo*, 4, p. 7, 7-8)

At first sight, it may seem that this sub-clause adds nothing new, because it is all implicit already in the parallelism between the 'finite' and 'infinite' images already examined. But instead, Cusanus

⁴¹⁸ On this theme, cf. notes 387, 416 above.

adds very important specifications: first of all, this creator (*ipse conditor*⁴¹⁹) «appears [as] visible» to them. This construction makes use of the adjective *visibilis* and predicates it of *ipse conditor*, connected to the accusative pronoun *se*. It is a crucially important passage with a strong hint of (possibly) the Incarnation: Cusanus avoids further specifications, and he does not say, for example, ‘in a visible way’, but simply says, literally, «the creator offers [himself] visible»⁴²⁰. We can also remark that the voluntary act of the finite intellect, in the finite image, offering its ‘light’ to others seems to be parallel to the active act of the *intellectus conditor* of presenting itself ‘visible’, according to the specification «in the way in which they can grasp [it]». It seems to be a necessary condition for the creator intellect to be ‘visible’ in order for the created intellects to be able to grasp it. There are interesting features of Cusanus’ grammatical construction: *visibilem* could also be read as the direct object of *capere*, which would mean ‘in the way in which they can grasp something visible’, a reading that is less plausible but available for the reader who is troubled by an association between *intellectus* and *visibilis*. The question of how precisely the creator intellect ‘offers’ itself, what it would mean for it to be ‘visible’, and what is the role of a *beryllus intellectualis* is in the end left unresolved here.

c) *quia se finem facit suorum operum* (*De Beryllo*, 4, p. 6, 5)

This clause, despite appearing before the others, is actually, in the logical order of the construction, an explanation of the image presented in the ‘main part’ that we have already examined. It clearly serves to introduce a teleological justification and explanation, which establishes the importance of the *visio* of the *veritas* of the *conditor*, or of the *capere* of the same: this *conditor* makes himself the final purpose of the creator’s ‘works’ (which obviously includes the *substantias cognoscitivas*)⁴²¹ and introduces at the same time a very important problematic: if the *conditor* is the ‘goal’, *finis*, does this imply that he is to be known *modo quo possint* by the cognitive substances? And

⁴¹⁹ An interesting choice of words: no longer named *intellectus* but rather identified with a pronoun. This is likely in order to maintain a (literal) separation at the clause level between *intellectus* and *visibilis*, two words that Cusanus seems to be specifically avoiding using next to each other here, even though they are grammatically connected.

⁴²⁰ Cf. also *deus visibilis* as a name for the visible world, a view later quoted as being that of David of Dinant in *De Non Aliud*, 17, 81, p. 42, 27.

⁴²¹ Cf. PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem* VI (Cousin 1115, Steel p. 396), which interestingly references the image of the ‘First’ in Plato’s Second Letter, cf. PLATO, *Epistula II*, 312e1-3.

what does it mean that the *conditor* is said to perform a positive action (*se fecit*) in this regard⁴²²? It is clear that there is some very important (but yet unspecified) relationship between the *finis* of a human being and the *visio intellectualis* of the *conditor*, which hints, as in the second paragraph, at the extraordinary importance of the *beryllus*.

d) *ut scilicet gloria sua manifestetur* (*De Beryllo*, 4, p. 6, 5 – p. 7, 6)

Here we encounter again the ‘dual’ structure already used repeatedly by Cusanus in the second paragraph: after a ‘philosophical’ clause (with implicit reference to a page in Proclus), we find one identified as on the same level of importance (with the help of the *scilicet*), explicitly using biblical language: in this case, recognizable as a recurring theme in the Old Testament, particularly in Isaiah⁴²³.

Hoc scire est primum, in quo complicate omnia dicenda continentur. (*De Beryllo*, 4, p. 7, 8-9)

To understand this final sentence of the ‘first premise’ (paragraph 4), we must consider what has actually been presented. We have come across a complex image concerning the finite intellects and the *conditor* (implicitly identified with the *principium*), now named and *intellectus*, through another paradigmatic application of (the first two steps of) the *beryllus* method, making a transition from a finite image (finite intellects which communicate their *lux* to each other) to an infinite one (where the communicating finite intellect becomes the *intellectus conditor*, correlated with the *principium omnium*, and the ‘receiving’ intellects are his creations). Cusanus has taken great care to explain the connection between *intellectus* and *principium* and clarify the framework of the *visio intellectualis*: its role, its importance and its ultimate object, i.e. the *principium/conditor* itself, which ‘makes itself’ the *finis* of all finite things⁴²⁴.

⁴²² This suggests a Christological meaning is being hinted at, as the *conditor* seems to take an extra active step (as otherwise, presumably, he would have been the *finis* by the very act of having created the finite intellects, without a need to ‘make himself’ that). Cf. the analysis of the Christological/Incarnational meaning of *ostensio* in Chapter 5.

⁴²³ Cf. Is. 35:2: «germinans germinabit et exultabit laetabunda et laudans gloria Libani data est ei decor Carmeli et Saron ipsi videbunt gloriam Domini et decorem Dei nostri»; Is. 40:5: «et revelabitur gloria Domini et videbit omnis caro pariter quod os Domini locutum est»; Is. 60:2: «quia ecce tenebrae operient terram et caligo populos super te autem orietur Dominus et gloria eius in te videbitur»; 1 Macc. 15.9: «cum autem obtinuerimus regnum nostrum glorificabimus te et gentem tuam et templum gloria magna ita ut manifestetur gloria vestra in universa terra.»

⁴²⁴ Yet, at this point, such a *finis* remains unattainable due to the ontological, unbridgeable difference between the infinite *intellectus conditor* and finite created intellects. Only with the introduction of the novel Christological construction in paragraphs 69-70 will the *finis* be made attainable and the image made complete. See the analysis in Chapter 5.

All this has been achieved by means of a finite-infinite construction typical of Cusanus' method, notably without directly invoking any traditional authority or even introducing premises that need to be accepted without justification. The starting point was the image of a finite intellect that communicates with other finite intellects; the rest can be constructed by 'infinetizing' various aspects of the image introduced, and thus 'justifying', in the end, the various Proclean and biblical notions introduced throughout within the framework of an application of the method itself. A skeptical reader might ask whether such a method, which leaves so much liberty for its user to construct arguments based on an (ultimately arbitrarily chosen) finite starting image, would not make it possible to construct arguments, particularly about the *principium/conditor*, that are problematic, or even heretical. This structural problem remains in the background of the text, and we will examine later (Chapter 4.4) the extra ontological presuppositions that Cusanus holds to, independent of the method itself, which 'censor' any unacceptable results.

In this way, we can understand more precisely Cusanus' statement that 'everything that will be said is contained in this implicitly' (*complicite*⁴²⁵). First of all, we must point out a possible reading that interpreters and translators usually ignore: the recurring wordplay using the word *primum*⁴²⁶, which can be an adverb but also a reference to the recurring *primum principium*, which makes a truly impressive reading of this passage possible: «This [the Creator] is what is necessary to know, in which all that is to be said/must be said is contained implicitly (*complicite*)» – a fully acceptable reading in Cusanus'

⁴²⁵ The terms *complicatio* and *explicatio* (approximately, 'enfolding' and 'unfolding') are important for Cusanus, providing another way to describe the basic relationship of *similitudo* between image and original which is at the core of the *beryllus* method: the original 'enfolds' (*complicat - complicatio*) the image, i.e. contains it in a superior ontological sense, and gives it being by 'unfolding' it (*explicat - explicatio*) from itself. Cusanus holds that this can be applied to God for a thoroughly orthodox account of creation, since the two ontological levels are strongly maintained, even as these relationships hold true, so that these are not to be understood in any way implying pantheism. For a more general account of how these terms function in Cusanus, see e.g. T. LEINKAUF, *Cusanus, Ficino, Patrizi – Formen platonischen Denkens in der Renaissance*, Berlin 2014, pp. 25-59; K. ALFSVAG, *Explicatio and Complicatio: On the Understanding of the Relationship between God and the World in the Work of Nicholas Cusanus*, in «International Journal of Systematic Theology» 14/3 (2012), pp. 295-309. They are a point of influence from the tradition of Thierry of Chartres; for an account of this tradition and its reception by Cusanus, see ALBERTSON, *Mathematical Theologies*, pp. 119-139, 185-186. Cf. THIERRY OF CHARTRES, *Lectiones in Boethii librum de Trinitate*, in THIERRY OF CHARTRES, *Commentaries on Boethius by Thierry of Chartres and His School*, ed. by N. M. Häring, Toronto 1971, II, 4-5, p. 155ff. For similarities in Cusanus' main sources, cf. PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, *De divinis nominibus*, ed. Suchla, V, 7, p. 185, 12-15; PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem* VI (Cousin 1069, 1074, 1087, Steel p. 362, 5; 365, 12ff; 374, 79ff).

⁴²⁶ *De Beryllo*, 2, p. 5, 11; 4, p. 6, 1.

terms, which would put emphasis on the need to know the *principium*, in which all ‘that is to be said’ is contained.

But even with the more commonly-employed reading, which interprets *hoc* as referring to ‘what was just said’, the interpretation remains similar, because all the applications of the method are implicitly linked to the status of its user (a *substantia cognoscitiva*) in relation to the *principium*, or *conditor*. The framework offered is of universal application, but not because of the application of any ‘first principles’ *more geometrico*, but instead due to the application of a method which has as its implicit precondition the epistemological and ontological situation of the user.

Particularly visible in this paragraph is the great difference between a more ‘systematic’ approach (as found, for example, in the *De Principio*, on which Cusanus is working, at least partially, during the same period) and a *praxis*-focused approach, which has as its intention to familiarize the reader with the method by applying it repeatedly to derive new explanations and justifications for principles that are already likely accepted by the reader from tradition (whether ‘philosophical’ or ‘theological’). Thus, this paragraph can be seen simply as a collection of ‘premises’ generally accepted in the tradition, which Cusanus puts together in an impressive construction, showcasing the possibilities, and the general character, of his promised method.

To understand the role of the next paragraph (paragraph 5) in the series of *praemissae ad hoc oportuna*, we must always keep in mind the current stage of the overall argument, particularly from the point of view of the reader not yet familiar with Cusanus’s thought, for which (as he already indicated in the introductory paragraph) Cusanus maintains a particular concern. The most significant problem still remaining from the ‘first premise’ argument above is that of the relationship between the ‘finite image’ (finite intellects communicating) and the ‘infinite image’, particularly concerning the *intellectus*: what is the relationship between the *intellectus conditor* and a finite intellect, particularly in relation to knowledge (and to how knowledge of the *conditor* would be possible)? We recall that Cusanus used the term *substantia cognitiva* and refrained from referring to finite *intellectus* or *intelligentiae* in the same image as the *conditor*, at the same time that, in the discussion of the finite

intellect in the ‘finite image’, the other intellect who must be the ‘receiver’ was only mentioned in an implicit way (*ostendere* and *communicare*—but to whom exactly?). This choice seems to be related to the progression of Cusanus’ argument, from an ‘epistemological-teleological’ side (paragraph 4) to an initial explanation of the ontological structure revealed by the method itself and which underlies these yet unexplained relationships (e.g. *conditor – intellectus*). An explanation of this topic would have probably complicated the complex sentence construction in paragraph 4 even more.

3.3.3 Paragraph 5 – ‘Premise 2’ (p. 7, 1 – p. 8, 13)

In paragraph 5, Cusanus has to explain, first of all, why he has only used *substantia cognoscitiva* so far and has not explicitly characterized the creations of the *intellectus conditor* as themselves intellects (which a reader would fully expect that he, in the end, will do, because of all the outstanding parallelisms he has constructed so far). Cusanus will thus have to explain also how different modes of knowledge operate (e.g. *visibilis*), and to reveal in closer detail the ontological-hierarchical structures that can be obtained through the application of the *beryllus* (which he has been using so far only up to ‘step 2’ of the full method, not yet attempting any of the comparative ‘divine-name-producing’ structures like he will build later on).

Paragraph 5 is clearly divided, in logical order, into two fundamentally distinct parts: the part regarding *similitudo / verosimilis*, and the part regarding ‘cognitive modes’. The conclusions of these two parts are finally put together only in paragraph 6, and serve as intermediate results to complete the ontological-epistemological image introduced schematically in paragraph 4, in order to eventually reach a fully detailed image of all the main problems, ontological, epistemological and teleological, of the argument developed in a schematic way in paragraph 3 and which justifies the role of the *beryllus intellectualis*. We will approach these parts in their order.

Secundo scias, quomodo id, quod non est verum neque verisimile, non est. Omne autem quod est aliter est in alio quam in se. Est enim in se ut in suo vero esse, in alio autem ut in suo esse verisimili, ut calidum in se est ut in suo vero esse et in calefacto est per similitudinem suae caliditatis. (De Beryllo, 5, p. 7, 1-5).

The first part of the paragraph begins, therefore, with an instruction directed at the reader, *scias*: ‘know, be aware of the fact that’. Examining the argument, we find that this also does not seem to be merely a statement of a fundamental principle or ‘axiom’, but rather the result of an application of the method to the image of heat (*calidus*), with what is essentially ‘step 3’ of the method (which transfers the relationship constructed between ‘finite’ and ‘infinetized’ elements in the image to another, usually more general image) presented before the other steps (a form of rhetorical inversion that Cusanus uses very often); *ut [calidum]* marks the connection between the two images (which we have proposed to represent as ‘B-structures’ below) that full the application of the method consists in:

B[calecta, *gradus] -> calidus

-calidus est in calefacto per similitudinem suae caliditatis

-calidus est in se ut in suo vero esse

UT

B[alia, *gradus] -> omne

-omne est in alio ut in suo esse verisimili

-omne est in se ut in suo vero esse

-omne est aliter in alio quam in se

This rigorously represents the structure of the argument, in a form that is highly standard for Cusanus in *De Beryllo* (while, arguably, similar ones underlie his development of ‘divine names’ generally). In his *praxis*-based approach, Cusanus is showing how principles such as these are in fact derivable from the application of the method, and here he introduces various ways of talking about the objects examined which will become very useful when transferred to other similar structures later. These are: *in se* / *in alio* and *similis* / *similitudo* (*verisimilis* being a particular type of *similis*). First, Cusanus makes a connection between truth and similitude: something either is *verum*, or is *verisimile* (therefore, similar to the *verum*)⁴²⁷; he clarifies that all things have their own *in suo vero esse*, or «as

⁴²⁷ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica*, 993b30-31: «διὸ τὰς τῶν ἀεὶ ὄντων ἀρχὰς ἀναγκαῖον ἀεὶ εἶναι ἀληθεστάτας (οὐ γὰρ ποτε ἀληθεῖς, οὐδὲ ἐκεῖναις αἰτιόν τί ἐστι τοῦ εἶναι, ἀλλὰ ἐκεῖναι τοῖς ἄλλοις), Ὡσθ ἕκαστον ὡς ἔχει τοῦ εἶναι, οὕτω καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας». In Bessarion’s translation used by Cusanus, this is rendered as: «propter quod principia semper existentium necesse est verissima esse. nec enim aliquando vera, nec illis ut sint aliquid aliud causa est, sed illa ceteris. quare ut secundum esse unumquodque se habet, ita etiam secundum veritatem» (ARISTOTLE, *Aristoteles Latine*, p. 487). A passage closely examined by Cusanus, who writes in the margin of his copy in Cod. Cusanus 184, fol. 11r: «ut secundum esse quodque se habet, sic etiam secundum veritatem». On this fundamental connection between truth and being, cf. also *De Venatione Sapientiae*, 36, 106, p. 100, 5-10.

they are in themselves/their true being»⁴²⁸, contrasted with *in alio esse, aliter, ut in suo esse verisimili*. Thus, any object that exists is (1) more or less similar with the *verum* itself (sc. *absolutum*), and (2) exists both ‘in itself’ and *in alio*, that is, in its various similarities in other objects similar to it in any way, in the same way in which it is similar in some way with the *verum* itself, and in the same way in which this *verum* itself, therefore, exists *in alio* in another way (*aliter*), all other objects being, therefore, its various similarities.

Let us follow the application of the method to the image provided at the end, seeing how Cusanus believes he can prove this ‘fundamental principle’ by moving from *calidum - calefactum* to *verum - verosimile*⁴²⁹. Following the argument in its logical order, we have as a starting point the *calidum* and the *calefacta*, warm things or ‘made to be warm’⁴³⁰. An (ontological) difference is pointed out between warm things and heat itself; the latter is something different, present (one can say) in warm things in various ways, but ‘in itself’ different from them. However, because of this difference, one can argue that *calidum* is at the same time both the maximum and the minimum warmth (as one can say it is, itself, ‘outside the spectrum’ of cold-warm as such). Thus, we have identified a type of relationship between *calidus* and *calefacta*, where the former can be said to be an ‘infinetized’ form of the latter, and we can transfer the relationships we can identify between them to the pair *verum* (i.e. *absolutum*) - *verisimiles*. If, in the plausible example of warmth and warm objects, we can speak of warmth as existing in itself *in suo vero esse* and in warm things *per similitudinem suae caliditatis*, it means that, due to the parallel B-structures, we can transfer these modes of speaking to the *verum*, and we obtain a number of new possible formulations, i.e. ways of speaking of the *verum* in relation to the

⁴²⁸ This construction recurs in Cusanus; cf. *De Conjecturis*, I, 11, 54, p. 55, 6-7; *De Filiatione Dei*, 1, 54, p. 42, 21-22; *De Dato Patris Luminum*, 2, 99, p. 74, 9-14; *De principio*, 28, p. 40, 4-5.

⁴²⁹ Interestingly, the connection between heat and truth is made by Aristotle in an example offered immediately before the passage examined just above (see note 427): ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica*, 993b24-27: «ἐκαστον δὲ μάλιστα αὐτὸ τῶν ἄλλων καθ’ ὃ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὑπάρχει τὸ συνώνυμον (οἷον τὸ πῦρ θερμότητος: καὶ γὰρ τοῖς ἄλλοις τὸ αἴτιον τοῦτο τῆς θερμότητος) : ὥστε καὶ ἀληθέστατον τὸ τοῖς ὑστέροις αἴτιον τοῦ ἀληθέσιν εἶναι», which is translated by Bessarion as: «unumquodque vero id ipsum maxime aliorum est, secundum quod aliis univocatio inest, ut puta ignis calidissimum: etenim ceteris hic est caliditatis causa. quare verissimum etiam est id quod posterioribus, ut vera sint, causa est» (ARISTOTLE, *Aristoteles Latine*, p. 487). It seems that this paragraph in *De Beryllo* is heavily influenced by Aristotle; however, Cusanus avoids, in particular, Aristotle’s arguments in support of this thesis, presenting its result within the context of the application of his own method.

⁴³⁰ This is a recurring image in *De Beryllo* in particular: *De Beryllo* 27, p. 30, 10- p. 31, 12; 41, p. 47, 4; 46, p. 53, 7-13. Cf. *De Venatione Sapientiae*, 8, 19, p. 20, 10-13.

corresponding objects it is being put in relation to: here, for example (applying the relationship transfer principle between the structures), to its *similitudines*, that is to things *verisimiles*. For instance, we are perfectly justified, applying the method, in saying: **verus est in verisimile per similitudinem suae veritatis*, an assertion perfectly consonant with the Cusanian argument and derivable directly from its structure, but not explicitly made by Cusanus.

We must make some remarks at this point on the subject of the ‘implicit statements’ in the Cusanian arguments based on the *beryllus* method. Usually, Cusanus avoids making explicit all the specific steps and all the possible terms derivable from an application of the method, particularly when the applicability of these is evident from the context, or their explanation would be too repetitive. All the ‘implicit statements’ that are distinctly identifiable in *De Beryllo* will always be marked with an asterisk (*) to denote them as such (cf. the description of the notation in Chapter 2.3).

Sunt autem tres modi cognoscitivi, scilicet sensibilis, intellectualis et intelligentialis, qui dicuntur caeli secundum Augustinum. Sensibile in sensu est per suam sensibilem speciem sive similitudinem, et sensus in sensibili per suam sensitivam speciem. Sic intelligibile in intellectu per suam intelligibilem similitudinem, et intellectus in intelligibili per suam intellectivam similitudinem. Ita intelligentiale in intelligentia et e converso. Illi termini te non turbent, quia aliquando intelligentiale nominatur /intellectibile. Ego autem nomino sic propter intelligentias. (De Beryllo, 5, p. 7, 5 – p. 8, 13)

In the second part of the paragraph, Cusanus develops the ‘ontological’ distinction already presented, which establishes an implicitly hierarchical order, between *verus* and *verisimile* and generally between being ‘in itself’ and ‘in another’ in an epistemological context, explaining in greater detail what *substantia cognoscitiva* in the previous paragraph means, and ordering all the objects according to their relationship with the faculties of knowledge. This double hierarchy, both ontological (all things are images of the infinite God) and epistemological (all things, considered in the way they are known, are, in a different way, images of the faculties of knowledge, which faculties are themselves, ultimately, images of God and are in a hierarchical relation between them), represents in fact two different applications of the same method we have been examining that have been joined together, an ontological structure characteristic of Cusanus’ thought in *De Beryllo*. Furthermore, Cusanus implicitly

refers to the already established pattern, implicitly linking the *modi cognoscitivi* with the *substantiae cognitivae* of the previous paragraph, which is further evidence that he is pursuing one unitary argument overall.

The reference to Augustine is peculiar, as it seems to introduce a term, *caeli*, which Cusanus never uses again. We can note that, in each of the ‘four premises’ (paragraphs 4-7), Cusanus cites explicitly exactly one other thinker. In this paragraph, he invokes Augustine, certainly someone one could invoke as an authority (unlike Anaximander in the previous paragraph)—but he does so only to mention a terminological choice, not particularly relevant to the argument: the fact that Augustine gives the names of *caeli* to the three cognitive modes⁴³¹. But this apparently ‘trivial’ reference does a lot of work for Cusanus in establishing the philosophical-theological legitimacy of his project. First of all, that reference claims, by itself, that his distinction into three cognitive modes is one accepted in the tradition, and furthermore, for the reader who is familiar with Augustine’s *De Genesi*, that they are linked to an explicitly theological aspect: the ‘heavens’ of Genesis. With this reference, therefore, Cusanus strongly links his construction to the Augustinian tradition. At the same time, he could have gotten the notion (also) from Proclus⁴³².

Developing a Proclean threefold division of knowledge *modi*⁴³³, Cusanus introduces recurring terminological patterns: *in* + Ablative, and the suffixes *-ivus* and *-ibilis* (and *-alis*). The result is the

⁴³¹ AUGUSTINE, *De Genesi ad litteram*, in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticum Latinorum*, ed. J. Zycha, vol. XXVIII, Vienna 1898, I, 9, p. 12, 8-10: «ut coeli nomine intelligatur spiritualis iam facta et formata creatura, tamquam coelum coeli huius»; I, 17 (p. 24, 6-9); XII, 26 (p. 419, 12-13), 29-31 (p. 430, 12 - 432, 9). Cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Summa de creaturis*, in ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Borgnet, vol. XXXIV, I, 3, 14, p. 431a: «Dicendum, quod tres coeli dicuntur ibi tres modi visionis secundum Augustinus, scilicet sensibilis, imaginariae et intellectualis: et dicunt caeli, quia celant aliquid».

⁴³² Cf. PROCLUS, *Theologia Platonis*, IV, 5, S-W 18.23 – 22.8, and Cusanus’ note in Cod. Cusanus 185, fol. 122r (CT III.2.1, p. 91, marginalia 263): «nota intelligibile celum est regnum iouis».

⁴³³ Cf. PROCLUS, *Theologia Platonis*, V, 16, ed. Portus, p. 278, and Cusanus’ note in Cod. Cusanus 185, fol. 179v (CT III.2.1, p. 103, marginalia 348) which repeats Proclus’ words: «tripliciter est universum aut intelligibiliter aut intellectualiter aut sensualiter»; PROCLUS, *Elements of Theology*, ed. E. R. Dodds, Oxford 1933 (2nd ed., 1963), pp. 108, 33 – 110, 1, prop. 123; PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem VII*, ed. Cousin, p. 1158, where Cusanus notes in Cod. Cusanus 186, fol. 122v (CT III.2.2, p. 135, marginalia 552): «...in intellectu intellectualiter, in anima animealiter, corporaliter et partibiliter in sensibilibus». For Proclus’ own sources in the Platonic tradition (Plotinus, Iamblichus), see PROCLUS, *Theologia Platonis*, V, 16, S-W 21.14ff and Saffrey’s note to 21, 5-6 (S-W p. 128).

Similar distinctions occur throughout Cusanus’ works, usually in groups of three from a subset of four basic ‘modes’, cf. *De Conjecturis*, I, 4, 15, p. 20, 1-3: «Omnia autem in deo deus, in intelligentia intellectus, in anima anima, in corpore corpus. Quod aliud non est quam mentem omnia complecti vel divine vel intellectualiter vel animaliter aut corporaliter»; cf. I, 9, 41, p. 45, 1ff, esp. the illustration. Often Cusanus divides the *intellectus/intellectualiter* into two and omits the *sensus* to create his triads: cf. *De Conjecturis*, II, 13, 137, p. 135, 11-13 (*intellectibilis, intelligibilis, rationalis*); *De Ludo Globi*, II, 104, p. 130, 10 – 131, 14 (*rationalem, intelligentialem, intellectibilem*); *Idiota de mente* 14, 151, p. 206, 1 - 152, p. 207, 12

following table (where I have marked, as always, the parts that are present only implicitly with an asterisk):

modus sensibilis	sensibile	in sensu	per suam sensibilem speciem sive similitudinem
	sensus	in sensibili	per suam sensitivam speciem (sive similitudinem)*
modus intellectualis	intelligibile	in intellectu	per suam intelligibilem (speciem sive)* similitudinem
	intellectus	in intelligibili	per suam intellectivam (speciem sive)* similitudinem
modus intelligentialis	- intelligente	in intelligentia	(per suam intelligentialem speciem sive similitudinem)*
	- intelligentia	in intelligente	(per suam intelligentivam speciem sive similitudinem)*
	(intellectibile)	(intellectibile)	

This division offers a clarification of the relationship between sensible things and the *sensus* and intelligible things and the *intellectus*, in a direct application of the pattern already established above (with the help of the method) between *veritas* and *verisimile*. Very interesting is the introduction of *species*, a very important concept for Cusanus' ontology-cosmology, and which will have a privileged place later the discussion of Aristotle⁴³⁴. As we see here, Cusanus means *species* as some kind of image/similarity of the original⁴³⁵, a general application of his argument regarding *veritas*, correlated with *in suo vero esse/in suo esse verosimili*, establishing here the term *per [X]i similitudinem* for each object, tying it to an ontologically higher level in this type of hierarchy.

Let us examine the particular uses that Cusanus wants to make of these suffixes: we can generally say that *-ivus* means an 'active' directional relationship, and *-ibilis* a 'passive' one. The 'in + Ablative' structure identifies the relationship between two objects at different levels in a typical

(*ratio*, *intelligentia*, *intellectibilitas*). Compare *De Quaerendo Deum*, I, 24-26 (*sensus*, *ratio*, *intellectus*; *sensibilia*, *rationabilia*, *intelligibilia*). Here in *De Beryllo* he presents an unusual form of the 'triad', which now omits the *ratio* mode and replaces it with the *sensus*—arguably because of the structure of the *beryllus* method itself, which often proceeds from sensible images directly to constructing an object featuring *coincidentia oppositorum*, which is no longer in the realm of *ratio*: in effect, the method could be said to 'skip over' the *modus* of the *ratio* altogether (although, of course, *ratio* is inevitably involved, for instance, in determining the properties of geometrical objects).

⁴³⁴ See the analysis in Chapter 3.4.7; cf. e.g. VOLKMANN-SCHLUCK, *Die Lehre des Nicolaus von Cues von der species*, and CORRIERAS, *Identité e difference dans le De Beryl.*

⁴³⁵ As Peroli notes in his commentary, *species* should be understood here not as forms according to the Aristotelian conception of perception, but rather as the object presented in the form of a message («la cosa in forma di messaggio»), a «medium» between the object and the sense organ: NICOLAUS CUSANUS *Opere filosofiche, teologiche e matematiche*, p. 2710, note 22. This revision of the Aristotelian conception also lies at the core of his own general concept of *species* as particular form (see Chapter 3.4.7). It should be noted here that these two senses of *species* (in visual perception and in a metaphysical account of forms) are usually distinguished, but they need not be in Cusanus: in his construction, due to the use of the *beryllus* and the similar type of *veritas-similitudo* relationships constructed in each of these cases, *species* can be taken as having one unitary meaning in all of these contexts.

application of the method. It should be noted, looking at the table above, that Cusanus seems to avoid speaking (at least explicitly) of intellectual *species*. The most peculiar part, however, is the *modus intelligentialis*, whose meaning is ultimately debatable, together with that of the sentence added by Cusanus where he explains that he named this level «because of the *intelligentias*» (i.e. the angels?)⁴³⁶. However, if we try to apply the same pattern as for the other *modi*, we would encounter a term such as *intelligentivus*, non-existent in Cusanus. This is likely the reason why Cusanus instructs the reader directly to ‘not to be disturbed’ by the terms, pointing out that *intellectibile* is another term for *intelligentialis*, which would better respect the pattern of the suffix *-ibile*, but which has a root already used in the *modus intellectualis*. Clearly, it would be problematic to speak in the same context of the *modus intellectualis* and *modus intelligentialis* because of possible confusions - and it is not surprising that Cusanus never does so in *De Beryllo*. In fact, he never speaks again in *De Beryllo* about this *modus intelligentiale*, and only once does he mention that there is, above the human *intellectus* and below God, a level of *intelligentiae*, i.e. angels⁴³⁷. Corrieras has proposed a different interpretation of this passage, where *modus intelligentialis* does not refer to the angels, but rather to the realm of a supra-intellectual vision, the *visio intellectualis* itself⁴³⁸.

⁴³⁶ This is the way in which most of the commentators and translators interpret this passage: see e.g. Hopkins’ note in NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Complete philosophical and theological treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, p. 831 note 16. Cf. Senger’s translation, NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Über den Beryll*, p. 7: «Intelligenzen», or Peroli’s translation, NICOLAUS CUSANUS *Opere filosofiche, teologiche e matematiche*, p. 1161: «intelligenze [angeliche]».

⁴³⁷ In the final passage summarizing the structures built throughout the book, *De Beryllo*, 71, p. 83, 10-13: «ita sursum ad intelligentias ascendendo, quae habent simplicitatem formae subtiliorem et omnia vident etiam sine eo, quod eis in phantasmate praesententur».

There are serious structural reasons why Cusanus does not talk about this ‘level of the angels’: it seems to be inaccessible using the *beryllus* method. The method is addressed to the *intellectus*, and works fundamentally by establishing relationships between sensible objects, intelligible objects (i.e. the ‘infinetized’ objects) and the infinity of the *principium/conditor*. Arguably, due to the structure of the method, there is no obvious way to construct a ‘berillic’ structure and apply it to an ‘intermediary’ level, above the human *intellectus* and ‘below’ God. Accordingly, everything Cusanus says in this passage in paragraph 71 seems to have no content involving an actual application of the method, and seems to rely entirely on Cusanus’ own underlying metaphysical framework of *simplicitas* (see the analysis in Chapter 4.3), which is here ‘more *subtilis*’, and on a rather contentless notion of *videre* without what is presented in *phantasma*. The notion of *phantasma* occurs only once more in the book, in paragraph 54, p. 61, 5-11: «Sic cum per sensus species sensibiles haurimus, illas quantum fieri potest simplicifimus, ut quiditatem rei videamus cum intellectu. Simplificare autem species est abicere accidentia corruptibilia, quae non possunt esse quiditas, ut in subtilioribus phantasmatis discurrendo quasi in sermone seu scriptura ad intentionem conditoris intellectus perveniamus». This description of the process of *simplicificare* seems to imply that *phantasma* pertains fundamentally to the senses. Thus, what could *videre* without *phantasma* mean, as in the case of the angels? Cusanus does not say explicitly, but we might conjecture a connection to the *visio intellectualis*, the main focus of *De Beryllo*, which is the only type of *visio* which appears to not involve the senses. It is possible, then, that Cusanus would say that the angels (insofar as we can know anything about them, not being able to apply the *beryllus* method) might use the *visio intellectualis* like human beings use their regular, sensible *visio*.

⁴³⁸ CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl*, Tome 2, pp. 40-41.

In the end, the ‘second premise’ (paragraph 5) defines some of the fundamental relationships for the ontological-epistemological construction characteristic of Cusanus’s thought in *De Beryllo*, identifying a parallel relationship between the cognitive faculties and their objects and between the absolute *veritas* (a name for God) and his creations. Interestingly, Cusanus again presents premises he knows from the tradition (the Proclean threefold division into *modi*, the Augustinian-Aristotelian connection of truth and being), but uses them, implicitly, as showcases for precisely the type of structure that his *beryllus* method offers.

3.3.4 Paragraph 6 – ‘Premise 3’ (p. 8, 1 – 8)

Tertio notabis dictum Protagorae hominem esse rerum mensuram. Nam cum sensu mensurat sensibilia, cum intellectu intelligibilia, et quae sunt supra intelligibilia in excessu attingit. Et hoc facit ex praemissis. Nam dum scit animam cognoscitivam esse finem cognoscibilium, scit ex potentia sensitiva sensibilia sic esse debere, sicut sentiri possunt; ita de intelligibilibus, ut intelligi possunt, excedentia autem ita, ut excedant. Unde in se homo reperit quasi in ratione mensurante omnia creata. (De Beryllo, 6, p. 8, 1-8).

This is ‘Premise 3’ of the ‘four premise section’ (paragraphs 4-7). In the first two numbered paragraphs of this section (paragraphs 4 and 5), we have seen how Cusanus introduced and justified the basic double hierarchical structure for his ontological-gnoseological construction, all on the basis of (or at least, demonstrated with the help of) a simple method applicable to any object to be examined, as he promised in his two introductory paragraphs. What does Cusanus still need to accomplish in this section? The ‘teleological’ aspect introduced in paragraph 4 (‘Premise 1’) still remains unexplained, a fundamental aspect for the significance of the *beryllus* method, since it claims to offer access to the *principium*. It is still not clear, therefore, how to go from the notion of similarity to an original to the original being its *finis*, and how we can use this image to draw conclusions about particular objects, which seem to be at the same time a kind of *similitudo* of the *principium* and a(nother) kind of *similitudo* of the *sensus* or *intellectus*, i.e. the faculty by which we know them. These problems come together in the gnoseological problem of the *mensura*, a very important theme for Cusanus⁴³⁹. He introduces this

⁴³⁹ The theme of *homo mensura rerum* is taken up again later, in *De Beryllo*, 65-68, p. 75, 1 – 80, 20. It is recurrent in Cusanus, and particularly prominent in *Idiota de Mente*, IX, 117, p. 172, 5; 123, p. 177, 5 – 124, p. 177, 9; cf. also *De*

terminology here, and it does not seem to be new on the structural level, but instead an application of the things already said, *ex praemissis*, i.e. ‘Premise 1’ (paragraph 4) and ‘Premise 2’ (paragraph 5).

According to the pattern already seen in the previous two paragraphs, Cusanus again cites one particular thinker for a term used: now it is Protagoras, cited as the source of the *dictum* that *homo mensura rerum est*⁴⁴⁰. Cusanus uses this Pythagorean *dictum* to introduce his notion of *mensura* by taking up the distinction between the ‘three regions’ already made in the previous paragraph, but with a surprising and significant terminological novelty. The terminology given here is the following:

homo cum sensu mensurat sensibilia

homo cum intellectu mensurat intelligibilia

homo in excessu attingit qua sunt supra intelligibilia

Obviously, the third line does not follow the pattern, and is very dissimilar to the terminology of the previous paragraph. According to the latter, the last line should rather be something like:

homo/intelligentia*(?) cum intelligentia mensurat intellectibilia*

Or, following the exact pattern of the terms given in the previous two lines in this paragraph:

homo cum intelligentia* mensurat intellectibilia*

Venatione Sapientiae, XXVII, 82, p. 79, 13-15. On the role of this notion in Cusanus, see e.g. C. TRINKAUS, *Protagoras in the Renaissance: An Exploration*, in *Philosophy and Humanism. Renaissance Essays in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, Leiden 1976, pp. 190-213, esp. p.199ff.

⁴⁴⁰ Again, Cusanus’ source seems to be Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*: ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica*, X, 1, 1053a35-b3; XI, 6, 1062b12ff.; IV, 5, 1009a6ff. For the Protagoras fragment, see *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. H. Diels - W. Kranz, 3 voll., Berlin 1951-1952, 80B1. Interestingly, two of the manuscripts of *De Beryllo* (Cod. Cus. 219 and Codex 166 Magdeburg) have «pithagore»/«pithagore», reflecting a common type of scribal error in copying Greek names which also affected Cusanus’ sources: both of his translations of the *Metaphysics* mixed up Pythagoras and Protagoras in the cited passages (Cod Cusanus 182, fol. 47rb, 54ra: «Pythagoras»; Cod. Cusanus 183, fol. 31rb: «Pytagoras», fol. 35va: «Protagoras»; Cod. Harl. 4241, fol. 50r: «Protagoras», fol. 64r: «Pytagoras»; Cod. Cusanus 184, fol. 62v: «protagoras», fol. 71r: «a pythagora dictum est»). This last locus has a note by Nicholas: «credo dici debere protagoras»). This resulted in all the pre-modern printed editions of *De Beryllo* featuring an erroneous attribution to Pythagoras here. However, Cusanus most likely never thought Pythagoras was the correct attribution here, and his original manuscript most likely had the correct reading Protagoras. See the argument of Senger and Bormann (against L. Baur’s opposite theory) in *De Beryllo*, pp. 104-105.

Giovanni Santinello has formulated an interesting theory according to which Cusanus learned of this quote from Leon Battista Alberti: see G. SANTINELLO, *Nicolò Cusano e Leon Battista Alberti: pensieri sul bello e sull’arte*, in *Nicolò da Cusa. Relazioni tenute al Convegno Interuniversitario di Bressanone nel 1960, a c. di G. Flores d’Arcais*, Firenze 1962, pp. 147-183, esp. p. 169. Cusanus did possess a copy of the relevant fragment of Alberti’s *De Pictura* in Cod. Cusanus 112, fol. 67r-73r.

Instead, Cusanus proposes a break in terminology, right after first introducing it, which certainly is bound to surprise the reader. To understand why he wants to introduce this change, we must analyze in detail the new proposed terminology.

First, we can observe that at the stage of *supra intelligibilia* it is no longer a question of *mensurare*, but of *atingere*. This is evidently a reintroduction of the *atingere ... prius invisibilem* and *atingitur... omnium principium* of paragraph 3, the initial introduction of the method, which the current ‘four premises’ (paragraphs 4-7) are intended to explain. Here, this *atingere*, which in paragraph 3 was correlated with *visio*, seems to be implicitly distinguished from *mensurare*, and the reason for this becomes clear if we consider that this *atingere* was, in paragraph 3, correlated with the *primum principium*, which Cusanus would certainly say is not ‘measurable’, according to the fundamental doctrine of the incommensurability of the infinite⁴⁴¹. Very much in accordance with the problematic nature of our knowledge of objects in this realm, Cusanus explicitly refuses to introduce a specific term for *quae sunt supra intelligibilia*—a strikingly ‘negative’ formulation, leaving the place open for the namelessness of the *principium*. In this same structure, in place of the ‘faculty’ (*sensus, intellectus*), Cusanus introduces *in excessu* (a term he seems to have taken from Pseudo-Dionysius⁴⁴²). It seems that Cusanus, in his classification, wants to point to the possibility of a type of knowledge that ‘goes beyond’ the (definable) faculties and types of knowledge enumerated. This seems to correspond to the scope of the *visio intellectualis*, which does not seem to be directed towards sensible objects, nor towards the *intelligibilia* which are the regular objects of the realm of the *intellectus*. That the *visio intellectualis*

⁴⁴¹ Cf. e.g. *De Beryllo*, 71, p. 84, 18-20: «mensura est simplicior quam mensurabilia»; *De Docta Ignorantia*, I, 1, 3, p. 6, 2-3: «infinitem ut infinitum, cum omnem proportionem aufugiat, ignotum est»; *De Theologicis Complementis*, 11, p. 55, 10-11: «Infinitem non est mensurabile, quia infinitum et interminum»; *De Apice Theoriae*, 11, p. 125, 4-5: «infinitem, maius omni mensurabili seu comprehensibili».

⁴⁴² Cf. PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, *De Divinis Nominibus*, VII, I, pp. 193, 5 – 195, 2 (865B – 868B); cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super De Divinis Nominibus*, VII, 7, 13 (p. 341, 53-74; 347, 60-61); a notion also found in BONAVENTURA, *Itinerarium mentis in Deo*, ed. D. Hattrup, Paderborn 2008, I, 1, p. 14, 12-13 («Dionysius in libro de Mystica Theologia, volens nos instruere ad excessus mentales»); I, 1, p. 16, 4 («ad supermentalem excessum»); IV, 3, p. 78, 20; IV, 6, p. 84, 10-12; IV, 7, p. 86, 9. Cf. *De Beryllo* 53, p. 60, 15: «videntes in excessu». Cf. *De Docta Ignorantia* I, 4, 11, p. 10, 10-12 «excedit... omnem intellectum»; *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*, 13, p. 10, 18-20: «Itaque divina oportet ut intelligamus non humano more, sed toti integre a nobisipsis excedentes atque prorsus in Deum transeuntes» (citing Pseudo-Dionysius’ *De Divinis Nominibus* in the Traversari translation which Cusanus owned in Cod. Cusanus 43); *De Venatione Sapientiae*, 112, p. 105, 12-13: «video deum in excessu super omnia».

As Senger emphasizes in his note *ad locum* (NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Über den Beryll*, p. 94), this is not merely the *ekstasis* or *mania* of the Platonic tradition; Cusanus is referring to it in the context of a method of gaining positive knowledge.

would be something ‘above’ the account of the regular faculties makes sense when looking at the construction in paragraph 3 as an ‘infinetizing’ of the image of the use of the physical, finite *beryllus*: not only is the object (*primum principium*) infinite and incommensurable, but the ‘faculty’ used to ‘see’ it (an ‘infinetized’ version of regular sight) will have (in some way) the same characteristics. Yet, even if Cusanus declines to name the faculty by which one can ‘reach’ these mysterious objects *in excessus*, this is nonetheless affirmed to be possible; in some way, therefore, the *intellectus* (with its *visio intellectualis*) must be able to go ‘beyond’ its own realm of *intelligibilia*—while at the same time, as we know, the intellect is *infirmus*, and needs a *beryllus intellectualis*, a weakness parallel (as in the construction in paragraph 3) with that of the limited *sensus*. This ‘amendment’ to the structure of the ‘three regions’ introduced in the previous paragraph seems to be the most important theoretical step performed by Cusanus in ‘Premise 3’.

If man is to be the measure of all things, are the *supra intelligibilia* measurable? In the second part of the paragraph, Cusanus develops the scheme in more detail, after having asserted that everything is merely an application of what has been mentioned already: *ex praemissis*, so that we should pay careful attention to the terms and structures he has already introduced. Here, he seems to be proposing the following scheme:

anima cognoscitiva est finis cognoscibilium

scit ex potentia sensitiva sensibilia sic esse debere, sicut sentiri possunt

scit ex potentia intellectiva* intelligibilia sic esse debere, sicut intelligeri possunt*

scit ex potentia excedentiva* excedentia sic esse debere, sicut excedant

We see that the teleological aspect, *finis*, left unresolved in paragraph 3, has now returned. Again, we have a symmetrical pattern that ‘breaks’ at the final level, where Cusanus changes the terms: if we follow the previously established pattern, there would have to be an implicit (and never mentioned) **potentia excedentiva*, while the *anima cognoscitiva* (a new term, cf. *substantia cognoscitiva* in ‘Premise 1’, paragraph 4) is able to know that the *excedentia* (a striking term, never

used later, for *quae sunt supra intelligibilis*) must be in such a way that ‘they go above’, *excedant*, which appears to be something of a tautology.

We will analyze the structure of this complex implicit argument underlying the terminological scheme. According to Cusanus, we can say from the fact that the ‘cognitive soul’ is the *finis* of the *cognoscibilia* that, given that there is *sensus* (with its *potentia sensitiva*, using again the ‘-iva’ suffix), *sensibilia* must be so that they can be perceived with the senses, i.e. *sentiri possunt*: up to now, this is simply an extension of the application of the method in the previous paragraph, where the ‘beryllic’⁴⁴³ relationship (of an image, similitude) between *sensus* and *sensibilia* (through the *medium* of *species*) has been explained. But how does this tie to the new term introduced at the beginning of the argument, as its apparent premise, invoking *finis*: another term denoting a type of relationship between ‘original’ and ‘image’, as we have seen (in paragraph 4)?

Importantly, we note that Cusanus has introduced here a type of ‘ethical’ language (or even, in the end, eschatological): *sic esse debere*, parallel to the *finis* for the *animae cognoscitivae*, and suggesting, by the parallel with the *intellectus conditor* being the *finis* for the *substantiae cognoscitivae*, that they also ‘must be in such a way’ (not yet defined) in relation to their *conditor*. This will have to be explained further, and it is partly the aim of paragraph 7 which follows.

The image we are left with at this point is of a complex structure built up of relationships of the type ‘original’-‘similitude’ (the basic type of image that the *beryllus* method uses most of all), which support the ‘premises’ Cusanus is drawing from the tradition and explain them in a new way by using (so far, not explicitly), the *beryllus* method. We can also note that the *excessus* is also, in a general way, a perfect illustration of the *beryllus* method itself. Always, when using the *beryllus*, one is identifying (1) some objects at a certain ‘level’ (2) something that is considered to be *supra*, and thus *in excessu* relative to the first ones. So we can interpret this mysterious ‘third level’ of the two ternary structures presented by Cusanus in this paragraph, with its peculiar terminology, not as an attempt to conceptualize

⁴⁴³ I will use the term ‘beryllic’, for convenience, to denote a construction that involves the *beryllus* method (or a B-construction) in a clear way; e.g. beryllic relationship, beryllic structure, etc.

a third distinct cognitive region, but instead as (1) a general pattern for how the other two applications of the same conceptual scheme (*sensibilia - sensus* and *intelligibilia - intellectus*) are to be understood, and (2) as a dynamically defined description of the method itself. In different way, we can interpret the couple *excedentia - excessus* as a general expression of the one-multiple problem, the former referring potentially to any plurality, and the last referring to the ultimate principle associated with it, which is always ‘exceeding’ relative to any definitional criterium. Thus we have an attempted introduction of a dynamic terminology, under the form of the substantivized *excessus/excedentia*, defined exactly as transcendent in relation to any particular thing knowable.

Unde in se homo reperit quasi in ratione mesurante omnia creata. (De Beryllo, 6, p. 8, 7-8).

This last sentence, formulated as a conclusion (*unde*), reaches an important anthropological result⁴⁴⁴, combining the parts of the argument presented so far. However, the formulation can appear highly problematic: can *ratio* ‘measure’ *intelligibilia*?⁴⁴⁵ The ambiguity is emphasized by the fact that Cusanus has left *ratio* out of the threefold structure he has been developing (*sensus, intellectus, intelligentia*). While it is true that in these passages Cusanus does not appear to strictly distinguish the domains of *ratio* and *intellectus*⁴⁴⁶, one is still faced with an interpretive problem. The crucial issue is how to interpret *quasi in ratione mesurante*. Beside the readings already proposed⁴⁴⁷, there is one that would seem to fit precisely with Cusanus’ construction: interpreting it as a subclause with an implicit missing term, namely: *quasi in ratione mesurante [reperit omnia mesurata]*, or [*reperit omnia mesurabilia*], which are in the end very similar. This would preserve a perfect parallelism between

⁴⁴⁴ A corollary of the *homo mensura rerum* principle; cf. the posited etymological connection between *mens* and *mensura*: *Idiota de mente*, I, 57, p. 90, 5-6 «mentem quidem a mensurare dici conicio»; cf. *ibid.*, 3.71.7-9, 9.116.2-9, 123-125. Cf. *De Conjecturis*, I, 10, 52, p. 53, 7-12; *De Venatione Sapientiae* 27, 82, p. 79, 14-15: «mens mensurat notionaliter cuncta» (in ref. to *Idiota de mente*); Sermon XCV («Eadem mensura», 1451), in *Sermones XVII/6*, 2, p. 516, 1: «mensurare venit ex ratione». For *mensura* generally, see note 439.

⁴⁴⁵ Cusanus seems to rule this out in *De Conjecturis*, I, 10, 52, p. 53, 7-12: «Sed haec non est vera simpliciter, sed rationaliter vera mensura. Rationalium vero praecisio intellectus est, qui est vera mensura».

⁴⁴⁶ This is an argument made by Hopkins: HOPKINS, *Complete philosophical and theological treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, p. 831, note 16.

⁴⁴⁷ Translators and interpreters have proposed many different solutions for this passage. Hopkins’ solution for this passage, HOPKINS, *ibid.*, p. 794, cf. note 22, is to render *ratio* as «measuring scale», which seems a rather artificial solution. Senger translates «Wesensgrund» (NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Über den Beryll*, p. 7). Peroli translates «fondamento» (NICOLAUS CUSANUS, *Opere filosofiche, teologiche e matematiche*, p. 1161). Corrieras keeps *ratio* as a faculty, cf. CORRIERAS, *ibid.*, pp. 42-44.

structures: *mensurans / mensurabilia* would be built on the same pattern as *sensus / sensibilia* and *intellectus / intelligibilia*, and the human being would be able to find *in se* all these categories of objects at each particular level because the human being has all these faculties: *sensus*, *ratio*, *intellectus*, and what corresponds to *in excessu* (arguably the *visio intelektualis*), and one can build, with the help of the method, ‘image-original’ relationships between each of these faculties and its object. Understood in this way, the paragraph culminates in a proof of the special status for the human being because of having the sum of all these faculties, fully justifying the *unde* conjunction and furthering Cusanus’ project of offering *praxis* for the method itself.

As we have seen, this conclusion is limited to *omnia creata*, which does not exhaust, of course, *omnia* as such (as it does not include the creator). Man ‘finds’ (*reperit*, again a visual verb, related to the *visio*) in his faculties (ie, in a parallel relation with that of ‘image/original’) all things created—and, crucially, he sees them as created, thus in relation to something not created, the creator. Anticipating, we can already see that the relationship ‘creator - created things’ is parallel to the relationship ‘human faculties - their objects’, a fundamental feature of the way in which Cusanus conceptualizes his method. But at this point Cusanus stops here, and the reader remains to anticipate ‘Premise 4’ (paragraph 7) in which this final connection, this relationship between creator/creation, is made explicit. This is exactly what Cusanus does below.

3.3.5 Paragraph 7 – ‘Premise 4’ (p. 9, 1 – p. 10, 13)

Quarto adverte Hermetem Trismegistum dicere hominem esse secundum deum. Nam sicut deus est creator entium realium et naturalium formarum, ita homo rationalium entium et formarum artificialium, quae non sunt nisi sui intellectus similitudines sicut creaturae dei divini intellectus similitudines. Ideo homo habet intellectum, qui est similitudo divini intellectus in creando. Hinc creat similitudines similitudinum divini intellectus, sicut sunt extrinsecae artificiales figurae similitudines intrinsecae naturalis formae. Unde mensurat suum intellectum per potentiam operum suorum et ex hoc mensurat divinum intellectum, sicut veritas mensuratur per imaginem. Et haec est aenigmatica scientia. Habet autem visum subtilissimum, per quem videt aenigma esse veritatis aenigma, ut sciat hanc esse veritatem, quae non est figurabilis in aliquo aenigmate. (De Beryllo, 7, p. 9, 1 – 10, 13).

Recall that the problem left open at the end of the previous paragraph was precisely that of the relationship between creator and creatures, and how this can be determined in relation to the

relationship between man and the objects of his faculties. So, for the attentive reader, the progression to the subject matter of ‘Premise 4’ is a perfectly logical one.

Given this context, Cusanus again invokes one author explicitly, inviting the reader in the most direct way so far (2nd pers. imperative) to ‘turn his attention to’ (*advertere*) the fact that Hermes Trismegistus said (in the *Asclepius*) that man is (a) *secundus deus*⁴⁴⁸. From the outset, this expression presents itself as a play on words, implicitly exploited by Cusanus for the structure of this paragraph: *secundum* (the Acc. of *secundus*) could in fact be not an adjective but a preposition, signifying ‘in the same way as, on the model of, in accordance with’, which is a meaning the reader might ponder, although because of the direct reference to the *Asclepius*, we must ultimately read it primarily as «another God, a second God». This is a rhetorically striking formulation, which, in joining together *homo* with the notion of a ‘second’ God, evokes explicitly Christological themes⁴⁴⁹. It also seems to be a paradigmatic application of the coincidence of opposites (if we assume that God cannot be multiple) to the case of the human being, as we will see later.

⁴⁴⁸ Cusanus studied the *Asclepius* extensively, as shown by his numerous notes in his manuscript (now found in Brussels, Bibliotheque Royale Albert 1er, 10054-56). The notes have been published in P. ARFE, *Cusanus-Texte*, III. *Marginalien*. 5. *Apuleius. Hermes Trismegistus*, Heidelberg 2004, pp. 103-160. The text itself can be found in HERMES TRISMEGISTUS, *Corpus Hermeticum*, ed. A. D. Nock, tr. by A.-J. Festugière, Paris 1945, vol. II.

The passages Cusanus is referring the reader to are: «magnum miraculum est homo, animal adorandum atque honorandum. hoc enim in naturam dei transit, quasi ipse sit deus ... diis cognata divinitate coniunctus est» (*ibid.*, *Asclepius*, 6); «dominus et omnium conformator, quem recte dicimus deum, quom a se secundum fecerit, qui videri et sentiri possit... voluit alium qui illum, quem ex se fecerat, intueri potuisset, simulque et rationis imitorem et diligentiae facit hominem» (*ibid.*, 8); «aeternitatis dominus deus primus est, secundus est mundus, homo est tertius» (*ibid.*, 10). See also the note Cusanus left in his manuscript at fol. 20v: «nota quomodo homo est deus de deo» (cf. Senger and Bormann’s note, *De Beryllo*, p. 106).

The image of *secundus deus* recurs in *De Conjecturis*, II, 14, 143, p. 143, 7-8: «homo enim deus est, sed non absolute, quoniam homo; humanus est igitur deus»; *ibid.*, 12: «Potest igitur homo esse humanus deus»; *ibid.*, 144, p. 144, 3-4: «quoniam [homo] humanus est deus».

For the notion of *homo secundus deus* in Cusanus and his interpretation of the *Asclepius*, see K. BORMANN, *Nikolaus von Kues: «Der Mensch als zweiter Gott»*, Trier 1999; M. THURNER, *Explikation der Welt und mystische Verinnerlichung. Die hermetische Definition des Menschen als “secundus deus” bei Cusanus*, in *La tradizione ermetica dal mondo tardo-antico all’Umanesimo*, ed. P. Lucentini – I. Parri – V. Perrone Compagni, Turnhout 2003, pp. 245-260; and P. ARFE, *Alberto Magno e Nicola Cusano interpreti dell’Asclepius*, in *Nicolaus Cusanus zwischen Deutschland und Italien*, ed. M. Thurner, Berlin 2002, pp. 129-151, for Cusanus see esp. p. 146ff.

⁴⁴⁹ This might be intentional on the part of Cusanus. One very interesting fact of the reception by Cusanus of this text is that Cusanus was aware of (and quoted approvingly) Lactantius’ (erroneous) interpretation of the passage from *Asclepius* 8, i.e. «secundum [deum] qui videri e sentiri possit» (which, in the context of the *Asclepius*, can only be *mundus*), as referring to Christ: see LACTANTIUS, *Divinae Institutiones, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. XIX/1, ed. S. Brandt, Vienna/Leipzig 1890, IV, 6, 4, pp. 286, 14 – 288, 4. Cusanus cites this approvingly in his earliest collected sermon, Sermon I, in *Sermones XVI/1*, 11, p. 10, 9ff. It is thus entirely possible that Cusanus continued to interpret this passage in this way, i.e. the *secundus deus* as a Christological image, which we should keep in mind when reading this passage.

The proposition identified as coming from Hermes Trismegistus is immediately explained with a direct and full application of the method (the first full one so far), with the comparative structure *sicut ... ita*, completed with a *hinc ... sicut* at the end, which ‘descends’ again to the finite level, showing how the terms derived from using the method can be applied, in the end, to anything – thus implicitly justifying the *ad quaequae indaganda* of the first paragraph. We can also remark that the use of the method on the dictum of Hermes is a paradigmatic formulation of the process proposed in the introductory paragraph: *iudex fias, quantum quisque propinquius ad veritatem accedat*—a formulation that directly addressed the reader in the second person, just like the first sentence of this paragraph.

We can formalize the use of the method using the B-notation as follows:

SICUT

B[entia realia et formae naturales] -> deus

- **deus est creator entium realium et naturalium formarum**
- **creaturae sunt intellectus dei divini similitudines**
- **intellectus *hominis est similitudo divini intellectus in creando creat similitudines similitudinum divini intellectus**

ITA

B[entia rationalia et formae artificiales] -> homo

- **deus est creator entium r. et formarum a.**
- **entia r. et formae a. sunt hominis intellectus similitudines**
- ***intellectus hominis creat similitudines suae formae naturalis extrinsecas artificiales figuras**

SICUT

B[extrinsecae artificiales figurae] -> intrinsecae naturalis formae

- extrinsecae artificiales figurae sunt intrinsecae naturalis formae similitudines

This structure is based on two fundamental relations of ‘similitude’, between God and the two categories of *entia realia* and *formae naturales* (joined under the name of *creaturae*), and, in turn, *homo* (a term apparently interchangeable with *intellectus hominis*, exactly as the *intellectus dei* seems to be identified with *deus*) and the *entia rationalia* and *formae artificiales* which are seen as his creations, and therefore *similitudines*. At the same time, *homo* is also, of course, a member of *entia realia* and therefore is himself a *similitudo*, his own creations (*similitudines*) being therefore, implicitly, *similitudines similitudinum* in relation to the creator God. Cusanus, in the end, explains and generalizes

this relationship for all finite objects, with the couple *intrinsicum-extrinsicum* derived from Proclus⁴⁵⁰, which is added to *naturalis-artificialis* and *realis-rationalis* to signify the ontological difference between original and image/similitude, i.e. the fundamental distinction on which each application of the method is constructed.

In an ontological-cosmological context, we remark the (probably wilfully) ambiguous formulation of the ‘duality’ of *entia realia* and *formae naturales*, joined under the term *creaturae*, which naturally leads the reader to wonder what the relationship is between *entia* and *forma* – which is precisely the problematic around which the criticism of Aristotle will develop in later passages.

Another problem left open until this point is the problem of the human faculties, because at this level we have only the *intellectus*, which seems to be in the position of creator of all human ‘creations’ (*entia rationalia, formae artificiales*)—but what is the relationship between *intellectus* and the *sensus* in the previous paragraphs, and between the two and the (surreptitiously introduced at the end of the last paragraph) *ratio*? As we can already guess from the recurrent structures Cusanus is using, it must ultimately be a relationship of similarity (image-original) conceived in a ‘hierarchical’ way, i.e. the *ratio* will likely be an image of the *intellectus*, and also the *sensus* in some way (predictably, the three will be ranked by symmetrical relationships between them), and then, similarly, their ‘creations’ (or indeed their objects, because there is the same type of ontological distinction between the faculties and their objects) will be *similitudines similitudinum* of the *intellectus*, which is in turn an image of the *creator*. Cusanus will go on to clarify this hierarchy of the faculties later in paragraphs 10-13.

Unde mensurat suum intellectum per potentiam operum suorum et ex hoc mensurat divinum intellectum, sicut veritas mensuratur per imaginem. Et haec est aenigmatica scientia. (De Beryllo, 7, p. 9, 8-11)

We have reached a very important step, where Cusanus offers an explicit definition of *aenigmatica scientia*⁴⁵¹, referring back to *speculum et aenigma* and one of the main ways of talking

⁴⁵⁰ PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem*, IV, ed. Steel, p. 178, 99ff, where Cusanus writes in the margin: «natura intrinsicus informat ars extrinsecus» (*ibid.*, p. 539; cf. *CT* III.2.2, marginalia 226); cf. *ibid.*, p. 214, 67 – 71.

⁴⁵¹ The term *aenigmatica scientia* appears to be inspired from a few passages in Proclus: PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem*, I (Cousin 713, Steel p. 77, 95-96): «[primus] enigmaticus autem et propter hoc secretum» (to the passage in the *Parmenides* at 128c2-

about his method⁴⁵², together with *visio intellectualis*. At this point, having developed the ‘ontological’ hierarchical structure through the use of the method, Cusanus can link to the conclusions reached in paragraph 6 (‘Premise 3’) on the *mensura* type of relationship. But he does not do it exactly in the way that we would expect: the argument that God is the *mensura* of his creations just like man is the *mensura* of all the things he knows is present only implicitly. Cusanus wants to talk about a different, active relationship, a way in which the human being not only uses his *intellectus* to ‘measure’ his objects, but ‘measures’ himself in relation to God⁴⁵³. This structure seems problematic, because according to the construction in this paragraph relating to the hierarchy of faculties it seems that the human being would need another faculty at this point, one beyond the *intellectus*.

6); V (Cousin 1027, Steel p. 330, 94-95): «Symbolicus ergo et insinuatius erit et enigmaticus doctrine modus et decens maxime mistica dogmata».

Cf. PROCLUS, *Theologia Platonis*, ed. Portus, III, 7, p. 132, S-W 29.25-26: «in epistula ad Dionysium per enigmata procedens», where Cusanus notes in his manuscript: «enigmata» (CT III.2.1, p. 82, marginalia 200). Another source is Albert’s commentary on *De Divinis Nominibus*: ALBERTUS, *De Divinis Nominibus*, 8, 3, p. 366, 34-35: «cognitio aenigmatica est de non-apparentibus».

In Cusanus, the terms *symbolice* (*investigare*) and *aenigma* recur often in similar roles as signaling the use of a type of specific method; as Katrin Platzer has shown, *symbolum* and associated words are much less used after *De Visione Dei*, and *aenigma/scientia aenigmatica* takes their place: PLATZER, *Symbolica venatio und scientia aenigmatica*, pp. 93-95, 102, 195-211. Cf. *De Docta Ignorantia*, I, 12, 33 p. 24, 15: «symbolice investigare», 24-25 «in enigmatate laborantibus»; *De Conjecturis*, I, 2, 9, p. 14, 5-9: «symbolice»; *Idiota de Sapientia*, 2, 47, p. 79, 2-4: «ut intuearis omnia in simplicissima rectitudine verissime, praecisissime, inconfuse et perfectissime, licet medio aenigmatico, sine quo in hoc mundo dei visio esse nequit», *Idiota de Mente*, 9, 125, p. 178, 8: «mensurat etiam symbolice comparationis modo»; *De Possess* 31, p. 37, 2 «in aenigmatate [videri deus]», 43, p. 53, 20 «ex aenigmatate et speculo»; 44, p. 54, 1-2 «[mathematica est] aenigma ad venationem operum dei»; 60, p. 71, 1: «mathematice aenigmatizando»; 61, p. 73, 10-11: «ad theologiam aenigma propinquius fieri posse arbitror». Interestingly, later in *De Possess* Cusanus will change the form of the term and use «enigmatica» in an adverbial way: cf. *ibid.*, 19, p. 25, 26; 25, p. 31, 8; 26, p. 32, 2; 27, p. 32, 3.

See also Cusanus’ later 1463 Letter to Nicolaus Bononiensem (Albergati), in *Cusanus-Texte: IV. Briefwechsel des Nikolaus von Kues: Dritte Sammlung: Das Vermächtnis des Nikolaus von Kues. Der Brief an Nikolaus Albergati nebst der Predigt in Montoliveto (1463)*, ed. G. von Bredow, Heidelberg 1955, 3, 48, pp. 46, 23-26: (in an explicitly Christological context, after just having mentioned the Eucharist): «Primo autem, fili mi, advertas nos in hoc mundo ambulare per similitudines et aenigmata, quoniam spiritus veritatis non est de hoc mundo neque per ipsum capi potest, nisi parabolice et per symbola nobis nota ad incognitum rapiamur».

⁴⁵² Cusanus’ formulation at this point regarding *mensura* is similar to a passage in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* X, 1053a31-33, which in the Bessarion translation says: «at scientiam quoque et sensum mensuram rerum dicimus esse, propterea quia per ea aliquid cognoscimus. atqui mensurantur magis quam mensurent. sed accidit nobis ac si alio nos mensurante cognosceremus quantinam sumus, eo quod toties nobis cubitalis mensura admota est. Protagoras autem hominem ait mensuram esse cunctorum, perinde ac si scientem aut sentientem diceret» (ARISTOTLE, *Aristoteles Latine*, pp. 515-516). Here, in his manuscript, Cusanus writes in the margin: «scientiam et sensum mensuram rerum dicimus».

⁴⁵³ Cusanus’ formulation recalls the note he left on a page of Albert’s commentary to *De Divinis Nominibus*, ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super De Divinis Nominibus*, VII, 7. p. 341, 55-59: «quando volumus mensurare ea que supra nos per proporcionem nostre sapiecie erramus» (Cod. Cusanus 96, fol. 187rb, cf. CT III.1, marginalia 531). We note the active verb, *mensurare*, used for human activity which gains some kind of knowledge. This statement does not exclude the possibility of some kind of ‘measuring’ of things *supra nos*, but excludes only that we can do it *per proportionem nostre sapiecie* – which is not problematic if we identify infinite things as *supra nos* and remember that there can be no ‘measurement’ between finite and infinite (see above, note 441). This note, on the other hand, only indicates that we need to do this in a completely different way, cf. the *in excessus* of our text and the *visus subtilissimus* in this paragraph, as we examine below.

This is a very important point, because it seems that this is precisely Cusanus' aim in this book, according to the opening paragraph. We will analyze the structure of the argument here proposed, which seems to be a new application of the method within the framework already established:

SICUT

B[imago] -> veritas

- **veritas mensuratur per imaginem**

B[operae intellectus] -> intellectus

- **intellectum se mensurat per potentia operum suorum**

EX HOC

B[*operae intellectus divini] -> intellectus divinus

- **mensurat intellectum divinum *per potentia operum suorum**

This appears perfectly consonant with the structures built up in the previous paragraphs, with a very important difference. The verb *mensurare* is now used in a different way than in the previous paragraph: there, the *mensura* relation was limited to things 'measurable' by the *ratio*, or *omnia creata*, thus proceeding 'downwards' from the ontological-hierarchical point of view (from the measure to what is measured). Here, however, 'measuring' is clearly an active, direct action to be taken by the human being, and it is applied in the case of the *intellectus divinus* (which Cusanus would obviously never identify as a created thing): it is an 'upwards' type of measurement, and no longer just a simple (passive) 'image-original' relationship as in the previous paragraph.

Here, therefore, Cusanus is changing the characteristics of the verb *mensurare*, which takes a particular subject (*homo*) and is a direct activity. In fact, it seems to be usable as a general term for 'the activity of using the method' (to determine relationships between objects), shifting our attention from the relationships determined in this way (i.e. image-original, etc.) to the *homo* which is formulating the argument and examining it. But what is the faculty by which the human being can do this? Obviously, it cannot be any (common) use of the *intellectus*: this special type of *mensurare* cannot be the regular activity of 'creation' by the intellectus of some *entia rationalia* or *formae artificiales*, because the object of the activity in question is now explicitly outside the domain of the structure where these have been described (although, of course, the structures we have examined until now in the text could obviously

be characterized themselves as *entia rationalia* or *formae artificiales*; but it is equally clear that the application of the method cannot be reduced to only this type of creation of *similitudines*). Exactly where is the human being in this structural schem when they are applying the method to determine such structures and relationships (as Cusanus has done in the past few paragraphs)?

Cusanus adds the final clarification to address this very issue:

Habet autem visum subtilissimum, per quem videt aenigma esse veritatis aenigma, ut sciat hanc esse veritatem, quae non est figurabilis in aliquo aenigmate. (De Beryllo, 7, p. 9, 11 – p. 10, 13).

Here, then, is the faculty with which the human being can perform the act of ‘measuring the *intellectus*’: a *visus subtilissimus*, a very specific term which strongly hints that it is none other than the faculty which corresponds to the *visio intellectualis*, just as we implicitly find an identification between the *visio intellectualis* and the use of the *beryllus* method itself. It is only with such an ‘extra faculty’, the *visus subtilissimus*, that the human being can use the method, because one of its fundamental and crucial aspects is being able to understand that an *aenigma* is a *veritatis aenigma*, a distinction which recalls the beginning of ‘Premise 2’ (paragraph 5): things are either *veritas* or *verisimiles* (i.e. *aenigmata veritatis*). Here we have the link to the *aenigmata* of the Pauline formulation (1 Cor. 13:12) that Cusanus takes up the introductory paragraph: therefore, the second ‘part’ of *per speculum et aenigmate*, i.e. the aenigmas/symbolisms, must be understood, in generic terms, as ‘created things seen as a similitude of the Creator’. At the same time, the notion of *speculum* will be examined (with the same general meaning) later, in paragraph 14, thus completing Cusanus’ reinterpretation of the gospel passage to fit the method he is developing.

Obviously, this special ‘faculty’ of the *visus subtilissimus* is assimilated, on a structural level (or even implicitly identified) with the ‘third faculty’ in ‘Premise 3’ above, the *in excessu* and the speculative **potentia excedentalis*. We observe that in all the cases in which this particular faculty appears, it is explicitly distinguished from the *intellectus* (but at the same time connected to the *visio intellectualis*); it is always a ‘nameless faculty’, without any specific name of its own, always referred to by the names of other faculties + adjectives (*visus subtilissimus*), by approximate and allusive

expressions (*quae sunt supra, in excessu*), or indeed ‘empty gaps’ left in a pattern for deriving terms, i.e. words that could be constructed to describe it (e.g. **potentia excendentalis*) but which Cusanus never wants to use. This problem of the ‘nameless faculty’ and its relation to the *intellectus* and the other faculties is one of the most interesting issues in *De Beryllo*, and we will analyze it in more detail when we reach the discussion of hierarchy in Chapter 4.

Let us analyze then what Cusanus says here about this *visus subtilissimus*. It is the first time that Cusanus uses this term, and it appears to be original to him, not identifiable in his sources⁴⁵⁴. The adjective used, *subtilissimus*, superlative of the word with the meaning ‘fine, delicate’⁴⁵⁵, and, in a metaphorical sense, particularly characterizing arguments, ‘intelligent, subtle’⁴⁵⁶, and also sometimes paired with *intelligentialis*⁴⁵⁷. Later, as we will see, *subtilis* will also represent a key term for

⁴⁵⁴ One of the few terminological parallels is found in *De Docta Ignorantia*, 118, p. 76, 25 – 77, 27: «Subtily intellectu ista altissima clare comprehenduntur, quomodo Deus est absque diversitate in omnibus, quia quodlibet in quolibet, et omnia in Deo, quia omnia in omnibus», where we have *intellectus subtilis* (which might not, however, name a faculty as such). We find something similar in Sermon XXII (1440), in *Sermones XVI/4*, 14, p. 341, 1-5: «Iam vides, si subtilissimo intellectu te elevaveris, quo omnem oppositionem supergreditur per infinitum». Cf. also Sermon XXV, in *Sermones XVI/2*, p. 448, 19-22: «Tanto enim altior est intelligentia subtilissima Cherub scientia nostra humana, quanto ignis acuties ac igneus flammeusque gladius pulvere terrae» - cf. the debate about the meaning of *intelligentiale* (i.e. whether it involves the angels) in paragraph 6 above.

In his later works, the same faculty seems to be named in *De Possessio*, 57, p. 68, 13-14: «magnum mihi praebet haec aenigmatica visio fidei orthodoxae argumentum», and in 17, p. 21, 6-7 as «quamcumque subtilissimam phantasiam» (the character speaking is Bernardus, not Cusanus himself), explicitly superior to the *intellectus*: «Simplex enim et quod non possit esse maius aut minus vel mediari aut duplicari nullo sensu nec etiam per quamcumque subtilissimam attingitur phantasiam. Nec altissimus intellectus concipere potest infinitum interminum»; the other personage beside Cusanus himself, Iohannes, concludes that «oportere ... suum intellectum transcendere», and Cusanus as a character immediately praises their speech at 17, p. 22, 20-21. This passage is perhaps the clearest place where we identify the hierarchy between this ‘faculty without name’ (again named provisionally) and the others.

Then, we find the same faculty discussed in the later work *Compendium*, 1, p. 2; 24, p. 19, 1 – p. 20, 16, with the same characteristics, as «visus mentalis». At the end of the *Compendium* we also find an interesting expression, with *visus* and *subtilius* as adverbs: «mundiores acutiorisque visus subtilius contemplantes» (*ibid.*, 47, p. 36, 9). In the *De Possessio* we also find *videre subtilius* (on the saints in the context of the Trinity): «quia subtilius sancti hoc viderunt quam nos» (49, p. 61, 25-26).

The intellect is described as *subtilis naturae* in *De Conjecturis*, 168, p. 170, 1. We also note an application of *subtilis* to *intellectus* in *De Venatione Sapientiae*, 15, p. 16, 3-5, in the context of a distinction between *intellectus* and *visus*: «Sic et intellectus lucidior est visu. Discernit enim subtilissime quae invisibilia sunt, puta intelligibilia to visibilibus abstracta». A parallel with *De Ludo Globi*, 92, p. 115, 11-12, «vis subtilissima animae rationalis», is also possible. In *Idiota de Sapientia* we find an interesting instance of *subtilis* applied to *ratio*: «subtily ratione quaesitum attingeres» (170, p. 226, 18).

From these passages, we can speculatively point to a recurring doctrine of a ‘fourth faculty’ or ‘faculty without name’ which appears explicitly distinguished from the *intellectus* in Cusanus’s later works beginning at least with *De Beryllo*.

⁴⁵⁵ The opposite of *grossum* in *De Conjecturis*, 45, p. 49, 5; 103, p. 100, 15; in Sermon IX, in *Sermones XVI/2*, 36, p. 199, 4-5; in Sermon CLXXIV, in *Sermones XVIII/3*, 2, p. 263, 6-7. Later the opposite of *crassus* throughout *De Venatione Sapientiae*.

⁴⁵⁶ Cusanus uses it in this sense often (particularly in adverbial form with the verb *considerare*, cf. e.g. *De Docta Ignorantia*, 71, p. 46, 1, 80, p. 51, 8; *De Filiatione Dei*, 6, 84, p. 60, 4; *De Genesi*, 148, p. 108, 1-2; *De Principio*, 7, p. 6, 5, cf. 33, p. 45, 1-3). He uses it in *De Beryllo* in this sense at 46, p. 53, 5; 50, p. 57, 1; 61, p. 59, 1.

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. *De Conjecturis*, 31, p. 38, 8: «subtily theologicas atque intelligentiales formas».

hierarchization according to ‘simplicity’⁴⁵⁸: we can also identify in our passage here a similar use, with connotations of ‘superiority’ in the hierarchy relative to the ordinary *visus* (and likely to the *intellectus*), which is clear from the context. Then, the double meaning of *subtilis*, both physical (‘fine, delicate’) and intellectual (‘intelligent’), converge in an optimal way to describe the properties of this ‘faculty’—especially if we look back to the wording in paragraph 3, where in the image of the physical *beryllus*, with which one *attingit prius invisibilem* (we can add: which was invisible, in the physical realm, because of its too great *subtilitas*). In the context of that image, one can speculate that a *visus subtilissimus*, considered as an ‘infinitezation’ of the image of regular sight with the regular *beryllus*, would indeed not need a *beryllus* after all, if it was indeed infinitely *subtilis*. But, just as our *intellectus* is *infirmus*, our *visus* is not (infinitely) *subtilissimus*, and thus needs (at least sometimes, when the object is too *subtilis* for us) a *beryllus*.

The small final clause of paragraph 7 links the *visus* of the first part of the sentence with the verb *scire*, and seems intended to clarify the particular type of knowledge related to the use of this *visus subtilissimus*: i.e. knowledge that *veritas* is the particular thing that is not representable (*figurabilis*) in any *aenigma*⁴⁵⁹. We have a conjunction of two clauses, one with *videt* and one with *sciat*, which seem paradoxically to contradict each other: at the same time, the human being ‘sees’, by means of the *visus subtilissimus*, (one) *aenigma* (in particular) as being the *aenigma veritatis*, and also ‘knows’ that *veritas* is not actually representable in any *aenigma*. This distinction between *videt per visum* and *sciat* seems very deliberate, and intended to clarify the paradox: it appears that according to the *visus subtilissimus* we can see the relationship between *aenigma* and *veritas*, and at the same time we ‘know’ (although we don’t ‘see’ – what we see is the *aenigma*) that *veritas* is not representable (in this way, or in any

⁴⁵⁸ *De Beryllo* 54, p. 61, 8-9, 63, p. 72, 3-4, 71, p. 83, 12. The opposite of *obtusus* (in a hierarchical sense, applied to knowledge) in *De Conjecturis* 140, p. 140, 1: «ab obtusioribus ad subtiliores». Accordingly, often with the sense of an ‘ontological superiority marker’, when in the comparative: cf. *De Conjecturis*, 169, p. 171, 4-5; cf. Sermon IX (in *Sermones XVI/2*, 13, p. 182, 24-26): «quanto substantia subtilior, tanto plus habet de forma et activitate». Cf. *Idiota de Mente*, 102, p. 153, 5; Sermon CCXLIII (1458), in *Sermones XIX/7*, 3, p. 255, 14-15: «subtiliores sensus habent propinquorem unionem cum intellectu», Sermon CCLXXXVIII, in *Sermones XIX/7*, 5, p. 648, 5: «potentia subtilior» (of *ratio* vs. *imaginatio*).

⁴⁵⁹ The ‘non-representability’ of God is a recurring theme in Cusanus’ works, representing one of the constants in his thought: see e.g. *De Docta Ignorantia*, I, 12, 33, p. 24, 21-25; *De Quaerendo Deum*, I, 18, p. 14, 2-5; *De Genesi*, 2, 159, p. 115, 7-8; *Idiota de Sapientia*, I, 9, p. 15, 4 – p. 16, 18; *Compendium* 8, 24, p. 19, 1 – p. 20, 7.

way at all). This last conclusion does not mean that the relations and terms developed between the various *aenigmata* are not valid, but instead that their final object remains, at the same time, beyond all these relationships (hence beyond the name of *veritas*, and, we can say speculatively, ‘beyond itself’ in any way we try to define it, at the same time that it does not cease to be itself; any definition must maintain this fundamental ‘instability’, or dynamism). A fundamental tension still remains, therefore, between the thing we ‘see’ and the (negative) thing we ‘know’: e.g. we ‘see’ a paradoxically ‘positive’ relationship that makes it possible to talk about God, and at the same time we ‘know’ that God cannot be spoken of. This paradox seems to be the particular object of the *visus subtilissimus*, which should make possible our *visio* of precisely the type of relationship with which the *beryllus* works, at the same time without, in a certain sense, claiming that they are ‘true’, or ‘appropriate’. The result is *scientia* but at the same time *aenigmatica*, something paradoxical that, implicitly, is itself only an image of a true, absolute/infinite *scientia*. If we can keep these fundamental tensions in mind, we are conceiving this *visus subtilissimus* in a (more) correct manner.

We can also note that *veritas mensuratum per imaginem* seems to be another way of describing the method itself in its application to any object, since the expression invokes the fundamental ontological separation, in the form of *veritas-imago*, on which each application of the method is constructed. The fundamental turn, therefore, achieved in ‘Premise 4’ is from this relationship as a ‘passive’ one to one which is actively pursued by the human being: which is arguably the essence of the *beryllus* method. The human being enters the picture, and the relationship are no longer simply ‘facts’ to be stated or acknowledged, but rather structures to be built and developed in an active way, through the application of the *visus subtilissimus* (i.e., here, through the *beryllus* method). This ‘constructive’, active character is one of the most important features of the method Cusanus is proposing, and a fitting end for the ‘four premise section’ (paragraphs 4-7) which has built up a comprehensive overall image of what the method is, how it can be used and what can be achieved by means of it.

3.3.6 Paragraph 8 – First explicit application of the *beryllus* (p. 10, 1 – p. 11, 17)

Ad rem igitur his paucis praemissis descendentes incipiamus a primo principio. Deridebat enim eos Indus ille, quem Socrates interrogabat, qui sine deo aliquid conabantur intelligere, cum sit omnium causa et auctor. Volumus autem ipsum ut principium indivisibile videre. (De Beryllo 8, p. 10, 1-5)

Paragraph 8 begins with a repetition of the words *ad rem descendens* of the end of the ‘introduction section’ (paragraph 2), with a very important change: instead of *descendens*, correlated with the verb *exponam* (hence with a singular subject, who is Cusanus himself), we have here *descendentes* and the verb *incipiamus*: the subject has become the plural ‘we’ instead of the singular ‘I’. This choice by Cusanus is meant to say something about the reader’s involvement: after the ‘four premise’ section of the *paucis praemissis*, the reader can now effectively accompany him in the ‘descent’ *ad rem*, even if perhaps he was not able to before, as he has presumably gotten some more *praxis* and a better understanding of the method. We recall also that in the same last sentence of paragraph 2, Cusanus expressed his intentions (in the subjunctive mood, pers. 1 sg.) to explain why he gave the name *Beryllus* to the book and «what [his] intention [was]/what [he] means [by that]», and we can say that substantially he has succeeded in giving a more or less complete (albeit very dense) explanation in the context of the ‘four premises’, making it possible, if the reader was careful enough, to understand how the *beryllus* works. At this point Cusanus can say *incipiamus*, ‘let us begin’, with the aim of the *primum principium* (implicitly identified as the ‘proper’ object of vision using the intellectual *beryllus* in paragraph 3).

The repetition of the ‘descent’ here and at the end of paragraph 2 is interesting, and while it could simply be an artifact of the ‘not well organized’ (*minus bene digestus*) state of the book according to Cusanus⁴⁶⁰, it would have been something easy to correct by Cusanus. What could he have wanted to say with this ‘double descent’ (paragraph 2 and here) *ad rem*? We can say that the *res* of the first formula might be the *beryllus* itself, a perfectly natural reference in the context, and that now the *res* means an effective practical application of it. The fact that the application to *primum principium* is

⁴⁶⁰ *De Beryllo*, 72, p. 85, 10.

achieved with a ‘descent’ may seem paradoxical, but we can see this choice as perfectly justified by Cusanus, as we see immediately below.

Deridebat enim eos Indus ille, quem Socrates interrogabat, qui sine deo aliquid conabantur intelligere, cum sit omnium causa et auctor. (De Beryllo, 8, p. 10, 2-4)

The «Indian whom Socrates questioned» refers to a story in Eusebius’ *Preparatione Evangelica*⁴⁶¹. The figure of the Indian is a paradigmatic exponent of someone whom a likely reader of Cusanus would consider an ‘outsider’: implicitly pagan, likely unfamiliar with both the Christian and the philosophical tradition, yet one who still recognizes that God is *omnium causa et auctor*, asserting the universality of human knowledge concerning a single creator principle. If we take this into account, the apparent paradoxical nature of a *descensio ad rem* with which we arrive at the *primum principium* is clarified: even if we make a ‘descent’ to the lowest possible starting point (without any help from any tradition familiar to the reader), we still cannot even attempt to understand (*conabantur intelligere*) anything without the *primum principium*. While at this point it is not clear how this is the case (i.e. what *sine* means (‘without knowledge of it’?, or ‘without at the same time considering the *principium*’?, or perhaps ‘without being aware of the *principium* in general terms’?), it argues for the need to take the *principium* as an object from the start. At the same time, we note that Cusanus chooses to start by emphasizing ‘those’, *eos*, who erred on this point, indicating that they exist (and implicitly that, likely, there are many of them), and we note the verb *deridebat*, which recalls the *risu dignum* of the second paragraph, therefore suggesting that ‘these’ (*eos*) mentioned here are probably the same with the *his, qui elevationes intellectuales ignorant* from the second paragraph. Cusanus is thus constructing a powerful rhetorical inversion: in paragraph 2, these ‘ignorant ones’ were seeing *haec alta* as a laughing matter, and now the Indian (who, Cusanus is implying by this parallel, is not himself ignorant of the *elevationes intellectuales*, although he can be assumed to be ignorant of the Christian and philosophical

⁴⁶¹ EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Werke*, ed. K. Mras, Berlin 1954-56, XI, 3, 8, p. 9, a work Cusanus possessed in 1454, cf. VANSTEENBERGHE, *Autour*, p. 120. Found in Cod. Cusanus 41, fol. 1ra-203rb, where Cusanus leaves a note next to the passage about the Indian, fol. 147rb: «notandum de Indo».

tradition – an important point) laughs at them instead, and is fully endorsed by Cusanus in doing so. Implicitly, Cusanus is suggesting a progression on the reader's part, from the initial 'knowing that one is lacking' to the point at which he can be considered a companion of Cusanus in the application of the method (*incipiamus* and the use of first person plural verbs in this paragraph), and in laughing at the (possibly many) 'ignorant ones'.

Volumus autem ipsum ut principium indivisibile videre. Applicemus beryllum mentalibus oculis et videamus per maximum, quo nihil maius esse potest, pariter et minimum, quo nihil minus esse potest, et videmus principium ante omne magnum et parvum, penitus simplex et indivisibile omni modo divisionis, quo quaecumque magna et parva sunt divisibilia. (De Beryllo, 8, p. 10, 4 – p. 11, 9)

At this point, after the multiple (and not explicitly signaled) applications of the *beryllus* within the 'four premises' section, Cusanus presents the first explicit, 'pre-announced' application of the method, introduced with the phrase *applicemus beryllum mentalibus oculis* (later recurring in various variations). The verb, as expected, is *videre*. Explicitly, the method is described as having the *primum principium* as its 'natural' object, but always seen in a particularly defined way, with a particular criterion which allows the conception of a 'maximum' and 'minimum' for the purpose of allowing us to 'see' the *primum principium* 'beyond' the ontological realm of application of the chosen ordering criterion, in a relationship of ontological distinction between two domains (or 'levels') which characterizes each application of the method.

This first explicit application of the method is highly abstract, dense, and presents complex interpretive problems, taking up the criterion of 'dimension' in the most general sense (*magna, parva*) which is implicitly identified with the **divisibilitas* of the *divisibilia*. Yet Cusanus urges us to examine the maximum and minimum conceivable in terms of **magnitudo* (i.e. *magnus-parvus*, and not in terms of *divisibilitas* or *divisio* as we would have expected if the object was to see the principle as *indivisibilis*), and we are to identify the *principium* as *ante magnum et parvum* (*ante*, 'before', a highly recurring technical term which describes the 'infinitized' object in relation to the greater-lesser opposition based on the criterion used), *penitus simplex* (suggesting that the criterion could also be

interpreted as *simplicitas*, with *simplex* instead of *magnus*, which still remains within the same conceptual realm of *divisibilitas* and magnitude), and also ‘indivisible in any mode of division’ (*omni modo divisioni*), which again invokes *divisibilitas*.

Unpacking this complex structure, and distinguishing the three criteria carefully, we arrive at 3 distinct applications of the method that Cusanus chose to join into one:

B[magna et parva, *magnitudo] -> primum principium

- **primum principium est ante magnum et parvum**

B[*omnia, *simplicitas] -> primum principium

- **primum principium est penitus simplex**

B[divisibilia, *divisibilitas] -> primum principium

- **primum principium est indivisibile omni modo divisionis**

We see that this passage is rather complex to interpret, and that Cusanus did not choose a simple and easy example to inaugurate the clearly ‘pre-announced’ uses of the method, but instead launched directly into rather high-level speculations, combining in a single sentence multiple uses of the method to join different ‘divine names’ freely. The great difference in difficulty between this example and the comparatively simple presentation of the *calamus* and *linea-angulus* geometrical example in the following paragraphs must have been obvious to Cusanus, and is evidently an intentional choice on his part as to the order the text. For the purpose of the *praxis* promised from the beginning, it looks like Cusanus has made the choice to present some particularly difficult exercises in this paragraph 8, and then solve the reader’s growing perplexity with a very simple geometrical image in the following paragraphs. Had the reader simply started with the ‘easy’ *linea-angulus* geometrical image, arguably they would not have had in front of their eyes the final goal: i.e. to ‘see’ the *primum principium* in various ways. But in this way, Cusanus offers the geometrical illustrations for a better understanding of these ‘advanced’ applications that are already introduced in this paragraph, and which give a preview of his ultimate goal in the application of the method.

Ac si per beryllum intueamur inaequalitatem, erit aequalitas indivisibilis obiectum, et perabsolutam similitudinem videbimus principium indivisibile omni modo divisionis, quo similitudo est divisibilis seu variabilis, scilicet veritatem. Nam nullum est aliud obiectum illius visionis nisi veritas, quae videtur per omnem similitudinem maximam pariter et minimam absolutum primum principium omnis suae similitudinis. (De Beryllo, 8, p. 11, 9-15).

After the difficult passage just examined, Cusanus chooses to raise again the level of difficulty, presenting two additional applications of the method, the second with some puzzling terminology, connected in the same sentence. Keeping the theme of **divisibilitas* (while also invoking an implicit **variabilitas*) as a constant to link these two applications, Cusanus again applies the method using the criterion of *inaequalitas* (by examining the principle as *aequalitas*), then uses an implicit criterion of *similitudo* by examining it as *veritas*⁴⁶². New terms are also introduced: the verb *intuere*, used like *videre* with *per beryllum* to indicate the application of the method, and then *obiectum (illius visionis)* as the direct object of the ‘B-structure’, i.e. what we examine in a particular application of the method. We can also remark that Cusanus speaks of the ordering criterion examined in an application of the method as the grammatical object (in the accusative case) of *videre / intuere*, while the class of objects to which it applies is usually left as presupposed (if there is nothing to distinguish the class of objects in any way, we will mark it as an undefined, most general **res*).

Here is the B-notation of the two applications in this sentence:

B[*res, inaequalitas] -> principium

- **aequalitas**

B[omnes similitudines, *similitudo] -> principium

- **absoluta similitudo**

- **indivisibili omni modo divisionis quo similitudo est divisibilis seu variabilis**

- **veritas**

- **absolutum primum principium omnis suae similitudinis**

The *per absolutam similitudinem* is particularly problematic to interpret⁴⁶³. The problem is that Cusanus commonly uses *absolutus* to refer to infinite objects, usually final objects of an application of the method, and uses *per* to refer to a *medium*, such as the *beryllus* itself; therefore, it is normal for him to say «*per + [accusative noun] + videatur Y absolutum*» and not «*per X absolutum videatur Y*».

⁴⁶² Cf. also the construction *veritas-verisimilis* in paragraph 2 (Chapter 3.2.2) above.

⁴⁶³ The interpretive difficulty is also seen from the fact that the passage has been amended in both the first two printed editions (Paris and Berlin) to *per absoluti similitudinem* «by a similitude of the first principle», which is much easier to interpret, while the Tegernsee manuscript Codex Monacensis 18621 has *perabsolutam*, which may have been intended as a modification in the same direction, eliminating the ‘per’ and predicating everything of ‘principium’. Cf. the apparatus ad locum in *De Beryllo*, p. 11.

However, the manuscript evidence indicates that this was there in the original. Why does Cusanus use this formulation here? As for a number of other problematic passages, the connotation for this paradoxical-seeming formulation is strikingly Christological: *similitudo absoluta*, a term Cusanus never uses again in the text, evokes (and is here in close proximity to) *aequalitas [absoluta]*, a common term in Cusanus for Christ. If one keeps in mind that in the previous paragraph *homo* was identified as a *similitudo* of God (not only by being one of the *entia realia*, but particularly as having *intellectus*), then, reading this passage Christologically, this clause would mean ‘through the likeness-of-God that is also absolute’ (i.e. ‘through what is both God and man’), and the meaning would be perfectly consonant in Cusanus’ overall framework (see the analysis in Chapters 5.3-5.5).

In this final argument, Cusanus more clearly formalizes the use of the method for the *similitudo-veritas* relationship already established and used in paragraph 5, and offers a general formula, one that can serve as a paradigm for the application of the method in general, given the fact that it applies ‘*for omnes similitudines*’, for which the most probable reading is ‘for all types (i.e., any particular type) of similarity’, which formula could cover any conceivable use of the method as long as the ultimate *objectum* is the *veritas / primum principium*.

Sic si per beryllum videmus divisionem, erit obiectum conexio indivisibilis; ita de proportione et habitudine et pulchritudine et talibus. (De Beryllo, 8, p. 11, 15-17)

Cusanus ends paragraph 8 (and the ‘Methodological section’ of the book) by offering a list of applications, which can be extended and generalized, as promised in the first paragraph; obviously, the reader is presumed to already be able to apply the method already explained in any similar cases: *ita de talibus*. We observe that the list of selected examples, and the list of applications already investigated as examples in this paragraph, was chosen with great care: we have in fact examined the *principium* as ‘simple / indivisible / before multiplicity’, then as *aequalitas*, generalized to *veritas-similitudo*, and now the first example proposed is to examine it through *divisio*, which Cusanus says will show the *principium* as *conexio indivisibilis*: we thus have here the triad *unitas-aequalitas-nexus*, the preferred

Trinitological expression in *De Beryllo* which is developed at length later. Thus, Cusanus offers here a subtle introduction to Cusanian Trinitology (and to what will be its main argumentative *modus operandi* in *De Beryllo*: the combination of terms derived from different applications of the *beryllus* for describing the divine persons)⁴⁶⁴.

For the other examples, *proportio*, *habitus*, *pulchritudo* and *et talibus*, one wonders what the extension of *talibus*, ‘things of this sort’, would be. We observe that for this clause, the grammatical form of introducing the elements of the application of the method has changed: while in the first part of this paragraph it was made explicit what the criterion was (e.g. what one will see the *principium* as a maximum and minimum of, e.g. *divisio*) as well as the *obiectum* (e.g. *conexio*, the main ‘divine name’ which is to be derived) for each application of the method, here Cusanus does not offer the *obiectum* for *proportio*, etc. This is something like an ‘exercise left for the reader,’ not difficult to solve, because it is apparent that *proportio*, *habitus*, *pulchritudo* (all with the qualifier *absolutus*) can each of them be the *obiectum* for any particular relationship associated with them. *Proportio* is a very general term, denoting in Cusanus more or less any definable relationship between finites, and *habitus* seems similarly general⁴⁶⁵; thus, it seems that *talibus* would include, in effect, any conceivable relationship between objects. Cusanus is offering here the blueprint for a truly exhaustive methodology.

But the use of the method so far has been restricted to the abstract derivation of a single ‘divine name’ (*aequalitas*, *veritas*, etc.), without much in terms of ‘name transfer’ between different images. There is also the crucial possibility of using the method not with the *primum principium* as the object, but with a finite object (considered in relation to what can be seen as its own particular *principium*: e.g. angle and line), and then linking two instances of the method, as we have seen, to ‘transfer’ the relationships found between one and another, making them ‘divine names’ within the *principium-*

⁴⁶⁴ On the ‘beryllic’ construction of Trinitological arguments, see the analysis in Chapter 3.4.4.

⁴⁶⁵ In connection with *habitus*, Senger and Bormann (*De Beryllo*, p. 72, note to paragraph 63 line 2) point to a passage in Thomas Aquinas in his commentary on Boethius’ *De Trinitate*, where *habitus* and *proportio* are connected and similarly ‘universal’ in scope: THOMAS AQUINAS, *Expositio secundum librum Boethii De Trinitate*, q. 1, a. 2 ad 3, in *Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters*, ed. J. Koch, Leiden 1955, vol. IV, p. 67, 10-12: «proportion nihil aliud est quam habitudo duorum ad invicem convenientium in aliquo, secundum hoc quod conveniunt aut differunt».

directed applications of the *beryllus*. Cusanus uses the geometrical images that follow to illustrate this point, as well as offer, as is his declared goal, more *praxis* for the reader's intellect.

3.4 Mathematical and geometrical images used in the application of the *beryllus*

We will proceed to the examination of the four main geometrical constructions that Cusanus employs as images for the *beryllus/scientia aenigmatica* method he has introduced in the 'methodological section' of paragraphs 1-8. As we read at the end of paragraph 8, Cusanus believes he has already given the reader everything they need in order to apply the *beryllus* to, in effect, any criterion or relationship between objects (8, p. 11, 15: *et talibus* – the only implicit requirement is that it should be possible to define a 'more' or 'less', a *magnus* and *parvus* for the relationship, so that one could conceivably construct a *maximum pariter et minimum*)⁴⁶⁶. He believes he has accomplished the first part of the promise he made in paragraph 1: to propose a *speculum et aenigma* through which anyone's *intellectus*, being *infirmus*, could assist itself and guide itself «in the highest realm of things knowable», *in ultimo scibilium*⁴⁶⁷. What is left is the second part of his plan for the work: to propose *sententias et opiniones* so that the reader may become a judge of 'how close' they get to *veritas*. This describes the rest of the book until paragraph 71. However, a reader will note that Cusanus has not yet talked about any criterion for 'how close an opinion gets' to *veritas* (although *veritas* has been identified with the *primum principium*). Yet this is at the core of what the reader is supposed to be able to do in this 'second part' of the book. Cusanus must believe that 'how to rank *sententias et opiniones*' must be implicit in the method itself, and that it is only a matter of applying it correctly. His four geometrical illustrations show precisely how this is to be done and why Cusanus believes this. (Although, in the end, his notion of how to do this implies not just the method itself but also a certain separate

⁴⁶⁶ See the explanation of the fundamental structure in Chapter 2.3.

⁴⁶⁷ *De Beryllo*, 1, p. 3, 5-7. Note here that the term *scibilium* introduced in the first paragraph has found its correlate with the introduction of the *aenigmatica scientia*. *Scibilia* is clearly a different realm from *sensibilia* or *intelligibilia* (though it likely includes them plus something 'extra': the *ultimo*, for which we again note the possible Christological interpretation), and it appears to be yet another name for the realm corresponding to *visus subtilissimus*, *visio intellectualis*, *quae sunt supra/excedant, in excessu*. Cusanus' chief goal is, then, to help the reader use their *intellectus* to access this realm, because the *intellectus* is, at least for this purpose (precisely because *scibilia* is ultimately wider than *intelligibilia*) *infirmus*.

‘hierarchical principle’ of *simplicitas* as an ‘input’ that governs the choice of images used and structures to be built with the method—see our analysis of the notion of hierarchy in Chapter 4.2-3).

3.4.1 The *calamus* image (*linea - angulus*) – *De Beryllo*, 9, p. 11, 1 – 10, p. 13, 22

This is the first image offered by Cusanus, and he introduces it by a direct instruction, with the verb *videre*: «see an *aenigma* of this art (*ars*) of ours». *Ars* is another new name for the method, suggesting a ‘craft’ that requires practice⁴⁶⁸, and which will crucially recur at the end of the book in an explicitly Christological image⁴⁶⁹. The first person plural possessive pronoun underlies the ‘closeness’ to the reader that Cusanus has emphasized in paragraph 8, since the ‘art’ of the method ‘belongs’ now to the reader as well.

Interestingly, Cusanus doesn’t introduce the image as a ‘geometrical’ construction at all – rather, he instructs the reader to take a reed (*calamus*) and fold it in the middle; a little later, he switches to talking about the abstract line in his geometrical illustration: *esto igitur quod calamus sit ut linea...* (p. 12, 3-4). He starts from a physical object and an instruction for the reader to physically follow, trying to counterbalance the ‘abstractness’ of the previous paragraph with *praxis*⁴⁷⁰.

First of all, he introduces a fundamental principle, namely that a line is the *principium* of a surface and of angles on the surface⁴⁷¹—however, this is meant to help the reader, and is not strictly required for his argument; it is rather an explanation of how *principium* works in this context,

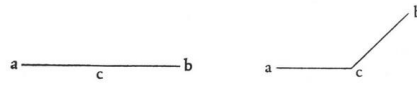
⁴⁶⁸ Flasch remarks that Cusanus intends *ars* in a Lullian sense, which requires not only learning but practical instruction, cf. FLASCH, *Nikolaus Cusanus*, p. 41.

⁴⁶⁹ *De Beryllo*, 70, p. 81, 2-6: «apprehensio eiusdem artis... sic intellectus divinus ars est omnipotentis... se nude ostendet in illa die», all in an explicitly eschatological context and with a Christological referent. See my analysis of this in Chapter 5.

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. FLASCH, *Nikolaus Cusanus*, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁷¹ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica*, V, 8, 1017b19-22. In the Bessarion translation (ID., *Aristoteles Latine*, 1017b17-23, p. 498): «quaecunque particulae insitae sint in talibus, definientes et quod quid significantes, quibus peremptis totum perimitur, ut superficies corpus, ut quidam aiunt, et linea superficies. et universaliter numerus videtur quibusdam talis esse (eo etenim perempto nihil esse) et omnia terminare». The *quidam* who say this are the Platonists and Pythagoreans, and the argument is that if the line is removed (as a principle), all (the surface) is removed, an identical argument to the one for *numerus*. These geometrical and mathematical principles are very familiar to a reader of Cusanus, as he employs them at length in *De Docta Ignorantia*, I, 13-15, 35-37, pp. 25, 17-8, 26, 21-22, 27, 16-17, 28, 11-23; 39, p. 29, 4. Furthermore, we must note that he adds *anguli superficiales* which is not present in his sources, so that one cannot accurately say that Cusanus is simply relying on this view from the tradition.

identifying it as the coincidence of the maximum and minimum⁴⁷² which the reader can easily see in the geometrical image Cusanus offers:



Here is the B-notation of the full application of the *beryllus* to this image in paragraph 9:

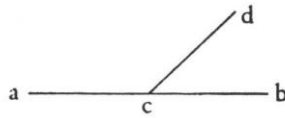
B[formabiles anguli, acutus-obtusus] -> continua linea CB cum CA
 - in eo motu CB cum CA causat omnes formabiles angulos
 - numquam erit aliquis [angulus] ita acutus, quin possit esse acutior
 - numquam erit aliquis [angulus] ita obtusus, quin possit esse obtusior
B[angulus, acutus-obtusus] -> principium angulorum
 - principium non est aliquid angulus
 - principium est simplex linea
 - principium superficialium angulorum est indivisibile omni modo divisionis, quo anguli sunt divisibiles
SICUTI-ITA
B[*res, maius-minus] -> absolutum primum principium

Accordingly, we have the basic image of a relationship found between two types of objects (a line and the angles it forms), when one is defined in terms of a *coincidentia oppositorum* of the other, and thus its *principium* and *simplex, indivisibilis* (in relation to it), etc. The *beryllus* allows us to ‘see’ these relationships, and then (this is the crucial part) to ‘transfer’ them (i.e., the ways of speaking about these objects in relation) to another use of the *beryllus*. Cusanus emphasizes very carefully where this step takes place, and the way it will be accomplished throughout *De Beryllo*, by means of a *sicuti...ita* structure: *sicuti igitur hoc vides, ita per speculum et aenigmate videas absolutum primum principium* (9, p. 12, 13-14).

Cusanus admonishes the reader to pay attention that the object they are ‘seeing’ in the application of the *beryllus* to the elements in the image is, in fact, a *coincidentia oppositorum*: the *maximum* and *minimum* in relation to the chosen property must not be *duo*, but rather coincide in the same one object, which is the crucial requirement for the method to work (10, p. 12, 1-4). He clarifies

⁴⁷² In our account of the principles underlying the ‘B-notation’ in Chapter 2.3, this can be referred to as seeing the Level I object as the *principium* of Level II objects; this is only one particular relationship, but it has fundamental importance for Cusanus, as we see him define the *beryllus* method as implicitly aimed at the *principium* in paragraph 3 and paragraph 8.

by adding an element to the previously static image of the angle: the reader must ‘make’ the angle-building line CD ‘movable’ (*mobilis*) – (10, p. 12, 1 – p. 13, 5):



This lets the reader build all possible angles while keeping the line-angle relationship (of *principium* and *principatum*) constant, in order to illustrate, most generally, how one constructs a *coincidentia oppositorum* when considering a particular criterion (which in our image is the size of the angle): the goal is to ‘see’ (the verb used constantly and repeatedly here) how the *maximum* and *minimum* appear as one, and their duality disappears (*dualitas debet cessare*): in this way, one has identified a *principium* for the purpose of the method. Cusanus introduces a great wealth of terms and expressions describing the relationship between the line and angles as *principium* and *principiata*— which, crucially, can be ‘transferred’ from this particular image to any other similarly constructed (‘berillic’) structure, including ones which take as their object the *absolutum principium*. Thus, all the relationships describable in this *linea-anguli* structure become ways of speaking about God.

Accordingly, here is the B-notation for the ‘updated’ image used in paragraph 10. Note how Cusanus switches from the *linea-anguli* image to the *principium* and back (by the word *puta*), and then back again in the last sentence introduced with *sic*:

B[omnia, maius-minus] -> principium
 -***principium indivisibile**
 -***maximum et minimum non duo**
HOC CLARE VIDE BIS SI
B[ACD-BCD anguli, maius-minus] -> angulus maximum pariter et minimum
 - **quamdiu CD unum angulum cum CA et alium cum CB constituit, nullus est maximus aut minimus**
 - **angulus semper maior potest esse, in tantum maior, quantum alius existit**
 - **[angulus] non est prius unus maximus quam alius minimus**
 - **[maximum vel minimus] hoc esse non potest, quamdiu sunt duo anguli**
 - **si dualitas cessare debet angulorum, non [*esset] nisi CD super lineam AB et nullum angulum**
 - **[angulus] post simplicem lineam**
 - **angulus maximum pariter et minimum est ante duo angulos**
 - **angulus maximum pariter et minimum non est signabilis**
IGITUR
B[principiata, maius-minus] -> principium

- principium est maximum pariter et minimum
- omne principiatum non possit esse nisi similitudo principii
- omne principiatum nec maius nec minus principio esse possit

PUTA

B[anguli, maius-minus] -> principium angulorum

- nullus possit esse angulus adeo acutus, quin suam acutiem habeat a principio
- nec possit esse aliquis ita obtusus, quin esse ipsum tale habeat a suo principio
- necesse est quod omni acuto dabili, cum possit esse acutior, in virtute principii sit creare

acutiorem

- *necesse est quod omni obtuso dabili, cum possit esse obtusior, in virtute principii sit

creare obtusorem

SIC

B[principiata, maius-minus] -> principium

- principium est aeternum et inevaluabile per omnia principiata

To reiterate, these relationships gained from each ‘B-structure’ (and transferable to any other) are the heart of how Cusanus’ method works, as they are ‘gained’ as transferable expressions for talking about any other object of a *beryllus* structure, including the *principium* as such, i.e. God. Thus, we are presented with a productive method for constructing ‘divine names’, without taking anything away from the fundamental unknowability and innominability of the *principium* itself.

What Cusanus does next is very interesting: he interrupts his account of the *linea-anguli* image in order to offer an interpretation of ‘the great’ Pseudo-Dionysius’ *De Divinis Nominibus*⁴⁷³, with explicit citations, asserting that «he said these same things (*ista*) in a pithy (*compendiose*) [and elegant

⁴⁷³ He is quoting from the Ambrogio Traversari translation he (proudly) owns, cf. his mention of owning the «novissima Ambrosii Camaldulensis translatione» in *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*, 2, 13, p. 10, 16-17. This translation is found in Cod. Cusanus 43. Cusanus is quoting from three distinct places from what is chapter VIII in his translation, but which correspond to chapter V, 7, 8 and 10 in the critical edition edited by Beate Regina Suchla, as follows:

PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, *De Divinis Nominibus*, V, 7, p. 185, 16-25 (821B): «Οὐδέν οὖν ἀτοπον ἐξ ἀμυδρῶν εἰκόνων ἐπὶ τὸ πάντων αἰτιῶν ἀναβάντας ὑπερκοσμίους ὀφθαλμοῖς θεωρῆσαι πάντα ἐν τῷ πάντων αἰτίῳ καὶ τὰ ἀλλήλοις ἐναντία μονοειδῶς καὶ ἡνωμένως, ἀρχὴ γὰρ ἐστὶ τῶν ὄντων, ἀφ’ ἧς καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι καὶ πάντα τὰ ὅπως οὖν ὄντα, πᾶσα ἀρχή, πᾶν πέρας [*], πᾶσα ζώη, πᾶσα ἀθανασία, πᾶσα σοφία, πᾶσα τάξις, πᾶσα ἀρμονία, πᾶσα δύναμις, πᾶσα φρουρά, πᾶσα ἰδρυσις, πᾶσα διανομή, πᾶσα νόησις, πᾶς λόγος, πᾶσα αἴσθησις, πᾶσα Ἰξις, πᾶσα στάσις, πᾶσα κίνησις, πᾶσα ἐνωσις, πᾶσα κράσις, πᾶσα φιλία, πᾶσα ἐφαρμογή, πᾶσα διάκρισις, πᾶς ὅρος [*] καὶ τὰ ἄλλα, ὅσα τῷ εἶναι ὄντα τὰ ὄντα πάντα χαρακτηρίζει». (The passage enclosed between [*] [*] is skipped over by Cusanus in his citation). Cf. *De Beryllo*, 11, p. 13, 3 – 14, 9: «Nihil itaque alienum a nostro instituto facimus, si per exiles imagines, ad auctorem omnium ascendentes purgatissimis et mundo superioribus oculis inspiciamus omnia in omnium causa et invicem contraria uniformiter et coniuncte. Est enim principium rerum, ex quo est ipsum esse et omnia, quae quomodolibet sunt, omne initium et omnis finis. Et post pauca subiungit: et alia quaeque ipso esse cum sint quae sunt, omnia exculpunt»;

Ibid., V, 8, p. 187, 6-8 (821D): «Ταῦτα γὰρ πάντα τοῖς θεωρηπῶς ὑμνοῦσι τὸ κατὰ πᾶσαν αὐτὸν ἐπίνοιαν ὑπερουσίως εἶναι σημαίνει καὶ τῶν πανταχῶς ὄντων αἰτιῶν»; cf. *De Beryllo*, 11, p. 14, 11-13: «Dicit enim omnia «exemplaria rerum in una supersubstantiali coniunctione in sui et omnium causa ante subsistere concedendum»;

Ibid., V, 10, p. 189, 8-9 (825B): «καὶ πέρας πάντων καὶ ἀπειρία πάσης ἀπειρίας»; 12-13: «καὶ ἐστὼς καὶ κινούμενος καὶ οὔτε ἐστὼς οὔτε κινούμενος»; cf. *De Beryllo*, 11, p. 14, 9-11: «Idem de eodem principio affirmat quod sit «finis» et «infinitus, stans et» progrediens et quod «neque» sit «stans neque se movens»».

(*eleganter*)] way». At the end, he tells the reader to «see how clear (*lucide*) that divine man affirmed the things before (*quae praemissi*) in this place and in other places⁴⁷⁴». But why does Cusanus add this paragraph here, in the middle of his geometrical demonstration, when he could have invoked Pseudo-Dionysius explicitly, for instance in the ‘four premises’ section (and to which, in fact, the word *praemissi* in this paragraph might be taken to obliquely refer)? The answer lies in the fact that Cusanus has just developed his own way of constructing ‘divine names’, and instead of citing Pseudo-Dionysius as a mere ‘authority’, he is implying that all the particular names for God cited in the passages he chooses can be arrived at by using the *beryllus* in the manner just indicated in the *linea-anguli* example—and he assumes that, just like the ‘list’ at the end of paragraph 8, he assumes the reader can already see how these can all be derived using his *beryllus* method.

Interpreting Cusanus’ intention this way, we can identify all the ‘names’ he cites as if they were derived using the *beryllus* regarding the *principium*, which would result, for example, in speculative B-structures such as the following possibility (in which one would ‘look at’ the opposition between a (finite) *auctor* and his *res creata*, and derive precisely the relationships that are predicated by Pseudo-Dionysius of God):

B[*res creata ab auctore, *gradus] -> *auctor

- *auctor
- *causa

B[*omnia, *gradus] -> principium

- principium est auctor omnium
- principium est omnium causa; omnia in omnium causa *sunt
- contraria uniformiter conjuncte [sunt in auctore]
- principium rerum ex quo est ipsum esse et omnia, quae quomodolibet sunt
- principium est omne initium et omnis finis
- alia quaeque ipso esse cum sint quae sunt, omnia exculpant
- omnia exemplaria rerum in una supersubstantiali coniunctione in sui et omnium causa ante subsistere concedendum

B[*principiata, *gradus] -> principium

- principium est finis et infinitus

B[*principiata, *motus] -> principium

- principium est stans et progrediens
- principium neque sit stans neque se movens

⁴⁷⁴ Similar formulations (i.e. a long list of negations of both pairs of opposites about God) are found in PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, *De Mystica Theologia*, V, pp. 149-150 (1045D-1048B).

The two B-structures at the end would be entirely similar to the ‘independent’ structures in paragraph 8 (cf. *principium indivisible*). As is obvious, there are many other possibilities of deriving Pseudo-Dionysius’ language using the *beryllus* (the example I have given above tries to group most of them under one image, i.e. the *auctor* and his works), for each particular ‘divine name’, and Cusanus says nothing about which particular ‘beryllic’ structures he has in mind. However, he includes Pseudo-Dionysius’ list of ‘divine names’ at this point because he wants the reader to interpret them as being derivable by the same *beryllus*-employing comparative structure, even if not using the *linea-anguli* image of paragraphs 10-11. In this way, Cusanus avoids, in particular, the question of the differences between his views and those of Pseudo-Dionysius: in particular, the question of why Pseudo-Dionysius, according to Cusanus, held that *haec alta* should be hidden from the ‘uninitiated’ (paragraph 2), while Cusanus seems to disagree.

In paragraph 12, right after the paragraph dedicated to Pseudo-Dionysius, in keeping with the overall dual symmetry between the ‘theological’ and ‘philosophical’ strands of the tradition that we have seen manifested numerous times in *De Beryllo*, Cusanus turns immediately to Proclus, and uses the *linea-anguli* image in order to prove three ‘Proclean’ theses: *mensura* as a ‘divine name’⁴⁷⁵ (a notion that he introduced in paragraph 6, but about *homo*); the notion of *complicatio/complicare* that he also introduced previously⁴⁷⁶; and the unnameability of God, seizing on the observation that the *nomini angulorum* (acute, right, obtuse) do not apply to the line⁴⁷⁷. This allows him to explicitly refer to Proclus’ commentary on the Parmenides for these three notions⁴⁷⁸, while emphasizing, at the same time, (1) Proclus’ fundamental agreement with Plato on this issue; (2) the fundamental agreement in this

⁴⁷⁵ See Chapter 3.3 and the analysis of paragraph 6 (‘Premise 3’) for the notion of *mensura*, particularly notes 439, 444 and 452.

⁴⁷⁶ See note 425 on the terms *complicatio/explicatio*.

⁴⁷⁷ See also Chapter 4.1.1, the analysis of paragraph 13.

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem*, VI (Cousin 1069, 1074, 1087, Steel p. 362, 5; p. 365, 12ff; p. 374, 79ff) and Cusanus’ own marginal notes (CT III.2.2, marginalia 422: «omnia negantur ab uno deo deorum», 434: «nota quomodo negationes in diuinis preferuntur affirmationibus», 456: «que sunt assequentia enti ut tali in secunda ypotesi ponuntur et secundum primam ypotesim ab uno negantur», found also in the Steel edition, pp. 546-547); cf. also PROCLUS, *Theologia Platonis*, II, 5, ed. Portus, p. 93, S-W II, p. 37.12-19; *ibid.*, IV, 11, ed. Portus, p. 197, S-W IV, p. 37.8-10; *ibid.*, V, 16, ed. Portus, p. 277, with Cusanus’ own notes ad locum: cf. CT III.2.1, marginalia 163: «de deo Plato aliquando per analogiam ad secunda loquitur aliquando per abnegaciones», 275: «ad dionysium» (with the correction in the hand of Nicholas: «et incognoscibilem in intellectualibus per negationes hanc Plato mystice ostendit»), 343: «primus deus supra patris denominationem. ineffabilis neque unum neque bonum proprie dicitur».

regard with *Dionysius noster*⁴⁷⁹; (3) the identification of *theologia negativa* and *theologia affirmativa*, particularly in Pseudo-Dionysius, as each fitting with particular aspects of using the *beryllus* (in the *linea-anguli* image), implying at the same time that his method is not reducible to either of these and is in fact aimed at overcoming their limitations⁴⁸⁰.

Here is the B-notation describing the full application of the *beryllus* in paragraph 12:

B[angulus, maior-minor*] -> angulus maximum pariter et minimus

- a. m. est actus omnis formabilis anguli
- a. m. est nec maior, nec minor, ante omnem quantitatem
- a. m. est simplicissimus
- a. m. in se omnes formabiles sive magnos sive parvos complica[t] nec maiorem nec

minorem quocumque dabili

- [anguli maximo] non plus nomen unius quam omnium angulorum atque nullius convenit
- nec acutus nec rectus nec obtusus angulus [maximus] nominari potest, cum non sit aliquis

talis, sed simplicissima omnium causa

IAM QUOMODO

B[omnia*, maior-minor] -> primum omnium mensuram

- primum omnium mensura est omnia complicate quae esse possunt

3.4.2 The *linea veritatis* and the *punctus – superficies* images – *De Beryllo*, 19, p. 22, 1 – 23, p. 26, 15

As Cusanus says in paragraph 18 when introducing this new geometrical image (18, p. 21, 1-3), ‘what the *beryllus* and *aenigma* show you’ is the ultimate criterion for judging all positions that will be examined, in full concord with the description of this part of *De Beryllo* in 1, p.1, 10-13. He gives another formulation for what, precisely, the *beryllus* shows, with *scilicet*: that *veritas* gives being (*esse tribuere*) to all things *per suam similitudinem*⁴⁸¹. He identifies this with Albert the Great’s thesis to the effect that «it must be said in some way (*aliquot modo*)» that «from the First, one Form flows into all things. This Form is the likeness of the essence of the First, and through it all things partake of being

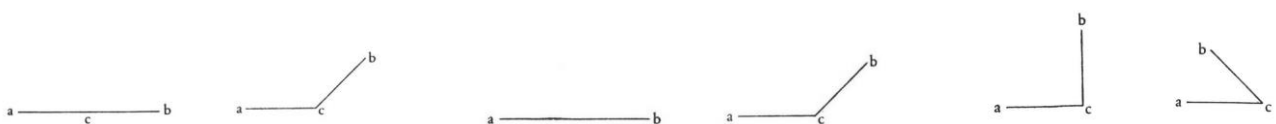
⁴⁷⁹ Cf. PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, *De Mystica Theologia*, I, 3, p. 143-144 (1000C-D); PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, *De Divinis Nominibus*, XIII, 4, pp. 230-231 (981C-984A). Cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super Dionysii Mysticam Theologiam*, in ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Opera Omnia*, ed. P. Simon, vol. XXXVII/2, p. 454, 78-84; p. 465, 65 – 466, 19, p. 471, 8ff.

⁴⁸⁰ On how Cusanus aims to develop (in agreement with his view of Pseudo-Dionysius) the ‘third step’, cf. BOND, *Nicolaus Cusanus: Selected Spiritual Works*, p. 33 (affirmative, negative, coincident theology); MILLER, *Reading Cusanus: Metaphor and Dialectic in a Conjectural Universe*, pp. 19-26 (affirmation, negation, hyper-negation/eminnence). Cf. the analysis in Chapter 2.3 and the other sources found in note 193.

⁴⁸¹ Cf. *De Beryllo*, 8, p. 11, 10-11: *per suam absolutam similitudinem*; note the possible Christological resonances there, which are also possible here, although one can interpret it as merely a restatement of the thesis that all things are *similitudines* of God.

that is derived from the First»⁴⁸². Furthermore, Cusanus adds that *veritas*, which ‘is all it can be’ (*id quod esse potest* – a proof derived in paragraph 12), cannot be partaken of (*imparticipabilis*) but is instead *communicabilis* in its *similitudo*, in which «it can be received in greater or lesser degree in accordance with the disposition of the receiver». This is a further terminological refinement of the *similitudo-veritas* basic ontological pattern introduced in ‘Premise 1’ (paragraph 4), which Cusanus intends to explain and prove by means of the *beryllus*. But he is concerned, even more importantly, to establish hierarchical relationships between different ‘levels’ of being, which he has not shown how to do before: accordingly, he quotes Avicbron’s *Fons Vitae*, which establishes a hierarchy between ‘being’ and ‘intellect’ by the notion of *reflexiones*: «that various reflexive turnings of being cause differences among beings, since one reflexive turning adds life to being, and two reflexive turnings add intellect»⁴⁸³, resulting in an ontological structure of *esse – vivere – intelligere*, one that Cusanus himself uses extensively⁴⁸⁴. The question is «how this can be understood in an *aenigma*»; here, Cusanus seems to imply that the reader has a lot of freedom: «you may (*velis*) envision in the way that follows», implying that there are other *aenigmata* that could also work for the same purpose.

This is the context for the image Cusanus proposes in paragraph 19, for which he gives these three illustrations:



While this appears similar to the *linea-angulum* structure in paragraphs 9-12, it is introduced in a very different way: Cusanus identifies immediately how the parallel two ‘berillic’ structures should

⁴⁸² *De Beryllo*, 18, p. 21, 4 – p. 22, 6, tr. Hopkins. (Wherever it is not directly specified, the translations are my own). Cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super De Divinis Nominibus*, V, 32, p. 322, 14-17.

⁴⁸³ SOLOMON IBN GABIROL, *Fons vitae*, ed. C. Bäumer, Munich 1895, III, 54, p. 199; V, 17-19, pp. 250-252. In their commentary, Senger and Bormann (*De Beryllo*, p. 107) identify the source of this passage in Cusanus as Albert’s commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius: ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super De Divinis Nominibus*, V, 32, p. 315, 62-79.

⁴⁸⁴ Cf. *De non aliud*, IX, 32, p. 18, 3ff; *De venatione sapientiae*, XXXI, 93, p. 89, 8ff: «Et totus hic mundus est ex intellectualibus, ex vitalibus et existentibus»; *De apice theoriae*, 5, p. 120, 1-5. Cf. PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem*, VI (Cousin 1098, Steel p. 383, 69-77), and Cusanus’ note: «unum maxime comprehensivum extra quod nihil, et post hoc ens, deinde vita, post intellectus» (*CT* III.2.2, p. 119, marginalia 478). See also the further discussion and sources regarding the ‘three modi’ in note 433 above.

work—from the beginning, line AB is said to be meant as an image of *veritas* which «falls in-between *veritas* and nothing» (which it does, of course, by the very fact that it is a *similitudo*). Most crucially for how Cusanus wants to present a ‘hierarchical’ image of being, the line is said explicitly at the beginning to represent *veritas* at one end, A, and *nihil* at the other end, B. It is not, therefore, a simple one-dimensional line like in the *calamus* image before, from which angles can be formed, so to speak, in any ‘direction’, so that an acute angle might be described at the same time as an obtuse angle. This is a completely different illustration: the line is, in fact, an axis on which one can move closer or farther away from *veritas*. Accordingly, as one can easily predict, the angles formed on it will have some extra properties, and will be able to be ordered: their *magnitudo* will now correspond, in fact, with the distance on the line from A, i.e. the distance from absolute Truth (*veritas*). Furthermore, we know from paragraph 12 that Cusanus has at his disposal names for *anguli*, i.e. *acutus*, *rectus* and *obtusus*, which were there used in a ‘negative’ way to prove God’s unnameability, as the line was, so to speak, an ‘unordered’ image for the *principium*. Now, however, they can obviously be used to define an ontological structure of ‘closeness’ to *veritas* (cf. also *minus*, *magis*, *maxime*, useful comparative adverbs that Cusanus will use).

Accordingly, here is the B-structure for Cusanus’ construction in paragraph 19:

B[*linea AB, gradus] -> *linea AC***

- *linea AB est fixa, ut egreditur a principio ut est AC, et mobilis, ut movetur super e complicatorie versus principium*

B[*angulum, motus obtusus-acutus*] -> *linea AC*

- *in hoc motu CB cum CA causat varios angulos et CB est per motum differentias similitudinis explicans*
- *primo in similitudine minus formali obtusum angulum causat ipsius esse, deinde magis formali ipsius vivere, deinde maxime formali et acuto ipsius intelligere*

- *acutus angulus plus de activitate anguli et simplicitate participat et similior primo principio. Et est in aliis angulis, scilicet vitali et ipsius esse; sic vitalis in angulo ipsius esse*

B[*angulum, motus obtusus-acutus*] -> *AB*

- *omnia in se continet, quae possunt explicari, et per motum fit explicatio*

SIC/QUOMODO

B[*omnia, *gradus*] -> **principium*

- *motus ubi simplex elementum de se explicat elementatum*
- *quae sunt mediae differentiae ipsius esse et vitae ac ipsius intelligere et quae explicari possunt*

We note that there was in fact no need for Cusanus to identify the line as *similitudo veritatis* in the beginning; he could have simply described a finite line that ‘folds back’ onto itself, determined the properties of the angles formed with the *beryllus*, and transferred everything to a *beryllus* structure with *principium* as its object, which he does in any case using *sic* and *quomodo*, precisely as he did in the *calamus* image. Calling the line *similitudo veritatis* from the beginning seems to be simply a device for the reader to better understand Cusanus’ construction and its ‘oriented’ nature. However, this early, ‘preemptive’ identification of exactly what the line will be the image of has a crucial purpose for Cusanus’ overall construction, which must be underlined carefully: the fact that the directionality (A = *veritas*, B = *nihil*) is assumed from the start. The method itself, combining two ‘B-structures’ in parallel, can in fact transfer any relationship that obtains between Level I and Level II objects in the first image to those in the second image, and has no constraints beyond that: from an image such as the angle ACB built in paragraph 19, one could (if one wanted to) identify the notion of ‘closeness to A’ in a completely different way when moving to the *beryllus* structure that involves the *principium*; indeed, one could identify B as standing for *veritas* and A for *nihil*, and completely reverse the *acutus*-[*in magis formalis similitudo*]⁴⁸⁵-*obtusus* ontological hierarchy triad as a result. Cusanus’ solution to this ‘subversive’ possibility is simple and straightforward: assert from the beginning (before the image is actually deployed) how exactly it must be used, i.e. what the directionality of the relationships will be. This is a crucial issue for the notion of hierarchy that Cusanus is trying to construct, and will be analyzed further in Chapter 4.3.

We note that Cusanus here manages to create a structure compatible with Albert’s dictum in paragraph 18, with the *linea* being an intermediate level, an image of something that remains incommunicable (*veritas*), yet itself communicable to the angles formed. But he still needs to build the structure in Avicbron’s account, with a threefold sequence of *esse – vivere – intelligere*. This is precisely what does in paragraph 20, changing the image by adding the *mathematicus* to the image, i.e.

⁴⁸⁵ Cusanus specifically avoids using *rectus* here, restricting himself to *acutus* and *obtusus*, as will be discussed further below.

a mathematician who is drawing a line (1) and ‘folding’ it into a triangle (2); this arguably changes the image on a fundamental level, as it switches from a ‘line-angles’ structure to a ‘mathematician-figure’ fundamental opposition (i.e. the mathematician is the *principium* and the line is the *principiatum*, and in turn the line is the *principium* and the triangle is the *principiatum*)—which is precisely what Cusanus intends: he thus introduces an ‘intermediate’ level of being, that of the *mathematicus*, between *veritas* and the *linea*; the line is a creation and thus a *similitudo* of the mathematician, resulting in an implicit threefold hierarchical structure: *mathematicus-linea-trianguli*, which corresponds to *intellectus conditor (incommunicabilis veritas) - communicabilis veritas - omnia vera* (20, p. 24, 4-7). This structure is achieved by a superposition of applications of the *beryllus*, each ‘stage’ being seen as the image of the ontologically superior one:

B[vera, *gradus veritatis] -> intellectus conditor
 - sic movet [CB/similitudinem suam], exemplaria, quae in se habet, explicat in sua similitudine
***SICUT**
***B[angulus, obtusus-acutus] -> linea AB**
 - sic movet CB, exemplaria [angulorum], quae in se habet, explicat in sua similitudine
SICUT
B[triangulum, gradus explicationis*] -> mathematicus
 - dum lineam plicat in triangulum, ipsum triangulum explicat motu complicationis, quem intra se habet in mente

B[AB, gradus in figuris*] -> mathematicus
 - AB communicabilem veritatem [mathematici] incommunicabilis veritatis [mathematici]
similitudo
UNDE DEBE IMAGINARI
B[veritas communicabilis, *gradus] -> veritas absoluta
B[omnia vera, *gradus veritatis] -> veritas absoluta
 - veritas communicabilis per quam omnia vera sunt vera, et non absoluta ut veritas, sed est in veris
B[omnia vera, *gradus potentiae] -> absoluta simplicitas omnipotens

In this way, Cusanus manages to define a *trinus gradus*, a threefold division into things that *sunt, vivunt* and *intelligunt*, in a hierarchy based on *simplicitas*, and which is fully compatible with (and thus a ‘proof’ of) Avicenna’s *reflexiones* model, which also has the same three ‘levels’. The three levels are defined, in this image, by defining three ‘types’ of angles relative to their size (*acutus*, [*magis in formali similitudine*], *obtusus*), where the second one is interestingly left unnamed (we would expect

rectus). He has not yet managed to show, for example, that the beings in the hierarchy have a particular relationship (i.e. participation) among those at different ‘levels’. But he has constructed the model for how to build a pattern of levels where each is an image of the former, on the pattern of the sequence *mathematicus-linea-triangulus*. Notably, though, he avoids saying that the mathematician himself is an image of the *intellectus conditor*, which would make this a four-level construction. He undertakes to explicitly build such a four-level construction in the next paragraphs.

In the next few paragraphs (21-23), using what is introduced explicitly as a separate image (*alia aenigma* – 21, p. 25, 1), Cusanus undertakes to develop yet another multi-level ontological construction by successive applications of the *beryllus* at each stage, on the notion of the successive relationships of *similitudo* between *veritas – unum/monas – punctus – linea – superficies – corpus* (correlated with *longum, latum, profundum*), with the criterion of *indivisibilitas* and then *simplicitas*. The argument in paragraph 21 proceeds as follows:

- B[omnia*, simplicitas/indivisibilitas] -> veritas**
 - **veritas est indivisibilis et incommunicabilis**
 - **veritas se vult ostendere et communicare per suam similitudinem**
SIT UT
B[punctus, simplicitas] -> unum/monas
 - **punctus est similitudo indivisibilitatis ipsius unius**
 - **unum se vult ostendere et communicare per suam similitudinem**
 - **punctus est communicabilis indivisibilitas in continuo**
 - **punctus non sit unum**

Interestingly, Cusanus starts the sequence of *beryllus* structures from the already familiar argument about *veritas* communicating itself (in paragraphs 19-20), and using it here to construct the relationship between *punctus* and *unum*. The crucial step which needs to be justified is at 21, p. 25, 3-4, namely the principle that the indivisibility of the point⁴⁸⁶ is a *similitudo* of the indivisibility of the *unum*, which enables the chain of ‘downward extension’ by means of successive *similitudo/indivisibilitas*. Paragraph 22 introduces the three *modi essendi* and three *modi dimensionis* (which appear to overlap):

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem*, VI (Cousin 1105, Steel p. 388, 45-47) and Nicholas’ note: «punctum non habet partes dimensionales, sed non simpliciter impartibile, tanquam nulla habens partem» (*ibid.*, Steel p. 549).

B[corpus, indivisibilitas] -> punctus

- punctus communicatus modo quo communicabilis est corpus
- punctus indivisibilis omni modo essendi continui et dimensionis [i.e. linea, superficies, corpus, longum, latum, profundum]

In paragraph 23, by the criterion of *indivisibilitas*, these are fashioned into a hierarchical structure similar to the hierarchy of angles (*acutus*, *, *obtusus*) in paragraphs 19-20:

B[linea, divisibilitas] -> punctus

- linea participat indivisibilitatem puncti, quia est linealiter indivisibilis
- linea in non lineam partiri nequit nec est divisibilis secundum latum et profundum.

B[superficies, divisibilitas] -> punctus

- superficies participat indivisibilitatem puncti, quia in non superficiem impartibilis

B[corpus, divisibilitas] -> punctus

- corpus, quia in non corpus secari nequit, [non est] secundum profundum divisibilis
- omne quod reperitur in corpore, non est nisi punctus

B[corpus/omne quod reperitur, divisibilitas] -> unus

- omne igitur, quod reperitur in corpore, non est nisi similitudo ipsius unius

B[punctus-linea-superficie-corporis, simplicitas] -> punctus

- in indivisibilitate puncti complicantur omnes illae indivisibilitates
- non reperitur punctus absolutus a corpore vel superficie aut linea
- punctus est principium intrinsecum dans indivisibilitatem

DE HAC TE ELEVA AD

***B[similitudines, *gradus] -> universum/veritas**

The end result is having *corpus*, *linea* and *superficie* in the relationship of being images of the *punctus* (although this is not also said to hold, for instance, between any two of them), which is itself an image of the *unum/monas*, which is an image of *veritas*. Cusanus has constructed four ontological levels, descending in a hierarchy of *similitudo/indivisibilitas* (compare paragraphs 19-20 where he built a three-level structure: *mathematicus – linea – triangulus*). At the end (23, p. 26, 12-14), he tells the reader that from this argument they should «elevate [themselves] unto a likeness of [*veritas*] and of the universe; and by means of [this] quite clear symbolism [of a point] make a conjecture (*conjectura*)⁴⁸⁷ about what has been said».

What is the point, one might ask, of building a three-level ontological structure and then building a four-level structure? (In addition, we recall that the initial image in paragraphs 9-12 had only two

⁴⁸⁷ This is the only occurrence in *De Beryllo* of the term *conjectura*, a highly prominent term in the earlier Cusanus (cf. e.g. *De conjecturis*, I, 11, 57, p. 58, 1-17); as such, this acts both as a link to Cusanus' earlier conceptualizations of the limitedness of human knowledge, and as an implicit sign that what he is doing in *De Beryllo* is, in some important way, different.

ontological levels: *linea* and *angulus*) A reader might ask themselves: which one is supposed to be the actually ‘true’ one? Cusanus’ ultimate point seems to be that this is, in the end, a misguided question: the method he proposes can help in constructing such ‘models’, which can be built from simple images, with the *beryllus* method, whenever one needs to examine, for instance, a *dictum* by Pseudo-Dionysius, Proclus, Albert or Avicbron (featuring two-level, three-level, or four-level structures, etc.). Indeed, in these passages the *beryllus* has always been used to show ‘how these opinions are true’, and not, for instance, to refute any of them.

3.4.3 The *anguli – naturae cognoscitivae* image – *De Beryllo*, 32, p. 36, 13 – 19

Tu igitur si volueris aeternam sapientiam sive principium cognoscitivum videre, posito beryllo ipsum videas per maximum pariter et minimum cognoscibile. Et in aenigmate quemadmodum de angulis inquire acutas, formales, simplices et penetrativas naturas cognoscitivas uti angulos acutos, alias obtusiores et demum obtusissimas uti obtusos angulos. Et omnes gradus venari poteris possibiles, et quemadmodum de hoc sic dixi, ita de quibuscumque sic se habentibus. (32, p. 36, 13-19)

This is a very important ‘methodological’ passage, in which Cusanus seems to give a brief description of using the *beryllus* method, in direct address to the reader. He says this a few lines after the extraordinary statement that «all of the foregoing writers, along with all the others I have seen, have lacked the beryl» (*beryllo caruerunt*)⁴⁸⁸, which contextualizes Cusanus’ views hinted at in the first and second paragraph of *De Beryllo*: the *beryllus* as a method is of such extraordinary utility (and novelty), that it can accomplish something unprecedented, such as (in paragraph 2) to ‘initiate’ a reader into *haec alta/mystica* in only a few days. This must be, finally, the reason why both Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius prohibited revealing ‘these things’ to those ignorant of the *intellectuales elevationes*: they simply did not have the *beryllus*, which Cusanus does—and which the reader, the *tu* of the direct address, now also does⁴⁸⁹. The reader is therefore in an extraordinarily privileged position vis-à-vis the entire tradition (even when these past authors, such as *Dionysius noster*, happened to be correct).

⁴⁸⁸ *De Beryllo*, 31, p. 35, 1: «Hi omnes et quotquot vidi scribentes caruerunt beryllo».

⁴⁸⁹ It is important to note that Cusanus says that everyone, *omnes*, lacked the *beryllus*, including Pseudo-Dionysius, even though in the very next sentence he says that one particular way in which interpreters have erred due to lacking the *beryllus* has been in reading Pseudo-Dionysius when it comes to the ‘conjunction of opposites’: *textum magistri divini disjunctive interpretantur* (32, p. 35, 5-6). However, Pseudo-Dionysius, even if he did not suffer from that particular flaw (cf. *magnum*

What are the contents of Cusanus’ ‘instructions’ to the reader as a user of the *beryllus* method? The stated goal, to see *aeterna sapientia* and *principium cognoscitivum*, seems to be the same as that posited from the beginning (paragraphs 3 and 8), i.e. the *principium* (i.e. God). The mode of operation—*per maximum partier et minimum cognoscibile*—is also essentially familiar since paragraph 3. However, Cusanus offers a more detailed account here. The *quemadmodum* indicates that the *aenigma de angulis* is not necessarily the only, or even the best one to use (as Cusanus, indeed, has been using many others), but it serves as a paradigmatic example. Here Cusanus recalls the *veritas-linea-anguli* structure built up in paragraph 19, where the types of angles, *acutus-[acutior]-obtusus*, are now mapped onto *naturae*: thus, there are *naturas actuas, formales, simplices et penetrativas* («acute, formal, simple, and penetrative cognitive natures») and those that are ‘more obtuse’ and ‘the most obtuse’; and (in a similar way) one will be able to ‘hunt for’ (*venari*)⁴⁹⁰ every possible degree/gradation (*omnes gradus possibiles*). Cusanus ends with a strong generalizing sentence about this holding regarding ‘all other things that are in such relations’ (*ita de quibuscumque sic se habentibus*)⁴⁹¹. The core of this ‘methodological’ statement is the suggestion that *gradus* (a general term for ‘gradation’, ‘degree’) can be investigated by employing a similar structure as that built in paragraph 19: thus, one involving a *motus* of *explicatio* across a continuum, with a particular predefined direction (*verus – nihil*).

3.4.4 The image of *angulus rectus* for *nexus* – *De Beryllo*, 41, p. 47, 10 – 12

Unde sicut angulus minime acutus et minime obtusus est simplex angulus rectus, in quo minima contrariorum angulorum coincidunt, antequam acutus et obtusus sint duo anguli, ita est de principio conexionis, in quo simpliciter coincidunt minima contrariorum. (*De Beryllo* 41, p. 47, 10-12).

est posse se stabiliter in conjunction figere oppositorum – where *magnus* is the constant epithet for Dionysius himself), also lacked the *beryllus*—which may be exactly, according to Cusanus’ account, what led him to formulate the ‘prohibition’ in paragraph 2.

⁴⁹⁰ The ‘hunt’, *venatio*, is a Platonic metaphor for the search for knowledge (cf. PLATO, *Republica*, IV, 432b-d) very dear to Cusanus; he will name one of his most important later works, which recapitulates his previous philosophical endeavors, *De Venatione Sapientiae* (cf. *De venatione sapientiae*, I, 1, p. 4, 20).

⁴⁹¹ Crucially, however, Trinitological relations are not meant to be included here; they must be dealt with not in the manner of finite *gradus* but coincidentally, as Cusanus later shows in paragraph 33; see Chapter 3.4.4 below.

In this paragraph, Cusanus formulates a quick application of the *beryllus* for the purpose of illustrating Cusanus' claimed solution to Aristotle's problem of the 'third principle', *privatio*⁴⁹², by means of *nexus*, i.e. the third person of the Trinity. The problem, as Cusanus presents it, is that Aristotle was unable, due to his reliance on the principle of non-contradiction, to accept that contraries can coincide in the third principle⁴⁹³. To solve this, Cusanus builds a new image that finally invokes the *angulus rectus*, the right angle, which was conspicuously missing in the construction in paragraph 19-20 (discussed in Chapter 3.4.3 above, note 485) and in the 'methodological' image in paragraph 32 (Chapter 3.4.4 above), which left an empty terminological place in the triad *acutus* - * - *obtusus*. Here, the same geometrical image is viewed differently: the least acute angle is said to coincide with the least obtuse angle, so that there is a coincidence of the minimums of these two opposites: *minima contrariorum coincidunt*. This new image comes as an illustration of his broader claim at the beginning of the paragraph (41, p. 47, 1-2), that «Our beryl makes us see more acutely [than Aristotle], so that, in the connecting *principium*, we see opposites prior to duality, i.e., before they are two contradictories». This corresponds to the *angulus rectus* being seen as the *principium* of the other angles, due to being the more *simplex* (according to the recurring external ontological criterion of *simplicitas* – see Chapter 4.3), because, in this image, the others are created by its 'movement' in one direction or the other; *acutus* and *obtusus* are thus reconceptualized as meaning something like 'deviation from the mean'. In effect, this simply means rotating the image of the angle-generating line in paragraph 19 by 90 degrees,

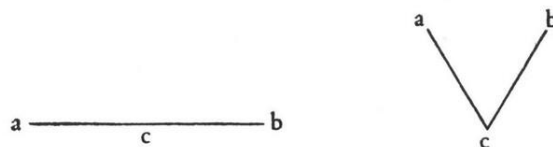
⁴⁹² Cf. *De Beryllo*, 40, p. 46, 1-3; ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica*, IV, 2, 1004b27-1005a4; XII, 2, 1069b32-34. Cusanus' criticism of Aristotle in *De Beryllo* is the most well-researched topic in the literature on *De Beryllo*; one can find a cogent exposition of all the particulars of the issue involved in, e.g., CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl. Tome 2*, pp. 88-112; FLASCH, *Geschichte einer Entwicklung*, pp. 468-477, ID., *Nicolaus Cusanus*, pp. 112-122; RUSCONI, *La Critica a Aristoteles en De Beryllo de Nicolas de Cusa*, pp. 203-218; ID., *Annäherung an die cusanische 'Scientia aenigmatica' im Licht aus seiner Lektüre des Aristoteles in De beryllo*, pp. 315-324; ARROCHE, *Acerca de las críticas a Platón y Aristóteles en el De beryllo*, pp. 41-58. For the most in-depth and comprehensive account of Aristotle's and Nicholas' differing ontological-epistemologica conceptions and the fundamentals behind Nicholas' criticism, see the recent work J. MAASSEN, *Metaphysik und Möglichkeitsbegriff bei Aristoteles und Nikolaus von Kues. Eine historisch-systematische Untersuchung*, Berlin – Boston 2015.

⁴⁹³ Cf. *De Beryllo*, 40, p. 46, 1-10. For the coincidence of contraries in Proclus as Cusanus' source, see PROCLUS, *Theologia Platonis*, IV, 30, p. 105, 17-19, and Nicholas' note: «de coincidentia contrariorum in uno»; PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem*, II (Cousin 725ff, Steel p. 87, 66ff), to which Cusanus notes: «et contradictoria secundum idem coincidere»; ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super De Divinis Nominibus*, V, 29, p. 320, 1-3, and Nicholas' note: «nota si rationes contrariorum possunt esse simul in anima quia non sunt contrarie forcius in deo». On the *coincidentia oppositorum*, see also notes 14 (for this theme in Cusanus generally), 193 (as cornerstone of Cusanus' method), 306 (in Cusanus' previous works).

since the principle that the line is generating the angles remains the same. By this change in how we look at the same basic image, Cusanus constructs precisely the structure he needs in order to use the *beryllus* to examine *contraria* and solve Aristotle's problem according to his coincidental method.

3.4.5 The image of *angulus* for the Trinity – *De Beryllo*, 33, p. 36, 1 – 34, p. 38, 9

Immediately after the passage above, Cusanus believes he needs to address a particular problem: that is, if the reader is not sure (*dubitas*) in what way the *principium* can be seen as *unitrinum*; this is a crucial question, as Trinitological reflection⁴⁹⁴ cannot be simply reduced to a matter of *gradus*, i.e. the degrees of differences in finite things. Cusanus formulates the argument himself introducing it with a strong verb form: *respondeo*. His solution is, in the main, that we consider the *principium* by means of the *beryllus* as both *indivisibilitas* (cf. 8, p. 10, 5), *aequalitas* (cf. 8, p. 11, 10) and *nexus* (cf. *conexio*, 8, p. 11, 15-17), which he has already shown how to do. Having these names for God at our disposal, we can combine them in various relationships in order to derive the appropriate trinitary construction. However, the crucial difficulty is considering which of these names we should use: Cusanus' first example invokes a *unitas* that has not been derived before, and Cusanus' chosen relationships for describing intra-Trinitary features (*unitas est fons indivisibilitatis*, *aequalitas est indivisibilitas unitatis*, *nexus est indivisibilitas unitatis et aequalitatis*) are not at all obvious; why couldn't one 'mix up' these predications in different ways? What is required is (as seems to be the pattern for any difficult relationship) a geometrical image. Thus, Cusanus takes an *aenigma* (33, p. 37, 8-15) based on the *linea veritatis* of paragraph 19:



Again, we have a line AB with a point C in the middle; AC remains fixed and CB is moved in order to generate angles. However, Cusanus changes the interpretation of the *linea veritatis* radically,

⁴⁹⁴ For an excellent account of Cusanus' rich (and orthodox) Trinitarian speculation, see e.g. R. HAUBST, *Streifzüge in die cusanische Theologie*, Münster 1991, pp. 255-302.

as he considers not the line AB, or CA, or CB, but the point C as the *primum principium anguli*, while lines CA and CB are considered *secundum principium*. The introduction of the *punctus*, combining, in fact, the constructions at paragraph 19 and 21-23, is an important change to the ontological structure: now the *linea* is no longer considered, as it was explicitly in the *linea veritatis* construction (19), as an image of *veritas*, but instead seems to stand alone as a geometric illustration. Instead of considering the line as a *principium*, Cusanus instructs us, basically, to ‘change perspective’ and interpret the same geometrical construction as originated from point C, which is the *principium* of both line CA and CB; at the same time, the lines CA and CB are still the *principia* of the angle, which are, in fact, one (non-plural) *principium* (exactly like we previously considered line AB in the image from paragraph 9). Cusanus’ point is that all three are *principia*, which are in fact one (non-plural, coincident) *principium*, i.e. they coincide in the ‘folded’ line AB (cf. paragraph 9). We have three *principia* for the angle, one fixed, one moving, and one which connects them, which are at the same time one *principium*, the line AB: a perfect illustration of the Trinity.

Cusanus thus explains, in a practical way, how to ‘see’ with the *beryllus* paradoxical coincidental relationships such as the ones involved in Trinitological speculation. It seems that the *beryllus* makes it particularly easy to do this, for an obvious reason: from the ‘perspective’ of what we have called Level II objects in a *beryllus* construction, their particular determinations can always be said to coincide in the Level I object which is their counterpart, i.e. the object featuring *coincidentia oppositorum* identified for the purpose of the particular ‘beryllic’ structure⁴⁹⁵. In other words, the process of ‘infinitezation’ of Level II objects will identify the Level I object as having a number of their properties (namely, those that we choose to focus on when identifying relationships in the act of applying the *beryllus*), maximally and minimally, and thus infinitely, etc., and also coincidentally⁴⁹⁶.

⁴⁹⁵ For a more in-depth explanation of how the method works according to ontological levels, see Chapter 2.3.

⁴⁹⁶ This is in accordance with the process of *transferre* to *figuras infinitas* described in *De Docta Ignorantia* for geometrical images: *De docta ignorantia*, I, 12, 33, p. 24, 10-25: «Verum quoniam ex antehabitis constat maximum simpliciter nihil horum esse posse, quae per nos sciuntur aut concipiuntur, hinc, cum ipsum symbolice investigare proponimus, simplicem similitudinem transilire necesse est. Nam cum omnia mathematicalia sint finita et aliter etiam imaginari nequeant: si finitis uti pro exemplo voverimus ad maximum simpliciter ascendendi, primo necesse est figuras mathematicas finitas considerare cum suis passionibus et rationibus, et ipsas rationes correspondenter ad infinitas tales figuras transferre, post haec tertio adhuc altius ipsas rationes infinitarum figurarum transsumere ad infinitum simplex absolutissimum etiam ab omni figura.

Thus, one can easily construct Cusanus' preferred Trinitarian model with the help of the *beryllus* if one chooses the starting image correctly (i.e. the object has to have three distinct properties that stand in the desired relation, such as the point C and the two lines which make up the angle in Cusanus' example). This type of proof, however, while it certainly establishes that the *principium* is *unitrinum*, does not by itself stop one from identifying any number of other coincidental properties; no proof is given here (and the method cannot by itself give one) that God is three-and-one and not also four-and-one, five-and-one, etc.⁴⁹⁷. The issue is how to determine which 'divine names' are better than other, or 'proper' and less so – coming back to the question of hierarchies, which we analyze in Chapter 4. For his purposes, Cusanus knows he has chosen the 'correct' image here⁴⁹⁸, so he can proceed to define the relationships between *unitas*, *aequalitas* and *nexus* in terms of *emanatio* in paragraph 34 (34, p. 37, 1 – p. 38, 9).

3.4.6 An ontological principle: *punctus a puncto non dividitur* – *De Beryllo*, 44, p. 50, 3 – 7

Ideo dum dividitur corpus, non dividitur substantia, quia non dividitur in non corpus aut in partes substantiales, scilicet formam, materiam et nexum, quae proprius dicuntur principia quam partes, quia esset dividere indivisibile ab indivisibili sicut punctum a puncto, quod non est possibile. (De Beryllo, 44, p. 50, 3 – 7)

After having introduced *forma*, *materia* and *nexus*⁴⁹⁹ as the three *principia* which are meant to solve the problem he identified in Aristotle's account, Cusanus here reprises something established by

Et tunc nostra ignorantia incomprehensibiliter docebitur, quomodo de altissimo rectius et verius sit nobis in aenigmate laborantibus sentiendum».

⁴⁹⁷ Cusanus attempts to prove that such proofs would be improper in *De docta ignorantia*, I, 20, 59, p. 39, 25 – 62, p. 42, 4, dedicating an entire chapter to trying to show that *non sit possibilis quaternitas et ultra in divinis*, arguing in particular that the triangle is the proper *principium* for surface figures; but from the point of view of the method itself, one can simply change the starting image to something else in order to obtain some form of *quaternitas* – for instance, Cusanus provides a tetrad that could be a perfect candidate as part of this very argument, at *De docta ignorantia*, I, 20, 60, p. 41, 3 – 20, namely *linea simplex – triangulus simplex – circulus simplex – sphaera simplex* (where *simplex* appears equivalent to *infinitus*). Cusanus is apparently using an 'external' criterion in order to conclude that such 'fourness' cannot be properly predicated of God: namely *simplicitas*, cf. «[quaternitas, etc.] repugnaret simplicitati et perfectioni maximi» (*ibid.*, I, 20, 60, p. 41, 16-17), which happens to be the same criterion used implicitly throughout *De Beryllo*; see Chapter 4.3.

⁴⁹⁸ Which is perhaps the reason for his uncharacteristically direct *respondeo*: «I answer this [here]» at 33, p. 36, 1-2. He also does not say at this point (as he usually does, implicitly or explicitly) that there could be other *aenigmata* which the reader could use to investigate this particular question.

⁴⁹⁹ Regarding this triad of *forma*, *materia* and *nexus*, Cusanus' source is likely Ramon Llull; cf. a fragment which he copied into Codex Cusanus 83 (which he thought was) by Ramon Llull (but, as we know now, this is not an authentic work), at fol. 100r-v, entitled «Scientiam inquisitivem veri et boni in omni materia», where we find written: «quia mundus est unus, per unitatem dei creatas habet unam formam constitutam ex primis principiis ex –tibus eorum et materiam ex –bilibus et per agere generabilia sunt coniuncta»; cf. E. COLOMER, *Nikolaus von Kues und Raimund Llull*, in *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. P. Wilpert, vol. II, Berlin 1961, p. 179, note 119, and p. 101ff regarding the «materia, forma, coniunctio» triad. Furthermore, in Codex Cusanus 85, Cusanus adds the following marginal note to a passage from Llull's

means of the image in paragraphs 21-23, namely the *punctus-corporis* relationship. Accordingly, *forma*, *materia* and *nexus* are *principia* for *corpus*, similarly to how *punctus* is a *principium* for *corpus*. Things can only be ‘divided into’ other things on the same ontological level; this is a principle we have seen since the first *linea-angulus* image in paragraphs 9-12, as one of the first derived ‘names for God’ was *indivisible omni modo divisionis*. This is nothing else than a structural requirement for the method itself, as it relies on identifying, for a certain set of objects (what we have called Level II), a *coincidentia oppositorum*, which implies that the criterion used (that we have called X) must allow for a maximum and a minimum, and thus for variation, which implies *divisio*. Fundamentally, the Level I object can only have both maximum and minimum X-ness, and thus is *indivibilis* in this respect. Due to this structural feature, it is easy to see through the *beryllus* that at the level of *corpus*, division proceeds only according to its specific characteristics, and certainly does not apply to the ‘higher’ level among the *principia*. The crucial point is that this derives from the structure of the method, and does not imply (as it might appear to) any underlying metaphysical framework.

3.4.7 The *triangulus - species* structure – *De Beryllo*, 58-62, pp. 65, 1 – 72, 21

Here, Cusanus introduces an element that was previously missing in all his geometrical illustrations so far: the triangle, for the specific purpose of illustrating his notion of *species*, i.e. specific forms (and genera), which is in fact a type of *superficies*, or surface figure. Cusanus starts (as he did in illustrating the Trinity) by stating what is to be shown from the beginning: given that they «are neither made nor corrupted except accidentally» (i.e. in the objects where they are found) and are «incorruptible

Arte amative boni: «ita forma sustentatur in materia ... et actus intrinsecus est proprietas formam et materiam coniungens in tali esse sine qua coniunctione forma non informaret nec materia informaretur» (fol. 55v; cf. *De Beryllo*, p. 111, adnot. 16).

The fragments from works by Ramon Llull that Cusanus collected in his Codex Cusanus 83 have been edited as part of the Cusanus-Texte collection: *Cusanus-Texte III. 4. Raimundus Lullus. Die Exzerptensammlung aus Schriften des Raimundus Lullus im Codex Cusanus 83*, ed. U. Roth, Heidelberg 1999 (hereafter referred to as *CT III.4*). This volume also features a useful introduction by Roth which gives a broader overview of the known influences by Llull on Cusanus: *CT III.4*, pp. 7-22, esp. 19-20. Other parallels with Llull include the ‘superlative degree’, *superlativus*, as a means to construct ‘names for God’ (corresponding closely with Cusanus’ ‘infinitezation’, or construction of a *coincidentia oppositorum* via a *maximum* and *minimum* for a specific criterion; see Chapter 2.3), and also the use of suffixes such as *-ibilis* and *-ivus* as technical terms, cf. the passage quoted above compared with Cusanus’ own constructions in paragraphs 5 and 6 (‘Premise 2’ and ‘Premise 3’) above—see Chapters 3.3.3 and 3.3.4. Overall, the question of the influence of Llull on Cusanus in *De Beryllo* has been little studied so far, and shows itself as potentially promising for further study.

likenesses of the divine, infinite Intellect», what needs to be shown is that «the Divine Intellect shines forth in every specific form (*in omni specie resplendere*)». From the beginning, one may conclude that *resplendere*, a word not used before in *De Beryllo*⁵⁰⁰, describes a similar relationship of *similitudo* that, as we have seen, is the basic type of relationship determined with the help of the *beryllus*—this, however, will not be entirely accurate. Interestingly, Cusanus seems to exclude one particular type of image: «[this shining forth does] not [occur] in the way in which a single face [appears] in many mirrors but, rather, as a single infinite magnitude [appears] in different finite magnitudes»⁵⁰¹. We remark that the ‘face-mirror’ model being excluded as inappropriate has both of its elements finite, which seems to be what the problem is⁵⁰². Instead, the *infinita magnitudo* structure suggests a standard *beryllus* formulation. Cusanus proceeds to construct precisely such a structure, introducing it, interestingly, in an unusual way: «I acknowledge that I conceive of this [as such]», *dico sic me concipere*, identifying the following argument (in a way he was not willing to specifically do before) as ‘his own’. Thus, he says the basic comparative structure will be between every finite *species* (implicitly in relation to their particular objects] and a triangle with respect to (*quoad*) surface magnitudes. It is clear that *magnitudo* will be the main criterion used for identifying the ‘berillic’ structures here. As to why Cusanus chooses not to offer a geometric figure to illustrate this particular geometric construction until paragraph 60, this is because he starts with a ‘conceptual’ argument, of a similar nature to the *punctus-corporis* image at 21-23, which also did not have an illustration, for rather clear reasons: how does one represent the *corpus* on the page? Cusanus limits himself, accordingly, to two-dimensional illustrations.

He starts with the *maximus et minimus angulus* (58, p, 66, 10) – which is interestingly not identified with the *linea* as it was in the *linea-angulus* image of paragraphs 9-12. This *maximus angulus*

⁵⁰⁰ It is used in *De Conjecturis* with what appears to be similar meaning: *De Conjecturis*, II, 1, 71, p. 72, 3-5: «Ipsum vero, cuius participatio est omnium pariter et singulorum esse, in omnibus et in quolibet suo quidem modo resplendet».

⁵⁰¹ *De Beryllo*, 58, p. 66, 4-6: «[...] ipsum intellectum in omni specie resplendere, non enim modo quo una facies in multis speculis, sed ut una infinita magnitudo in variis finitis magnitudinibus et in qualibet totaliter».

⁵⁰² Cf. the image of *vivum speculum – speculum veritatis* in *De Filiatione Dei*, 67, p. 49, 1 – p. 50, 16. The theme of the mirror, *speculum*, is also important in *De Visione Dei*: see the discussion and sources in notes 277, 279-281 above.

is not only the principle of angles, but also the principle of the triangle, and thus, with two simple *beryllus* constructions, Cusanus introduces the term *resplendere*:

B[angulus, magnitudo] -> infinitus angulus

- infinitus angulus est principium infinitum angulorum

B[triangulus, magnitudo] -> infinitus angulus

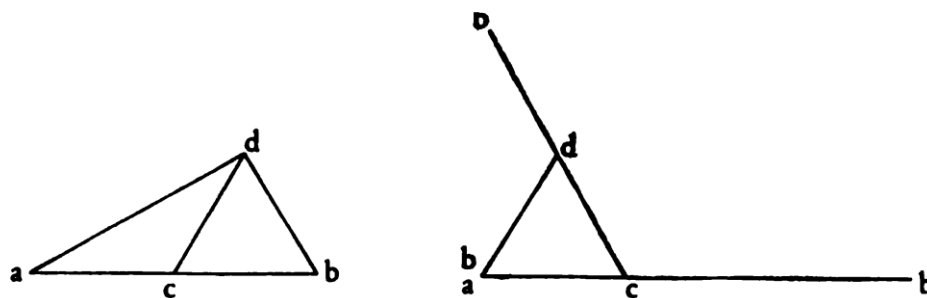
- infinitus angulus resplendet in omni triangulo ex integro

Interestingly, Cusanus establishes here a complex hierarchy, as both the *angulus* and *triangulus* have the same *principium*; and he also emphasizes the fact that two right angles (which are equal to the *maximus angulus*) are equal to the sum of the angles of the triangle. This aspect, in particular, makes the infinite angle ‘shine forth as a whole’ in the triangle—thus, *resplendentia*, if we are to distinguish it from the regular relationship of similitude, i.e. between angles and the infinite angle, will have to mean something like ‘shows itself in an object in a different, special/unforseen/extra way’, just like the maximum angle shows itself in the triangle not (only) in its regular form (which is what the *beryllus* structure shows) but also in a ‘novel’ form (that the *beryllus* structure does not by itself show) of three angles whose sum is equal to it (and which can, each of them, vary indefinitely in relation to each other, while keeping the sum constant). It seems that *resplendentia* names a very interesting ‘extra’ aspect of the relationship of ‘being an image of’ found in a normal ‘beryllic’ structure: if we use carefully constructed geometrical objects, we can determine, beside the ‘standard’ *coincidentia oppositorum*-based identification of a *principium*, also other types of relationships, describable in geometric terms, which can be added to the basic *beryllus* structure in order to develop completely novel relationships—which are, in turn, ‘transferable’ to other *beryllus* structures, and thus amenable to becoming ‘names of God’—even if they are not directly derivable from the ‘beryllic’ structure itself but come up as an ‘extra’ way in which the *principium* shows itself in the *principiata*.

Accordingly, Cusanus develops the argument further in paragraph 59, where he can show (just like in paragraph 44) that, by the fact of being a *principium* in the *beryllus*-based structure, the triangle is (regarding the *modi divisionis* of the things it is a principle of) *incompactibilis* and *non resolubilis*,

and thus stands as an image of *species* and *prima substantia*⁵⁰³. This is based on it being identified as a *principium* of finite *superficies*, i.e. of two-dimensional geometrical figures, as it is the *prima superficiei terminate*, ‘first fully formed figure’⁵⁰⁴. Therefore, the various types of triangles, which all fit this conceptual argument, help Cusanus illustrate the different kinds of *species*.

Finally, in paragraphs 60-61, Cusanus gives a full geometrical illustration of the argument, using lines, angles and triangles and the wealth of possible relationships that can be derived from various combinations of these elements when examined, in various ways, through the *beryllus*, and including, as well, the Trinitarian angle-based imagery he developed in paragraphs 33-34 and the notion of *complicatio* from paragraph 12. He offers the illustration, he says, so that the reader will «make [for themselves] a clear conceptualization»: *clarum conceptum* (60, p. 67, 1), which recall the words he used in paragraph 1, *ut quam clare conceptum depromam*. In a number of ways, this geometrical construction, involving all the elements of the previous ones, is itself the ‘pinnacle achievement’ of *De Beryllo*, a concise image of ontology and cosmology (which Cusanus might even be referring to, in the end, as the *conceptus* in paragraph 1). Undoubtedly, as we have seen, Cusanus’ project has been to use geometrical images of greater and greater ontological (in terms of levels) and relational complexity.



The *objectum* of the *beryllus* is now *principium triangulorum*, which will again be the line, the *principium* of all the other figures illustrated, but now of both angles and triangles. The illustration is different from those we have seen in paragraphs 9-10 and 19-20, as now the line does not simply fold

⁵⁰³ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica*, VII, 7, 1032b1-2, where Aristotle defines *species* as *eidos*, unlike his conception in the *Categories*. To this passage, Nicholas adds the following note, agreeing with the definition of *species* as ‘forms’: «speciem autem dico ipsum quod erat esse uniuscuiusque et primam substantiam».

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. BOETHIUS, *De institutione arithmeticae*, ed. G. Friedlein, Leipzig 1867, II, 6, p. 92, 6-9: «princeps est latitudinis, ut ceterae omnes superficies in hanc resolvantur»

in the middle; there is a completely different line, CD, which goes out from C, and connects from D to both A and B. However, unlike in the previous *calamus* image with angles (paragraph 9), the notion of what the ‘maximum triangle’ could be is not obvious at all, as the areas of both triangles decreases when line CD moves towards AB. However, it is obvious what is the *minimum* of triangles: the line AB. We have encountered precisely such a construction, where we could obtain the *principium* by means of the *minimum*, in paragraph 41 with the image of the right angle. Although Cusanus does not say this explicitly, this would be one way to conceptualize how line AB is in fact also the ‘greatest possible triangle’, as that would necessarily have to coincide with the *minimum*. Cusanus seems to hedge on the issue of how to use the *beryllus* with the *objectum* as *principium triangulorum* according to *magnitudo*; he instead says explicitly that one should do it for angles (*video per maximum partier et minimum angulum* – which is obvious), and then adds *et cum* (‘and since [the principle] is’) the maximum and minimum triangle (which is not obvious, and cannot be seen from the image at all)⁵⁰⁵. This is apparently why Cusanus needed to prove this separately in paragraph 58, without using any images. Because it is the principle of angles (which has already been shown in paragraph 33 to be ‘one and three’), it is by this fact a *principium unitrinum* (60, p. 68, 16). Even more, Cusanus now can make use of his newly developed term *resplendentia*, as the *principium unus et trinus* now can be said (because of the fact that it is trinitary) to ‘shine forth’, i.e. show itself in a relationship not reducible to mere *similitudo* or ‘being the *principium*’, presumably in the ‘threeness’ of the triangle’s angles and sides (in addition to the fact that the three angles add up to a maximum angle, a form of *resplendentia* which we have just examined before).

Then, Cusanus adds a dynamic element to the construction: movement, *motus*, like he did to the *linea-angulus* construction in paragraph 12, and thus befigures the notion of *complicatio*⁵⁰⁶—but now

⁵⁰⁵ *De Beryllo*, 60, p. 68, 11-15: «In hoc igitur principio, quod video per maximum pariter et minimum angulum et cum hoc maximum pariter et minimum triangulum, et est principium unitrinum, video omnes angulos pariter et triangulos complicari».

At issue is not as much the correctness of his conclusions (as there cannot be any doubt, in the end, that all infinite figures, like all infinite things generally, will have to coincide), but rather how he reaches them. One possible argument here, although Cusanus does not make it explicitly, would be that if we know the infinite angle, the infinite triangle (which will have three infinite angles, which will coincide with all its other elements) has to coincide with it.

⁵⁰⁶ For the notion of *complicatio/explicatio*, see note 425.

aimed at developing not angles but triangles, to fit with the *ex complicatione* of the *species*. Accordingly, Cusanus folds CB over CD and then BD over DA to create a triangle⁵⁰⁷, maintaining line AB as the *principium*. The triangle thus ingeniously constructed stands for a *species*, and is itself the principle (implicitly) for other two-dimensional figures.

In paragraph 61, Cusanus again takes up the image of a triangle to lead the reader (*manuducens*) to the concept (*conceptum*) of *species*. But he introduces it as a separate *aenigma*, and he proceeds very differently from the way he has just developed it in the image. Accordingly, a triangle is equal to any other triangle in the fact that it has the following properties of all triangles: the threeness (*trinitas*) of the angles⁵⁰⁸, and that the sum of its three angles is equal. In the same way, every *species* is equal to every other ‘in magnitude’ (or, as we might say, ‘in terms of ontologic level’ at the level of the B-structure). How does this *aenigma* work, and where is the *beryllus* actually used? What appears ‘concealed’ is in fact a step in which we find the *principium* of all triangles, which has all the properties of triangles but is ‘infinitized’: this is in fact the respect in which the triangles are ‘equal’ to each other. The same relationship holds for *species* and their own *principium*, and thus Cusanus transfers it to the relationship between the ‘subjects’ which have the respective forms (*in subiecto, cuius est species*) and their respective *species*, which act like local *principia*. Cusanus builds this multiple-level hierarchy in order to define the ‘intermediate level’, in the hierarchy of *similitudines*, of the *species*: thus to reach a justification through the *beryllus* of his proposal for *substantia/quod erat esse* which would solve Aristotle’s difficulties⁵⁰⁹. His final result is that a triangle (and thus all things) receive their properties *per speciem*, which ‘gives it its being’ (*dat hoc esse*).

⁵⁰⁷ The two *reflexiones* recall Avicbron’s *Fons Vitae* in paragraph 18, i.e. the triad *esse – vivere – intelligere*, which Cusanus used the triad *angulus obtusus - * - angulus acutus* to befigure in his construction at 19-20. Could this ‘double folding’ in this image be another image for Avicbron’s *reflexio*? It does not seem to work in the context of Cusanus’ comparative structure here; if this folding represented the generation of all things, presumably those that correspond to *esse* and *vivere* would have no *species*. This is, therefore, something of a ‘loose end’ in Cusanus’ argument (i.e. how he could have illustrated Avicbron with this image of *reflexiones*).

⁵⁰⁸ This *trinitas* hints back to the *resplendentia* in the previous paragraph: even while we are not actually examining it as an image of the *principium unus et trinus*, we can still notice the ‘extra hint’ of the threeness of its angles (and sides).

⁵⁰⁹ See Chapter 3.4.6 above and the sources in note 492.

The problem left is how to understand the differences between forms, and how to incorporate Aristotle's definition of *species* as *specificatio generis per differentiam*⁵¹⁰. Cusanus deals with this in the next paragraph (62, p. 70, 1ff), within the same overall *aenigma*, making use, again, of the different names for different types of triangles. How can he prove that there are 'different' *species*, for instance, for a right angle triangle or for one that is acute or obtuse? This is a problem because the *beryllus* allows to easily construct, for instance, a '*principium* of right triangles' or 'of obtuse triangles', etc; however, distinguishing these from each other is a problem, because infinite objects seen using the *beryllus*, by default, tend to coincide. But Cusanus has a solution: he believes he can take Aristotle's terminology and show that *specificatio*, i.e. the determination of *species*, is identical to the (Trinitarian) *nexus*, and can connect forms with their specific *differentia*⁵¹¹. How does he achieve this? Like in the previous paragraph, there is an implicit application of the *beryllus* involved: the *specificatio* is in fact being implicitly infinitized, together with its object (a *species*) and a *differentia*, in a 'trinitary' connective structure in which **specificatio absoluta* coincides straightforwardly with *nexus*. Thus, any determination of a species is an 'image' of this with finite terms, and this fact makes it comprehensible if we use the *beryllus*: applying all the relationships we have derived, every *subjectus* will have its own *species*, which we can say is *specificata* from a *genus* and a *differentia*. It is crucial to underline the peculiar character of Cusanus' solution: although these statements can all be clearly shown to be true with the *beryllus*, any or all of these terms (*species*, *genus*, etc.) might be infinite, unknowable, incomprehensible, or indeed all of the above (involving at various points instances of *coincidentia oppositorum*). We do not know from the start whether such statements have any non-paradoxical content that can be readily expressed in ordinary language; however, we know that if we build the appropriate *beryllus* structures, we will be able to show that such statements are true (no matter what

⁵¹⁰ ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica*, X, 1057b7.

⁵¹¹ *De Beryllo*, 62, p. 70, 1 – 71, 8: «Et attende quomodo non dat solum esse triangulare generale, sed esse triangulare orthogonicum aut oxygonicum sive amblygonicum sive aliter differentiatum ex illis. Et ita species est specificatio generis per differentiam. Specificatio est nexus, qui nectit differentiam generi, et ita totum esse rei dat species. Unde species, quae est alia et alia, non est alia a subiecto, sed in se habet sua principia essentialia, per quae determinatur substantialiter, sicut figura suis continetur terminis». The notion that a geometric figure contains its boundaries is found in ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super De Divinis Nominibus*, V, 29, p. 320, 8-9.

that ‘means’ in regular, finite, non-paradoxical language that does not involve any *coincidentia oppositorum*). This is the most important characteristic of the knowledge obtained using the *scientia aenigmatica*, i.e. the *beryllus* method⁵¹².

Cusanus then clarifies how to ‘see’ *specificatio* through the *beryllus* by connecting this to a completely different ‘beryllic’ image, that of *harmonia*⁵¹³ (61, p. 71, 8-17), understood in general terms as depending on *harmonica habitudo* and *proportio*: i.e. orderly relationships between (different types of) things⁵¹⁴, reunited into one concept, *harmonia*, which—an important result—is itself a *species*; indeed, it shares all the properties of one, being indivisible and identifiable (implicitly) as a *principium* of a particular instance of harmony by means of the *beryllus*.

Cusanus ends the paragraph by applying again the concept of *resplendere/resplendentia*, the relationship he has just implicitly defined above (in the form of *resplendere in* + Abl.) as both ‘being an image of’ and ‘showing some characteristic of the original, in addition to being an image’ (62, p. 71, 18 – p. 72, 21). This ‘extra’ aspect is underlined as present in *harmonia* in addition to the *similitudo* of the ‘eternal *ratio*’ or (interestingly, these terms seem to be used interchangeably) the divine creator *intellectus*—and this we experience directly (*experimur*) when that *proportio* is «delightful and pleasing to each of the senses whenever it is perceived»⁵¹⁵.

These geometrical illustrations that we have examined underpin all of the main ontological-epistemological structures that Cusanus develops in *De Beryllo*, up to and including his Trinitarian

⁵¹² It is thus necessary to always qualify carefully remarks such as Flasch’s regarding the ‘new type of physics’ proposed by Cusanus in *De Beryllo* (FLASCH, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, p. 105: «*neue Physik*»). While it is clear that Cusanus wanted to propose an ontological framework that would replace the one constructed by Aristotle in his *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, Cusanus’ proposal has even less to do with anything we understand as ‘physics’, which is the fruit of very different intellectual developments (which also happened to involve the rejection of the Aristotelian framework). In our modern division of academic disciplines and fields of knowledge, Cusanus’ *beryllus* proposal would be located in the field of ‘(applied) non-classical logic’ (outside the bounds of ‘regular’ philosophy or metaphysics, not to mention anything to do with our notions of the ‘physical world’). On the issue of the conflict between Aristotelian and Cusanian *physike*, and the possible role played by Aristotle’s discussion of the infinite in inspiring Cusanus’ *coincidentia*-based approach, see A. MORITZ, *Aristotelische Physik und Cusanische Koinzidenz. Mittelalterliche Rezeptionen der aristotelischen Unendlichkeitsdiskussion als Vorgeschichte der cusanischen Koinzidenzlehre*, in «Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft» 29 (2005), pp. 161-182.

⁵¹³ This notion is heavily informed by the importance Albert assigns to *pulchritudo*, cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super De Divinis Nominibus*, IV, 73, p. 184, 2-10; 75-78, pp. 185-187.

⁵¹⁴ For *habitus* and *proportio* as general terms, see note 465.

⁵¹⁵ *De Beryllo*, 62, p. 72, 19-21: «Et hoc experimur, quoniam proportio illa delectabilis et grata est omni sensui, dum sentitur».

thought. They provide a quasi-complete blueprint of how to apply the method to various theoretical questions, depending on the task (i.e. according to what kind of structure we are aiming to construct, with what features, and with how many ontological ‘levels’). The *opinionones* Cusanus examines from the tradition serve as showcases for different use cases, and—a constant undertone—as *praxis* for the benefit of the reader.

There is, however, another class of *aenigmata* used prominently in *De Beryllo* that are not reducible to the geometrical ones: the ‘political’ images (*res publica - rex, princeps, imperator*), which end up playing a crucial structural role in the book, up to and including providing the context for the final Christological explanation of the *finis* of created things and the way of attaining it; a *finis* that is, in the end, the *rex/imperator* himself (as we will see in Chapter 5, identified with the *ostensio* of God in Christ). The next chapter will investigate the crucial question of the nature of hierarchy on the basis of an extended examination of the passages in which Cusanus uses this extraordinarily versatile and important set of ‘political images’, with the apparent overall aim of combining the two ‘strands’ (geometrical *aenigmata* and political *aenigmata*) into a new synthesis at the end, in a fascinating parallel with the ‘philosophy’ – ‘theology’ duality which informs, as we have seen, *De Beryllo* at a fundamental level from its introductory paragraphs.

CHAPTER 4 – Hierarchy in *De Beryllo*

Given the characteristics of a method such as that of the *beryllus*, a natural question is how it could be compatible with a ‘hierarchical’ medieval-type ontology (and why ‘modernizing’ interpreters of Cusanus, such as Cassirer, are in fact wrong when they assign to him a ‘modern’, non-hierarchical philosophical outlook⁵¹⁶). At its core, the method appears to be classifying its objects into two stark ontological categories: the object manifesting *coincidentia oppositorum* and the non-coincident objects, i.e. the *principium* and the *principiata*. In each application of the method, an object is either one or the other, and there appears to be no room for any intermediary position. Cusanus, indeed, uses this feature of the method to attack Plato’s (non-coincidentally conceived) triad of first cause, *intellectus* and *anima mundi*, as we will analyze in Chapter 4.1.3 below. Aspects of Cusanus’ methodology have led scholars such as Flasch to identify a type of ‘dehierarchization’ in Cusanus’ thought⁵¹⁷, while at the same time he continues to cite authors clearly in support of a hierarchical ontological conception⁵¹⁸, and build, as we have seen so far, structures that are strikingly ‘hierarchy-like’. While Cusanus’ positions regarding the main issues connected with hierarchy, such as the notion of *species*, have been thoroughly examined in the literature⁵¹⁹, the question has not been addressed in the particular context of Cusanus’ method, its structure and its applications⁵²⁰.

Accordingly, in the first part of this chapter, I will analyze the recurrence of a crucial *beryllus*-based image, paradigmatic for the notion of hierarchy (and, connected with this, as we will see, for Cusanus’ criticism of Plato): the ‘political’ image (*res publica – rex/imperator*). Then, I will analyze

⁵¹⁶ For a summary of the most important such interpretations, and a refutation, see the article by Jasper Hopkins: HOPKINS, *Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464): First Modern Philosopher?*.

⁵¹⁷ «Ent-Hierarchisierung des Kosmos» (FLASCH, *Geschichte einer Entwicklung*, p. 100). According to Flasch, Cusanus manifests this tendency from *De Docta Ignorantia* II onwards. He moderates this claim further, however, in FLASCH, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, p. 58, describing both a ‘deconstruction’ of hierarchies (*abbauen*) and an attempt to found them anew (*neu zu begründen*).

⁵¹⁸ E.g. *De Beryllo*, 18, p. 21, 1 – p. 22, 12, where Cusanus cites (approvingly) the hierarchical ontological doctrines of Albert the Great and Avicbron.

⁵¹⁹ Cf. e.g. VOLKMANN-SCHLUCK, *Die Lehre des Nicolaus von Cues von der species*; CORRIERAS, *Identité e difference dans le De Beryllo*.

⁵²⁰ CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl, Tome 2*, pp. 64-67, approaches this issue but all too briefly; similarly, Flasch devotes only a few pages to it: FLASCH, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, pp. 57-61.

the explicit criteria Cusanus gives for two types of hierarchy will be discussed: the hierarchy of ‘divine names’ (i.e. the relationships determined with the *beryllus* as they apply to the *principium*), and finally the ontological hierarchical principle of *simplicitas* (of Neoplatonic type) that Cusanus endorses in a number of passages (which, while independent of the method itself, crucially informs his choices as to how to apply it).

4.1 The recurring political images in *De Beryllo* – a study in the nature of hierarchy constructed via the *beryllus*

One of the less-remarked-upon aspects in the research on *De Beryllo* is just how prominent and recurring the ‘political imagery’ is in the role of images for constructing *beryllus* structures. The number of these images is surprisingly large: six separate explicit uses, rivaling the eight for the mathematical and geometrical images (analyzed in Chapter 3.4). Yet the main commentators on *De Beryllo* have given comparatively much less attention to this recurring theme. Kurt Flasch dedicates only two pages to this particular type of imagery⁵²¹; in Corrieras, in turn, we find only a little more⁵²². We will attempt to analyze all these six passages from the perspective of using the method of the *beryllus*, and inventory the significance and uses yielded by this image. As one might expect, this will yield a fruitful examination of how Cusanus conceives of hierarchy in relation to his method.

4.1.1 The first image of *rex* – paragraphs 16-17 (*De Beryllo*, 16, p. 19, 1 – 17, p. 21, 13)

The first interesting question that comes up at the beginning of paragraph 16 is why Cusanus switches suddenly from analyzing the *linea-angulus* image developed in paragraphs 9-12 and used further in paragraphs 13-15 to recounting what other authors have said about *rex* as a divine name. We note that these two paragraphs, 16 and 17, are located between the first geometrical image of the *linea-angulus* and the second, the image of the *linea* as a ‘directional’ likeness of *veritas* (paragraphs 18-20). The first sentence of paragraph 18 is highly telling about how we are to interpret these two paragraphs featuring political imagery (18, p. 21, 1-3): «All those statements which Plato or Aristotle or someone

⁵²¹ FLASCH, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, pp. 56-57.

⁵²² CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl*, Tome 2, pp. 48-50.

else makes are not other than the beryl and the symbolism (*aenigma*) show to you: viz., that truth [*veritas*]—by means of a likeness to itself—bestows being on all things» (*per suam similitudinem omnibus tribuit esse*). It seems clear that Cusanus is explaining here how to interpret these two paragraphs placed ‘in the middle’ of his larger development of geometrical images—that is, we should understand them by applying the *beryllus* on the model of what has already been shown (the first *linea-angulus* image), looking also towards what Cusanus develops right afterwards, arguably in response to the new doctrines (the *veritas-linea* image).

In this interpretation, Cusanus is engaged in precisely the same activity as before (as we saw, in the case of Pseudo-Dionysius, in paragraph 10-11, and for Proclus in paragraph 12): applying the *beryllus*, within the framework of an image that was already introduced, in order to ‘demonstrate’ various doctrines belonging to other authors, whom he is citing by name. In paragraph 16, we have Plato’s Second Letter (to which Cusanus also referred at the beginning of paragraph 2) and Proclus, who give the *primum principium* the name *rex*, and Aristotle, who uses *princeps*. Cusanus thus conveniently groups these ‘political’ images together. Implicitly, the purpose is that the reader should try to understand them by applying the *beryllus*, as Cusanus has just shown.

Accordingly, if we make use of the *linea-angulus* construction that has been used by Cusanus until now, and assume an implicit comparison with the relationship between *rex* and everything else in *res publica*, it is clear that the argument works on a fundamental level only as long as one makes a crucial assumption without which one cannot construct a *beryllus* structure centered on the *rex – omnia in re publica* relationship: the *rex* has to be assumed to be an instance of *coincidentia oppositorum* of some sort, relative to some kind of ordering relation among the objects considered (those *in re publica*). If the *rex* is not such a *coincidentia*, the argument does not work; thus, in order to use this image, Cusanus must be claiming that such an ‘ontological gap’ exists between *rex* and everything else in the *res publica* that the *beryllus* can be applied. In the terms we used in Chapter 2.3 to describe the structure of the *beryllus* method, the king must be at a different ontological level than any other element in the *res publica*. This was not, of course, a requirement for the authors Cusanus is quoting, as they did not

propose that there is a method based on the *coincidentia oppositorum* by which their statements could be derived. However, this is a requirement for Cusanus, so we have to pay close attention to what, in fact, he is presupposing.

First of all, he quotes Plato's Second Letter: «all things exist with the King of all and that they all exist for his sake and that he is the Cause of all good things»⁵²³; then he adds that «a few [lines] later [he says]: The human mind desires to understand what kind of things those are. It views the kinds of things with which it is kindred, none of which are perfect; but in the King himself there is no such [characteristic]»⁵²⁴ (*in rege ipso nihil tale*). He adds a rather cryptic remark: «Assuredly, Plato there wisely writes that this [teaching] is to be held secret», which is a clear reference to the discussion of 'secrecy' for the *haec alta* that we analyzed for paragraph 2 of the text, where Cusanus refers to the same Second Letter (Chapter 3.2). As we saw there, the question was both why Plato 'prohibited' the revealing of such matters to the uninitiated and why Cusanus thought the prohibition should no longer apply. How does what he says here answer that? Clearly, the context is again that of Cusanus himself 'revealing' all these doctrines, and the way to examine and prove them (the *beryllus*) to the reader; thus, there is an implicit contrast, inevitably, between the *ibi* where Plato *bene scribit* that the doctrines must be kept secret, and the context of Cusanus' own book, which is obviously now revealing them (and we can assume Cusanus thinks that he himself *bene scribit* here).

Cusanus then emphasizes that Plato did not use such a name for the *primum principium omnium* without reason (*absque causa*⁵²⁵). He builds the image of a *res publica* in a 'beryllic' structure, with the *rex* being the *principium*⁵²⁶. In the middle of this structure, Cusanus suddenly identifies a paraphrase

⁵²³ Although he owned the Letters in the Bruni translation, here he seems to be quoting from Proclus' commentary to the Parmenides: PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem* VI (Cousin 1115, Steel p. 396, 3-4), with the text Cusanus quotes, and his marginal note (CT III.2.2, marginalia 502, p. 124): «nota expositionem epistule platonis circa omnium regem omnia esse»; cf. also PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem* VII (Cousin 1150, Steel p. 424, 32): «Platone clamante et illud causam esse omnium bonorum», with Cusanus' note «primum vere omnium rex et ipsum bonum» (CT III.2.2, marginalia 476, p. 118). Cf. also *De Principio*, 24, p. 34, 3-4: «Causam dicit ipsum unum, regem scilicet omnium sive deum deorum».

⁵²⁴ Hopkins' translation; cf. PLATO, *Letters* II, 312e4-313a2.

⁵²⁵ Cf. also the first word of paragraph 2, and the interesting (though speculative) 'juridical' meaning it might have – see Ch. 3.2 and note 338. Notably, Cusanus is being quite bold here: he is saying 'Plato did not say this without good reason' before introducing a *beryllus* structure to show it; implicitly, without the *beryllus* it would seem to be an open question whether Plato had good reasons for writing it.

⁵²⁶ This is an image he is highly interested in, as we see, for examples, from his notes on his copy of Proclus' *Theologia Platonis*. In PROCLUS, *Theologia Platonis*, V, 20, ed. Portus, p. 288-289, Proclus writes: «Porro et corporum ipse conditor

of a passage in Proclus⁵²⁷, while he departs in his interpretation from Proclus' original text, which says that the various elements in the 'political' image are coexisting *in mente politici*, not *in ipso [rege]* as Cusanus willfully paraphrases to fit within the *beryllus* structure, clearly aiming to transfer the image to the *principium*⁵²⁸. This is the B-structure he is building:

- B[omnia in re publica, *gradus] -> rex**
- **res publica per regem et ad ipsum ordinata et per ipsum regitur et existit**
 - **quae igitur in re publica reperiuntur distincta, prioriter et coniuncte in [rege] sunt ipse et vita**
 - **duces, comites, milites, iudices, leges, mensurae, pondera et quaeque talia omnia sunt in rege ut in publica persona**
 - **omnia, quae possunt esse in re publica, [in rege] actu existunt ipse**
 - **lex [regis] in pellibus scripta est in [rege] lex viva**
 - **[omnium] rex auctor est,**
 - **ab [rege] omnia habent, quae habent tam esse quam nomen in re publica**

In all this, there appears to be an implicit comparative structure of the standard *beryllus* type, with a transfer of properties, between this and the structure of *primum principium* seen in relation to *omnia*. This can be seen next, when Cusanus quotes Aristotle, who is said to have named the same (*principium*) as *princeps* in similar respects: *in simili ipsum principem nominavit* (16, p. 20, 15-16). In the reference to Aristotle⁵²⁹, the *principium* is named *princeps* «to whom the whole army is ordained, as to an end (*quam ad finem*), and from whom the army has whatever it is». Cusanus ends with an explicit comparative *sicut...sic* structure, signaling a relationship transfer between *in principe* and *in primo* (16, p. 20, 17-19), focused on the 'in + Ablative' relationship, i.e. of the general (recurring) form

est. ipse perfectius his optimis proportionibus omnia connectens et eorum potencias et moles et numeros optimis nexibus coaptans», Cusanus notes (and marks in red): «nota totum de conditorio intellectu. Quem dicit unigenitum et simulacrum perfecti dei / regem universi et regem regum» (CT III.2.1, p. 105-106, marginalia 366). A little further, at *ibid.*, p. 289, where Proclus writes: «[conditor] totam denique in mundo ut sic dicatur rem publicam instituit», Cusanus adds the note: «totam in mundo rem publicam instituit», marked in red and with a red mark added (CT III.2.1, p. 106, marginalia 371). These notes show his great interest in the image of *rex / res publica* for the *principium*, for which Proclus is his apparent source, but which he develops, as we will see, in his own unique manner.

⁵²⁷ PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem*, III (Cousin 814, Steel p. 156, 51 – p. 157, 55): «Etenim in mente politici omnia sunt ennoematice, miles, rhetor, ordinis princeps, popularius, et ennoematum ad inuicem parua quaedam est differentia – omnia enim sunt uitalia et simul coexistentia in mente politici –, sed exterius plurima differentia militis et popularii».

⁵²⁸ Cf. Cusanus' marginal note to this passage: «nota exemplum quomodo uti in mente politici sunt omnia, sic et in mente dei siue in diuino intellectu» (CT III.2.2, marginalia 177; PROCLUS, *ibid.*, ed. Steel, p. 537).

⁵²⁹ ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica*, XII, 10, 1075a11-15, esp 14-16: «ὥσπερ στρατεύμα; καὶ γὰρ ἐν τῇ τάξει τὸ εἶ καὶ ὁ στρατηγός, καὶ μᾶλλον οὗτος; οὐ γὰρ οὗτος διὰ τὴν τάξιν ἀλλ' ἐκείνη διὰ τοῦτόν ἐστιν»; cf. ID., *Aristoteles Latine*, p. 527: «quemadmodum exercitus: etenim bene esse eius in ordine; et dux ipse est, ac magis ipse: non enim ipsem propter ordinem, verum ordo propter ipsum est».

‘all *principiata in principio* are the *principium*.’ Furthermore, several small ‘single-term’ applications of the *beryllus* (similar to those in paragraph 3) are present, for *vita*, *tempus* and *creatura-creator*, which are all ‘caught up’ inside the *sic* structure. Here is the B-notation for this structure:

B[exercitus, *gradus] -> princeps

- ad [principem] exercitus est ordinatus tamquam ad finem

- a [principe] habet exercitus quidquid est.

- lex scripta in pellibus mortuis est lex viva in principe

SICUT-SIC

***B[omnia, *gradus vitae] -> vita**

SIC

***B[tempus, *gradus temporalitatis] -> aeternitas**

SIC

***B[creatura, *gradus creaturae] -> creator**

In total, there are no less than six ‘beryllic’ structures present in this paragraph: *res publica-rex*, *exercitus-princeps*, *omnia-vita*, *tempus-aeternitas*, *creatura-creator*, and the main focus, *omnia-principium omnium*, to which all are connected in similar comparative structures. The crucial principle is that all the relationships found in each of these can be transferred immediately to another, by use of a ‘marker’ such as *sicut*, *sic*, etc., or even implicitly, as Cusanus does often.

Furthermore, it must be taken into account that the *omnia-principium omnium* structure already comes ‘filled in’ from the previous paragraphs, i.e. by transfers of properties from the *linea-angulus* structure built up ever since paragraph 9. All the relationships identified within a *beryllus* structure (and thus the ‘divine names’ discovered/gained) are essentially cumulative, and may be used again within any other *beryllus* structure with any other object (as long as, of course, one applies them to the particular type of objects with which the new structure is built). The *beryllus* that Cusanus is showcasing is a mode of thought with extraordinary power and versatility, which can be applied, furthermore, anywhere a *coincidentia oppositorum* may be identified (or constructed, e.g. in the geometrical images).

In consequence, there is effectively no relationship of ‘priority’ between the six *beryllus* structures explicitly invoked in this paragraph. The *beryllus* method is a fundamentally different mode of investigation from, say, deduction from first principles. One can effectively start anywhere, from any particular structure, and one has the full freedom, for instance, to choose images precisely according

to the problem one wants to solve or the doctrine one wants to examine (as we have seen in Chapter 3.4 with the geometrical images). Whichever particular object is examined through the *beryllus*, the relationships discovered between it and its ‘infinetized version’, or *principium*, will be easily transferable to a ‘default’/‘most general’ *beryllus* structure *omnia-principium omnium*, by means of an explicit (cf. Cusanus’ *sicut*) or implicit comparison of the two structures.

One interesting question this paragraph raises is thus shown to be, in the context of the method, misguided: namely whether Cusanus is actually proposing here a political theory based on the *omnia in re publica – rex* construction, for which, of course, all the relationships discovered with the *beryllus* for *omnia-principium omnium* would hold: everything in the state would be literally an image/manifestation/copy etc. of the king. The question of Cusanus’ ‘political theory’ misunderstands the context: once one has formulated the ‘beryllic’ construction of *omnia in res publica – rex*, all these relationships can directly be transferred either from *omnia-principium* or from any other *beryllus* structure we choose to involve (such as *linea-angulus*). Cusanus is not ‘committing’ here to any theory of the state; he is simply creating a (theoretical) construction in which *omnia in res publica* and *rex* can be viewed by means of the *beryllus*. For instance, this does not commit him to saying that such a *res publica* and *rex* have ever existed, or even could possibly exist, in the real world⁵³⁰, especially not among the regular, finite, human kings and states. It must be noted that Plato, Proclus and Aristotle, in the passages Cusanus is referring to in this paragraph, all applied this language (in Cusanus’ interpretation) to the *principium* directly. It should also be emphasized that using the *beryllus* offers no ‘ontological guarantee’: the object identified as manifesting the *coincidentia oppositorum* (such as the *rex* here) might be infinite, paradoxical, unknowable, etc. Furthermore, one cannot escape the Christological connotations inherent in discussing a possible *rex* that is also the *principium* – and Cusanus seems to highlight the theological possibilities with two of the *beryllus* structures in this

⁵³⁰ However, Cusanus does seem to hold to something like a ‘coincidental’ view of political, and particularly ecclesiastical, hierarchies, particularly in his first treatise, *De concordantia Catholica*: for similarities with this passage, see e.g. *De concordantia catholica*, III, 12, 376, p. 375, 1ff; III, 4, 331, p. 348, 7-11; cf. also *De conjecturis*, II, 16, 156, p. 155, 22-23; 158, p. 158, 4-5: «ut virtus ducalis aut comitalis in rege regia est».

paragraph: *omnia-vita* (*in primo omnia sunt vita* – cf. John 1:4: *In [verbo] vita erat*), and *creatura-creator*.

In paragraph 17, Cusanus continues with an even greater wealth of authors he feels at liberty to cite, as he has now shown the reader how one can use the *beryllus* to examine their doctrines. Here, he is focused on the problem of forms in the tradition: *formae, ideae, rationes, exemplaria*. He is obviously inspired to formulate a solution here by the image of *res publica – rex* in the previous paragraph: as we have seen in his interpretation of the second passage from Proclus there⁵³¹, he believes he has found a way of conceptualizing how objects seen in a *beryllus* structure are ‘in’ their *principium* (*in + Abl.*), which is precisely the grammatical construction that the doctrines he quotes in this passage are centered on. Accordingly, he takes aim at the disagreement between Plato and Aristotle regarding the forms, quoting commentators: Averroes on Aristotle⁵³², quoted as saying that *formae* are *actu in primo motore*, and that Aristotle rejected Plato’s ideas on this basis⁵³³, which Albert also is said to have agreed with in his commentary on *De Divinis Nominibus*⁵³⁴. The main issue, according to how Cusanus presents it, is the multiplicity of these *formae/ideae*, and Aristotle (according, again, to Albert’s account⁵³⁵), admits a certain type of ‘multiplicity’ in the *prima causa*, as it is *tricausalis*, tricausal, namely efficient, formal and final⁵³⁶, and «Aristotle does not find fault with Plato for this understanding». Cusanus identifies, crucially, *formalis* with *exemplaris*, then *rationes* with *exemplaria*⁵³⁷. And, finally (invoking, as usual,

⁵³¹ See his note: «nota exemplum quomodo uti in mente politici sunt omnia, sic et in mente dei siue in diuino intellectu» (CT III.2.2, marginalia 177, cf. Steel p. 537), to PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem*, III (Cousin 814, Steel p. 156, 51 – p. 157, 55). See note 526-528 above.

⁵³² AVERROES, *Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois Commentaris*, vol. VIII: *Metaphysica*, Venice 1562 (reprinted Frankfurt am Main, 1962), commentary 18, fol. 305va (I): «Et ideo dicitur quod omnes proportionales et formae sunt in potentiali in prima materia et in actu in ipso motore». Cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super De Divinis Nominibus*, 2, 45, p. 73, 60-61 and Cusanus’ note: «omnes formae sunt in actu in primo motore et in potentia primae materiae» (CT III.1, marginalia 224).

⁵³³ AVERROES, *ibid.*, commentary 18 (fol. 303rb, to E): «dicit [Aristoteles], quod manifestum est quod nihil cogit nos dicere formas Platonis»; cf. fol. 303va (H-I), 303vb (K, L), 305rb (E).

⁵³⁴ Cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super De Divinis Nominibus*, V, 37, p. 325, 11-23, to which Cusanus notes: «deus operatur per exemplaria. contra aristotelem, qui tamen rationes causatorum apud primam causam admittit», showing the main pattern of the criticism in this passage, but which is here presented in a more favorable way towards Aristotle.

⁵³⁵ Cf. also *ibid.*, II, 45, p. 73, 41-45: «Sequimur opinionem Aristotelis, quae magis videtur catholica. Dicit enim in XI Metaphysicae quod primum se habet in habitudine triplicis causae ad res, scilicet Formalis, exemplaris, efficientis et finalis». Cf. *ibid.*, I, 33, p. 18, 47-67; IV, 86, p. 192, 71ff).

⁵³⁶ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica* XII, 4, 1070b30-35; *Physica* II, 7, 198a24-25; cf. Averroes’ commentary, AVERROES, *Metaphysica* XII, comm. 24 (fol. 309rb, E).

⁵³⁷ An identification made by Augustine, who placed the Platonic ideas in the divine mind as *rationes*. Cf. AUGUSTINE, *De Diversis Quaestionibus*, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, vol. XLIV/A, LXXXIII, q. 46, 2, p. 71, 22-30. Cf. PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem*, III (Cousin 798, Steel p. 144, 67ff): «in se ipsum ergo aspiciens et se ipsum cognoscens novit,

both of the ‘philosophical’ and ‘theological’ strands explicitly together), the ‘theologians’ (i.e. Pseudo-Dionysius) are said to identify the *exemplaria* with God’s will (*voluntas*)⁵³⁸, which is the term Cusanus needs in order to tie in to the *res publica – rex* image, and thus provide a *beryllus*-based solution for the contentious theoretical problem of the forms/exemplars. On the ‘theological’ side, he ties in to a recurring theme in the Old Testament, «the Prophet says that God created as He willed to» (cf. Psalm 134:6)⁵³⁹. This identification of God’s *voluntas* and the *exemplaria* marks a crucial development in Cusanus’ thought in *De Beryllo*⁵⁴⁰. It is based on the property of the *beryllus* method which easily allows the transfer of relationships between *beryllus* structures, which all imply, on a structural level, that the determinations of the Level II objects will be ‘infinetized’, and coincide, in the Level I object: accordingly, if we have developed a way of speaking of God’s will through a *beryllus* structure (here the *res publica – rex* structure), and, in parallel, of the causes of all things as coinciding in the *principium* (as with the application of the *linea-angulus* image in paragraph 12), it follows that these elements can be identified with each other in the *principium*. As we will see, this identification, a highly valuable result, lies at the core of how Cusanus proposes his own solution to the Aristotelian question of *quid erat esse / substantia / quidditas*. We can also notice that this notion, and the image of *rex*, is tied implicitly to how Cusanus chooses to ‘update’ his geometrical image in paragraphs 19-20, with the introduction of the *mathematicus* who creates the line which is the image of *veritas*, and who does the

quae post ipsum. Rationibus ergo et speciebus immaterialibus novit mundiales rationes et species ex quibus omne. Et est in ipso omne ut in causa sine materia». Cusanus leaves a long note here reconstructing this argument (*ibid.*, ed. Steel, p. 536; CT III.2.2, marginalia 147, p. 44-45).

⁵³⁸ PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, *De Divinis Nominibus*, V, 8, ; cf. Albert’s commentary, ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super De Divinis Nominibus*, V, 36-37, p. 325, 57-61: «Deinde ostendit, quomodo scriptura nominat ista *exemplaria*, et dicit, quod vocat ea *praediffinitiones* vel *praedestinationes*, sicut habet ALIA TRANSLATIO, et etiam *voluntates divinas* vel *voluntates bonas*, *secundum quas omnia deus praediffinivit* et etiam esse fecit», to which Cusanus writes the note: «nota exemplaris vocantur voluntates divine».

⁵³⁹ Psalms 113:3: «omnia quecumque voluit fecit; Psalms 134:6: «omnia quecumque voluit dominus fecit»; Jonah 1:14: «quia tu, Domine, sicut voluisti, fecisti»; cf. Wisdom 12:12.

⁵⁴⁰ As Davide Monaco noted in D. MONACO, *Cusano e la pace della fede*, Rome 2013, p. 56, 60, note 63. In Monaco’s view of the development of Cusanus’ thought, this notion and the emphasis on God’s absolute freedom are one of the crucial and characteristic developments in Cusanus’ late thought, which can thus be described as a passage from the unknowability of God to God’s freedom (cf. MONACO, *Deus Trinitas*, pp. 284, 328, esp. pp. 290-296; ID., *Dio come libertà nell’ultimo Cusano*, in «Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft» 33 (2011), pp. 213-227.

active geometrical construction, folding the line (which involves, of course, his *voluntas*) in the illustration of *explicatio*⁵⁴¹.

On the same model as our analysis of these passages, we will examine the other occurrences of the ‘political image’.

4.1.2. The *rex/imperator* image – paragraph 25 (*De Beryllo* 25, p. 28, 1-12)

In this paragraph, Cusanus continues his investigation of the human being started in paragraph 24, immediately after the *principium – unus – punctus – corpus* image developed in paragraphs 21-23 (which we analyzed in Chapter 3.4.4). If we take into account the anthropological construction started in paragraphs 6 and 7 (i.e. *sensus – intellectus – in excessu*), it is clear what Cusanus is trying to do, namely put his anthropology on a sound *beryllus*-based footing by putting to use his just-developed multi-level ‘beryllic’ structures: the *esse – vivere – intelligere* of paragraphs 19-20, as well as his four-level structure in paragraphs 21-23, and thus reformulating in a more comprehensive way his argument as to *homo mensura rerum* already made in paragraph 6. Thus, he claims to offer the reader here a *veraciorem conceptus*, notably not ‘of the human being’ but indeed ‘from’ (*ex*), signaling that this is not meant to be a new investigation aimed at the human being in particular, but rather an updating and re-use of the anthropology he has already basically formulated in the last two ‘premises’ in paragraphs 6 and 7 (see the analysis in Chapter 3.3). We note again the recurring notion of one overall *conceptus* that Cusanus appears to be trying to build up in *De Beryllo*.

Accordingly, Cusanus starts immediately by laying out the ‘ontological levels’ that he will consider: *intellectus – anima – natura – corpus*, which seems to introduce the extra levels of *anima – natura – corpus* where *sensus* used to be in the simpler previous construction in paragraph 6. There is again no mention of *ratio*, which is, as before, rather surprising⁵⁴². *Anima* is the level of the faculty of

⁵⁴¹ *De Beryllo*, 20, p. 24, 1-2. Cf. our analysis in chapter 3.4.3. For *complicatio/explicatio* see note 425.

⁵⁴² Especially if we look, for example, at Cusanus’ marginal note to ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super De Divinis Nominibus*, I, 54, p. 34, 9-12, where Albert’s text says: «per *mentem* significat intellectum, qui est supremum rationis, quia infimum intellectus est supremum rationis, cuius infimum est supremum sensus, et sic per ordinem de aliis potentiis et de naturis» and Cusanus writes: «mens est intellectus, cuius infimum est supremum rationis. Et infimum rationis est supremum sensus». The reason why *ratio* is dropped from the hierarchies in *De Beryllo* up to this point is a legitimate question.

cognitio sensitiva, providing a map as to how to fit together the structures in paragraph 6-7 and those presented here. An ‘update’ of the cognition model is being offered, as now all of these faculties are put in a relationship of descending *communicatio*, based, as Cusanus has just shown in his previous geometrical examples, in several ‘nested’ applications of the *beryllus*. But in paragraph 25, he takes this principle further than before: *anima*, *natura* and *corpus* are both images of the *intellectus* and respective images of each other, in a complex dance of interlinked implicit *beryllus* structures, a leap in complexity from what Cusanus has attempted before. One only needs to examine the B-structure notation for this whole paragraph⁵⁴³ to see the symmetry and beauty of how Cusanus is deploying his method here:

B[*omnia in homo, *gradus] -> intellectus

- intellectus est supremitas rationis, cuius esse est a corpore separatum et per se verum
- intellectus est non communicabilis aut participabilis propter suam simplicem

universalitatem et indivisibilitatem

B[anima, *gradus] -> intellectus

- intellectus in sua similitudine communicabilem se reddit, scilicet in anima
- anima in eo quod similitudo intellectus sentit libere
- anima per se sentit [sicut intellectus]
- cognitio sensitiva animae ostendit se similitudinem intellectus esse

B[natura, *gradus] -> intellectus

- per animam intellectus se communicat naturae

B[natura, *gradus] -> anima

- anima per naturam animat
- anima in eo quod est unita naturae animat

B[corpus, *gradus] -> intellectus

- intellectus per naturam se communicat corpori

B[corpus, *gradus] -> natura

B[corpus, *gradus] -> anima

- anima operatur in corpore medio naturae, contracte

SICUT

B[organum cognoscitivus, *gradus contractionis] -> anima cognoscitiva

- anima cognoscitiva operatum in organo contracte secundum organum

⁵⁴³ *De Beryllo*, 24, p. 27, 1 – 28, 13: «Recipias veraciorem conceptum ex homine, qui omnia mensurat. In homine est intellectus supremitas rationis, cuius esse est a corpore separatum et per se verum, deinde est anima, deinde natura ac ultimo corpus. Animam dico quae animat et dat esse animale. Intellectus, qui non est communicabilis aut participabilis propter suam simplicem universalitatem et indivisibilitatem, se in sua similitudine communicabilem reddit, scilicet in anima. Cognitio enim sensitiva animae ostendit se similitudinem intellectus esse. Per animam intellectus se communicat naturae et per naturam corpori. Anima in eo quod similitudo intellectus sentit libere, in eo quod est unita naturae animat. Ideo per naturam animat, per se sentit. Quae igitur anima operatur in corpore medio naturae, illa contracte operatur, sicut cognoscitiva in organo contracte secundum organum».

The last structure introduced by *sicut* is Cusanus tying back to the structure he built in paragraph 6 for the same notion of *anima cognoscitiva* (6, p. 8, 4-7). At each stage of the building of this complex structure, the basic relationship between each of the two elements considered (one being a *similitudo* of the other, one being a *principium* of the other) is the same, and the relationships and modes of speaking of these objects can be transferred from one level to another, as the repeated adding of new *beryllus* structures allows. This image is a paradigmatic illustration of the type of hierarchy which can be developed by using the *beryllus* method, which can incorporate whichever elements Cusanus chooses from the tradition Cusanus places himself in (by his citations of particular authors), as he has done explicitly in paragraphs 11-13 and 16-18, but does so on its own terms: a method based on constructing images of sufficient complexity by the repeated application of the simple relationship between two (types of) objects which is fundamental to a *beryllus* structure, joining together a number of these structures in order to reach a final complex structure which ‘maps onto’ the structure of the *opinio/sententia* being considered.

The complex multi-level anthropological construction of paragraph 24 the context for the introduction of the *rex/imperator* in paragraph 25. It is apparent that Cusanus has something very similar in mind as when he first introduced the *res publica – rex* image in paragraph 16 in order to apply it to the Aristotle-Plato controversy regarding the *formae*: i.e. to use it as a solution to what is, ultimately, an instance of the one-many problem. In that context, the plurality of the *formae*, and their being *in* the *principium*, was what was at stake, and the *rex* image demonstrated how many different things can be seen at the same time to be *in rege*, and thus *in principio*, by using the *beryllus* to build its characteristic structures and transfer properties between them. Thus, the reintroduction of this image in paragraph 25 serves to reemphasize for the reader that even though we have described a complex hierarchy of faculties in the human being in the *conceptus* presented in paragraph 24, the unity of the whole must now be emphasized and maintained, at every single level of all those just introduced, «so that there is one man», or rather ‘so that man is one’ (*sit unus homo* – 25, p. 28, 2). Cusanus starts by employing the *rex* image explicitly, applying this to the body (*corpus*) and its parts (*membra formalia*),

which each have their own ‘law’ (*lex*) or ‘nature’ (*natura*), power, operation (*operatio* – a notion just introduced in paragraph 24) and order (*ordo*); he also adds two other images of the *principium*, apparently in order to create a triad: *causa, auctor, rex*, which match the three Aristotelian causes that he invokes next: *ut in causa efficiente, formali et finali*, and the three sentences which follow, creating a threefold structure overall⁵⁴⁴, as follows:

		omnia sunt	
in causa	in causa efficiens	anterioriter in potentia effectiva	imperator
in auctor	in causa formali	formaliter in ipso qui omnia format	
in rege	in causa finali	finaliter in eo [cuius] gratia sint	rex

These, as one can easily see, correspond to three distinct *beryllus* structures in the paragraph, in a beautiful construction that appropriates the Aristotelian causes. Two of them, the first and the third, are *res publica – imperator* and *omnia – rex*. Interestingly, although the *imperator* structure seems to be entirely similar to the previous *rex* image in paragraphs 16-17 (i.e. intended to demonstrate multiplicity in unity), the *omnia – rex* does not seem to be a ‘political’ image anymore, but is rather the general *omnia – principium* structure, employing the *rex* as a name for the *principium* (a name which has been transferred, apparently, from the *res publica – rex* structure). Here we have a reprise of the words from Plato’s Second Letter in 16, p. 19, 2: *illius gratia omnia*⁵⁴⁵, and an interesting element which a reader might have been waiting for ever since paragraph 4: namely, a development regarding how the creator intellect *se finem facit operum suorum* (4, p. 6, 5). Accordingly, this is elucidated here in the context of the image of the human body, but the result is rather peculiar in this context: «all the [body’s] members seek (*appetunt*) nothing except inseparable union (*unionem inseparabilem*) with the intellect, as with their beginning (*principio*), ultimate good (*bono ultimo*), and everlasting life» (25, p.

⁵⁴⁴ *De Beryllo*, 25, p. 28, 1 – 12: «Respiciamus ergo ad corpus et omnia eius membra formalia et ad cuiuslibet legem sive naturam, virtutem, operationem et ordinem, ut sit unus homo; et quidquid reperimus explicite, illa reperimus in intellectu ut in causa, auctore et rege, in quo omnia sunt ut in causa efficiente, formali et finali. Omnia enim anterioriter in potentia effectiva sunt, sicut in potentia imperatoris sunt dignitates et official rei publicae. Omnia sunt formaliter in ipso, qui omnia format, ut formata in tantum sint, in quantum sunt suo conceptui conformia. Finaliter sunt omnia in eo, cum eius gratia sint, cum ipse sit finis et desiderium omnium. Nihil enim omnia membra appetunt nisi unionem inseparabilem cum ipso tamquam cum suo principio et bono ultimo et vita perenni».

⁵⁴⁵ Cf. PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem*, VI (Cousin 1097, Steel p. 392, 50-51), and Cusanus’ note *ad locum* repeating the expression (*ibid.*, ed. Steel, p. 549).

28, 10-12). These words strongly suggest that much more is involved here than the mere image of bodily parts in relation to the whole of the human body. Cusanus seems to be making an unmistakable theological reference, to Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12:12ff) and the image of the Church as the *corpus Christi*.⁵⁴⁶ The whole paragraph can be read in both ways: in the 'philosophical' way of discussing the relationship between parts and the whole in the human being (i.e. in continuation of the argument of the previous paragraph), or in a 'theological' way, with the *corpus* being the Church, the body of Christ, and all the relationships within the argument reinterpreted in a new light. This is a striking example of fertile ambiguity on the part of Cusanus, refusing to exclude any of the two readings, while using an image that he uses in a recurrent manner in his works, both in 'philosophical' and 'theological' contexts (but usually clearly marked as either one or the other)⁵⁴⁷. He continues with the 'philosophical' strand of the argument in paragraph 26, as we would expect, stressing the unity of the faculties/levels that he has constructed by means of the complex web of *beryllus* structures in paragraph 24, and after *corpus* focusing on *anima* and *natura*, in a general *beryllus* structure of *omnia - conditor intellectus* (on the criterion of *similitudo*) (26, p. 29, 8-9), compared with an entirely standard *beryllus* structure of *omne visibile - visus* (which recalls, again, the *similitudo* relationship between objects of the senses and the senses established already in paragraph 6). This paragraph marks the end of the current argument, as Cusanus continues with a discussion of the *varie aenigmata* of the *sancti et philosophi* (27, p. 30, 1 – and we can note here again the ever-recurring duality between 'philosophy' and 'theology' as a running theme).

4.1.3 The image of the *imperius (exsecutore imperii, intentio imperantis)* – *De Beryllo*, 35-38, p. 38, 1 – p. 44, 10.

In paragraphs 35-38, Cusanus formulates clearly his criticism of Plato's ontology of the three *modi essendi*, using the tool of the image of the *principium unitrinum* which he has just developed in

⁵⁴⁶ 1 Cor 12:12ff: «Sicut enim corpus unum est, et membra habet multa, omnia autem membra corporis cum sint multa, unum tamen corpus sunt: ita et Christus.»

⁵⁴⁷ For 'philosophical' uses of the image of *membra – corpus*, see *De docta Ignorantia*, II, 5, 121, p. 78, 7-18; *De conjecturis*, II, 10, 125, p. 120, 4-6; *De venatione sapientiae*, XXX, 91, p. 87, 1-13. For clearly 'theological' uses, see *De Docta Ignorantia*, III, 12, 256, p. 158, 19-21ff (*ecclesia*); Sermon CCLXXIV (1457), in *Sermones* XIX/6, 26, p. 531, 12-14: «Unum est corpus Christi mysticum, et omnia membra eius per ipsum omnia faciunt»

paragraphs 33-34 (cf. our analysis in Chapter 3.4.4). From his first foray into ‘reconciling’ Plato and Aristotle in paragraph 16, we can already predict what the issue at stake will be: the problem of the coincidence of one and many, i.e. how can (many) things be *in principio principium*, since these are the terms in which he presented his own solution there. Here, the fact that Plato (and Aristotle) *caruerunt beryllo* (32, p. 35, 1) will be prominently on display, as Cusanus is, overall, accusing them of two things: 1) trying to interpret the *trinitas* that they also «saw to be present» in the *principium* (which they did manage to see, *viderunt*, by «ascending from caused to Cause»⁵⁴⁸ - 35, p. 38, 1-2) in the same way in which the interpreters of Pseudo-Dionysius erred⁵⁴⁹: i.e. in a disjunctive manner, *disjunctive* (i.e. not accepting the *coincidentia oppositorum*), because, just as those interpreters, they tried to see the *principium* through *ratio*⁵⁵⁰. This is precisely the problem Cusanus identifies with Plato’s account of the three *modi essendi* (36, p. 40, 1-6)⁵⁵¹. As our focus is on Cusanus’ method and the notion of hierarchy in relation to it, we will note the fundamental issue at play in these paragraphs with regard to the matter of interpreting the triune nature of the *principium*, a characteristic which Cusanus regards as clearly proven and available also to the *philosophi*—evidently not by means of his *beryllus*-using argument in paragraphs 33-34 with the image of *punctus-linea-angulus* (as, indeed, they could not have formulated such an argument as they were ‘lacking the beryl’), but by the fact that there are three causes: efficient, formal and final (35, p. 39, 11). Namely, the problem is simple: Plato applied a finite model of hierarchy to the triune *principium*, without infinitizing it, i.e. without viewing it

⁵⁴⁸ This is, one might remark, also a perfectly suitable description for Cusanus’ own method. The difference, however, is that he, broadly speaking, reaches the cause by ‘infinitizing’ the object being investigated, and does not see it as a problem if the resulting object has contradictory properties (such as being one and three, which is at the core of the argument here). Even if the objects being considered are paradoxical and completely incomprehensible (as, at the ultimate level, the unnameable, infinite God must be), Cusanus has still managed to identify relations which hold between these objects (however incomprehensible they are), and can transfer them to similar *beryllus*-based structures at will.

⁵⁴⁹ *De Beryllo*, 32, p. 35, 6.

⁵⁵⁰ *De Beryllo*, 35, p. 39, 8: «per rationem reperire». Cf. *ibid.*, 32, p. 35, 9-10: «ad discursum rationis revertimur ... [visione certissima] super omnem ratione ... cadimus de divina ad humana».

⁵⁵¹ Based on an interpretation of the *Timaeus* (29a-37c), viewed through the interpretive lens of Proclus. The main interpreters of *De Beryllo* have given comparatively little space to the criticism of Plato by Cusanus in these passages: cf. FLASCH, *Geschichte einer Entwicklung*, p. 466-468; ID., *Nicolaus Cusanus*, pp. 80-83; CORRIERAS, *Le traité du béryl. Tome 2*, pp. 85-86. ARROCHE, *Acerca de las críticas a Platón y Aristóteles en el De beryllo*, pp. 44-47 has a somewhat more developed, but also schematic account.

coincidentally, as the *beryllus* allows. Accordingly, Cusanus says that Plato called⁵⁵² the *principium intellectus conditor*; he conceived of its ‘father’ as *causa cunctorum*, and defined the relationship between them as *quasi filius a pater*; and, third, he saw a *spiritus* or *motus* «diffused throughout the universe» (35, p. 39, 11 – p. 40, 19). The only problem Cusanus has with any of these relationships (which he can interpret using the *beryllus* in a correct, coincidental way) is that Plato saw these erroneously as distinct and not coincident in the one *principium*. Accordingly, when compared with how Cusanus’ *beryllus* method works with regard to the *principium*, requiring a *coincidentia oppositorum* in order to be formulated, Plato failed to properly investigate the *principium*—in particular as regards the problem of participation⁵⁵³. This is a paradigmatic illustration by Cusanus of Plato’s claimed methodological failure: since Plato saw that *primus deus* is *imparticipabilis*, and incommunicable, he concluded that, in order for being to be partaken of, there had to be a *communicabilis intellectus*, distinct from it and thus created by it, the *anima mundi*. The fundamental problem is that he was not willing to accept a *coincidentia oppositorum* with respect to the criterion of participation (a finite criterion like any other), while, on the pattern of Cusanus’ previous applications, the *beryllus* can show the *principium* as a *coincidentia* formulated on this criterion as well. Interestingly, Cusanus avoids going into the specifics of this possible argument and says merely that an *intellectus creatus* or an *anima mundi* are not necessary (37, p. 42, 12); a possible argument would be that, since *participatio* is a finite degree of some kind (like *esse*), the *principium* has both the *maximum* and *minimum* in regard to it (thus, in some way, both fully participating in being and not participating at all). What is crucial is that the *intellectus creatus*, not having these paradoxical properties, is simply not the *principium* at all.

⁵⁵² Cf. PROCLUS, *In Parmenidem*, IV (Cousin 902, Steel p. 228, 12-13) and Cusanus’ note (CT III.2.2, p. 80, marginalia 301, cf. PROCLUS, *ibid.*, ed. Steel, p. 542), and *ibid.*, VI (Cousin 1096, Steel p. 381, 20-28) with Cusanus’ note (CT III.2.2, p. 118, cf. PROCLUS, *ibid.*, ed. Steel, p. 548).

⁵⁵³ *De Beryllo*, 37, p. 41, 1 – 42, 9: «Plato autem considerans multitudinem intelligentiarum vidit intellectum, cuius participatione omnes intelligentiae sunt intelligentiae. Et quia vidit primum deum absolutum, simplicissimum, imparticipabile et incommunicabile principium, ideo communicabilem intellectum in deis multis seu intelligentiis varie participatum et communicatum arbitrabatur primam creaturam. Ita etiam animam mundi, quae in omnibus animabus communicabiliter participatur, ante omnes animas, quasi in qua prioriter omnes complicantur ut in suo principio, esse credit».

This last argument lies in the background of Cusanus' indications that a *principium contractum* would not be the actual *principium* (37, p. 43, 1-3), as it would 'operate out of necessity' (*ex necessitate operatur*), contrasted with the *principium ipsius naturae*, which would be *liberum*, and which created all things by *voluntas*, free will⁵⁵⁴. What underlies this argument is the crucial point that any kind of necessity is simply not compatible with a *coincidentia oppositorum*: by its nature, necessity is in a certain way and it cannot be in another, and is not *quod esse posset* (14, p. 17, 5), and cannot be conceived without *maius nec minus* (14, p. 17, 3), etc. Necessity seems to be a type of determination that is of the same kind as the examples Cusanus offers in paragraph 8, like *divisibilitas* and *inaequalitas*: it can only be conceived in finite terms by its very definition, and thus using the *beryllus* in relation to it will result in seeing the *principium* as its negation, *libertas*, which is not determined in such a way. Any *natura* which is working *ex necessitate* will not be the *principium* but will have its own *principium*, i.e. *principium ipsius naturae* (37, p. 43, 17), which can be seen by means of a *coincidentia* with the help of the *beryllus*—and which is, as a result, not subject to *necessitas* but free.

Furthermore, a crucial result is that all finite determinations, including everything pertaining to finite hierarchies of any sort, are to be seen coincidentally in the *principium* with the help of the *beryllus*. The type of hierarchy that Plato conceived is misguided (or rather it is not about the *principium* at all), but it can describe the *principium* when properly 'infinite' according to Cusanus' method. At the same time, it is still possible, as Cusanus has shown, to build up hierarchies and different 'levels' of being, as he shows, as we have seen, in paragraph 24 (and the previous geometrical examples in paragraphs 21-23, as well as 18-20), by repeated uses of the *beryllus* at every single step in order to create something like a 'ladder of *coincidentia*' to solve any particular ontological problem.

The use of the recurring 'political image' of the *imperium* in these four paragraphs illustrates Cusanus' point perfectly and paradigmatically. It is a running theme of the argument, chosen by Cusanus as a sign of both Plato's failure to conceive of the *primum principium* correctly and of

⁵⁵⁴ Cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super De Divinis Nominibus*, I, 41, p. 23, 51-57; cf. Cusanus' note *ad locum*, CT III.1, marginalia 154: «Deus voluntate creat quae est et virtus naturalis».

Cusanus' successful *beryllus*-based solution. Thus, in paragraphs 35 (p. 40, 17), the *intellectus* incorrectly identified by Plato as *creatus* executes the command (*imperium*), or intention (*intention*), of the Father; accordingly, in the second *modus essendi*, all things are said to be «in the most wise Executor» of the *imperium* (*in exsecutore imperii sapientissimo*), and the third *modus* shows all as being *in instrumento exsecutoris* (36, p. 40, 3-5). In the 'political' image (similar in all discernible ways to the *res publica – rex* image we have seen before), this is the mistake in this interpretation: if the 'executor' does not coincide with the *rex*, he is simply not a *principium* but part of the *omnia in re publica* which are in a relationship of *similitudo* with the *rex* and are *in rege*: a mere 'executor' will not have all the powers of the king himself, and neither, of course, will an 'instrument of execution'. For Cusanus, elements such as these (whether they exist or not) are not the *principium*, which is what his method is interested in. In the political image properly used according to the *beryllus*, one must look rather at what is 'in' the king himself. Accordingly, when investigating the *principium*, all things will not be said to be created by some *exsecutor* who is himself created (and thus irrelevant to the argument), but rather they will be considered in relation to the *rex* (i.e. either coincident with him or created by him), and thus *omnia* can be described as *voluntate fiunt* (37, p. 43, 18-20). Furthermore, applying the coincidental argument Cusanus made in paragraphs 16-17 about the *exemplaria* and the *voluntas* (which all coincide in the *principium*), one also reaches a crucial result: the form (*forma*) of any particular thing is (identical with) the 'intention of the ruler' (*intentio imperantis*); by successive applications of the *beryllus*, this can be made to be the 'intermediate' level which solves the problem of participation (on basic the model of *mathematicus – linea* from paragraphs 19-20, or indeed *principium – unus – punctus – linea* from paragraphs 21-23, as Cusanus will develop this later, with the triangle images and the concept of *species* – cf. Chapter 3.4.7). In general, every created thing is the *intentio voluntatis omnipotentis* (37, p. 43, 21-22), in which all coincide (*voluntas, intentio*, as well as the other two persons of the Trinity properly conceived).

Thus, in paragraph 38 it becomes clear why Cusanus chose *imperium* as the name for his 'political' image here: *imperium* can also mean order or command, and thus is a perfect illustration of

the wrongness of saying that the *intellectus conditor* does anything *ex necessitate* (38, p. 43, 1-2): because, in a clever wordplay, that would mean acting *necessitatum per superioris imperium*: there would be a ‘higher level’ of *imperium*, i.e. one seen via the *coincidentia*, and thus the true *principium*, in which all coincide, and thus also *voluntas*, among other things, coincides with the true principle/king’s *essentia* (38, p. 44, 8). Cusanus then quotes Aristotle on precisely this point (*omnia in principio primo sunt ipsum*)⁵⁵⁵, but says that Aristotle did not pay attention to the coincidence of *voluntas*, *ratio* and *essentia* (and, implicitly, all the other things: *intentio*, *exemplaria*, etc.). Every error of Plato and Aristotle, Cusanus says, follow from this: *ex hoc omnis eorum error secutus est* (38, p. 43, 2), i.e. in the end, the lack of a proper, *coincidentia*-based method for investigating the *principium*, of the type which Cusanus is now proposing as the *beryllus*.

But why is, for instance, *necessitas absoluta*, for instance (as opposed to *libertas*), not appropriate as a name for the *conditor*? Being built using a *coincidentia*, the *principium* will be, in effect, at the same time maximum and minimum *necessitas* as well as *libertas* (taking them as *opposita*), and it could be called *necessitas absoluta* as well, fulfilling the conditions of the ‘beryllic’ construction. However, the two names are obviously not ‘equal’ in Cusanus’ usage (as is the case with all pairs of opposites), even though for the purposes of the method they work in the same way, as long as a *coincidentia* is properly identified. This points to a crucial issue for hierarchy in *De Beryllo*, namely the hierarchy of relations/’divine names’ identified by means of the method, which will be treated in Chapter 4.2.

4.1.4 *Princeps, quiditas voluntas creatoris* – paragraph 51 (*De Beryllo*, 51, p. 57, 1 – p. 58, 19)

In order to solve the problem of *substantia/quod erat esse* that Aristotle had doubts about (49, p. 56, 1-2, as well as Socrates ‘both young and old’, according to Proclus – 50, p. 57, 1-2) Cusanus

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica*, XII, 7, 1072b 20-23; 9, 1074b 18-22, and Cusanus’ note to 1072b28-30: «nota quid deus est id quod ei inest ipse est». But the more direct reference seems to be to a passage in Albert: ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super De Divinis Nominibus*, IV, 9, p. 118, 20-25: «Et ideo agere secundum essentiam in ipso est agere secundum suam voluntatem et secundum suam sapientiam ... quia suum est suum intelligere et sua actio et sua substantia, ut dicit Philosophus in XI Metaphysicae»; cf. *ibid.*, IV, 8, p. 117, 46-48.

applies the same image as above (*res publica, princeps* – 51, p. 57, 5), and builds the same implicit argument, namely the argument he developed in paragraphs 16-17 regarding the coincidence of *exemplaria* and *voluntas* in the *principium*. Accordingly, in the image, the *princeps* can establish an (arbitrary) measure such as the *sextarius* without need for further justification, as well as other things, citing Ulpian's *Institutiones* as illustration to the effect that «what has pleased the Prince has the force of law»⁵⁵⁶. Precisely because *voluntas* coincides with *intellectus* and *ratio* (51, 16, p. 58), *voluntas creatoris* is the ultimate *ratio essendi*, and there is no further (knowable) reason that can be investigated about the *substantia* of anything. Due to the coincidental nature of the *imperator*, his *ratio*, manifested in the *lex*, appears to us as *voluntas* (51, p. 58, 19), precisely because it is not further determinable/comprehensible beside these coincidental relationships that the *beryllus* shows.

4.1.5 Ducali dignitas in regia dignitatem – paragraph 57 (De Beryllo, 57, p. 64, 1 – 65, 9)

Paragraph 57 is part of a very important argument for questions relating to hierarchy: namely to the effect that «those things which cannot be made by our art exist more truly (*verius sunt*) in perceptible objects than in our intellect»⁵⁵⁷. *Verius* is the key term at issue, and it is clear that Cusanus is trying to better delineate the image he constructed of the sensible faculties in paragraph 6, in which, as we saw, basically the same type of relationship (via implicit *beryllus* structures) was established between (1) objects of sense/intellect and *sensus/intellectus*; and (2) the same objects and *intellectus conditor*. Cusanus is here trying to determine a criterion to 'rank' these two relationships ontologically. In itself this is not a difficult question, if we consider 'Premise 2' and 'Premise 3' in paragraph 6 and 7, as we have analyzed them (Chapter 3.3): what was implicit there was the notion of multiple layers of *similitudo*, as the *intellectus* was an image of the *principium*, the objects of the *intellectus* were seen as images of it, and at the same time they were images of the *principium*. Here⁵⁵⁸ Cusanus is arguing,

⁵⁵⁶ Cf. ULPIAN, *Institutiones*, ed. T. Mommsen – P. Krueger, Berlin 1908, vol. 1, p. 35.

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. *De Beryllo*, 56, p. 63, 1-10, on the image of the house, *domus*, in relation to the *mentalis figurae*.

⁵⁵⁸ *De Beryllo*, 57, p. 64, 1 – 65, 9: «Sic vides quomodo ea, quae per artem nostram fieri non possunt, verius sunt in sensibilibus quam in nostro intellectu, ut ignis verius esse habet in sensibili substantia sua quam in nostro intellectu, ubi est in confuso conceptu sine naturali veritate; ita de omnibus. Sed verius esse habet ignis in suo conditore, ubi est in sua adaequata causa et ratione. Et licet non sit in divino intellectu cum sensibilibus qualitibus, quas nos in ipso sentimus,

using the *beryllus* (with the image of drawn circle vs. circle *in intellectu*), that things created are ‘in a truer way’, *verius*, in the creator, like fire is *in suo conditore ... in sua adaequata causa et ratione* (as opposed to how it is in our *intellectus* – 57, p. 65, 1-4). The image of the *dignitas ducali* and *dignitas regia* comes up again in the context of emphasizing the unity of a multiplicity in one in the *principium*, and that things are *vera* in the *divinus intellectus*, even as they do not have the sensible qualities (*cum sensibilibus qualitatibus*) that they have as objects of the senses. But there is a crucial innovation here, namely the appearance of an ‘intermediary rank’, that of *dux*, in the implicit image of the *res publica*, which exists in a more true manner, *verius*, in the *rex*. This is all in preparation for Cusanus’ argument as to *species* in the following paragraphs, 59-62, based on the *linea-triangulus* image, which again constructs a multiple-layered *beryllus* structure. The crucial principle for seeing *species* as part of an ontological hierarchy is the argument in this paragraph regarding ‘being more truly in’ (*verius in*), i.e. multiple layers of intermediate *principia* make the *similitudo* ‘less true’, and each is ‘truer’ in a more ‘superior’ level, while at the same time, they are ‘more true’ in the *intellectus conditor*, in the ‘original’ *beryllus* structure without the intermediate levels. The concept of *verius* is thus a fundamental structural principle of multiple-level *beryllus* constructions, and allows Cusanus to construct hierarchies.

4.1.6 *Imperator gloriosus* – paragraph 68 (*De Beryllo*, 68, p. 79, 15 – 80, 20)

In paragraph 68, Cusanus starts by repeating his claim about the error of the philosophers: the «wrong presupposition», *malus praesuppositus*, because of which «they imposed necessity on the First Cause» (68, p. 78, 1-2). This, as we have seen, is a methodological error, as they did not investigate the *prima causa* coincidentally (which would have shown them that their conception was not that of the *principium* at all)—by which they could have seen (*reperissent*) a solution for «all perplexities», in any investigation (*in omni inquisitione*) (68, p. 78, 2-4). Thus, Cusanus is claiming that he has fully fulfilled the purpose set out in paragraph 1, of providing a method for solving *quaequae indaganda*. In this context, Cusanus returns to the image in ‘Premise 1’ (paragraph 4), where he showed (by an implicit

tamen propterea non minus vere est, sicut ducalis dignitas in regia dignitate verius est, licet cum exercitio ducali ibi non existat».

beryllus structure) that the *intellectus conditor* wishes to manifest itself in the form of his creations. He can now deploy all his constructed hierarchical structures (both the hierarchy of faculties at 24-27, ‘updated’ with the *verius* theorem in paragraph 57, and the hierarchy of *species* built on the *linea-triangulus-superficies* image in paragraphs 58-62) in order to fill out the ontological structure. He thus develops an image of the *conditor* manifesting himself with different levels of ‘clarity’ (68, p. 79, 13: *clariori modo se ostendit*), starting from a rose and moving from the rose as a physical object (*corpus*, cf. *sensus*) through the *vita vegetabilis* (cf. *natura*) and *vita intellectiva* (cf. *anima*), i.e. the hierarchy developed in paragraphs 24-27 (68, p. 78, 5 – 79, 15). Interestingly, he not only uses an ambiguous (and possibly theological) *in verbo suo* (68, p. 79, 8) but relies crucially on the interesting notion of *resplendentia*, which he has introduced a few paragraphs in previous (62, p. 71, 18 – 72, 21 – cf. Chapter 3.4.8), and which seems to have the special meaning of ‘(somehow) showing the nature of its *principium* even beyond the fact of its being an image’ – as with the notion of *harmonia*, this *resplendentia* has particularly strong effects on human nature: «with a movement of joy and with a most pleasing harmony that gladdens a man’s entire nature» (*cum motu laetitiae et dulcissima harmonia omnem naturam hominis exhilarescente* – 68, p. 79, 11-12). Apparently this ‘shining forth’ effect increases with the ontological level, as it shows itself ‘clearer’ at the level of the intellect: «*adhuc clariori resplendentia in vita intellectiva*» (68, p. 79, 14). This is the level at which Cusanus introduces the *gloriosus imperator* image⁵⁵⁹, a standard reiteration of the *res publica* – *rex* construction, although now also featuring the just-developed conception of *species* (68, p. 79, 17). What is different here is the ‘theological’ adjective *gloriosus*⁵⁶⁰, recalling the *ut gloriam suam manifestetur* of paragraph 4 (4, p. 6, 5-6), which is also crucially tied to the *resplendentia*: when one is using the *beryllus*, therefore, one can experience this ‘extra’ aspect of the object examined, which leads one to derive pleasure from seeing the physical rose, and (implicitly) even more so by examining the ‘beryllic’ image of the

⁵⁵⁹ *De Beryllo*, 68, p. 79, 15 – 80, 20: «quam gloriosus sit ille imperator, qui per naturam tamquam legem omnibus imperat, omnia conservat in specie incorruptibili supra tempus et in individuis temporaliter, et quomodo omnia hac lege naturae oriuntur, moventur et operantur ea, quae lex naturae imperat, in qua lege non nisi intellectus ille viget ut omnium auctor».

⁵⁶⁰ Cf. Dan. 3:56: «Benedictus es in firmamento caeli: et laudabilis et gloriosus in saecula».

imperator as an image of the *principium*. This all ties in to the epithet *admirandus*, ‘marvellous, to be admired’, given to the *conditor* (68, p. 71, 7). It is to be emphasized that *resplendentia* seems to be something properly ‘outside’ the *beryllus* structures, just as we have it in this case, where the application of a *beryllus*-based image causes pleasure and admiration in the one who applies it. Thus, Cusanus seems to be implicitly acknowledging that the *beryllus* structure itself has fundamental limitations, or rather that there is something ‘beyond’ it—as we will examine in Chapter 5 on the question of Christ (introduced explicitly in paragraph 69).

4.2 The hierarchy of ‘divine names’

If God is to be «named by the names of all things and by none of all these names» (13, p. 16, 10 – 17, 1), this seems to imply a certain ‘indifference’ in determining names. Indeed, as we have seen, the method can be used from any starting image and does not itself ‘discriminate’ between all its possible results. In order to address the difficulties noted above regarding how to choose the images, and which of the *innumerabiles modi* (27, p. 31, 13) one should use, Cusanus uses certain implicit premises that are unconnected to the *beryllus* method as such, and essentially independent from it. These concern the question of which objects one should choose when applying the *beryllus*, and which relations one should choose to transfer between different ‘beryllic’ structures (in order to obtain, for instance, ‘names for God’, if one transfers such relations to the *omnia – primum principium* structure).

As regards these, Cusanus briefly approaches this theme in paragraph 13 (p. 16, 1 – 17, 12), in particular in the first sentence, which says that the name *unus* «seems to befit God (*deo magis convenire*) better than does any other name», citing Parmenides and Anaxagoras’ «melius unum quam omnia simul»⁵⁶¹. He then goes on at length to describe that this is not the *unus numeralis*, the ‘number one’, or the monad (*monas*), but *unus* understood, in accordance with the method, as having two fundamental aspects: *indivisibilitas (omni modo divisionis* – 13, p. 16, 5), and *simplicitas (sine omni*

⁵⁶¹ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica*, XII, 2, 1069b20-21.

dualitate intelligitur, lacking in duality, which translates further below to the adjective of *simplex* – 13, p. 16, 9).

To ‘evaluate’ the *modi*, Cusanus often seems to use adjectives such as *propinquus* (63, p. 72, 1) or *gratus*, which do not give much information about how to choose them. There is only one other passage in which Cusanus refers to a criterion for choosing images, in paragraph 63:

Et quanto quantitas discreta est simplicior quantitate continua, tanto species melius in aenigmate quantitatis discretae videtur quam continuae. (63, p. 72, 3-6) *Simplicior autem est magnitudo discreta quam continua et spiritualior atque speciei, quae penitus simplex est, similior, licet utique speciei simplicitas, quae est quiditas, sit ante simplicitatem illius discretae magnitudinis.* (63, p. 72, 8-11).

The criterion used to rank the *aenigmata* here is *simplex/simplicitas* (connected, interestingly, with *spiritualis*). Cusanus’ point, coming in the context of the discussion of the newly developed concept of *species* (with the help of the *linea-triangulus* image in paragraphs 58-62), is that the *species*, being themselves ‘thoroughly simple’ (*penitus simplex*), can be seen better (*melius videtur*) in images featuring discrete quantities than continuous quantities, as the former are ‘simpler’. There seems to be an implicit methodological premise here: one should generally choose *aenigmata* at a similar level of *simplicitas* (for example, with the same number of ‘ontologic levels’) as the object which one is trying to investigate (by means of comparison of *beryllus* structures). Indeed, Cusanus appears to follow precisely this advice in his ‘hierarchical’ constructions overall, and appears to be guided throughout the book by a project to offer more and more complex constructions, at which each particular ‘ontological level’ is comparably simple to the object to be investigated (e.g. his most complex construction, the *linea-triangulus* image for *species* at 58-62). However, that is not all there is to the notion of *simplicitas*, as it appears to have a clear Proclean lineage and to involve an ordered ontological framework, based on Cusanus’ studies of Proclus during this period, particularly of the *Elementatio Theologica*, as we will examine below.

4.3 The Proclean hierarchy of entities – the main ontological premises underlying *simplicitas*

In eight passages⁵⁶² in *De Beryllo*, Cusanus refers explicitly to this fundamental ‘ontological premise’ of an order of *simplex/simplicitas*, which, although independent of the method as such, goes a long way towards explaining why he chooses to build the structures he does, and why he chooses certain passages and not others from the authors he is quoting. This is what underlies the term *simplex* applied to names that we have identified above, as well as the widely-used term *subtilis* (see the extended discussion and sources in note 454 above). And in one particular passage, Cusanus seems intent to extend the same fundamental conception to new terms, using four different new terms for it at once: *principalius, nobilius, altius, incorruptibilis*.⁵⁶³

The source of this hierarchical conception of *simplex* can be seen, particularly, in Proclus, one of Cusanus’ main sources and a major influence in this book⁵⁶⁴. For instance, in the *Elementatio Theologica*, a book studied carefully by Cusanus, we read, e.g., at proposition 61:⁵⁶⁵

«*Omnis potentia impartibilis manens maior est, partita autem minor. - Qua enim partitur procedit in multitudinem. Si autem hoc, remotius fit ab uno. Si autem hoc, pauciora poterit, ab uno et continente ipsum distans et imperfecta, siquidem uniuscuiusque bonum existit secundum unio*»

At proposition 95⁵⁶⁶, we read:

«*Omnis potentia unitior existens est infinitior quam plurificata. - Nam a prima infinitas uni propinquior, et potentiarum quae uni magis eminentius est infinita distante ab ilio. Plurificata enim perdit unitalitem, manens habebat excellentiam ad alias, contenta propter impartibilitatem. partibilibus potentiae collectae quidem multiplicantur, partitae autem debilitantur*»

We can already recognize a theme that has informed many of the Proclean passages that we have encountered so far, together with their annotations by Cusanus himself. Accordingly, we see how a conception of ‘greater/lesser’ in an ontological sense (whether referred to by *simplicitas, subtilis*, etc.) informs Cusanus’ choices regarding the order and manner of use of his *aenigmata*, and it appears to be

⁵⁶² *De Beryllo*, 19, p. 24, 18-22; 20, p. 24, 7-13; 23, p. 26, 11-13; 44, p. 51, 13-15; 63, p. 72, 3-6; 63, p. 72, 8-11; 65, p. 76, 11; 71, p. 83, 8 - 84, 19. See Annex I for a full list of these passages.

⁵⁶³ «Est autem principalius cognoscere et nobilius, quia habet altiorem et incorruptibiliorem finem» (*De Beryllo*, 65, p. 76, 11).

⁵⁶⁴ On this, see particularly D’AMICO, *Nikolaus Cusanus als Leser von Proklos*; cf. FLASCH, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, pp. 123-125.

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. PROCLUS, *Elements of Theology*, p. 58, 16-21 (Dodds). Cf. *Liber de Causis*, XVI, 138: «Omnis virtus unita plus est infinita quam virtus multiplicata».

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. PROCLUS, *ibid.*, p. 84, 28ff, prop. 95.

a hierarchical notion ultimately going back to the theme of the One-multiple relationship. This happens to map precisely onto a standard ‘B-structure’ (see Chapter 2.3). Cusanus’ innovation is to take this fundamental Neoplatonic ontological structure and apply it to an abstract method constructed on the notion of *coincidentia oppositorum*, resulting in a simple structure for identifying *principia* in any type of object applied. While the method itself is indifferent to what particular objects and what particular ‘ontological levels’ (in the terms we have used in Chapter 2.3) are being chosen for a particular application, as long as the *coincidentia oppositorum* is properly formulated, the overarching notion of *simplicitas* helps him always establish ontological ‘directionality’, as he does so explicitly, for instance, in Chapter 3.4.2 with the *linea similitudo veritatis* image, which is oriented from the start (outside the requirements of the method itself) as representing *veritas* at one particular and *nihil* at the other.

It is Cusanus’ overall contention that this way of interpreting this aspect of the tradition is in fact in basic conformity with the meaning of both Proclus (and Plato viewed through his lens) and Pseudo-Dionysius (in his interpretation) and the ‘theological’ part of the tradition. Thus, Cusanus’ idea, which lies behind *De Beryllo* and the *beryllus* method, is that he can bring together Pseudo-Dionysius’ coincidental names with Proclus’ hierarchical structure, and ‘reconstruct’ said structure, and the rest of the tradition relying on it (cf. e.g. Albert, Avicbron in paragraph 18), by using his innovative method for building multi-level complex hierarchies which can be ‘translated’, ultimately, into different levels of *simplicitas*. At the same time, it remains true that someone might choose to use the *beryllus* method with completely different ‘external criteria’ and construct completely different ontological structures/hierarchies based on the *coincidentiae oppositorum* identified at each step. This should lead us to think carefully about the notion of *praxis* that Cusanus claims to offer: this does not only include training in the use of the *beryllus* method, but also training in the employment of the correct ‘external criteria’ by which to guide it—cf., for instance, the crucial ‘methodological’ passage we have analyzed in Chapter 3.4.3. At stake is not only the ‘correctness’ of one’s conclusions/constructions, but, in the end, much more than that—no less than Christian salvation. This we will show in the chapter ahead.

CHAPTER 5 – Christ and the *beryllus*: *De Beryllo* as a Christological work

This chapter will examine an important and interesting question in the context of our discussion of the characteristics of the method: where would Christ fit in, according to Cusanus' understanding? While commentators so far have not recognized the importance of the theme of Christology in *De Beryllo*⁵⁶⁷, the last few paragraphs make explicitly Christological arguments (69-70), which do not seem readily understandable in terms of the *beryllus* method as we have analyzed it so far. They require, therefore, special attention in the analysis. Furthermore, in the background of Cusanus' writing *De Beryllo* are always the sermons he is preaching during this period, some of which go into ontological and epistemological themes, together with explicitly Christological ones. And, as we have seen in Chapter 3.1, there is strong evidence, particularly in Sermon CXXVI (1453), that Cusanus would have conceived of the *beryllus* as far more than a mere metaphor for a lens—indeed, that he thought of it also in terms of a particularly fitting image of Christ. We will analyze all these aspects in turn below.

5.1 Sermon CXXVI - Christ as a stone (*lapis*)

We have analyzed this sermon, preached on June 29, 1453 in Brixen, in Chapter 3.1.d. We will summarize here the most important conclusions of that analysis, especially as concerns Christology. Thus, in paragraphs 10, 11, and 12, Cusanus develops a very interesting image: that of a small stone (*lapis/calculus*, used interchangeably) as an image of Christ (tying together, in particular, the *lapis angularis* of 1 Pet. 2:4-6 and the *calculus* of Rev. 2:17). In paragraph 10, he notes that stones have *virtutes*, i.e. (what we would call supernatural) powers; in paragraph 11, he proposes the image of a «small, bright but clear stone»⁵⁶⁸ that would possess all the powers of all the stones *complicite*—an indication that this is meant to be, in a standard *beryllus*-like structure (similar to those we have just examined in *De Beryllo*), a type of *principium* of the stones. Then, Cusanus describes how despite

⁵⁶⁷ Paradigmatic for this is, for instance, the account of FLASCH, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, pp. 138-140.

⁵⁶⁸ Sermon CXXVI, in *Sermones* XVIII/1, 11, p. 26, 1-4: «Considera igitur, si foret calculus parvus candidus seu lucidus, qui haberet in se complicite omnem omnium lapidum pretiosorum virtutem».

having all the *virtutes* of all the stones, it would be ignored and deemed ‘as nothing’ (*pro nihilo haberetur* – implicitly, by people judging it by its appearance alone), but «if someone were to believe some great and erudite teacher (*magno et doctissimo magistro*), who showed the stone and announced its power (*virtutem eius*), [the one who believed], after he believed, would see that [the stone] is indeed such (*reperiret ita esse*), and would place it above all the stones (*super omnes lapides*), in Zion»⁵⁶⁹. Cusanus explicitly identifies this stone as an image of Christ⁵⁷⁰. In paragraph 12, Cusanus uses the same image of the stone to build up an image of the Incarnation, as a combination of *materia* and *ratio aeterna*⁵⁷¹. In this way, Cusanus says, «you can befigure body, soul and divinity in the best way in the small stone»⁵⁷². This Christological image of the *calculus parvus candidus seu lucidus* has a clear resonance with the introduction of the *beryllus* stone in *De Beryllo* (*lapis lucidus, albus et transparentis* – 3, p. 5, 1), and needs to be considered from the start as a background to Cusanus’ writing of the text. As we will see further below, there is much to argue for the fact that the same Christological conception underlies, to an important extent, Cusanus’ use of the *beryllus*.

5.2 The philosophical-theological-epistemological problem – how can God be known? A reading of Sermon CLXXXVIII (1455)

The question of how a Christian would be able to ‘see God’ is central to Christian theology, as this notion (i.e. the *visio beatifica*) is a fundamentally important image for salvation—yet, the biblical sources appear to offer paradoxically conflicting statements about whether this is possible and how⁵⁷³.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-11: «Sed si quis crederet alicui magno et doctissimo magistro, qui ostenderet calculum et annuntiaret virtutem eius, ille postquam crederet, reperiret ita esse. Talis poneret lapidem illum super omnes lapides in Sion». Cf. Rm 9:33, 1 Pt. 2:6.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 15: «Sic dicitur Christus per similitudinem lapis». He then identifies the *magister* as John the Baptist (line 15), and «*post hoc*», the Apostle Peter (lines 18-19).

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 12, p. 26, 1 – p. 27: 17: «Unde attende, quod sicut lapis candidus ex purissimis guttulis elementaribus in terra virtute caelestem coagulatur ita, quod lapis pretiosus incomparabiliter excedit matrem et non habet alium patrem quam virtutem caelestem, sic Christus ex purissimis guttulis virginis gloriosae compactus virtute Altissimi existit. Et habet calculus ille materiam ex terra virginea, candorem seu animam lucidam seu rationalem, quia lux ratio, de caelo lucidissimo. Caelum lucidissimum est sapientia seu ratio aeterna, per quam omnia facta. Nihil enim est, cuius ratio, ut esset, non existit. Habet virtutem, quia candor ille animae rationalis est in luce originis suae, et ita suppositatur in virtute, quae est causa omnis virtutis, et ita est virtus divina».

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 12, p. 27, 18-19: «Et sic habes corpus, animam et deitatem optime figurari in calculo».

⁵⁷³ Cf., for Old Testament sources, Exodus 33:20 vs. Genesis 32:30, Isaiah 6:5; for the New Testament, John 1:18, 6:46, 1 John 4:12, Matthew 11:27, 1 Timothy 6:16 vs. 1 Cor. 13:12, 2 Cor. 3:18, 1 John 3:2.

As a result of attempts at working out a consistent theological interpretation of the *visio beatifica*, two strands of interpretation developed within the Western tradition on this question, which can also be framed in terms of: exactly how unknowable/incomprehensible is God to finite beings (and even to Himself) in the end? The first strand followed the interpretation of Augustine⁵⁷⁴ to the effect that, at least in the next life, a *visio* of God is fundamentally possible. The second strand, however, of a clear Eastern Christian lineage (together with some influence from the Neoplatonic tradition) and including influential figures such as Gregory of Nyssa⁵⁷⁵, Pseudo-Dionysius⁵⁷⁶ and Eriugena⁵⁷⁷, denied that any true vision of God was possible, whether in this life or the next, due (ultimately) to the radical ontological separation between the infinite and finite and the Creator and creation; while each of these authors developed particular theoretical solutions so that salvation was not rendered impossible after all, the radically ‘inaccessible’ character of God remained a fundamental feature⁵⁷⁸. In the Augustinian strand of the tradition, we later find thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas⁵⁷⁹; in the second, ‘apophatic’ tradition, we find Albert the Great⁵⁸⁰, then Meister Eckhart⁵⁸¹, and, later on, Cusanus himself. As we

⁵⁷⁴ Cf. AUGUSTINE, *Epistula* 92, 5-6, in PL 33, col. 320; ID. *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 26, 2, 11, in PL 36, col. 203; ID. *De civitate Dei*, 22, 30, in PL 33, col. 804; ID., *De trinitate*, 8, 9, 13, in PL 42, col. 960.

⁵⁷⁵ Cf. GREGORY OF NYSSA, *De beatitudinibus, Oratio VI*, in PG 44, col. 1263-78, esp. 1272B. For a more general account of the more ‘apophatic’ character of the interpretation of the *visio beatifica* by the Fathers of the Eastern Church, see V. LOSSKY, *The Vision of God*, tr. by A. Morehouse, London 1963, esp. pp. 77-79, 112-114.

⁵⁷⁶ Cf. PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, *De Mystica Theologia*, I, 3, p. 144 (1000D-1001A); II, p. 145 (1025B); on this ‘non-seeing seeing’ (*theoria*) (cf. 1 Timothy 6:16) see also ID., *De Divinis Nominibus*, IV, 11, p. 156 (708D); I, 4, 5, p. 114-115 (592C).

⁵⁷⁷ Cf. ERIUGENA, *Periphyseon*, in PL 122, I, col. 447B-451C, esp. 448C; II, col. 557BC; and throughout book V: e.g. *ibid.*, V, col. 905C-D, 926C-D, 945C-D, 1000B-D, 1010C-D, and esp. 998B-1000A.

⁵⁷⁸ This is, by necessity, a highly simplified account, which omits many of the important distinctions such as the different kinds of *visio* and faculties which might be involved, whether it is possible in this life or the next, whether *quid est* or *quia est* knowledge of God is available, whether God’s essence is knowable even to God himself, etc. For a comprehensive look at this medieval debate and its sources, see the authoritative and exhaustive C. TROTTMANN, *La vision béatifique. Des disputes scolastiques a sa definition par Benoit XII*, Rome 1995.

⁵⁷⁹ This is an oft-treated theme in Aquinas; see TROTTMANN, *La vision béatifique*, pp. 302-320; for an in-depth study see W. HOYE, *Actualitas omnium actuum. Man’s beatific Vision of God as Apprehended by Thomas Aquinas*, Meisenheim am Glan 1975.

⁵⁸⁰ Cf. e.g. ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Super Mysticam Theologiam*, II, in *Opera Omnia* (Cologne edition), vol. 37/2, I.74, p. 460; II.8-9, p. 465; and esp. ID., *Summa theologiae*, tr. 3, q. 13, cap. 1, in *Opera Omnia* (Cologne edition), vol. 34/1, esp. p. 40, II.39-41. Cf. TROTTMANN, *La vision béatifique*, pp. 282-302. On Albert’s apophaticism (one of the influences on Cusanus, as we have already seen in a number of passages where Cusanus relies on his interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius), see e.g. E. WEBER, *Langage et methode negatifs chez Albert le Grand*, in «*Revue des sciences philosophiques et theologiques*» 65 (1981), pp. 75-99.

⁵⁸¹ Cf. e.g., for Eckhart’s strong version of apophaticism, MEISTER ECKHART, *Deutsche Werke*, vol. III, Sermon 71, pp. 211-231 (on the revelation of Paul), esp. p. 214, II.6-7; p. 215, II.9-11; p. 231, II.1-2. Cf. also ID., *Sermo in die B. Augustini*, in *Lateinische Werke*, vol. V, pp. 594-595; ID. *Sermo XXII*, in *Lateinische Werke*, vol. IV, pp. 197-203. (All references to Eckhart’s works are to the two parts, in Latin and German, of the modern critical edition, MEISTER ECKHART, *Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke*, Stuttgart - Berlin, 1936-). For a general account of Eckhart’s mystical theology, see B. MCGINN, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart. The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing*, New York 2001.

have seen, Cusanus conceptualizes the relationship between man and God (cf. *creatura-creator, principiata-principium*) as, on one hand, a radical skepticism about any possibility for a finite being to have any kind of ‘access’ to the infinite God, combined paradoxically with a radical ‘optimism’ about the possibility of some type of ‘knowledge’, associated always with a special *visio intellectualis*, and which goes above both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ theology⁵⁸². At the core of this epistemological construction, as we have seen, lies the rejection of the principle of non-contradiction for certain objects (namely the realm of the *intellectus/beryllus intellectualis*); the *coincidentia oppositorum* is the key to overcoming the impossible situation of the finite human being wanting to ‘reach’ God; somehow, this ‘logically tragic’ situation should be overcome, and the impossible made possible through the judicious application of *coincidentia oppositorum*. His characteristic idea here in *De Beryllo* appears to be that this can be ‘instrumentalized’ in order to derive ‘divine names’ (in continuity, according to his own interpretation, with Pseudo-Dionysius) and in order to make possible a particular type of vision, in *De Beryllo* called *visio intellectualis*⁵⁸³ (and the faculty correlated with it *visus subtilissimus*), ultimately aiming at such an ‘access’ to the inaccessible infinite—but how? This is the theological (and indeed soteriological) scope of the method of the *beryllus* that we are analyzing.

Klaus Reinhardt, in a recent article on the notion of *intellectus* in *De Beryllo* and a number of near-contemporary sermons⁵⁸⁴, identifies this crucial theme of the problematic ‘access’ to God for a human being in the epistemology that Cusanus presents in some sermons dating from the time during which Cusanus worked on *De Beryllo*, and this deserves careful consideration in relation to what Cusanus actually says in our text about the nature of the faculties, particularly the *intellectus*.

In these sermons, one finds the same fundamental notion that also has crucial importance for *De Beryllo*: that the human mind by itself is deficient⁵⁸⁵, particularly for ‘knowing’/’seeing’/’attaining

⁵⁸² See note 193 and the literature cited there about the ‘three-step’ formulations of his method, on the basis of interpretations of Pseudo-Dionysius.

⁵⁸³ See note 307 and the discussion there.

⁵⁸⁴ REINHARDT, *Der Intellekt als Prinzip des Seins in De Beryllo und Sermo CLXXXVII Spiritus autem Paraclitus*, esp. pp. 15-16.

⁵⁸⁵ Cf. *De Beryllo*, 1, p. 3, 5: «infirmus intellectus».

to' God, and requires a certain kind of assistance. Thus, in Sermon CLXXXVII («*Spiritus autem paraclitus*», preached on Pentecost in 1455), Cusanus lays out a familiar ontological scheme, but emphasizing an element that has been missing so far in our analysis in *De Beryllo*: namely the teleological aspect of the *principium* being the *finis* for the *principiata* (and thus God being the goal of human beings), what this implies, and how, indeed, this 'goal' could be reachable, since the *beryllus* structure seems to show a fundamental and irreconcilable separation between the two ontological levels involved. Accordingly, in this sermon, Cusanus says that, while the human being is created to know about the *divitiae gloriae Dei*, they are unable to attain this, or know God, by their own forces (*ex propriis viribus*)⁵⁸⁶; in particular, man is unable to see God (*deus excelsus non videtur per intellectum*)⁵⁸⁷, as indeed God's light would have to 'be poor' to be visible with the *intellectualis oculus* of a creature⁵⁸⁸. But since God (lit. God's *gloria*) wants to show himself (*se ostendere*), he created creatures to whom he gave intellect, by which they can know that God is their creator, although incomprehensible⁵⁸⁹. That does not, however, solve the problem that *visio gloriae [Dei]* is impossible. Therefore, Cusanus says: «But as the weak natural light [of man] cannot proceed all the way to the vision of [God's] glory (*ad visionem gloriae pertingere*), therefore, God wanted to show (*ostendere*) the riches of His glory in [its] very infinity, in the light of [God's] glory, by adding something to (*superaddendo*) the natural light [of man] for the one disposed in the best way to receive [Him]»⁵⁹⁰. In this way, «by the gift of the most merciful king (*clementissimi regis*), we are freed of the defect and

⁵⁸⁶ Sermon CLXXXVII, in *Sermones* XVIII/4, 8, p. 345, 5-6: «ad cognitionem Dei non potest homo pervenire ex omnibus viribus suis...» 8-12: «Homo igitur, etsi creatus sit, ut sibi notae fiant divitiae gloriae Dei, et hoc in laudem ipsius gloriae Dei, tamen non sic quod ex propriis viribus ad hoc pertingere possit».

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-19: «Sicut excellens sensibile citius corrumpit sensum quam per victoriam sensus capiatur, ita Deus excelsus non videtur per intellectum, immo minus quam claritas solis per oculum, licet nihil plus sit visibile quam claritas, quae semet ingerit in oculum».

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 9, p. 345, 1-2: «Parvae igitur forent divitiae Dei, si per creaturam capi possent, et parva lux, si per creatum intellectualem oculum foret inoffense visibilis».

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-13: «Quapropter gloria Dei, quae non potest se ostendere, uti est, visibilem, quia omnem visum creabilem in infinitum excedit, divitias bonitatis et clementiae suae meliori modo, quo creatura illas capere possit, ostendere volens, creavit creaturam cui dedit intellectum, per quem pertingere posset ad sciendum ipsum Deum creatorem suum esse, licet incomprehensibilem, sicut visus hominis pertingit claritatem solis esse et tamen incomprehensibilem».

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14-20: «Sed quia debile lumen naturae non potest usque ad visionem gloriae pertingere, tunc in hac infinitate voluit Deus ostendere divitias gloriae et servavit largitati suae infinitae facultatem dandi creaturae potestatem attingendi «divitias gloriae suae» in lumine gloriae superaddendo lumini naturae optime disposito ad receptionem eius».

poverty of nature»⁵⁹¹, and thus are able to acquire said «riches» (and, taking the argument further in terms of ‘Premise 1’ in *De Beryllo*, be able to attain our *finis*, or indeed attain to the *thesaurum*, according to the terms introduced in paragraph 2).

Thus, the natural condition of man is to be radically unable to know God; however, in addition to the gift of the *intellectus*, God will offer man ‘something further’ (*superaddendo*) in order to be able to partake of his *gloria*. Where is this ‘something further’ in *De Beryllo*, and how can we understand it in terms of the *beryllus* structures that Cusanus builds throughout?

5.3 Where does Christ fit in a *beryllus* structure? A structural proposal

A *beryllus* structure, as we have previously pointed out, identifies a relationship between objects of one type (Level II) and an object of another type (Level I), the second being identified as a *coincidentia oppositorum* in relation to Level I objects, when considered according to a particular criterion. However, at the same time that it identifies this relationship, this structure asserts a radical separation between these two levels. This is a core feature of the method: for instance, in an *angulus – linea* structure, no finite angle (only the *principium angulorum*) could ever coincide with the line; they are seen as radically, ontologically separate. In this view, if one constructs an ontology/epistemology/teleology by using repeated applications of this structure (as we see Cusanus trying to do throughout *De Beryllo*), one is left with what may be called a fundamentally bleak, indeed tragic, ontological outlook, particularly (but not exclusively) according to the Christian terminology Cusanus is always maintaining in the background. If indeed we are left with a situation in which, on one hand the *intellectus conditor*, is the *finis* (end goal) of his creations (*De Beryllo*, 4, p. 6, 5; 25, p. 29, 9) and their (greatest) desire (*desiderium* – 25, p. 29, 10), and they, ‘like the parts of a body’, want nothing else than to achieve an inseparable union (25, p. 29, 11) with their creator as their highest good (*bonum ultimum* – 25, p. 29, 12), and all these elements function within standard *beryllus* structures, as

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 21-26: «In hoc enim manifestantur thesauri bonitatis et clementiae eius, quando dono clementissimi regis liberamur a defectu et paupertate naturae et efficimur divites in donis, ne quisquam in assecutione felicitatis sibi gloriam ascribere possit, sed solum illi datori eius».

we have seen, then this ultimate goal for creatures is, simply put, impossible. No creature can ever obtain the fulfilment of this greatest desire, as they will always be, in effect, infinitely distant from their *principium*; the ‘parts of the body’ are not only not in the union they seek with the whole, but they are effectively ‘cut off’. This is a structural feature of the *beryllus* method, and no way of overcoming it seems to be possible within the standard structure itself. But it is equally clear from the sermon we have examined above that this ‘tragic’ situation is not Cusanus’ ultimate view.

Indeed, the very fact that the *beryllus* involves identifying a clear distinction between (in general terms) *principium* and *principiata* provides the conceptual possibility for a new type of object to be considered. Namely, one can apply the principle of the *coincidentia oppositorum* to the ‘opposites’ that the *beryllus* method itself identifies, and construct an object that would be both at the same time – cause and caused, original and image, and (at the limit, considering this for the case of the *omnium* – *principium* opposition) creature and creator. This would be a new type of object in a *beryllus* structure, building up new relationships between it and the other elements.

This argument we have just outlined is very similar to the one Cusanus makes at the beginning of book III of *De Docta Ignorantia*, when he introduces a similar paradoxically-defined object, *maximus absolutus simul et contractus*⁵⁹², which is then identified as Christ. Although some commentators have argued that this ultimately represents an ‘inconsistency’ in Cusanus’ thought⁵⁹³, others have remarked that this fits perfectly well within the logic of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, and that this Christological concept is in fact a paradigmatic example of it⁵⁹⁴. Following the same logic, we will identify in our structural conceptualization of the ‘B-structure’ (cf. Chapter 2.3) an extra element

⁵⁹² *De docta ignorantia*, III, Prologus, 181, p. 117, 1 – 3, 202, 129, 14. This extended argument takes up the first three chapters of the ‘Christological’ book III.

⁵⁹³ Notably HOPKINS, *Translator’s introduction*, p. 42.

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. e.g. MILLER, *Reading Cusanus*, pp. 58-64, esp. 60; BOND, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, pp. 34-35. Nancy Hudson’s Eastern Christian theology-influenced reading is also geared towards such an interpretation: HUDSON, *Becoming God: The Doctrine of Theosis in Nicholas of Cusa*. Another highly interesting interpretation of *De Docta Ignorantia* focusing on Christ as the paradigmatic *coincidentia oppositorum* around which the whole work is structured is Ulrich Offermann’s *Christus: Wahrheit des Denkens*: U. OFFERMANN, *Christus: Wahrheit des Denkens, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters* 33, Münster 1991.

meant to represent the coincidence of Level I and Level II objects as we have described them in the construction.

We will note, for simplicity, this ‘extra’ coincidental element as ‘C’ (and will refer to it also as a ‘C-type’ element, as there is no requirement strictly within the method itself that it be unique). Its presence will require, in fact, the development of a new form of the B-structure, as the relationships between it and other elements will not be easily representable in the standard notation we have proposed. Thus we propose the following notation, for whenever such an element is identified:

B[Level II objects, ordering criterion A] -> Level I object
- relation a holds between the Level II objects and Level I object
- relation b holds between the Level II objects and Level I object
...
- C is both a Level II object and the Level I object
 B[another set of objects, ordering criterion B] -> C
 - relation c holds between the set of objects and C
 - relation d holds between the set of objects and C
 ...

Thus, we propose a notation with ‘nested’ B-structures, one ‘included’ in the other (represented by an extra level of indentation), signifying in a simple and intuitive way that the X object is built as an ‘extra’ *coincidentia oppositorum* within an original B-structure. X is defined from the start as having all the properties of both Level I and Level II objects, with all the consequences that follow – thus, one can ‘read’ its properties by looking at the set of relations found in the original B-structure. However, one can also consider C in relation to a different set of objects altogether, which is why it is proper to insert it into its own structure, using the extra indentation as a sign of the ‘dependencies’ involved.

With this new notation, the interpretive benefits will become apparent, as we will be better able to conceptualize the passages where Christ explicitly appears in *De Beryllo*: 69, 70 and 72⁵⁹⁵.

⁵⁹⁵ This presupposes, of course, that Cusanus’ basic views regarding Christ’s ontological status as *coincidentia oppositorum* did not change from the time of *De Docta Ignorantia* to the time of *De Beryllo*. There is no evidence for such a change; Cusanus’ conception of Christ seems to have remained consistent throughout his sermons across this lengthy period of time, and no strong ‘periodization’ of his Christological views in the sermons has been proposed so far. See e.g. the excellent recent (2014) overview in REINHARDT, *Die Rolle der Christologie im Denken des Cusanus*, pp. 61-71.

5.4 Reading the Christological passages – 69-70, 72

We will examine here the passages at the end of *De Beryllo* where Christ is introduced, not merely in the context of Trinitarian speculation (which, as we have seen, Cusanus can befigure by means of the *beryllus* without any particular difficulty, cf. Chapter 3.4.4), but with a clearly different, ‘Incarnational’ role, which renders the regular *beryllus* structures Cusanus has used fundamentally problematic, and necessitates the introduction of the ‘C-element’ notation.

5.4.1 Paragraph 69 – *De Beryllo*, 69, p. 80, 1 – 81, 14

In paragraph 69⁵⁹⁶, after giving a general image applying his developed hierarchical-ontological structures to the example of the rose and the image of the *imperator gloriosus* in paragraph 68 (cf. our analysis in Chapter 4.1.6), Cusanus explicitly combines the *homo mensura rerum* doctrine of ‘Premise 3’ (paragraph 6) with the image in ‘Premise 1’ (paragraph 4): *ut suam gloriam manifestetur* (cf. our analysis in Chapter 3.3). Now Cusanus has finally built up all the necessary structures in order to explain the teleological aspect of this view: how God can be the *finis*, and how that can be attained, which had remained up to now an unresolved question. He also quotes Aristotle at the beginning of the paragraph⁵⁹⁷, in support of his ontological (and also ‘beryllic’) scheme of *sensus – sensibilia* in ‘Premise

⁵⁹⁶ *De Beryllo*, 69, p. 80, 1 – 81, 14: «Vidit Aristoteles id ipsum, scilicet semota sensitiva cognitione esse et sensibilia semota, quando dicit in *Metaphysica*: «Si animata non essent, sensus non esset neque sensibilia», et plura ibi de hoc. Recte igitur dicebat Protagoras hominem rerum mensuram, qui ex natura suae sensitivae sciens sensibilia esse propter ipsam mensurat sensibilia, ut sensibilibus divini intellectus gloriam possit apprehendere. Sic de intelligibilibus ea ad cognitionem referendo intellectivam, et demum ex eodem contemplatur naturam illam intellectivam immortalem, ut se divinus intellectus in sua immortalitate eidem ostendere possit. Et ita evangelica doctrina manifestior fit, quae finem creationis ponit, ut videatur «deus deorum in Sion» in maiestate gloriae suae, quae est ostensio patris, in quo est sufficientia omnis. Et promittit ille noster salvator, «per quem» deus «fecit et saecula», ipsum scilicet verbum dei, quomodo in illa die se ostendet et quod tunc illi vivent vita aeterna».

⁵⁹⁷ ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica*, 1010b30 – 1011a2; in the Bessarion translation: «necessarium enim non contingit aliter et aliter se habere. quare si quid necessario est, non ita et non ita habebit. et simpliciter, si sensibile solum esset, nihil esset profecto, cum animata non essent. sensus namque non esset. neque sensibilia itaque neque sensationes esse fortassis verum esset: sentientis enim haec passio est. at ipsa subiecta, quae sensum faciunt, non esse etiam absque sensu, hoc impossibile est: sensus namque non ipse est sui ipsius, sed est aliquid aliud etiam praeter sensum, quod necesse est prius sensu esse. movens enim natura prius est moto; et si ad se in vicem dicuntur, ipsa eadem nihil minus» (ARISTOTLE, *Aristoteles Latine*, p. 495). Here, in his copy (Cod. Cusanus 184, fol. 25r-25v), Cusanus adds a lengthy note summarizing Aristotle’s argument, particularly focusing on the dependency of sense-objects on the senses, which, as we have seen, he interprets (from paragraph 5 on) as elements of a *beryllus* structure: «et simpliciter si sensibile solum est: nil esset profecto si animate non essent: sensus namque non esset: Neque sensibilia itaque neque sensationes esse fortassis verum est sentientis enim haec passio est ipsa uero subiecta quae sensum faciunt non esse et absque sensu hoc impossibile est sensus namque non est ipse sui ipsius sed est aliquid aliud etiam praeter sensum quod necesse est prius sensu esse: movens enim natura prius est moto etsi ad se invicem dicuntur ipsa eadem nihil minus».

2' (paragraph 5); and then he uses the mode of concluding from the properties of the finite intellect to those of God (*ex eodem*) that he introduced in 'Premise 4' (paragraph 7). Paragraph 69 therefore represents a full reprisal of all the 'four premises' that Cusanus analyzed in the beginning of the work, a recapitulation and reintegration of the problems set out from the initial paragraphs. One might expect that Cusanus would perhaps choose to end the work after this tying together of its most important themes. What he does in paragraph 69, though, is quite unexpected: he suddenly switches fully to theological language on line 10⁵⁹⁸, and introduces a radically new element: that, according to the *evangelica doctrina*, the *finis* of creation is that the «God of gods in Zion be seen (*videatur*) in the majesty of His glory»; God's *gloria*, furthermore, is said to be the *ostensio* of the Father. This is new: we have encountered *ostensio* before in a seemingly 'regular' beryllic structure, but now the goal is explicitly put in terms of 'seeing': it is a matter of no less than *videre Deum*. Furthermore, we know (after examining Plato and Aristotle's errors, cf. Chapter 4.1.4) that the apparently 'multiple' elements should be in fact interpreted coincidentally, i.e. all of *deus*, *gloria*, *pater*, *sufficientia*, *ille salvator*, *verbum dei*, in various ways, name God and not created, finite things.

Here the *beryllus* construction seems to fail, if we take *ille salvator* and *verbum dei*, as we are obviously meant to by Cusanus, as (also) a particular human being, namely Christ. While the basic familiar structure of *omnia creata – creator* is still available, there is nowhere to place Christ without the extended 'C' notation we have formulated. And Christ is the essential element which makes possible, in the end, the *finis* set out, in particular, for human beings, ever since 'Premise 1' (paragraph 4). The only way to actually achieve the goal (instead of tending asymptotically towards the infinite and tragically failing) is for God, who is *sufficientia omnia*, to offer a kind of *ostensio patris* (69, p. 81, 12) that is a radically different kind of relationship from the regular, ontological '*dat esse*'. This can

⁵⁹⁸ All of the language Cusanus uses until the end of the paragraph has a clear Biblical source: «videbitur deus deorum in Sion» (Ps. 83:8); «gloria maiestate eius» (Is. 2:10-19); «tunc dominus ostendet haec et apparebit maiestas domini» (2 Macc. 2:8); «spiritus omnipotentis magnam fecit suae ostensionis evidentiam» (2 Macc. 3:24); «Domine ostende nobis patrem et sufficit nobis» (John 14:8); «sufficientia nostra ex deo est» (2 Cor. 3:5); «per quem fecit et saecula» (Hebr. 1:2); «verbum dei» (cf. Luke 2:15); «vivent vita aeterna» (John 5:25; Rom. 2:7). For the verb *se ostendet*, cf. Eph. 2:7, Matt. 16:27, 24:30, 25:31; Mark 8:38, 13:26; Luke 21:27.

only occur if the ontological separation seen through the *beryllus* between creation and creator is overcome: thus the new, ‘C’ element is both necessary and sufficient here. Christ’s eschatological promise is thus rendered into a comprehensible ontological movement: *in illa die se ostendet et quod tunc illi vivent vita aeterna*. Let us represent this basic pattern with the B-notation, using the new concept we have developed:

B[homines, *gradus] -> deus/creator/pater

- [vita aeterna est impossibilis]

- C est homo et deus

B[illi, *gradus] -> C

- C se ostendet, est ostensio patris

- illi vivent vita aeterna [cur C vita aeterna est]

This would be a perfectly orthodox restatement of Christian eschatological doctrine in Cusanus’ view. Thus we see the way in which Cusanus believes that *evangelica doctrina* can become *manifestior*; not, in the end, according to *ratio*, as it involves (at least two levels of) the *coincidentia oppositorum*, but indeed according to *intellectus*, i.e. to the *visio intellectualis* we inevitably use when understanding this conceptual structure. In this way, *fides* becomes fundamentally tied to the *visio* Cusanus is seeking.

5.4.2 Paragraph 70 - *De Beryllo*, 70, p. 81, 1 – 82, 10

In this crucial paragraph⁵⁹⁹, Cusanus aims to explain how this *ostensio* and *visio* should be thought of, as they are a completely new type of relationship, not the same as in a regular ‘beryllic’ *principium – principiata* structure. He does this again by a *beryllus*-type structure, by means of an image: the intellect of Euclid, its *ars*⁶⁰⁰, its *explicatio*⁶⁰¹ in Euclid’s *Elements*; accordingly, the *visio* described here would be the *apprehensio* of the *ars* itself, as opposed to the understanding by our finite *intellectus* of the contents of Euclid’s book. This is not possible in the regular ontological structures

⁵⁹⁹ *De Beryllo*, 70, p. 81, 1 – 82, 10: «Haec enim ostensio est concipienda, ac si quis unico contuitu videret intellectum Euclidis et quod haec visio esset apprehensio eiusdem artis, quam explicat Euclides in suis Elementis. Sic intellectus divinus ars est omnipotentis, per quam fecit saecula et omnem vitam et intelligentiam. Apprehendisse igitur hanc artem, quando se nude ostendet in illa die, quando nudus et purus apparuerit coram eo intellectus, est acquisivisse dei filiationem et hereditatem immortalis regni. Intellectus enim si in se habuerit artem, quae est creativa vitae et laetitiae sempiternae, ultimam est assecutus scientiam et felicitatem».

⁶⁰⁰ Cf. *ars* at the beginning of paragraph 9, see Chapter 3.4.1.

⁶⁰¹ For *complicatio/explicatio* see note 425.

that Cusanus has built (the *intellectus* has access only to *intelligibilia*; there is no *visio* by which one can see someone else's *intellectus*), which is precisely the point. It would be necessary for Euclid's *intellectus* to *se nude et pure ostendere*, just like Christ has to do in the comparative image, otherwise such a relationship is not possible. Thus, we have two 'double' *beryllus* structures, in a standard application of the method but with the extended 'C-object'.

The presence in the finite intellect of the infinite *ars* is the term used for the relationship in which the *finis* of a human being can be fulfilled. At the same time, this *ars* is obviously meant to be a name for Christ: compare *per quam fecit* in paragraph 70 (p. 81, 3) to 69 (p. 81, 12); and in any case *ars* and *intellectus* coincide in God. Thus, there is no escaping the conclusion that the human being must become a coincidental object themselves, a coincidence of finite and infinite *intellectus*, in order to obtain the *filiatio Dei*, *ultima scientia*, *ultima felicitas*, which are all immediate consequences of entering a type of *coincidentia* with God. The human being must, therefore, become 'deified'⁶⁰², and will have to be added *in illa die* to a third 'level' of *coincidentia oppositorum*.

To understand how this works in a rigorous fashion, let us examine the example of Euclid and his book by means of the B-notation. The 'regular' situation, according to the ontological framework Cusanus has been building, is the following:

B[liber Euclidis, *gradus] -> intellectus Euclidis

Another person cannot 'gain access' to Euclid's own intellect, as from their perspective the things they read and understand in Euclid's books will be in a similarity relationship only to their own intellect (cf. the example of fire in paragraph 57, which we have analyzed in Chapter 4.1.5):

B[liber Euclidis, *gradus] -> intellectus alius

⁶⁰² The notion of *deificatio* (particularly prominent in the Eastern Christian tradition, cf. *theosis*) has an important role in Cusanus' theology, as Nancy Hudson has clearly shown in her landmark 2007 study: HUDSON, *Becoming God: the Doctrine of Theosis in Nicholas of Cusa*. As we might expect from Cusanus' usual patterns of thought, this entails a certain kind of 'coincidence' attainable between man and God (on the model of Christ), in the life to come: Cf. *De Filiatione Dei*, 70, p. 52, 5-6: «tunc recte deificamur, quando ad hoc exaltamur, ut in uno simus ipsum in quo omnia et in omnibus unum»; *De Visione Dei*, 101, p. 79, 4-5: «verbum enim dei est humanatum et homo deificatum».

Unless, that is, Euclid's intellect were to show itself (*ostendere*) in an extraordinary, coincidental way, by means of a coincidental 'C-object':

B[liber Euclidis, *gradus] -> intellectus Euclidis

- C est intellectus Euclidis et liber Euclidis

B[C, *gradus] -> intellectus alius

- C est in intellectu alio [Ergo, intellectus Euclidis est in intellectu alio]

This basic pattern is an image for the Christological structure that Cusanus is proposing. One can obtain the exact relationship that Christ, the 'coincidental object', has with the world by simply transferring the properties of this *liber Euclidis* – *intellectus Euclidis* structure to the relationship between creation and the creator, as Cusanus does in paragraph 70, with a simple *sic* (cf. 70, p. 81, 3):

B[liber Euclidis, *gradus] -> intellectus Euclidis

- C est intellectus Euclidis et liber Euclidis

B[C, *gradus] -> intellectus alius

- C est in intellectu alio [Ergo, intellectus Euclidis est in intellectu alio]

SIC

B[omnia, *gradus] -> creator

This is an extraordinarily important result, for the very fact that it puts a central 'dogmatic' Christian doctrine on a solid basis by means of the application of a formal-abstract method such as the *beryllus* as we have seen it used so far. It implies that, in Cusanus' view here, one cannot maintain a strong distinction between 'natural' and 'revealed' theology; by means of this *coincidentia oppositorum*-based method, all the 'positive contents' of the Christian tradition (and even the most paradoxical-seeming ones, such as the Incarnation and the Trinity) are rendered just as understandable as any *sententias et opiniones* of the *doctissimi* generally⁶⁰³.

5.4.3 Paragraph 72 – *De Beryllo*, 72, p. 84, 1 – 85, 13

⁶⁰³ Thus one can see how Flasch's reading of Cusanus' thought in *De Beryllo* becomes distorted because of him trying to maintain these irrelevant distinctions (see FLASCH, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, pp. 138-140, e.g. on p. 139, where he says that «Cusanus treibe keine Bibelauslegung und keine Glaubenswissenschaft» in *De Beryllo*, which, as we have seen, is misleading to say the least; or on p. 140, where he says that Cusanus is a «Theologe» only in the sense in which «Plotin und Cicero, Descartes, Spinoza und Leibniz, Fichte und Hegel» also were).

The last paragraph⁶⁰⁴ comes after a ‘summarizing’ paragraph 71, where Cusanus invokes explicitly all of his newly-constructed hierarchies and decisively connects them to the overall metaphysical ordering principle of *simplicitas*, explicitly stating two *simplicitas*-related postulates connected with it: *nulla cognitio possit in simplicius eo* and *mensura autem est simplicior quam mensurabilia*. Thus, the validity of the *beryllus* structure is justified, in Cusanus’ view, by how well it can describe such a hierarchy of different levels of *simplicitas* that Cusanus is familiar with from his Neoplatonic-influenced sources. All his constructions, and the answer to a number of philosophical problems he mentions, can be found *complicite in beryllo et aenigmate* (an innovative use, thus placing the *beryllus* on the level of a *principium* in its own *beryllus*-based structure, with its applications as its ‘images’). He will stop here (although, implicitly, he could continue indefinitely), *brevitatis causa*.

In the last paragraph, Cusanus returns to Plato, coming back to the topic he addressed in paragraph 2: why does he think that the *haec alta* should now be revealed and no longer kept secret, against Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius’ prohibition (to which is added Plato’s injunction against writing such things)? Cusanus is particularly subtle here: he agrees with Plato that «knowledge is very short in length (*scientia brevissima est*); it would be communicated better apart from all writing, if there were those who were seeking [it] and who were [suitably] disposed» (72, 84, 1 – 85, 3), and he recalls Plato’s strict criteria for those ‘suitably disposed’ from the Seventh Letter⁶⁰⁵, adding that such a ‘seeker’ should be *fidelis atque deo devotus*, «from whom he may obtain—by means of frequent (*crebris*)⁶⁰⁶ and imploring prayers—the gift of being enlightened (*illuminari*)», as «God gives wisdom (*sapientia*) to those who seek it (*petentibus*) with steadfast faith». We note that, as is his pattern throughout the book,

⁶⁰⁴ *De Beryllo*, 72, p. 84, 1 – 85, 13: «Ego autem finem libello faciens dico cum Platone: Scientia brevissima est, quae sine omni scriptura melius communicaretur, si essent petentes atque dispositi. Illos autem Plato putat dispositos, qui tanta cupiunt aviditate imbui, quod sibi potius moriendum esse putent quam carendum scientia, deinde qui a vitiis et deliciis abstinere corporalibus atque ingenii habent aptitudinem. Dico ego illa omnia sic esse addens quod cum hoc sit fidelis atque deo devotus, a quo illuminari crebris et importunis obtineat precibus. Dat enim sapientiam firma fide, quantum saluti sufficit, petentibus. His iste quamquam minus bene digestus libellus dabit materiam cogitandi secretioraque inveniendi et altiora attingendi et in laudibus dei, ad quem aspirat omnis anima, semper perseverandi, «qui facit mirabilia solus» [Ps. 71:18-19, cf. Ps. 135:4] et est in aevum benedictus. Deo laus».

⁶⁰⁵ Cf. PLATO, *Epistulas VII*, 340b-340e.

⁶⁰⁶ Cusanus uses the same word in an adverbial form in his account of his own activities in his other books, in paragraph 1: *in coincidentiam oppositorum crebrius versatum*.

Cusanus is establishing, by means of his use of the ambiguous word *petentes* to signify both ‘seekers for knowledge’ according to Plato and Christians praying for divine enlightenment, and by his use of *sapientia* for what is obtained as a result, an equal status between ‘philosophy’ and ‘theology’. Cusanus then goes on to say what this somewhat ‘less well organized’ (*minus bene digestus*) book offers to such a ‘seeker’ (*his*), namely *materia* for an interesting triad: *cogitandi*, *secretiora inveniendi* and *altiora attingendi*, and, in addition, for always *perseverandi in laudibus dei*, as God is *ad quem aspirat omnis anima*, reiterating the theme of the theological *finis* in paragraphs 69-70. However, commentators usually miss⁶⁰⁷ a crucial aspect of the construction of this passage: it all hinges on the hypothetical clause *si essent petentes atque dispositi*—‘if seekers were to exist with the right disposition’. But what, indeed, if they do not? If such exist, Cusanus seems to say, Plato is right, and they can be taught in a better way than in books (including *De Beryllo*) the *scientia* which is *brevissima*. However, Cusanus still believes he is right to write about *haec alta*, in implicit disagreement with Plato (as we saw in paragraph 2), as shown by the fact that he wrote this book. While he emphasizes at the end the benefits his book would bring (also) to one of the ‘well-disposed seekers’, he is specifically not mentioning anything about all his other readers who do not fit all the stringent criteria put forward by Plato in the Seventh Letter and by Cusanus himself here: it is enough to compare the much less stringent requirements put forth in paragraph 2⁶⁰⁸ with the ones mentioned in this paragraph. As we have seen in analyzing that paragraph (in Chapter 3.2.2), Cusanus seems to promise that he can take a reader even from the condition of *homo animalis* to perceiving the *thesaurus inexhaustibilis*. There is no sign, indeed, that he is renouncing this promise here in the last paragraph. What he does mention (how those people who happen to fit such strict criteria, both in philosophical aptitude and devotion to God, and for whom *scientia* is *brevissima*, would also benefit from his book—if they exist at all) is in fact less important, for the average reader, than what he does not mention but leaves implicit here: that the book is meant to help also those who do not fit these criteria (even starting from the *homo animalis* stage),

⁶⁰⁷ For instance, Corrieras takes these strict Seventh Letter ‘criteria’ at face value, as meant to be applied generally for Cusanus’ own endeavor (not only Plato’s): CORRIERAS, *Le traité du beryl*, pp. 115-116.

⁶⁰⁸ Cf. *De Beryllo*, 2, p. 4, 7 – 5, 11, and the extended analysis in Chapter 3.2.2.

and who might be helped to get to the point of fitting these criteria by means of *De Beryllo*, and particularly the *praxis* it presents. Crucially, *sapientia* is described as a *donum* given by God⁶⁰⁹ (a term with clear Christological connotations), and we must interpret the recapitulation of these ‘requirements’ in light of the powerfully Christological paragraph 69 and the new ‘C-object’ it introduces in the regular *beryllus* scheme—offering the ultimate *sapientia* in an *ostensio* that surely cannot be said to be conditioned by Plato’s stringent Seventh Letter criteria.

In the end, the key to interpreting this passage seems to be that the *scientia aenigmatica* that Cusanus is offering in *De Beryllo* appears to be something different from the *scientia brevissima* of Plato that he mentions here; and perhaps the *scientia aenigmatica* is more fit for a reader who does not ‘qualify’ for that Platonic *scientia* which is not to be written down, as its ‘access criteria’ are much lower (i.e. those set out in paragraph 2). However, the important and subtle point Cusanus is making here—while claiming to agree with Plato—is that both of these are (types of) *scientia*: and that, in the end, only the paradoxical *ostensio* of God (as a ‘C-object’) offers access to *ultima scientia* (70, p. 82, 10). It is this which is the true goal of a human being, and all different types of *scientia*, whether ‘philosophical’ or ‘theological’, whether *aenigmatica* or *brevissima*, are images of it/subordinate to it/aiming at it as their goal. This argument (built according to a familiar *beryllus*-type structure, involving the novel ‘C-element’) justifies Cusanus’ project in *De Beryllo*, which is no less than a true synthesis (according to the mode of thought he provides) between these different aspects of *scientia*—including also, most particularly, the philosophical and theological.

5.5 The *beryllus* as a Christological image

What is the *beryllus* of the title—or, to be more precise, what is the *beryllus intellectualis*, in relation to our Christological considerations? We have seen already that Cusanus would have seen the *beryllus* as a stone with particular powers (and a number of explicitly Christological connotations when used as an image in the tradition). We have also looked at the image of Christ as *lapis* in Sermon

⁶⁰⁹ Cf. James 1:5, Prov. 2:6, Job 32:8.

CXXVI, one that makes use of the ‘small stone’ that was (in a ‘beryllic’ structure) the *maximum*, or ‘infinetization’, of the powers of all the stones. Finally, we have seen how essential structural elements in the arguments in *De Beryllo* point to the necessity of what we have termed a ‘C’-type of object, formed by a ‘double *coincidentia oppositorum*’, and which Christ would indeed fit perfectly—and we have seen that at the end of the book, Cusanus himself identifies *ille nostre salvator* (69, p. 81, 13) as fulfilling these structural roles.

But what is the *beryllus*, in the end? Can we characterize it properly as a Christological image, and *De Beryllo*, at an important level, as a Christological treatise? Let us look again at the structure where Cusanus introduces it, in paragraph 3 (previously analyzed in Chapter 3.3.1).

After the hierarchical-ontological constructions that *De Beryllo* builds later in the book, we are able to analyze the *beryllus – beryllus intellectualis* construction in paragraph 3 much easier. Thus, it appears to be a parallel between a relationship on the level of *sensus/corpus* (with the physical *beryllus*) with one on the level of the *intellectus*: to the *intellectualis oculis* is fitted a *beryllus intellectualis*. But appearances (and terminology) can be superficially deceiving: if the parallel were to hold between the *sensus* and *intellectus* levels, the *beryllus* would be a help for the intellect to better understand its regular objects, at its own ontological-epistemological level, i.e. the *intellectibilia* (which include, for instance, mathematical figures, human creations *per artem*, and, indeed, *aenigmata*). However, the *beryllus intellectualis* is clearly not intended by Cusanus for helping us understand, for instance, mathematical problems. Instead, and most crucially, the *beryllus intellectualis* is connected to *visio intellectualis*, which is not the same as the ‘regular’ activity of the *intellectus*, and it has as its object something that is not among the *intelligibilia*: the *indivisible omnium principium*. The *beryllus intellectualis* is not meant to be an aid for the intellect in its common operations, but rather offers it access to a higher ontological level, described, as we have seen, by the terms *visio intellectualis – intellectuales oculi – in excessu – quae excedant* and, indeed, *principium*. Thus, the comparison between *beryllus* and *beryllus intellectualis* does not actually hold: the *beryllus intellectualis* offered in the book is not like the physical *beryllus* at all, but rather (extrapolating and speculating) as if one could look through a

physical lens and actually ‘see’ objects on a higher ontological level than that of sight (for instance, one could see the *species* of objects, not in their sensible form)⁶¹⁰. Thus, the *beryllus intellectualis* is an extraordinary type of object, which seems to be a type of ‘mediator’ between ontological levels. This is clear from the language Cusanus uses for the *beryllus*, namely the ‘*per* + Accusative’, e.g. *per beryllum videre*, which is built on the pattern of *per suam [X] speciem/similitudinem* language developed at 6, p. 8, 5-11 for the *modi cognoscitivi*. In paragraph 8, Cusanus says clearly how we are to understand what the *beryllus* is, in one of the most striking ‘methodological’ statements: «[veritas] videtur per omnem similitudinem maximam pariter et minimam absolutum primum principium omnis suae similitudinis» (8, p. 11, 14-15; cf. also 8, p. 11, 10-11: *per absolutam similitudinem videbimus*). Therefore, the *beryllus intellectualis* is identified with a *similitudo maxima pariter et minima*, which also makes it easy to understand why the *beryllus* works: it is something like a ‘paradigm’ for *aenigmata*. Pursuing the argument further, the *beryllus intellectualis* must be, in the end, an ‘infinitezation’ of the physical beryl stone—but this is arguably exactly the maximal *lapis/calculus* that we have seen Cusanus construct in Sermon CXXVI, paragraphs 10-11, presenting it as an explicit Christological image.

It appears, therefore, that Cusanus decided to use the exact same fundamental image that he built for this sermon (from June 1453) for constructing the *De Beryllo* (which he had been planning before 1454, possibly from mid-1452, as we have seen), as the ‘infinitezated’ version of the regular beryl stone, to which he gave the name *beryllus intellectualis*⁶¹¹, thus also preserving all the connotations and meanings of the physical beryl stone and ‘infinitezating’ its role as an aid for sight. But the fundamental image (an ‘infinite stone’, possessing all the *virtutes* of all the stones, and at the same time being found in the form of one of them in particular) appears to be paradigmatically Christological.

⁶¹⁰ One could make an interesting parallel with how the mode of knowledge of the *intelligentiae*, the angels, is briefly described; see notes 436 and 437.

⁶¹¹ *Intellectualis* here seems to refer, in the end, to being in (or a product of) the human intellect, in the same way in which all *aenigmata* are *intellectualis*, like all ‘infinitezated’ constructions. But it is a special case in Cusanus’ usage of terms.

But what is the ontological status of this object? Cusanus seems to characterize the *beryllus* as a *speculum et aenigma* (1, p. 3, 5). Thus, it would be a construct of the human *intellectus*, like the *linea* – *angulus* construction or any other of the *innumerabiles modi*. Therefore, according to Cusanus’ view on the status of human creations, the *beryllus intellectualis* (in the manner of, say, a circle – cf. paragraph 57, analyzed in Chapter 4.1.5), is an image of, and exists most truly in, the human *intellectus*.

However, we can certainly ask what would happen if such a thing as the *beryllus intellectualis* in fact existed in the universe—as Cusanus himself asks in *De Docta Ignorantia* book III about the infinite line⁶¹², another one of his paradigmatic constructed geometrical images. He concludes that this is not possible (leaving the matter as a *quomodo ergo* rhetorical question at the end), because this object, which would be both infinite (and thus the *maximum*, and thus God) and at the same time a line, would end up, accordingly, in actuality (*actu*), everything that can be from a line (*omne id, quod ex linea fieri potest* – *De Docta Ignorantia*, 196, p. 126, 13), i.e. considered as a *principium* (which would thus include, presumably, according to Cusanus’ similar geometrical derivations in *De Docta Ignorantia*, all of *corpus*). However, Cusanus points out that a line does not have life (*vita*) or intellect (*intellectus*)—as he assumes the ontological triad, familiar also in *De Beryllo*, of *esse* – *vivere* – *intelligere*. Therefore, the infinite line would not reach the fullness of all natures (*plenitudinem naturarum non attingit* – *De Docta Ignorantia*, 196, p. 126, 15-16), since it would be ‘stuck’, so to speak, within its own ontological ‘region’, and it would be a *maximum* that could be greater (*maius esse posset*), which is a contradiction in terms. As such, Cusanus feels confident he can assert that an infinite line, and generally any coincidental object on the model of what we defined as a ‘C-type object’ in the *beryllus* structure, cannot exist in reality⁶¹³ and is only a creation of the human intellect, a mere

⁶¹² *De docta ignorantia*, III, 196, p. 126, 8-16: «Si enim ipsa inferiorum natura consideratur, et aliquid talium entium ad maximam eleuetur, erit tale Deus et ipsum, ut in linea maxima exemplum datur. Nam ipsa cum sit infinita per infinitatem absolutam et maxima per maximam, cui necessario unitur, si maxima est, Deus erit per maximam, et remanet linea per contractionem; et ita erit actu omne id, quod ex linea fieri potest. Linea autem non includit neque vitam neque intellectum. Quomodo ergo linea ad ipsum maximum gradum poterit assumi, si plenitudinem naturarum non attingit? Esset enim maximum, quod maius esse posset, et perfectionibus careret».

⁶¹³ This was one of the accusations brought against him by Johannes Wenck, a scholastic and Aristotelian theologian who wrote *De Ignota Litteratura* in 1442/43 against Cusanus’ *De Docta Ignorantia*; on this controversy, see J. HOPKINS, *Nicholas of Cusa’s Debate with John Wenck: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Ignota Litteratura and Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*, Minneapolis, 1988; also FLASCH, *Nicolaus Cusanus*, pp. 181-194. Cusanus wrote specifically about the matter

construction like the geometrical *aenigmata*. His ultimate argument in *De Docta Ignorantia* is that such an object would have to be exclusively a human being, due to human nature being a *microcosmos*, possessing within it (*complicans*) both intellectual and sensible nature⁶¹⁴, which would allow being ‘infinite’ in such a way without resulting in a contradiction. But it is important to note that this argument depends in a fundamental way on the exact ontological division and hierarchy of *essere – vivere – intelligere*, a type of hierarchy based, as we examined in Chapter 4.3, on a notion of *simplicitas* derived from the Neoplatonic tradition. Thus, it concerns Cusanus’ beliefs about the actual ontological order, entirely independent of the method of the *beryllus* (or any similar method, if we are to consider this in the context of the *De Docta Ignorantia*). While Cusanus does build *beryllus*-based images to show such an ontological threefold division, other images and other divisions are also possible to be built using the *beryllus* method, even if they don’t particularly fit Cusanus’ external metaphysical criterion of *simplicitas*. It is thus important to note that there is nothing in the *beryllus* method itself to prevent such a ‘C-object’ as we have described from being constructed and being said to exist, such as a line that is ‘both God and a line’, or, indeed, a maximum *lapis*, a stone that is ‘both God and a stone’. This is a crucial aspect to note regarding the method as such (the structural *coincidentia oppositorum*-based *beryllus*) and the external *simplicitas* metaphysical framework Cusanus brings in, which he uses to ‘filter’ both his choices of arguments developed with it and its results.

If one assumed a metaphysical framework in which coincidental objects of type ‘C’ were generally possible, particularly in the case of stones (and not only in the case of *natura humana* as in *De Docta Ignorantia*), then the *beryllus intellectualis* could exist *actu* (as well as the *lapis* which is an

of the infinite line in his *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*, 47, p. 32, 8-11: «Neque capere potest [Wenck] exemplum de infinita linea, quod impugnat de falsitate, – licet supervacue, cum impossibilitas essendi lineam infinitam actu sit multipliciter in Docta ignorantia ostensum». One may also speculate that the reason why, embroiled in the new controversy about *mystica theologia* with Vincent of Aggsbach, he seems to have chosen to not complete *De Beryllo* was in fact to avoid being caught in the same trap, i.e. being accused of nothing less than heresy because of the (rather easy to make) erroneous interpretation that the *beryllus* actually exists.

⁶¹⁴ *De Docta Ignorantia*, III, 198, p. 127, 1 – 128, 6: «Humana vero natura est illa, quae est supra omnia Dei opera elevata et paulo minus angelis minorata, intellectualem et sensibilem naturam complicans ac universa intra se constringens, ut microcosmos aut parvus mundus a veteribus rationabiliter vocitetur. Hinc ipsa est illa, quae si elevata fuerit in unionem maximitatis, plenitudo omnium perfectionum universi et singulorum existeret, ita ut in ipsa humanitate omnia supremum gradum adipiscerentur».

image of Christ in Sermon CXXVI, 11, p. 26, 1-13); it would presumably be coincidental with Christ—however that might be understood (perhaps in the manner of the Eucharist?).

However, although he does not address this matter directly in *De Beryllo*, Cusanus most likely still agrees entirely with his arguments in *De Docta Ignorantia* and the *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae* regarding the general impossibility of the existence of such objects, as he seems to share in *De Beryllo*, as we have seen, the same fundamental Neoplatonic *simplicitas*-based ontological premises expressed in the *esse – vivere – intelligere* triad. Therefore, in Cusanus' view, the *beryllus intellectualis* is an *aenigma* that does not exist *in actu*—but is nonetheless an extraordinarily powerful and complex image of Christ, of such a nature as to occasion, in Cusanus' own words—«most sweet speculations»⁶¹⁵.

⁶¹⁵ «dulcissime speculanda» (Sermon CXXVI, in *Sermones* XVIII/I, 10, p. 25, 1-2).

Conclusions

The treatise *De Beryllo* is a highly interesting work that needs to be studied more, both in terms of its philosophy and theology, and, in particular, in terms of the innovative and well-structured synthesis it claims to achieve (and appears surprisingly successful at achieving) between them, in addition to the crucial role it likely plays in the development of Nicolaus Cusanus' later thought.

This investigation has shown that Cusanus' claims in the first two paragraphs as to the extraordinary potential of his *beryllus* method are worthy of being taken seriously: namely, that he does in fact formulate a highly consistent pattern of thought, which is able to produce, when used consistently, novel philosophical and theological insights, and that one can analyze this fruitfully in terms of a *Strukturanalyse*, with the help of a type of 'formal' notation like the 'B-structure' notation I have proposed and used. Yet, at the same time, this method-focused, formalized, abstract-sounding (and even 'modern-sounding') mode of thought, when applied consistently, does not lead to a weakening, but rather to a strengthening of some of the fundamental propositions of 'positive' Christian faith and tradition, even (and particularly so) in its most paradoxical elements: the Trinity and the Incarnation—according, of course, to Cusanus' own view, but which, once we reconstruct his arguments, is surprisingly philosophically powerful, coherent, and worthy of serious consideration—particularly given the recent developments in non-Aristotelian/non-classical logic in our time, which allow for a more rigorous treatment of 'paradoxical' objects or objects with contradictory properties, such as those the *coincidentia oppositorum* seems to propose. The *beryllus*-constructed structures, even when isolated from Cusanus' metaphysical presuppositions of a hierarchy of *simplicitas*, are meant to show the possibility of developing a unified philosophical-theological intellectual approach, one in which (as Cusanus seems to promise) the Incarnation and the Trinity are no more difficult, or problematic, than analyzing the simple geometrical illustrations, featuring lines and angles, that he devises for the core of his method's application. The fact that the *De Beryllo* allows for both a theologically-focused and philosophically-formalizing interpretation of the titular image of a *beryllus*

(a beryl stone, used as a ‘lens’), and in fact for a fruitful combination of both, as I have tried to show in this work, is itself a testament to its novelty, and to the unexpected intellectual riches that Cusanus’ unique approach might offer.

We have analyzed closely the characteristics of Cusanus’ proposed method to a deeper level of detail than previously attempted, and we have investigated the *De Beryllo* within the overall framework of a *Strukturanalyse*, identifying the recurrent structure that the method represents in Cusanus’ development of his arguments. We have accordingly proposed a system of notation, the B-notation, which has proved to be helpful in analyzing passages in terms of the presence of this particular structure, especially due to the wide variety of terms Cusanus uses for the same underlying argumentative patterns. At the same time, in Chapter 4 we have distinguished the formal core of the method from the metaphysical presuppositions that guide Cusanus in using it, and have analyzed throughout the way in which he reinterprets and reconstructs the elements in his tradition (both ‘philosophical’ and ‘theological’) with the help of his *beryllus*. And we have followed the effects of such a ‘deconstruction/reconstruction’ on the core of the Christological and Incarnational image (of which the *beryllus* itself is an illustration) that he proposes at the end of the work, as we analyzed in Chapter 5.

In the end, taking into view the general character of the work as a whole, one might speculate that he did not finish it and did not send it to his Tegernsee friends perhaps because he felt that his ultimate synthesis of intellectual pursuit and Christian mystical *visio* was, in fact, in a certain sense, too powerful: due to the power and arguable flexibility of this method, the risk was too great that his Christological *beryllus* would be misused and misinterpreted by his opponents (like Johannes Wenck had done some years before with Cusanus’ simple image of an infinite line in *De Docta Ignorantia*).

The apparent fruitfulness of the methodological approach that we have developed points to a number of promising avenues for future research. First of all, the same approach, or a similar one, should be tried for analyzing the small treatises *De Aequalitate* and *De Principio*, on which Cusanus was working in close proximity to (if not, as is likely, precisely during) the time of writing *De Beryllo* (i.e. during Cusanus’ ‘exile’ in Andraz Castle in 1458). In particular, reading *De Aequalitate*, a highly

Christologically-focused work, with the help of the ‘B-notation’ and the general form of the *beryllus* method seems particularly promising, in order to examine whether the special ‘C-type’ Christological object, based on a ‘double’ *coincidentia oppositorum*, can also be identified there in relation to the ‘regular’ *principium-principiata* structures, as we have identified it in *De Beryllo*. If this methodology succeeds, this could prove highly enlightening regarding the presence of (heretofore unacknowledged) Christological-type elements in other works by Cusanus, from the ‘late period’ or even generally; furthermore, the identification of such a ‘double *coincidentia*’ and its distinction from regular *coincidentia oppositorum* might go a long way towards dispelling the misunderstandings and misreadings of the text that the presence of such unacknowledged complex structures would undoubtedly have caused.

Another interesting avenue of research concerns *De Visione Dei*, Cusanus’ preceding speculative work (written towards the end of 1453), which one would expect to have significant similarities with *De Beryllo*, particularly given that it is also explicitly focused on the themes of *visio* and *mystica theologia*. However, our investigation of *De Beryllo* has uncovered many fewer points of contact than one would expect: while we have noted a number of common themes that *De Beryllo*, *De Visione Dei* and Sermon CXXVI from 1453 all share (particularly the notion of *speculum sine macula*⁶¹⁶ and *spiritus lapidis* regarding precious stones⁶¹⁷), as well as commonalities between *De Beryllo* and *De Visione Dei* such as the introduction of the crucial theme of *praxis*⁶¹⁸, the theological theme of *thesaurus*⁶¹⁹, as well as the switch from the terminology of *symbolum* to *aenigma* pointed out by Katrin Platzer⁶²⁰, and even though the ‘image’/‘icon’ that *De Visione Dei* (also called *De Icona*) is built around shows very interesting similarities to the role of *beryllus* as a Christological image (cf. Chapter 5.5), it seems difficult to relate the different approaches taken by these two works, or to identify significant similarities (beyond the use of images for the purpose of developing ‘divine names’ and the pervasive

⁶¹⁶ See notes 277, 279, 280, and 281.

⁶¹⁷ See note 284.

⁶¹⁸ See note 343.

⁶¹⁹ See note 391.

⁶²⁰ Cf. PLATZER, *Symbolica venatio*, p. 93.

theme of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, which are common themes in a great number of works by Cusanus). It seems that, in certain respects, Cusanus must have had a different philosophical-theological approach in mind in 1458, when finishing *De Beryllo*, than he had had in 1453 (one sign of this is, for instance, the fact that, although *visio*, particularly ‘of God/the *principium*’, is a strong common theme⁶²¹ between the two works, in *De Beryllo* this is restricted to *visio* on the part of the finite creature, while the *visio* by God is not mentioned; instead, God’s faculties being focused on are *intentio* and *voluntas*, as we have seen). The question of the large differences between *De Visione Dei* and *De Beryllo* and the nature of this apparent ‘change’ in Cusanus’ approach, in light of the development of the *beryllus* method, would be a very interesting one to investigate further.

While the methodology introduced and developed here, while highly promising, remains, of course, to be further refined and improved in future work, the central result of this thesis remains, given the wealth of evidence, undeniable: that *De Beryllo* represents a very important step in Cusanus’ intellectual development and a highly interesting philosophical (and theological) work in its own right, which definitely deserves more scholarly attention than it has received so far—not only from scholars working on intellectual history, but even (and particularly so) from those working on cutting-edge developments and looking for novel approaches in the modern philosophical disciplines.

⁶²¹ For an account of this theme, also in connection with *De Visione Dei*, see note 307.

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APPENDIX I – Index of passages in *De Beryllo* establishing the *simplicitas* hierarchical principles

- 1) simplex elementum de se explicat elementatum ... Simplicitas enim elementalis est ex mobili et immobili, sicut principium naturale est principium motus et quietis (19, p. 24, 18-22)
- 2) Experimur autem ipsum esse verorum in trino gradu, in eo quod quaedam sunt tantum, alia vero veritatis gestant simpliciolem similitudinem, quorum esse est virtuosius, quia eo quod sunt vivunt. Alia adhuc simpliciolem, quae eo ipso quod sunt vivunt et intelligunt. Esse autem quanto simplicius, tanto virtuosius et potentius. Ideo absoluta simplicitas seu veritas est omnipotens. (20, p. 24, 7-13)
- 3) Linea autem plus participat simplicitatem puncti quam superficies, et superficies quam corpus. (23, p. 26, 11-13)
- 4) Unde per aenigma poteris differentias talium formarum investigare, quae sunt multum materiales et immersae et quae minus et quae valde simplices. (44, p. 51, 13-15).
- 5) Et quanto quantitas discreta est simplicior quantitate continua, tanto species melius in aenigmate quantitatis discretæ videtur quam continuæ. (63, p. 72, 3-6)
- 6) Simplicior autem est magnitudo discreta quam continua et spiritualior atque speciei, quae penitus simplex est, similior, licet utique speciei simplicitas, quae est quidditas, sit ante simplicitatem illius discretæ magnitudinis. (63, p. 72, 8-11)
- 7) Est autem principalius cognoscere et nobilius, quia habet altiorelem et incorruptibilelem finem. (65, p. 76, 11)
- 8) Sic de intellectu, cuius forma est simplicitas intelligibilium formarum, quas ex propria natura cognoscit, quando nudae sibi praesentantur, et ita sursum ad intelligentias ascendendo, quae habent simplicitatem formae subtiliorelem et omnia vident etiam sine eo, quod eis in phantasmate praesententur; et demum quomodo omnia in primo intellectu ita cognoscitive, quod cognitio dat esse cognitivis sicut omnium formarum causativum exemplar se ipsum exemplificando; et cur sensus non attingit intelligibilia neque intellectus intelligentias et eo superiora, scilicet cum nulla cognitio possit in simplicius eo. Cognoscere enim mensurare est. Mensura autem est simplicior quam mensurabilia sicut unitas mensura numeri. (71, p. 83, 8 - 84, 19)