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Johannes Hoff *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa*. (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013). Pp. xxiv + 267. £22.00, \$38.00 (Pbk). ISBN 978 0 8028 6890 9.

In this insightful and strongly researched volume, Johannes Hoff presents Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) as a transitional figure: a philosopher who lived through and resisted the first steps from the medieval to the modern era, and one whom Hoff proposes as a bridge from his own age to aspects of pre-modernity that would not simply turn back the clock, but address the deeply felt ills of postmodernity. ‘Cusa’s significance’, he summarizes,

lies in the fact that he attempted the impossible. He aimed to develop an apophatic way of thinking that preempts the nihilistic self-deconstruction of Western Christianity by reconciling the pre-modern synthesis of wisdom and science with the modern ideals of social, political, cultural, and scientific innovation, and the related ideas of individuality and creativity. (24)

Cusa’s path to the modern age, Hoff argues, was able to emphasize the creativity of individual and scientific innovation without placing the atomized ego at the centre of the universe, because it did not divorce scientific inquiry from wisdom, understood as a gift that presumes a relationship between giver and receiver. In his masterpiece *De docta ignorantia*, Cusa indicated that he ‘was led by . . . a heavenly gift from the Father of lights, from whom comes every excellent gift, to embrace incomprehensible things incomprehensibly in learned ignorance (*docta ignorantia*)’ (7). Cusa, following Aquinas, who had in turn followed Dionysius, wrote that ‘the most wise science consists in the praise of God who fashioned all things from out of His praise and for the sake of His praise’ (18–19). The resulting world-view stands in contrast to modernity, in which the autonomous self stands before a bare and neutral universe, and constructs its meaning.

Hoff applies a distinction between two kinds of truth to Cusa’s doxological mode of scientific inquiry. There is propositional truth, on the one hand: truth-functional statements that predicate attributes to finite objects of knowledge. This is not the sort of truth that can be spoken of God, who transcends propositional truth statements in his infinity. But truth can nonetheless be spoken of God in the sense of statements that ‘[guide] our ability to distinguish between significant . . . and insignificant propositions’ (20). This latter sort of truth does not simply state what is the case, but rather draws our attention to what is praiseworthy, worthy of awe, or otherwise remarkable. It is the second sort of truth that one needs to express not merely what is the case, but the *significance* of the fact *that* something is the case, to move beyond proof to explanation. As Wittgenstein says, there can be no surprises in a logical proof; an explanation, however, can surprise and provoke wonder. The latter form of truth is a mode of speaking with liturgical

and doxological capacity, but Cusa does not restrict its usage to religious settings. For him, it is also the appropriate mode of speaking in the context of scientific inquiry.

The primary innovators of Cusa's day were artists, not scientists, Hoff explains, and it was artists who developed the modern conception of a world determined not by its relation to God, but by its position in an atemporal space and the relation of that position to a fixed observer within the world. Hoff cites the development of linear perspective as an example. An artist painting an image in linear perspective is essentially marking the points on the canvas that connect the object to the eye of the assumed viewer. This is art as bare, propositional truth; there is no relationship between artist and viewer such that the viewer would be engaged selectively to attend to what is significant. It was later that Descartes and Locke would extend the geometric concepts developed by artists of Cusa's day to metaphysics, conceiving of objects as 'extended things', reducible to quantifiable 'primary qualities' (64). But already in this artistic context, the modern concept of autonomy was emerging in parallel to the modern concept of space.

Hoff argues that Cusa rejected the modern concepts of both space and autonomy. The pre-modern tradition, which Cusa follows in this respect, held that knowledge was a performative act and a participation in the being of another; science thus involves *desire*, beginning with what our attention is *drawn* to (37). Cusa's doxological and liturgical mode of speaking, Hoff writes, is also truly social in a way that modernity's approach to space and autonomy cannot be. The autonomous self occupies a single point in space from which to observe the world. Modernity does not deny that there are multiple perspectives from which to view the world, but it compels the single ego to insert itself into those perspectives in order to attain them. It celebrates the freedom from constraint that allows such movement, but with two negative side effects. First, it generates restlessness: if the observer has no place of its own, it must be in every place. And second, it displaces the other even as it seeks to attain the other's view of the world, making intersubjectivity merely convertible: if the ego can stand in the place of the other, the other herself is no longer needed. And these two cycle viciously upon one another – once the other is displaced the ego *must* occupy all places at once. Cusa's alternative modernity, by contrast, relativizes individuality without discarding it, requiring the other and demanding that the ego not only *hear*, but *trust*, the voice of the other as it conveys what it can see.

As a central image of the social aspect of multiperspectival knowledge, Hoff turns to an example from Cusa's *De visione Dei* (1453). Cusa describes there how he sent an icon to the monks of Tegernsee; he instructed them to affix the icon to the northern wall of the monastery and observe how its gaze would follow the viewer as he walked from east to west. He instructed them, moreover, to speak to each other as they walked in different directions, so that all would hear what the others were seeing – namely, that the icon's gaze was following each monk's individual movement, even as they walked in opposite directions.

The example indicates two central concerns for Cusa. First, the evident truth of what is impossible – that the icon's gaze moves in opposite directions at the same time – illustrates the 'coincidence of opposites'. Central to the concept of a God who, in his infinity, cannot be defined (that is, limited by any finitely comprehensible concept or category) is the 'impossibility that coincides with necessity'. This is what Cusa means when he refers to a knowing ignorance (*docta ignorantia*): 'we know that [God], and *only* he, exceeds all relative determinations and oppositions *by necessity*. At least in one respect the infinite is precisely conceivable' (30).

Second, the Tegernsee monks demonstrate the necessity of the other for the acquisition of wisdom. Hearing the voices of the other monks, each monk knows that the others see something he does not, that he cannot see all there is to see. Therefore, this *social* form of knowledge – which, Cusa notes, requires that one's own vision be supplemented not only by hearing but by *trust* in the voice of the other – can render the invisible visible in a way that the knowledge of the autonomous individual cannot. Cusa could contemplate the One in the faces of others. There he encountered the face of Christ, in whom opposites are ultimately reconciled: simultaneously participating in the particularity of human nature and the social plurality of individuals, even as he is the Son of God, through whom all things are created and upheld. For Cusa, it was the visible body of Christ that simultaneously acts as the unifying centre of desire that draws our attention and as the refracting lens that drives us to attend to others in their essential reality.

Cusa, Hoff writes, was enthusiastic about the growing capacity for precision in scientific inquiry. In his understanding, however, such precision could not be gained without receiving a multiplicity of viewpoints, and a single subject could not adequately inhabit all viewpoints. Rather, advances in scientific endeavours require the generosity to listen to and trust other voices. The doxological mode of knowledge, received as a gift, thus eludes our desire for clarity and autonomous control, but is essential to the *end* for which we desire to know. Wisdom thus gained draws us into the social multiplicity that, paradoxically, participates in the simplicity of the divine to a greater degree as it becomes more varied.

In Hoff's view, the loss of liturgical imagination that Cusa could have helped us avoid has led directly to the 'representationalist dualism' that plagues modern science. It is this that has driven us to the point at which 'invisible realities such as mind, soul, and spirit came now to be seen as the delusive background noise of functional information processing systems' (171). But as theists such as David Bentley Hart and atheists like Thomas Nagel have pointed out, this 'background noise' forms a critical part of the data that any reasonable scientific theory must explain. A thoroughgoing modernity divorces the fixed observer from his own consciousness, emotion, and rationality, rendering them illusory; it leaves science, however powerful it may be as a technology for prediction and control of the environment, incapable of providing an explanatory account of the most basic, common-sense aspects of our lives as individuals and society. Hoff makes a

compelling case for viewing Cusa as an important dialogue partner for moderns, one who would not merely point back to a pre-modern concept of the self and its relation to the world, other selves, and its creator, but who could help to save science and preserve the massive benefits the innovations of the modern world have delivered to individual creativity and liberty.

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Fiona Ellis *God, Value, and Nature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
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In this absorbing and compelling book, Fiona Ellis argues that theism and naturalism are compatible. This claim is provocative because almost all card-carrying naturalists agree in defining their position in opposition to theism and other forms of ‘supernaturalism’. Many theists also concur in defining their position in these oppositional terms (consider, e.g., the work of Alvin Plantinga). Ellis develops and defends an expanded conception of naturalism (i.e. ‘theistic naturalism’) which goes beyond any of the major views of naturalism currently on offer.

Ellis begins by discussing ‘scientific naturalism’, which circumscribes reality within the bounds of what can be validated by the natural sciences. Anything beyond these bounds is regarded as ‘supernatural’ and thus illusory. The problem with this kind of scientism, even for many non-theists, is that it regards as illusory certain things deemed humanly important from within our engaged or experiential standpoint on the world. For the scientific naturalist, our experience of objective values is to be explained as mere projection onto the world of our subjective states, rather than as recognizing that certain features of the world (e.g. other human beings) are *worthy* of our concern and make *demands* upon us.

However, many philosophers dissatisfied with this sort of scientific naturalism seek to articulate and defend a more expansive form of naturalism that can accommodate a realm of objective values which fall outside the purview of the natural sciences. Ellis first considers a position that she calls ‘Expansive Naturalism I’, or ‘expansive scientific naturalism’. According to this position, naturalism can accommodate objective values if we allow for a realm of reality that is only properly accounted for by the human sciences (psychology, anthropology, sociology, etc.)