Without fail we recognize a great text from a great thinker by the fact that, in addition to and beyond what it intends to demonstrate (and indeed does demonstrate), it offers further resources, sometimes long unnoticed, for illuminating questions arising well after the text was written, and which come, at least so it would seem, from entirely different preoccupations. Of course the point is never to make a text say what it in fact does not say within the context of a debate for which it was not written; rather, the point is to allow it to say everything that it can contribute today to a second debate that is added to the first one and extends it in other terms. A text truly gives us food for thought when it reveals, in addition to its explicit intention, a potentially multiple pertinence that awaits the opportunity that will make manifest one of its possible significations for a question that it probably did not imagine, even if, in fact, it may have made that question possible.

Such is the case with Nicholas of Cusa, whose De visione Dei sive de Icona encounters, beyond the question of the vision of God, numerous contemporary debates concerning visibility in general, and thus the dimensions of phenomenality—namely, questions concerning the icon as a type of phenomenon, the reversal of vision into a countervision, the distinction between the object or the nonobject of the seen, and the possibility of seeing the other. These will be the themes that I will attempt to follow in my reading of De visione Dei, a text that indeed illuminates them, but which also in turn receives from them a new pertinence.

I. THE ALL-SEEING

Let us begin by noting a characteristic trait of this debate in play in De visione Dei: Cusanus’s aim is not so much to set out a theoretical position as
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it is to propose to a monastic community (the Benedictines of Tegernsee) an experience (“vos experimentaliter in sacratissimam obscuretatam manu-ducere” [I will attempt to lead you experientially into the most sacred darkness])¹ of mystical theology in order to convince them of its paradoxical accessibility (“circa facilitatem mysticae theologiae” [about the facility of mystical theology]).² Indeed, De visione Dei enters into a debate opened by the publication of Cusa’s Docta ignorantia, which had opposed, among others, Vincent of Aggsbach (Impugnatorium doctae ignorantiae, 1453) against Bertrand of Waging, the prior of the Tegernsee monastery (Laudatorium doctae ignorantiae, 1451; Defensorium laudatorii doctae ignorantiae, 1459). At stake was the possible reinterpretation of the theologia mystica according to Denys the Areopagite through the via moderna, as purely affective, a love of mere will without any theological knowledge (and thus against the interpretation of Thomas Aquinas and of the via antiqua).³ The request for enlightenment made to Nicholas of Cusa by the abbot of Tegernsee, Caspar of Aindorffer, sets forth the problem straightforwardly: “Est autem hec quaestio utrum anima devota sine intellectus cognicione, vel etiam sine cogitacione previa

¹ Quotations from Nicholas of Cusa’s De visione Dei sive de Icona follow the edition of Heide Dorothea Riemann: Nicolai de Cusa, Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Heidelbergensis, vol. 6 (Hamburg: Meiner, 2000), citing by chapter, section, and page; here, De visione Dei, §1, 3. For other works, I quote from Nikolaus von Kues, Philosophisch-theologischen Schriften, ed. Leo Gabriel (Vienna: Herder, 1967). I also refer to the recent translation by H. Lawrence Bond, in his collection Nicolas de Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings (New York: Paulist, 1997), 235–89. Here, see De visione Dei, §1, Bond, 235. The emphasis on experience is constantly evident: “et quisque vestrum experietur” (and each of you will experience that) (Praefatio, §3, 5; Bond, 236); “frater...experietur visum in eo figi” (the brother...will experience the gaze as fastened on him) (ibid., §4, 6; Bond, 236); “in hac tua imagine providentiam tuam quadam sensibili experientia intueor” (in this image of you I now behold your providence by a certain sensible experience) (IV, §9, 13; Bond, 239); “te me diligere experior” (I experience that you love me) (IV, §10, 14; Bond, 239); “prehendere experimentali contactu” (to know through the touch of experience) (V, §13, 17; Bond, 241); “experior, quomodo necesse est me intrare caliginem” (I experience how necessary it is for me to enter into the cloud) (IX, §36, 34; Bond, 251); “clare experior, quod tu simul omnia vides et singula” (I experience clearly that you see all things and each thing together) (IX, §38, 35; Bond, 252); “Experior bonitatem tuam” (I experience your goodness) (XI, §43, 39; Bond, 254); “experior in contracto amore” (in contracted love I experience) (XVII, §72, 59; Bond, 267); “Et hoc experior hac praxi” (this I experience in the following application) (XVII, §77, 61; Bond, 269); “Experimur” (it is our experience) (XXII, §98, 76; Bond, 280); “in nobis experimur intellectum locum esse, ubi verbum magistri capitur” (in our experience the intellect is the place where the word of a teacher is received) (XXII, §100, 78; Bond, 281, mod.); “Sic experimur” (in similar fashion we experience) (XXIV, §110, 83; Bond, 285).

² De visione Dei, §1, 3; Bond, 235, which is found again in the conclusion: “Quid facilius quam credere Deo?...Nihil enim astruis credenti difficile et nihil amanti denegabile” (What is easier than to believe God?...you teach nothing difficult for a believer and nothing a lover can refuse) (XXIV, §114, 86; Bond, 287).

vel concomitante, solo affectu seu per mentis apicem quam vocant synderesis Deum attingere possit, et in ipsum immediate moveri aut ferri” (This is the question: whether the devout soul, without the exercise of the intellect or even without a preceding or simultaneous exercise of it, could attain God by affection alone or by the summit of the mind which they call synderesis and be moved or carried immediately within Him). 4 If in effect the union with God is made without knowledge, through immediate affectus, then the via mystica becomes not only unintelligible but also irrational, reserved for some and inaccessible to others because without reason and, therefore, without possible initiation: “Theologia scientia, precipue mistica, paucissimis admodum cognita” (Theological science, especially the mystical, which is known to very few). 5 In what sense is theologia mystica still accessible, if its experience is solely open to an affectus without knowledge? And doesn’t Nicholas of Cusa’s introduction of theology as pure docta ignorantia belong to the same irrationalist drift?

Nicholas of Cusa’s response to these questions will thus have to open access to an experience of theologia mystica but at the same time guarantee its intelligibility and rationality. In fact, it will have to reproduce the very intention of Denys the Areopagite in his own treatise entitled Mystical Theology, as Nicholas of Cusa himself makes clear in a 1453 letter to the monks of Tegernsee: “Sed in hoc libello ubi theologiam mysticam et secretam vult manifestare possibili modo, saltat supra disjunctio et coincidencia, seu unionem simplicissimam que est non lateralis sed directe supra omnem ablacionem et positionem, ubi ablacio coincidat cum positione, et negatio cum affirmacione; et illa est secretissima theologica, ad quam nullus philosophorum accessit, neque accedere potest stante principio communi tocius philosophiae, scilicet quod duo contradictoria non coincidan” (In this book De mystica theologai, in which he [Denys] wished to reveal in a possible way mystical and secret theology, he rises above disjunction even to union and coincidence, or most simple union, which is not on the same level but directly above all removal and addition, where removal coincides with addition and negation with affirmation. And that is the most secret theology to which none of the philosophers approach; nor can one of them approach while the common principle of all philosophy, that is, that two contradictories do not coincide, endures). 6 Theologia mystica must surpass the principle of noncontradiction

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4 Quoted in Ziebart, Nicolaus Cusanus, 155 n. 77, with English translation 154.
5 Ibid., 154 n. 75; English translation, 154.
6 Letter of Cusanus to Aindorffer and the monks of Tegernsee, September 14, 1453; English translation, Ziebart, Nicolaus Cusanus, 161–62. The letter then concludes: “Unde necesse est mystice theologizantem supra omnem racionem et intelligenciam, eciam se ipsum linquadndo, se in caliginem iniiciere; et reperiet quomodo id quod racio indicat impossibile, scilicet esse et non esse simul, est ipsa necessitas, ymmo, nis videretur tanta caligo impossibilitatis et densitas, non esset summa necessitas que illi impossibilitati non contradicit; sed impossibilitas est ipsa vera necessitas” (quoted in E. Vansteenberghe, Autoir de la doce ignorantia, 114–15; and in Ziebart, Ni-
as understood by philosophy, but it must also contradict it by principle, according to a necessity that is itself rational—namely, that when God is at issue, the opposites coincide and the impossible becomes necessary. Indeed, this seems to be the goal of *De visione Dei* to open, according to a certain paradoxical rationality, the experience of that which passes beyond reason as understood by philosophy.

In order thus to arrive rationally at *theologia mystica*, Nicholas of Cusa proposes to the monks of Tegernsee the experience of doing so, through a *praxis* (“in praxi”). A praxis, that is, an operation that produces nothing outside of the one who operates it (*poësis* is not involved), but which modifies the one who operates it, to the point that, upon being repeated, it confers on him a new way of behaving, another *habitus*. What is this operation? Precisely, the praxis of a phenomenon, a phenomenal praxis: that of contemplating the “image of someone who sees all,” the *imago omnia videntis*, the *figuram cuncta videntis*. Such images show to the spectator’s gaze another gaze, painted, which seems to have the property of seeing comprehensively everything that appears before it; to the point that each spectator has the impression that, regardless of where he is, it is on him (and him alone) that this gaze falls, a gaze that is in the strict sense universal (that turns in every direction), such that at any point along the 180 degrees swept by this gaze, each person has the impression that it is he alone who it sights and sees: “Quisque vestrum experietur, ex quocumque loco eandem [namely, figuram] inspexerit, se quasi solum per eam videri” (Each of you will experience that from whatever place one observes it the face will seem to regard him alone). Of course, in order to verify this, each person must confirm with the other the same experience, and thus it is right to note that what is at stake is an experience that is not only communitarian, but which presupposes trust (*credere*) in the witness of one’s neighbor.

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8 *De visione Dei*, Praefatio, §2, 5; Bond, 235. See also: “vos . . . per quandam praxim devotionis in mysticam propono elevare theologiam” (I propose to uplift you . . . through a certain devotional exercise, to mystical theology) (§4b, 7; Bond, 237), and “Et hoc experietor in praxi” (this I experience in the following application) (XVII, §77, 61; Bond, 269).

9 Ibid., §2, 5; Bond, 235.

10 Ibid., §3, 5; Bond, 236.

11 According to Michel de Certeau’s fitting remark: “for want of a common vision, each has to believe the other. The protocol of a verbal agreement between them is made up of successive acts . . . ordered to the production of a shared judgment or *sentence*” (“Nicolas de Cues: Le secret d’un regard,” in *Traverses* [Paris, 1984], 30–31; English translation: “The Gaze
Nicholas of Cusa lists several examples of such an all-seeing figure, thus referring to an experience widely held by a large public. And yet, of the four examples mentioned, only one remains known to us: that of a character from a scene in *The Justice of Trajan* painted by Roger van der Weyden; indeed, the figure of a face stands out, cutting through the crowd around it, that could very well be that of the painter himself: “Bruxellis Rogeri maximi pictoris in pretiotissima tabula.” Nevertheless, the essential lies elsewhere: how is it that the painting, and thus the image of a figure, and, read with further precision, that of an immobile face, could succeed in giving the impression to each and every spectator that its gaze follows and pursues him without stopping, wherever he goes in the space covered by this gaze? Recently H. Lawrence Bond set forth the conditions that this representation of an all-seeing gaze must fulfill. In sum, the figure of this face must clearly attract the spectator’s attention by overlooking the scene that frames it and thus must not merge with its environment (neither the décor, nor the other characters, etc.) or depend on the time and the place of the plot (the historical anecdote or pretext); and, in order to succeed, this figure must offer a face that is at once fairly neutral, in order to appear atemporal and universal and applicable to every sighting, but also able to make a power that is nonfocused (unexplicit) and ever active stand out. Now, in a sense, it happens that these conditions are fulfilled fairly frequently, to the point where sometimes it is hard to know whether one is dealing with a human all-seeing gaze or one that is divine and Christic, for example in the famous case of Dürer’s (self-)portrait (or not) (1500, Alte Pinakothek, Munich), which does not, of course, authorize the conclusion that “the filial here gives way to the fraternal in the vision of God” or that “the faith...is not in God first of all, but in man or in the other” (Emmanuel Falque, “L’omnivoyant: Fraternité et vision de Dieu chez Nicolas de Cues,” *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 98, no. 1 [2014]: 65). Aside from its profoundly non-theological character, this hasty conclusion presupposes exactly what has to be demonstrated: how would “brothers” be able to trust one another if they had not already participated in the same filial sighting or aim? In other words, what does “fraternal” mean if no “filial” relation makes it possible, and if the “brothers” are not first of all sons tied together precisely by the same experience of sonship, namely, for each among them, that of having been seen by the same gaze?

12 *De visione Dei, Praefatio*, §2, 5; Bond, 235. This fresco, painted at the Hôtel de Ville of Brussels, is only known to us today through its reproduction in the form of the tapestry at Berne. See the demonstration by Edwin Panofsky, “Faces illa Rogeri Maximi pictoris,” in *Late Classical and Medieval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr.*, ed. K. Weizmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), which dates Nicholas of Cusa’s visit to Brussels in February–March 1451 (two years before the writing of *De visione Dei*) and which identifies the three other examples invoked here, and now lost: the archer overlooking the square in Nuremberg, the angel from the castle at Brixen, and the painting from Nicholas of Cusa’s personal chapel at Koblenz, about which more later.

Thus, precisely because an all-seeing figure remains relatively common (and for that very reason amounts to a good choice for opening up an experience for the monks of Tegernsee, as well as for the reader of the treatise), the establishment of the *figura cuncta videntis* is not enough to define the proper goal of *De visione Dei* (the experience of *theologia mystica*). We must specify this *figura* as that which bears the universal gaze of God—in this case, the gaze of Christ as an all-seeing face.

II. RECOGNITION OF THE ICON

The entire question thus becomes that of knowing what *facies* and what *figura* Nicholas of Cusa proposes for the experience and the praxis of the all-seeing—what painting (*imago, tabella*) must be privileged? He himself makes the question all the more inevitable when he declares to the monks of Tegernsee that he is sending precisely such a *tabella* to them along with his text *De visione Dei*. Even though all trace of it has been lost, we do have at our disposal two arguments allowing for its characterization. First, Cusanus explicitly names the painting containing the face of the all-seeing one an icon: “mitto tabellam figuram cuncta videntis tenentem, quam icona Dei appello” (I am sending . . . a painting . . . containing an all-seeing image, which I call an icon of God). The distinction between the two terms leaves no doubt: in the *sensibilis figura*, it was considered in one sense a painting (“tabellam figuram . . . tenentem”) and, in the other, by what this painting shows, namely, the icon and its omnidirectional gaze (“figuram cuncta videntis . . . quam iconam appello”). Moreover, we find this same firm distinction between, on the one hand, the painted image (“haec imago faciei tuae . . . sic sensibiliter depicta,” “haec picta imago, quam intueor”), and, on the other,

14 See the clarifications by Werner Beierwaltes in the “Addendum: Cusanus und Dürr” to his notable “Visio facialis—Sehen ins Angesicht: Zur Coincidenz des endlichen und unendlichen Blicks bei Cusanus,” Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse Sitzungsberichte 1988. Heft 1 (Munich: Verlag der Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1988). Moreover, the conclusion of *De visione Dei* seems to suggest that Christ himself is the painter of his icon (XXV, §116, 88; Bond, 287).

15 *De visione Dei*, Praefatio, §2, 5; Bond, 255.

16 The gap between the painted *imago* and the *eicona* itself is clearly marked here: “Agit autem intuitus tuus, ut considerem, quomodo haec imago faciei tuae eaptropter est sic sensibiliter depicta, quia depingi non potuit facies sine colore nec color sine quantitate existisset. Sed video non oculis carneis, qui hanc *eiconam* tuam inspiciunt, sed mentalibus et intellectualibus oculis veritatem faciei tuae invisibilem, quae in umbra hic contracta significatur” (And your gaze prompts me to consider how this image of your face is thus portrayed in a sensible fashion since a face could not have been painted without color and color does not exist without quantity. But I see the invisible truth of your face, represented in this contracted shadow here, not with the eyes of flesh, which examine this *icon* of you, but with the eyes of the mind and the intellect) (ibid., VI, §17, 20; Bond, 242–43; emphasis added). And again: “Admiror, Domine, postquam tu simul omnes et singulos respicis, uti haec etiam picta figurat imago, quam intueor, quomodo coincidat in virtute tua visiva universale cum singulari” (You look on all and each together, even as does this painted image that I contemplate, and so I marvel, O Lord, at how in your visual faculty the universal coincides with the particular) (IX, §32, 31; Bond, 249).
the icon ("visus eiconae"); to the point that the passage from the one to the other is sometimes thematized as such: "visus eiconae te aeque undique respicit et non deserit quocumque pergas"; and "Sto coram imagine faciei tuae, Deus meus, quam oculis sensibilibus respicio, et nitor oculis interioribus intueri veritatem, quae in pictura signatur" (I stand before this image of your face, my God, which I observe with the eyes of sense, and I attempt with inward eyes to behold the truth that is designated in the picture); or "Video in haec picta facie figuram infinitatis" (I see in this painted face an image of infinity).

This gap between the physical vision of the image put into a painting (figura, imago, facies subtilli arte pictoria, tabella) and the icon’s aim (visus iconae) thus structures the entire experience in praxi and therefore the entirety of De visione Dei.

Another indication confirms that only an icon can be at issue: among the four examples of paintings representing an all-seeing figure, Nicholas of Cusa mentions the one which, without any doubt, was the most familiar to him, and the dearest: “Confluentiae in capella mea veronica” (that of a veronica in my chapel at Koblenz). Since Panofsky’s demonstration, no one can contest that what he is mentioning here is not an image of St. Veronica (Why her? Why would she see omnidirectionally?), but that of the very facies of Christ walking to his death, as imprinted on the veil held out by a woman to wipe his face, thus constituting the vera icona. Plainly stated, Nicholas of Cusa proposes to the monks of Tegernsee the experience of seeing themselves seen by an all-seeing facies, not in general, but with the very precise and particular case of an icon, that is to say of the image “not made by human hands” of the face of Christ himself, whose gaze sees all and at the same time each one individually. The point is not simply to experience an all-seeing figure (an angel or an archer, the self-portrait of a painter, and

17 Ibid., Praefatio, §3, 6; Bond, 236: “the icon’s gaze.” See: “nihil posse apparere circa visum eiconae Dei, quin verius sit in vero visu Dei” (nothing concerning the gaze of the icon of God can be apparent that is not truer in the true gaze of God) (I, §5, 10; Bond, 237).

18 Ibid., IV, §9, p. 13; Bond, 239: “Accede nunc tu, frater contemplator, ad Dei eiconam... quia visus eiconae te aeque undique respicit et non deserit, quocumque pergas” (Now, brother contemplative, approach the icon of God... the icon’s gaze regards you equally everywhere and does not leave you wherever you may go).

19 Ibid., X, §38, 35; Bond, 252.

20 Ibid., XV, § 61, 51; Bond, 262–63.

21 Ibid., Praefatio, §1, 5; Bond, 235 (and see Bond’s notes 10–11 on 324).

22 Panofsky concludes that this formula “must therefore be interpreted not as ‘the face of the St. Veronica in my chapel,’ but as ‘the face of the vera icon [namely, Christ?] in my chapel’” (“Facies illa Rogeri Maximi pictoris,” 385). He also recalls (ibid., 395) the older meaning of the term: “Veronica: Romanis appellatur tabella, in qua Christi Domini, pergentis ad Crucis supplicium, divino miraculo expressa effigies efformatur. . . . Imago tabellam praedicta repraesentans” (Veronica: is defined among the Romans as a little tablet on which is formed a likeness, imprinted by divine miracle, of the Lord Christ proceeding to the torment of the Cross. . . . An image representing the above tablet) (quotation from Charles du Fresne du Cange, Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis, 2nd ed. [Paris, 1938], 8:285 [Translator’s note: Thanks to Joseph Almeida for the English translation]).
so on), but, with the example of a true icon (veronica), to experience and to practice Christ himself as the preeminently all-seeing, or in a word to see the all-seeing (and only in this way the all knowing), the omnivoyant (and only in this way the omnipotent).

These two arguments increase the reasons we have to oppose the unfortunate tendency among some contemporary interpreters who do not wish to accept the letter of the very title De visione Dei [sive de icona liber], and instead speak only of a "painting."\(^{23}\) This obstinate denial cannot be justified by some worry on the part of Cusanus about keeping his distance from the so-called Byzantine icon—after all, this would be rather strange for someone so dedicated to Christian unity.\(^{24}\) In fact, this philological resistance probably testifies to their reticence in front of the very usage of eicona as a concept. But this misology, far from opening the way to a better understanding of De visione Dei, simply results in our missing its basic intention: to have (and facilitate) the experience of the vision of God through the practice of the iconic gaze: "Non potest oculus mentis satiari videndo te Ihesum, qui es complementum omnis mentalis pulchritudinis; et in hac eicona conicio mirabilem valde ac stupidum visum tuum" (The eye of the mind cannot be satiated in seeing you, O Jesus, because you are the completion of all mental beauty, and at this icon I conjecture about your exceedingly wonderful and astonishing gaze).\(^{25}\)

\(^{23}\) This is a misinterpretation held by A. Minazzoli in his translation Le Tableau ou la vision en Dieu (Paris: Cerf, 1986; republished by Belles Lettres [Paris, 2012]) without any real argument, other than to avoid orienting "the imagination of the reader toward the singular domain of Byzantine iconography" (ibid., 1st ed. 101, 2nd ed. 141). As if the concept of the icon (a) related only to the history of art, when in fact belongs as a concept to philosophy and theology as such; (b) was limited to the Byzantine period and territory, when in fact it widely overflows them in space and in time, for instance and at the minimum, in Roman medieval art. This disappointing misinterpretation was unfortunately orchestrated symphonically, without further explanation, but in a caricatural manner, by Emmanuel Falque: "The novelty of the procedure [namely, attributed to Nicholas of Cusa] forbids translating falsely the formula de icona in the title (De visione Dei sive de icona) by of the Icon rather than of the Painting, as a number of commentators have sometimes wrongly done" ("L’omnivoyant," 47 n. 4). Forbids? What, and who, forbids it? In fact, every translator, in every language (the French translator excepted), translates icona/eicona by icon, including P. Magnard himself ("Voix c’est être vue: Le chiasme de la vision," in Nicolas de Cues, penseur et artisan de l’unité, ed. D. Larre [Lyon: ENS éditions, 2015], 62). It is the reader, instead, who finds himself dumbfounded before so much self-assurance in forbidding the least bit of argumentation. See instead A. Stock, “Die Rolle der ‘icona Dei’ in der Spekulation De Visione Dei,” Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft 18 (1989): 50–62.


\(^{25}\) De visione Dei, XXII, §94, 74; Bond, 278.
Once it has been established that Nicholas of Cusa indeed uses a concept of the icon in order to define the visio Dei, or rather in order to open the experience of it in praxi, we can pose the real question: what decisive contribution does the use of this concept make? Let us note immediately that we are not dealing here with a doctrine of the icon developed in and for itself, but rather with a praxis of the icon as means of access to the experience of the vision of God: “Primo loco praesupponendum esse censeo nihil posse apparere circa visum eiconae Dei, quin verius sit in vero visu Dei” (As a first premise, I believe it should be presupposed that nothing concerning the gaze of the icon of God can be apparent that is not truer in the true gaze of God).26 The vision does not involve solely the icon, but, through it, God himself, all the more so in that, according to an ancient tradition (one that is not only Christian), “theos ab hoc dicitur, quia omnia vidit” (God is called Theos because of the fact that [He] looks on all things).27 God sees insofar as He is God, and God-sees forms a tautology (just like the Anselmian designation major quam cogitari possit [what is greater than can be thought] taken up in the same sentence). Thus, not only does the visio Dei mean both “to see God” and “God sees,” but above all and to begin

26 Ibid., I, §5, 10; Bond, 237.
27 Ibid., I, §5, 10; Bond, 237. See: “visus tuus, qui est theos, Deus” (your sight, which is Theos) (VIII, §31, 31; Bond, 249). Cusanus takes this up in other texts as well. Thus, “Puta cum Deus theos dicitur a videndo et quaeratur quomodo sit videns, respondetur eo modo, quo mesurans” (For example, when God is called theos because of His seeing, and when we ask in what way He sees, the answer is: in the way in which He measures) (Complementum theologicum XIV, Philosophisch-theologischen Schriften, 3:700; English translation: Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa, trans. Jasper Hopkins [Minneapolis: Banning, 2001], 771). And “Quare patet Deum, qui theos quod est a theoro seu video dicitur, visionem illam ante alium esse, quam non possimus perfectam nisi trinam videre, quodque ipsum videre infinitum et interminatum in alio est videre non-alium ab aliquo” (Therefore, it is evident that God, who is called theos [(a word) which comes from “theo,” i.e., “video”], is—prior to other—this vision which we cannot see as perfect unless [we see it] as trine. [And (it is evident) that to see God in an other—God, who is infinite and boundless—is to see (Him who is) not other than anything]) (De Li Non-Aliud, XXIII, Philosophisch-theologischen Schriften, 2546; Hopkins, 1157). Or: “Non est igitur theos nomen Dei, nisi ut quaeritur ab homine in hoc mundo. . . . Theos dicitur a theoro, quod est video et carre. Curriere igitur debet quaerens per visum, ut ad omnia videntem theon pertingere possit” (Hence, “Theos” is the name of God only insofar as God is sought, by human beings, in this world. . . . “Theos” is derived from “theo,” which means “I see” and “I hasten.” Therefore, the seeker ought to hasten by means of sight, so that he can attain unto God, who sees all things) (De quaerendo Deum, I, 19, Philosophisch-theologischen Schriften, 2:570; Hopkins, 315). This theme originates at least as far back as Denys the Areopagite (De divinis nominiis, XII, 12), through the intermediary of John Scot Erigena: “Igitur theos spes quidem videns, si theos videns interpretatur” (Therefore [a] hypertheos is taken to mean one who sees better than normal, if [the word’s root] theos is taken to mean one who sees) (De divisione naturae I, 14, in Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne [Paris: Migne, 1865], vol. 122, col. 460a; see also I, 12, ibid., PL 122, 452c [Translator’s note: Thanks to Joseph Almeida for the English translation]). (Subsequent references to Patrologia Latina will be indicated by the abbreviation “PL,” followed by the volume and column number in Arabic numerals).
with that it belongs to God to see, before there is any question of some-one else seeing God. 28 God fully exercises vision, while man sees only by derivation. In this way we better understand that the visio Dei is unfolded through the practice of the icon; for it belongs precisely to the icon (and preeminently to the icon of one that is all-seeing) that it gazes on him who believed he was exercising his power of vision over it. The icon sees much more essentially than it is seen; or rather, it sees so originarily and so completely the one who looks at it that it overturns the order of intentionality and makes itself felt precisely through the experience of receiving a gaze that is absolutely concentrated on each of the spectators. To see an icon amounts to seeing oneself seen by it. And, in the case of the icon of an all-seeing figure, this experience of seeing oneself seen is intensified. To begin with, this icon shows a gaze that aims at each one of its spectators, giving at least a face or a surface of itself to be seen; above all, the gaze that it shows has the property of following the eyes (or of seeming to do so—which in praxi amounts to the same thing) of each one of the spectators, no matter where he is or where he moves. Its all-seeing gaze sees everything together, cuncta videns: “Visus tuus, cum sit oculus seu speculum vivum, in se omnia videt” (Since your sight is an eye or living mirror, it sees all things in itself). Moreover, this gaze sees not so much what it has in front of it (and which would condition it), as it does that which arises from the very fact of seeing itself seen: “immo quia causa omnium omnium, hinc omnia in causa et ratione omnium, hoc est in se ipso, complectitur et videt” (Even more, since [your, i.e., God’s, sight] is the cause of all that can be seen, embraces and sees all things in the cause and reason of all, that is, in itself). 29 Thus we understand the reasoning better: clearly, no finite gaze (and even less the painted gaze on a painting) can genuinely and completely function as an all-seeing icon; every gaze in this world indeed remains contractus, concentrated on and restricted to such or such object, and is never universal. Nevertheless, we can conceive of an absolute gaze (visus abstractus), and we must do so if we are concerned with major quam cogitari possit. 30 And in this case, what is nearly true for the icona Dei is absolutely true for the visus Dei: “Quare, si visus pictus apparere potest in imagine simul omnia et singula inspiciens, cum hoc sit perfectionis visus, non poterit veritati minus convenire veraciter quam ei-


29 De visione Dei, VIII, §30; Bond, 249.

30 Ibid., I, §5, 10; Bond, 237.
conae seu apprentiae apparenter” (If, therefore, the painted gaze in the icon can appear to be observing all and each at the same time, and since this faculty is of the perfection of sight, it cannot truly pertain to the truth less than it apparently pertains to the icon or appearance). But there is more: not only does the icon see all and each, it gives the impression to each spectator that Christ aims only at him and even looks at him more than at any other: “agit cuiuslibet quasi de solo eo, qui experitur se videri, et nullo alio curet, adeo quod etiam concipi nequeat per unum, quem respicit, quod curam alterius agat” (He will see that it takes diligent care of each, just as if it cared only for the one on whom its gaze seems to rest and for no other, and to such an extent that the one whom it regards cannot conceive that it should care for another). We will have to try to understand the legitimacy of what at first seems to be an illusory and even condemnable egocentrism (see Sec. IV of this essay). In any case, this feeling of exclusive visibility in the gaze of the all-seeing confirms that God’s vision thus plays out in the experience of the icon, which looks at me, whoever and wherever I may be; to the point that we can even consider that every real icon puts into play an all-seeing gaze and that Nicholas of Cusa here describes the very essence of every icon.

And indeed, the definition that Nicholas of Cusa here proposes of the visio Dei reaches into the fundamental character of the icon—namely, that it sees us more than we see it. “Quid aliud, Domine, est videre tuum, quando me pietauis oculo respicis, quam [te] a me videri? Videndo me das te a me videri, qui es Deus absconditus. Nemo te videre potest, nisi in quantum tu das, ut videaris. Nec est aliud te videre, quam quod tu videas videntem te” (What other, O Lord, is your seeing, when you look upon me with the eye of mercy, than your being seen by me? In seeing me you, who are the hidden God, give yourself to be seen by me. No one can see you except in the measure you grant to be seen. Nor is your being seen other than your seeing one who sees you). The reasoning is clear: I can very well say that I see God, but that can only be if God, this God who remains a hidden God, grants it to me; and he does not give himself to be seen by someone else, except by giving it, and thus, first of all, by he himself seeing this someone who then, possibly, will see him. In order for a face to see the face of God, it is necessary that God first turn his face toward those who gaze

31 Ibid. See the excellent commentary by Ziebart, Nicolaus Cusanus, 189.
32 De vision Dei, Praefatio, §4, 6; Bond, 236.
33 This point in common between the icon according to the phenomenological sense I gave it (see God without Being, trans. Thomas A. Carlson [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990; 2nd ed. 2012], chap. 1) and its meaning according to Nicholas of Cusa was taken note of (before I had made the least connection with De visione Dei) by H. B. Gerfl-Falkovitz, “Der Gott-Gedanke des Nikolaus von Kues und seine erkenntnistheoretische Bedeutung für die Gegenwart,” in Der Gottes-Gedanke des Nikolaus von Kues, ed. W. A. Euler, Akten des Symposiums in Trier von 21. bis 23. Oktober 2010, Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft, 33 (Trier, 2012).
34 De visione Dei, V, §13, 17; Bond, 241.
at it: “Ita est facies tua ad omnes facies te intuentes conversa. . . . Qui igitur amorosa facie te intueitur, non reperiet nisi faciem tuam se amorose intuentem” (Your face is turned to all faces which look on you. . . . Whoever looks on you with a loving face will find only your face looking on oneself with love). 35 There is nothing else to see of God than the fact that he sees me and that our gazes cross. But this crossing of gazes is enough to define love: “visus tuus videt omnem visum videntem.”36 Thus, rather than it being the case that seeing God is opposed to seeing oneself seen by God, these two terms, opposed from our point of view, coincide in God’s point of view, and it is precisely this very coincidence that the (iconic) praxis of the visio Dei teaches to every creature: “Nam ibi es, . . . ubi videbit coincidit cum videri. . . . Ab omnibus creaturis es visibilis et omnes vides; in eo enim, quod omnes vides, videris ab omnibus. Aliter enim esse non possunt creaturae, quia visione tua sunt; quod si te non viderent videntem, a te non caperent esse. Esse creaturae est videre tuum pariter et videri” (For you are there . . . where seeing coincides with being seen. . . . You are visible by all creatures and you see all. In that you see all you are seen by all. For otherwise creatures cannot exist since they exist by your vision. If they did not see you who see, they would not receive being from you. The being of a creature is equally your seeing and your being seen). 37 Seeing God first of all signifies that God sees

35 Ibid., VI, §19, 21; Bond, 243.
36 Ibid., VII, §29, 29, which continues: “et omne visibile et omnem actum visionis et omnem virtutem videntem et omnem virtutem visibilum et omne ex ipsis exsurgens videre, quia omnia causas.” Bond, 248: “your gaze sees every sight that sees, everything that can be seen and every act of seeing and also every act of seeing and also every power of seeing, every power of being seen and every actual seeing that results from them both. Since your seeing is causing, you who cause everything see everything.” On the crossing of gazes, see my “L’intentionnalité de l’amour,” in Emmanuel Lévinas, ed. J. Rolland, Les Cahiers de la Nuit surveillée (Paris: Verdier, 1984), republished in Jean-Luc Marion, Prolegomena to Charity, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicag: University of Chicago Press, 2002), chap. 4.
37 De visione Dei, X, §40, 36; Bond, 253. See: “Et videndo creata simul et se videt. Creata enim, quia creata, non videntur perfecte, nisi creator videatur. Et effectus perfecte non videtur, quia effectus, nisi et causa videatur. Visio autem Dei est perfectissima et se videndo, cum sit causa, videt omnia causata. Et causata videndo, cum sint causata, videt se, quia causa. Coincident in Deo mensurare et mensurari, quia est mensura et mensuratum; sic et vide et videri coincidunt et sic videre se est videri a se et videre creaturas est videri in creaturis” (With seeing created things He sees also Himself. For created things, because they are created, are not seen perfectly unless their Creator is seen. Likewise, an effect, because it is an effect, is not seen perfectly unless also its cause is seen. Now, God’s vision is most perfect. And since He is Cause: in seeing Himself He sees all things caused. And since they are caused: in seeing Himself He sees all things caused. And since they are caused: in seeing them God sees Himself, since He is their Cause. In God, measuring and being measured coincide, because He is both the Measuring-standard and What-is-measured. Similarly, [in Him], seeing and being seen coincide; and, likewise, His seeing Himself is His being seen by Himself, and His seeing creatures is His being seen [by Himself] in creatures) (Complementum theologicum, chap. 14, ed. L. Gabriel, Philosophisch-theologisch Schriften [Vienna: Herder, 1967], 3:702; Hopkins, 772). It is within this context of a practice of the icon as reversal of the subject (and object) of vision that the text itself can become iconic, as H. Lawrence Bond rightly notes: “Not only does Cusanus supply a material icon for
always and everywhere the one who claims to see or imagines himself seeing him, even if only in a glass darkly. But God sees me in the full light.

With this thesis—which gathers into focus the entire De visione Dei—Nicholas of Cusa not only raises the notion of the icon to the level of its concept, but, by thus granting it a universal meaning, justifies in advance its approach by contemporary phenomenology. Indeed, what do we understand by the word “icon” when we recognize in it, beyond its function in the history of art (whether Byzantine or other), a mode of description of certain phenomena? What phenomena can and must be described as icons? Elsewhere I have proposed defining the phenomenon of the other as an icon.38 Indeed, the other does not show himself as a visible object in the world—for the crowd of “others,” which occupies the environment of each of us, does not offer access to an other in the proper sense, but only to the spectacle of animated objects. We only have an other if a face is presented, a face that is not summed up in a surface; that is to say, a gaze. Now, what is proper to a gaze lies in its giving nothing to be seen directly; that which exerts the gaze, the eyes and more precisely the pupils, show nothing and express nothing, consisting only in a black point, or even less—a black hole, empty of the visible and thus of meaning. Why, then, when we wish to grasp the other as such, do we attach ourselves precisely to the point of his individuality that is the least visible, even the least expressive, the void of the pupil, when his general attitude, his body language, the expressions of his mouth and of his entire face tell us much more? There is only one answer: because the movement of the eyes and of the pupils, which certainly show nothing visible, nevertheless show indirectly and unquestionably whether or not the other truly looks at me, by aiming right in my eyes or following me consistently, with the all-seeing gaze of the icon. The other does not become visible insofar as I see him (for I would probably only see an object among others), but to the precise extent that, with his invisible gaze, he sees me.

Now, Nicholas of Cusa arrives at exactly this result in his description of the icona Dei, as it explains the vision: in God there is no other face to see than the gaze that aims at me: “Visus tuus, Domine, est facies tua” (Your vision, Lord, is your face).39 In other words, the very reasons that led Nicholas of Cusa to conceive the visio Dei according to the model of the icon lead us to apply this same iconic model to the gaze of the other.

39 De visione Dei, VI, §19; Bond, 243.
IV. SEEING AND SEEING ONESELF SEEN: THE APORIA OF THE OTHER

Consequently, I will not take up here the analysis of the icon that Nicholas of Cusa puts at the center and the heart of the *visio Dei*. To do that it would be necessary to explain his developments by comparing them with previous analyses of the vision of God (those of Denys, Proclus, Augustine, Eriugena, Eckhart, etc.) and of the theology of the icon. For lack of time I will not venture it here, both because such an immense labor calls for interpreters qualified in other ways than I, and also because I would like to indicate how the iconic doctrine of the *visio Dei* in its turn allows us, through its phenomenological rigor, to take up the classic phenomenological aporias not so much of the vision of God, but of the other in general. And perhaps to indicate the conditions for their solution.

On first consideration, the two terms that the Cusanian definition of the icon puts into operation do not pose any difficulty: *videre* and *videri*, seeing and seeing oneself seen, respond to one another as the active form of the verb to its passive form; I am seen like I see, I see and, in turn, I am seen; in fact, we customarily hold as settled that, when and in as much as we see a thing, we know it as such. Of course, we admit that appearances can fool us and that consequently it makes sense to test whether we see correctly; but with these precautions taken (at least tangentially), vision offers the royal road to true knowledge. Does this assumption remain valid when we pass from seeing to seeing oneself seen? What truth flows from this experience of seeing oneself seen? What parallel connects him who has the privilege of seeing with the one (perhaps the same) who finds himself in the situation of seeing himself seen? In reality, these two situations do not match up at all, as if correlative and simply inverted operations were involved. First of all because when I see, I do not see that I see (unlike touch, where I see that I feel, or hearing, where I understand that I produce a sound); thus, since I do not see myself while seeing, even less can I see that someone is seeing me, or see myself seen. But there is more. For, even if I see another’s gaze, I do not see myself seen by him, because his gaze remains strictly speaking invisible (it shows nothing); thus, in addition to the fact that the empty gaze of the blind person does not allow me to see myself seen (instead I see that he does not see me), neither the distracted gaze of the dreamer seeing something else, so to speak, through me, nor that of the passerby hardly

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40 It is preferable to translate *videri* by *seeing oneself seen* rather than by *being seen*, for two reasons: first, in order not to overload from the outset a problem of (phenomenological) vision with a problem of being (logical and ontological); and next so as to retain the basic ambiguity of *videri*, which functions not only as a passive of *videre*, but also as a means: it appears to me that . . . it seems to me that someone sees me.

41 “Vidit se ipsum non videt, licet in alio, quod videt, se videre attingat” (Sight does not see itself, although it comes to be aware of itself in the other which it sees) (De Non-Alibi, XXIII, in Philosophisch-Theologisch Schriften, 2:546; Hopkins, 1157). Here Nicholas of Cusa is writing in the margins of Plato, *Alcibiades* 153a–b. See the astute remarks of Magnard, “Voir c’est être vu: Le chiasme de la vision.”
seeing me move across his visual ray, nor that of the seller seeking to seduce a buyer—none among these sees me and gives me the certainty of seeing myself seen. Thus most of the time, and at first glance, I see without ever seeing myself see, or seeing myself seen. In the experience of finite vision, that of men, I pass, seeing but invisible, among the gazes that see that which I do not see, especially me myself. And furthermore, I most often seek, with many precautions and stratagems, to see without having myself, who sees, seen. This approach does not imply that I have become a spy, or that I work for a private detective or am employed by the Fiat Lux Agency. 42 It is enough that I seek to protect my private life, that I inform myself about the society around me, that I prepare all my moves by surrounding myself with the greatest possible quantity of information; in short, that I never expose myself uselessly to the inquisitions of other social actors, or to their vision, perceived as a threat, whether imagined or real.

I see, but I see without making myself seen. I do not dream so much of becoming all-seeing as I fear becoming the universally visible, naked, seen and known by all. Thus I desire to remain seeing without others being able to see me see—I desire to become a voyeur. For, in order to accept without reservation or fear that others see me, it should be necessary to assure myself first of all that there are many gazes that truly direct their attention to me (which the experience of social life constantly contradicts) and above all that these gazes seeing me wish me well, that they “have me in their good books,” in short that they are benevolent toward me—that they cast a good eye over me. But for that outcome, it would be necessary that the aporia of the access to the other already be resolved. In order to see myself seen, in order to accept and tolerate seeing myself seen, much more is necessary than reversing videre into a videri. Two conditions would have to be satisfied: that there be alter egos and that they love me.

V. THE INACCESSIBILITY OF THE OTHER: ONLY THE OBJECT IS VISIBLE

These conditions are not fulfilled straightaway, nor most of the time. Not for lack of subjective good will, but because the aporia of the other is inscribed through the necessity of the concept within modern metaphysics. Indeed, the establishment of methodical knowledge grounded in reason restricted Descartes to the possibility of considering other men, potential others, only as objects, ruled by the same conditions of visibility as the things of the world raised “to the standards of reason.” 43 Thus, after having dem-

42 [Translator’s note: The Fiat Lux Agency is the headquarters of the hardboiled detective Nestor Burma, featured in Léo Malet’s series of crime novels Les Nouveaux Mystères de Paris.] 43 René Descartes, Discours de la méthode, in Oeuvres de Descartes, ed. Ch. Adam and P. Tannery (1908; repr., Paris: Vrin/CNRS, 1966), VI:4 (subsequent citations from this work will be abbreviated “AT” followed by the volume number in Roman numerals and, in Arabic numerals, the page number), and The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1:117.
onstrated that the empirical thing (for instance, a piece of wax) could retain its permanent self-identity beneath the different appearances imposed on it by sensible variations only on the condition of being reduced to what the inspectio mentis could conceive of it, he extended the same conclusion to “men”: “Unde concluderem statim: ceram ergo visione oculi, non solius mentis inspectione, cognoscis; nisi jam forte resespexissem ex fenestra homines in platea transeuntes, quos etiam ipsos non minus usitate quam ceram dico me videre. Quid autem video praeter pileos et vestes, sub quibus latere possent automata? Sed judico homines esse. Atque ita id quod putabam me videre oculis, sola judicandi facultate, quae in mente mea est, comprehendo” (But then if I look out of the window and see men crossing the square, as I just happen to have done, I normally say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax. Yet do I see any more than hats and coats which could conceal automatons? I judge that they are men. And so something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgement which is in my mind). To see an other [autrui], it is not enough to see a quasi-other [quasi-autre] or a quasi-alter ego. I believe I am seeing an other, but in fact I judge his identity indirectly, without seeing him directly. What I in fact see—coats and hats moving about beneath my gaze in the street below—not only offers to my gaze mere theater costumes that I can interpret freely either as men or as automatons, but functions like the visible sketches of a phenomenon that remains finally at first approach invisible. And in fact, in the other, all that which could qualify him as a genuine alter ego, an ego with the same status as I (his expression, his intentions, his meanings)—none of that ever appears as such, but contributes only a sum of appearances, still to be interpreted. And, in this interpretation, only my ego decides if this is a man or not, just as it decides about every other object.

From this epistemological necessity, Pascal drew the unavoidable ethical consequence: even I, who am the only ego as far as I think and I see, nevertheless become, when the issue is seeing myself seen, no longer an ego, but an object constituted as visible by another ego, who in his turn becomes perfectly invisible: “A man goes to the window to see the people

44 René Descartes, Meditatio II, AT VII, 32, lines 4–12, and The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2:21 (for a detailed commentary on this passage, see my analysis in Questions Cartesiennes [Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1991], chap. 6). This is confirmed by this additional astonishing declaration: “I pay no more attention to the people I see there than I would to the trees in your woods or the animals that browse there” (Descartes to Balzac, May 5, 1631, AT I, 205; The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kennedy [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 3:31, translation modified). Husserl thoroughly explored the impossibility in principle of attaining immediately to the phenomenality of the other man as other and thus the necessity of not approaching him straightway except as an object. See Cartesian Meditations, §50, in Edmund Husserl, Gesammelte Werke (Husserliana), ed. Walter Biemel (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954– ), I, 139.
passing by; if I pass by, can I say he went there to see me? No, for he is not thinking of me in particular. But what about a person who loves someone for the sake of her beauty; does he love her? No, for smallpox, which will destroy beauty without destroying the person, will put an end to his love for her.” Here there is no ego that is seen, but only a new object (for only the object can be seen, and every seeing makes that which it sees its object); no ego can see itself, precisely because it sees; and in seeing, it must remain out of view, become invisible. From now on, in order to see more than an object in me and of me, an ego must operate by analogy, apperception, empathy, transference, and so on, all operations that are not seen and do not make a new phenomenon directly visible. Thus I never see the Other as an other me, an other ego, for I see of it only what one can see: the characteristics of a visible object (form, space, quantities, time, etc.). In order to reach the “person” it would be necessary to add judgment, an inspexitio mentis, a particular intention, and so on; in short, all that which vision cannot reach, nor give. And in turn, when I see myself seen, I do not see myself seen as myself, but as that which one can see of me as an object. And this is why, moreover, I am the first one to be unable to see myself, and the last one to know myself, since I can approach myself only as one of the objects that I know from the outside. I know the other insofar as I do not know him (I do not see him) as such. I am known by the other insofar as he remains unknown (and unseen) as such.

Seeing the other would therefore mean seeing that which makes of him no longer an object, but an other—namely, that he sees like I myself see, without making himself seen. But the fact that I see is not seen, neither by me, nor a fortiori by others. It is undergone through the struggle of consciousnesses seeking to be recognized. Hegel understood this and described it: either I am dead, or I am an object. Dead? Not exactly, for I certainly remain alive if I am the victor. But I was able to become this victor only because I preferred to risk dying as spirit (like the one who sees through judgment, who exercises the inspexitio mentis, who puts into operation the labor and the suffering of the negative), over subsisting as a mere permanent object, without spirit (as a thinking object, a servant or a slave): “And it is only through staking one’s life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the immediate form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing vorhanden present in it, nothing which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is only pure being-for-itself.” For seeing only allows the seeing of objects: “the unessen-

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tial consciousness [the servant] is for the lord the object \(\text{der Gegenstand}\).”\(^{47}\) Without this passage and this risk of the negative, without the true moment of consciousness, we (I and the other) remain “for each other like ordinary objects \(\text{gemeiner Gegenstände}\).”\(^{48}\) The difficulty of being seen (as such, not as an object, an empirical me) consists first of all in the difficulty of being seen by an other, who likewise is not an object, an empirical me constituted as such by me (who alone is to assume the function of transcendental \(I\)).

As a good commentator on this point, Sartre clearly summed up the aporia of the objectifying vision, which is necessarily objectifying of the other: “But the Other is still an object for me.”\(^{49}\) How do we get past this objectification, which conceals the other from me at the very moment of presenting him to me, concealing him from me all the more as it presents him to me in this way? How do we avoid objectifying that which is subject to vision (whether it is me or an other than me)? “My apprehension of the Other in the world as probably being a man refers to my permanent possibility of being-seen-by-him; that is, to the permanent possibility that a subject who sees me may be substituted for the object seen by me. ‘Being-seen-by-the-Other’ is the truth of ‘seeing-the-Other’.”\(^{50}\) We find in Sartre the coincidence of \textit{videre} with \textit{videri}, as we already saw in Nicholas of Cusa, with a fundamental difference: for Cusanus, the equivalence allows access to the other (Christ as icon), while for Sartre it forbids seeing anything more than an object. To the question, “What does being seen mean for me?”\(^{51}\) Sartre can answer only with the plain affirmation of objectity: “My gaze simply manifests a relation in the midst of the world, a relation of myself-as-object to the object-gazed-at”;\(^{52}\) and he can do no better, because “if in the upsurge of the Other’s gaze, I paid attention to the gaze or to the Other, this could be only as to objects, for attention is an intentional direction toward objects.”\(^{53}\) Indeed, if one sets down that every gaze is intentional, and that every intentionality is of an object, then it follows that every gaze on the Other (coming from me) or on me (coming from the Other) will reach neither the Other, nor me, but objects. “In short there are two authentic attitudes: that by which I recognize the Other as the subject through whom I get my objectity—this is shame; and that by which I apprehend myself as the free object by which the Other gets his being-other—this is arrogance \([\text{l’orgueil}]\) or the affirmation of my freedom confronting the Other-as-

\(^{47}\) Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, 116; \textit{Phänomenologie des Geistes}, 144.

\(^{48}\) Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, 113; \textit{Phänomenologie des Geistes}, 143.


\(^{50}\) Sartre, \textit{L’être et le néant}, 296; \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 345.

\(^{51}\) Sartre, \textit{L’être et le néant}, 298; \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 347.

\(^{52}\) Sartre, \textit{L’être et le néant}, 305; \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 356 (mod.).

\(^{53}\) Sartre, \textit{L’être et le néant}, 308; \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 359 (mod.).
Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen

object.\textsuperscript{54} Within the horizon of the object (better named by Sartre objectivity), the only two possible visions of the one (I, ego) and of the other (the other) are defined as arrogance (seeing the other as an object) or shame (being seen myself as an object).

What other gaze would allow for seeing and being seen without finding oneself within the horizon of the object? What other mode of seeing would not immediately and necessarily transform (by virtue of the objectifying character of intentionality) the one who sees \textit{[le voyant]}, me (the ego), or the other (the alter ego), into a voyeur?\textsuperscript{55} In order to be able to see oneself seen as such, and not make oneself seen as an object, it would thus be necessary to change horizons, which means, exit from the horizon of objectivity, and thus escape from the necessarily objectifying gaze. But what evasion will allow for such an exodus? For, if nothing less than changing horizons is necessary, it will have to happen right away, at once, without transition or mediation. It is because it dreads or is unaware of this radicality that contemporary thought strains to open access to the other as such.

VI. THE NONOBJECTIFYING ICON

And it is on the contrary because Nicholas of Cusa practiced and confronted this radicality that he conceived the access to God and, by transposition, could be able to clear away the aporia that blocks our access to the other. In other words, the radical decisions undertaken in order to open the \textit{visio Dei} could allow the opening of the vision of the other, with the case of the \textit{icona Dei} becoming a model for envisaging the face of the other. It makes sense, then, to pinpoint the decisions taken by Nicholas of Cusa regarding the gaze of God and to measure whether and to what extent they can be transposed \textit{in view of} the gaze of the other. These decisions, which concern all the \textit{visus Dei}, are three in number: (1) as icon, the seen face of God (\textit{visus Dei}) does not allow itself to be objectified; (2) as icon, God’s gaze (\textit{visus eiconae}) does not objectify but renders to each his own visibility, individualizes him, and in this way makes itself visible; and (3) these two movements surpassing objectivity through the \textit{visus Dei} draw their possi-

\textsuperscript{54} Sartre, \textit{L'être et le néant}, 330; \textit{Being and Nothingness}, 386 (mod.).

\textsuperscript{55} In a sense no one has posed this question—how to pass from the other as an intentional object to the other as an alter ego?—better than Husserl. But his answer remains limited by two difficulties: (a) The definitive appresentation of the other (\textit{Cartesianische Meditationen}, §50) can only be surmounted by a suite of indirect operations: the “apperceptive transfer (\textit{apperzeptive Übertragung}),” “pairing” (\textit{Paarung}, §51), spatial transfer (§54), the analogy of the body of flesh (§55) and empathy (\textit{Einfühlung}); but these all presuppose what they are supposed to allow: access to the other. (b) Logically, the real answer comes not from the second term (the other), but from a third term, the known object, such as it results from an intersubjective constitution (§§56ff.). In other words, the horizon of objectivity remains unsurpassable, and, if we are able to comprehend there our community of objects constituted in common with the other, we nevertheless can never see the other within that horizon otherwise than as an object.
bility only from the fact that, for God, seeing is equivalent to loving (videre tuum est amare): while the gaze of the natural attitude (ours) occupies itself first with seeing without any concern for loving, at the risk of not loving in order better to possess [pour mieux regarder], God sees insofar as he loves, and to the extent that he loves—that is to say, he sees universally, because he loves infinitely.

Let’s consider the first decision—as icon, the face of God is not objectified. Indeed it makes sense to go back to the phenomenality of the icon, which properly always proceeds from the gaze, but a gaze that is overturned: no longer the result of the aim of an ego (which sometimes aims at a maximum object, as in the case of an idol), but the impact of an aim that considers me and rests itself on me. Thus the visio Dei signifies, as we have seen, first and foremost God’s vision, much more than our vision of God. Above all, the visus eiconae always indicates the gaze coming from the iconic image and allowing for seeing precisely by seeing oneself seen by Christ: “Et si figendo obtutum in eiconam [the gaze of the man on the image] ambulabit de occasu ad orientem, comperiet continue visum eiconae [the gaze coming from God] secum pergere” (Even if while fixing his gaze on the icon, a brother walks from west to east, he will discover that the icon’s gaze continuously follows him). This prior gaze, which renders every other gaze (all our gazes) posterior and definitively derived, does not constitute an attribute of God (or of the other), but his fund and his center: “visus tuus, qui est tua essentia.” God (or the other) sees as such, not only in the sense of the old etymology that assimilates divinity to vision (“visus tuus, qui est theos”), but because he manifests himself or reveals himself in so very far as he sees. In other terms, radical alterity (that of God, and thus also that of the other) does not disclose itself in the difference between regions of the visible under the aim of a common gaze, but through the distance between the regions of the visible (which see themselves seen), on the one hand, and, on the other, the invisible insistence of the other gaze, which envisages. A decisive consequence follows: concerning God, there is nothing other to see than his gaze and his aim: “Visus tuus, Domine, est facies tua” (The aim of your gaze, Lord, is the only face that you can ever show). And this gaze, by definition and phenomenal necessity, cannot be

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56 De visione Dei, IV, §10, 14.
57 To the question of an exit from the horizon of objectivity, we have a simpler answer at our disposal: the visio Dei, as experience and practice of the eicona Dei, belongs precisely, as icon, to the saturated phenomenon, by opposition to every poor or common law phenomenon or object (see Marion, Being Given, §21 and §23, and In Excess, throughout). But this answer is still too formal to meet the argument.
58 And, going forward, this gaze does not let him go: “similiter eum non deseret” (De visione Dei, Praefatio, §3, 6; Bond, 236).
59 De visione Dei, IX, §32 and §35, 31, 33; Bond, 249, 250.
60 Ibid., VIII, §31, 31; Bond, 249 (see n. 27 above).
61 Ibid., VI, §19, 21; Bond, 243 (mod.).
seen as the object of a spectacle. The gaze remains invisible and thus delivers the truth of his invisible face: "veritatem faciei tuae invisibilem." 62

The icon’s gaze indeed weighs on me, but not as it would crush an object. Rather it weighs on me because it calls me and it follows me (like a follow spot light in the theater illuminates the main actor). Moreover, this is how to understand divine pro-vidence, since indeed "visio tua providentia est." 63

This iconic gaze in fact gives the very characteristics of the other: unforeseeable because it is the first to come forth, prior to or independent of my aim, this gaze also holds me under its guard and protects me only because it warns me; and (if we restrict ourselves to a finite other) it could threaten me, knowing a truth about me that perhaps I hide from myself or am simply unaware of. We will not be surprised, then, that this gaze and this aim ask for a response, a free acceptance: “Sed tam nobilis es, Deus meus, ut velis in libertate esse rationalium animerarum te diligere vel non” (But you are so magnanimous, my God, that you will for rational souls to be free to love you or not to love you). 64 In fact, to see this invisible gaze can mean only to respond to it, since once there is nothing to see on the face of God but his gaze, it follows that this gaze, which cannot show anything, can only make itself noticed by speaking: “Et occurrit mihi, Domine, quod visus tuus loquatur; nam non est aliud loqui tum quam videre tum” (The thought occurs to me, O Lord, that your gaze speaks, for your speaking is not other than your seeing). 65 This extraordinary anticipation of the formulas of Levinas nevertheless limits itself, in a sense, to drawing out all of the consequences contained in a formula of St. Paul (in Romans 4:17): “vocas ad esse quae non sunt” ([the God] who calls into existence the things that are not). 66 On these terms, the visio Dei is freed from the horizon of objectity and no one can or should be able, strictly speaking, to idolize it.

The second decision remains: as icon, God’s gaze (visus eiconae) does not objectify but renders to each one his proper visibility. For the metaphysical objection still remains alive: how would I not become an object under God’s (or the other’s) gaze? Or put another way: supposing that the icon, which gazes at me, escapes from the horizon of objectity, what guarantee is there that I, in having its gaze weigh on me, will not be buried ever deeper in objectivity by this icon as it frees itself? How can I, remaining under a gaze

62 Ibid., VI, §17, 20; Bond, 243.
63 Ibid., VIII, §28, 28; Bond, 248: “your vision is your providence.” Providence in fact means consideration [prévenance] and anticipation, that of the father who watches for the return of his son (evoked in the same text): prior paternus oculus, the preceding gaze of the father, who anticipates and sees further.
64 Ibid., XVIII, §80, 63–64; Bond, 271.
65 Ibid., X, §38, 35; Bond, 252; emphasis added.
66 Ibid., X, §40, 37; Bond, 253. See “in se nihil est et nihil mansisset, si tu non vocasses ipsum de nihilo” (that which in itself is nothing and would have remained nothing had you not called it forth out of nothing) (De visione Dei, V, §14, 18; Bond, 241); and: “Vocare enim ad esse, quae non sunt, est communicare esse nihilo” (To call into being things which are not is to communicate being to nothing) (De visione Dei, XII, §49, 43; Bond, 257).
(even the nonobjectifiable gaze of an icon), avoid finding myself reduced to the dishonorable rank of an object (of a me, with ego)? This danger makes itself all the more pressing in that it has to do not with the gaze of an other, a mere alter ego, but that of an infinite other (God): his specular gaze (oculus specularis), which comprehends “omnium species,” could, as “forma formarum,” exert itself as a perfect panopticon, from which the objectification of a divine Big Brother would rule. With the overturning of videre into videri, wouldn’t we simply meet up again with the metaphysical equivalence fixed by Berkeley on behalf of the metaphysical system of ontology, under the famous terms Existence is percipi or percipere?69

We must not answer the question by examining only the icon in general; first of all, because the icon never goes into action in general, since it exerts a gaze and there is no gaze in general, but always an individualizing and individualized gaze—to the point that it alone probably attains individualization. Moreover, here, we are talking about the icon of Christ. Now, this icon is not limited to putting into action an all-seeing gaze in general, that would see all its spectators; Nicholas of Cusa acknowledges in it a gaze that is more complete and complex than this—a gaze that sees all and at the same time each one: “admirabimini, quomodo hoc fieri possit, quod omnes et singulos simul respiciat” (you will marvel at how it is possible that the face looks on all and each one of you at the same time).70 He insists here: “Sic quidem ades omnibus et singulis, sicut ipsis omnibus et singulis adest esse, sine quo non possunt esse” (Indeed, you are present to all and to each, just as being, without which they cannot exist),71 “unico intuitu omnia simul et singulariter discernas” (with one glance, you discern [all things] and each individual thing at one and the same time).72 In the field of objectivity (and thus of discrete quantity) the rule seems to be that we either see everyone or we see each one in particular. However, in the case of God (and probably of the other, too), seeing everyone does not contradict seeing each one, for the issue is no longer that of quantity, nor of number or measure. Here, seeing no longer aims at regarding, but at safeguarding—making the one toward whom the gaze is extended feel that he is taken into consideration as the unique

67 Ibid., VIII, §30, 30; Bond, 249.
68 Ibid., XV, §63, 53; Bond, 264.
70 De visione Dei, Praefatio, §3, 5; Bond, 256; emphasis added.
71 Ibid., IV, §9, 13; Bond, 239.
72 Ibid., VIII, §29, 29; Bond, 248. “Admiror, Domine, postquam tu simul omnes et singulos respicias, uti haec etiam picta figurat imago, quam intueor, quomodo coincidat in virtute tua visiva universale cum singulari” (You look on all and each together, even as does this painted image that I contemplate, and so I marvel, O Lord, at how in your visual faculty the universal coincides with the particular) (De visione Dei, IX, §32, 31; Bond, 249). And “universalis pater pariter et singularis” (equally universal and individual father) (De visione Dei, VII, §27, 28; Bond, 247); or: “tunc clare experior, quod tu simul omnia vides et singula” (I experience clearly that you see all things and each thing together) (De visione Dei, X, §38, 35; Bond, 252).
beloved (for love wills unicity as much as it does eternity). Under this safeguarding ‘regard’ (gaze), which places him under the guard of the icon, each and every one experiences himself as unique: “quisque vestrum experietur, ex quocumque loco eandem [namely, icona] inspexerit, se quasi solum per eam videri” (and each of you will experience that from whatever place one observes it [the icon] the face will seem to regard him alone). The one who sees himself seen sees himself not only as the uniquely viewed by God’s aim, but also as the one preferred by his attention, before every other other: “Ita enim tu absolutum esse omnium ades cunctis, quasi non sit tibi cura de quoquam alio. . . . Ita enim tu, Domine, intueris quodlibet, quod est, ut non posit concipi per omne id, quod est, te aliam curam habere, quam ut id solum sit meliori modo, quo esse potest, atque quod omnia alia, quae sunt, ad hoc solum sint, ut serviant ad id, quod illud sit optime, quod tu respicis” (For thus you, who are the absolute being of all, are present to all as if you had concern for no other. . . . For you, Lord, so look on anything that exists that no existing thing can conceive that you have any other care but that it alone exist in the best manner possible for it and that all other existing things exist only for the purpose of serving the best state of the one which you are beholding). We might be tempted to denounce in this passage the sacrilegious importation, so to speak, of the egocentrism of the ego (and in fact of every creature), right into divine charity—unless it is about something else entirely.

First of all, it is about God’s privilege, about the propriety of the visus eiconae to make coincide within itself that which is opposed in our use of the gaze—the globality of apprehension and the focalization of attention, universal love and particular love. But the issue here is not only a case of the coincidence of opposites (even if it is one such instance that we have the least difficulty in conceiving); at stake above all is an absolutely singular characteristic of the love that comes from God, and which common understanding disfigures into a predestination of some to the detriment of many. Indeed, unlike us, God does not love following an arbitrary election of certain individuals (or even of me alone) to the exclusion of others (or

73 Ibid., Praefatio, §3, 5; Bond, 236; emphasis added. And also “videt, quod ita diligenter curam agit cuiuslibet quasi de solo eo, qui experitur se videri, et nullo alio curet, adeo quod etiam concipi nequeat per unum, quem respicit, quod curam aliterius agat” (He will see that it takes diligent care of each, just as if it cared only for the one on whom its gaze seems to rest and for no other, and to such an extent that the one whom it regards cannot conceive that it should care for another) (De visione Dei, Praefatio, §4, 6; Bond, 236).

74 Ibid., IV, §9, 13, 14; Bond, 239. See: “Nequaquam, Domine, me concipere sinis quacumqueimaginione, quod tu, Domine, aliud a me plus me diligas, cum me solum visus tuus non deserat” (By no imagining, Lord, do you allow me to conceive that you love anything other than me more than me, for it is I alone that your gaze does not abandon) (De visione Dei, IV, §9, 14; Bond, 239). And “quia tu me continua visione amplecteris, quando amorem meum ad te solum converto, quia tu, qui caritas es, ad me solum es conversus” (You hold me in your constant vision, and when I direct my love to you alone because you, who are love, are turned toward me alone) (De visione Dei, IV, §11, 15; Bond, 240).
even all the others); we must choose our beloveds (like so many “charity cases”) among whom to share out our penury of love; but God loves infinitely (absolutely) each one (in particular) in such a way that each experiences the feeling of becoming the privileged beloved, tangentially the only one; I experience this feeling under God’s safeguarding gaze and I must experience it since I am experiencing myself finally seen as such, finally completely individualized. What theoretical knowledge never succeeds in accomplishing is accomplished by the visus eiconae by giving me the certainty of being loved absolutely for myself, of receiving not only filiation, but the filiation of an only son, of enjoying the privilege of identifying myself with the Son’s identity, in whom the Father takes delight. And each one of the others, for example each of the monks of Tegernsee, can and must experience, through the praxis of the iconic gaze, becoming himself because he sees himself seen as the only son in the Son. Thus, under the icon’s gaze, I finally enjoy myself because for the first time I become who I am. And if I thus receive the ultimate individualization—if I discover myself as the unique and preferred one in this sense—then I have already escaped the horizon of objectivity.

And, because the iconic gaze does not possess what it sees, it succeeds in rendering it possible and thus existent: “Apparuiisti deinde mihi ut ab omnibus visibilis, quia in tantum res est, in quantum tu eam vides, et ipsa non esset actu, nisi te videret. Visio enim praestat esse, quia est essentia tua” (Later you appeared to me as visible by all, for a thing exists only as you see it, and it would not actually exist unless it saw you. For your vision confers being, since your vision is your essence).75 The iconic gaze does not see a being that is already there, awaiting in its being a gaze to come visit it; here the being is precisely insofar as it sees itself seen; it receives itself from the simple fact of showing itself to be seen: “Nihil est, quod visus tuus non vident” (Nothing is which your sight does not see).76 Through the crossing of two gazes, the gazing gazed at and the gazed at gazing, that which is not God nor of the same manner as God is kept alive: “Ab omnibus creaturis es visibilis et omnes vides; in eo enim, quod omnes vides, videris ab omnibus. Aliter enim esse non possunt creaturae, quia visione tua sunt; quod si te non viderent videntem, a te non caperent esse” (You are visible by all creatures and you see all. In that you see all you are seen by all. For otherwise creatures cannot exist since they exist by your vision. If they did not see you who see, they would not receive being from you).77 Thus I

75 Ibid., XII, §47, 41; Bond, 256; which continues: “Sic, Deus meus, es invisibilis pariter ac visibilis. Invisibilis es, uti tu es, visibilis es, uti creatura es, quae in tantum est, in quantum te videt” (Thus, my God, you are equally invisible and visible. As you are, you are invisible; as the creature is, which exists only insofar as the creature sees you, you are visible).
76 Ibid., IX, §37, 35; Bond, 252 (mod.).
77 Ibid., X, §40, 36; Bond, 253.
remain only by staying under the protection of the gaze of God (and of the other) and, under this safeguard, I am not an object. This is also why, moreover, I no longer have to claim for myself an ego: “In tantum enim sum, in quantum tu mecum es; et cum videre tuum sit esse tuum, ideo ego sum, quia tu me respicis, et si a me vultum tuum subtraxeris, nequaquam subsistam” (I exist only insomuch as you are with me. And since your seeing is your being, therefore, because you regard me, I am, and if you remove your face from me, I will cease to be).78 Neither object nor ego (subject), I receive myself from that through which (or through whom) I see myself seen. Under the visus eiconae, neither I nor my brothers become objects; instead, each and every one of us sees ourselves seen as a unique and privileged son.

VII. THE REGARDING GAZE SAFEGUARDS, THE AIM LOVES

And yet this response—nothing is safe unless it sees itself seen by the icon of God—seemingly fails to dispel every ambiguity; for, after all, one could read here the very principle of absolute power, namely, that no one is genuinely recognized as present in its court if he does not enjoy a sovereign gaze.

In fact, however, this objection does not make much sense, because it presupposes what precisely must be proved: that the sovereign reigns and gazes in order better to guard and keep. Now, the first two movements beyond objectivity through the visus Dei draw their possibility from the third: that, for God, seeing is equivalent to loving. In other words, when the eicona Dei envisages, its gaze safeguards. It safeguards by virtue of its privilege, which for us is unthinkable: it loves. “Et quoniam ibi oculus ubi amor, tunc te me diligere experior, quia oculi tui sunt super me servulum tuum attentissimi. Domine, videre tuum est amare” (And since the eye is there wherever love is, I experience that you love me because your eyes rest most attentively on me, your humble servant. Your seeing, Lord, is your loving).79

Let us understand clearly: the eye is found, is discovered, and exerts itself there where love is, and not the contrary; the eye does not develop itself in love, as if it were making love (like the seducer’s eye, which gazes in order to make a grab and ends up by possessing), but rather it is love that opens the eyes, that makes (the) eyes and allows what the eye sees to see itself loved, and therefore to see itself lovable in the gaze that loves it. In God, love

78 Ibid., IV, §10, 14; Bond, 240. This formula could seem to refute in advance Descartes’s cogito; I am not because I think (myself), but because I find myself seen (and therefore thought) by another. But for one detail: the ego of the cogito also finds itself seen or under the gaze of another: “aliquis Deus, vel quocunque nomine illum vocem” (a God, or whatever I may call him) (Meditatio II, AT VII, 24; The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, 2:16).
79 De visione Dei, IV, §10, 14; Bond, 239; emphasis added; and which continues: “visus tuus est bonitas illa maxima” (your gaze is that maximum goodness) (ibid.; Bond, 240).
alone sees (and it sees everything): “Amare tuum est videre tuum. Paternitas tua est visio” (Your loving is your seeing. Your fatherhood is your vision). And, seeing in order to allow each thing to see itself seen, he thus makes it appear: “Non est videre tuum nisi vivificare, nisi dulcissimum amorem tui continue immittere” (Your seeing is nothing other than your bringing to life, nothing other than your continuously imparting your sweetest love). Thus, for the icon, or in other words for the antecedent gaze of God on me, intentionality does not aim at an object, nor anything else in the mode of objectivity; indeed, when intentionality arises first and radically from God, it takes the figure, for us brand new, for him originary, of love, and it always sights a beloved, who then can become a lover. God sees and aims only in loving: “tu . . . quia amor amans, nihil odire potes” (you . . . can hate nothing because you are the love that loves). Herein lies the most radical difference, first, between phenomenology and theology, and next between being seen by an other in the mode of the ego and being seen by an other in the mode of the icon of God: the intentionality does not end up in objectivity, or aim at an object, but puts love into action and sights a beloved, who can in turn become a lover.

The intentionality of the icon thus operates from the outset in terms of what I have elsewhere thematized as the reduction to givenness and the erotic reduction—it aims (and constitutes) only insofar as it loves. And this is why, according to Nicholas of Cusa, by passing from the intentionality of objectivity to the intentionality of love, Jesus pierces through the vision of the other limited to his accidents, to go as far as the vision of the other (or, as it happens, of me) in his final essence as lover: “Videbas igitur, Ihesu, oculo humano accidentia visibilia, sed visu divino absoluto rerum substantiam. Nemo umquam in carne constitutus praeter te, Ihesu, substantiam vidit aut rerum quiditatem” (Therefore with your human eye, O Jesus, you saw the visible accidents, but with your divine and absolute sight you saw the substance of things. No one constituted in flesh, except you, O Jesus, ever perceived the substance or quiddity of things).

Nicholas of Cusa recognizes and takes stock of the proper actions of this intrinsically loving gaze. The intentionally erotic gaze takes pity on the other, rather than power over him: “Quando autem ad te revertitur [the prodigal son of Luke 15], sine mora tu ei occurris, et antequam te respiciat, tu paterno affectu in eum oculos misericordiae inicis. Nec est aliud tuum miseri quam tuum videre” (Yet as soon as the sinner returns to you, without delay you hurry to meet the sinner, and before the sinner sees you, you cast your eyes of mercy on the sinner in parental affection. For with

80 Ibid., VIII, §27, 28; Bond, 247.
81 Ibid., IV, §12, 16; Bond, 240.
82 Ibid., XVIII, §80, 63; Bond, 270–71.
83 Ibid., XXII, §97, 76; Bond, 279; emphasis added. Contrary to the other’s view of my attributes, which lack my substance, as Pascal pointed out (see n. 45 above).
you having mercy is no different than seeing).  

He follows what he loves, like a follow spot light follows an actor that it seeks to make visible. The safeguarding gaze acts in the name and to the benefit of the one that it loves: “Tu igitur es Deus meus, qui omnia vides, et videre tuum est operari” (You, therefore, are my God, who sees everything, and your seeing is your working). And thus, “videre tuum est creare tuum” (your seeing is your creating). To the point where, finally, because “God is love” and God loves by seeing what he loves and makes to be insofar as he sees it (and sees it seeing the one who loves it), God consists only in this erotic gaze: “Visus tuus, Domine, est essentia tua” (Your sight, Lord, is your essence).

The loving aim of the gaze necessarily results in a trinitarian unfolding. For if the gaze does not objectify or allow itself to be measured objectively, but gives itself and is received, we of course must attribute it to the icon of Christ; and for that very reason, we must lead its play back to the Trinity, which is to say, we must recognize, in the crossing of gazes, the final gaze, the person of the Spirit: “A posse in infinitum amare et posse in infinitum amari oritur amoris nexus infinitus ipsius infiniti amantis et infiniti amabilis” (From the power to love infinitely and the power to be loved infinitely arises an infinite bond of love between the infinite lover and the infinite lovable). And this is why the “brothers” would not be able to trust one another if they did not first regard one another within a safeguarding gaze. Or in other words, if they did not first find themselves within the site and the praxis of the eicona Dei, where seeing oneself seen as the unique beloved, the preferred son in the only Son, can alone be experienced.

84 De visione Dei, V, §15, 18; Bond, 242, which concludes, “Videre tuum est movere tuum” (Moreover, your seeing is your moving).
85 Ibid., V, §16, 19; Bond, 242.
86 Ibid., XII, §49, 42; Bond, 257. See “videre tuum est causare” (Your seeing is causing). Ibid. VIII, §29, 29; Bond, 248.
87 Ibid., IX, §32, 31; Bond, 250.
88 Ibid., XVII, §71, 58; Bond, 267.
89 The credere of the Praefatio, §3, 6 (Bond, 236) (underscored by de Certeau) finds its filial fulfillment in the se confidere [verbo magistri] of XXIV, §112, 85 (Bond, 286).
90 De visione Dei, XXV, §117, 88; Bond, 288.