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CHAPTER 11

Through a Clock Darkly

The Time of the Eye in Nicholas of Cusa's *De visione Dei*

Sean Hannan

At 5:15 p.m. (Central Daylight Time) on Friday, May 15, 2015, Jean-Luc Marion delivered the Morimichi Watanabe Lecture in Kalamazoo, Michigan.[1] Before the audience, which included many members of the American Cusanus Society, Marion presented a phenomenological reading of the icon in Nicholas of Cusa's *De visione Dei*. When, in 1453, Cusanus sent this treatise to some monks at Tegernsee who were interested in the theory and practice of mystical theology, he included a 'Veronica' painting of the face of Jesus with all-seeing eyes.[2] This was a fateful inclusion, insofar as the icon has become an object of such fascination that it risks eclipsing the

[1] In reconstructing his argument, I rely upon the published version: Jean Luc Marion, "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen: Nicholas of Cusa's Contribution in *De visione Dei*," trans. Stephen E. Lewis, *Journal of Religion* 96, no. 3 (2016), 305–331.

[2] The term 'Veronica' is used here to denote an image of the face of Jesus, crafted in the spirit of the legend about Veronica bearing a veil with the imprint of Christ's visage on it. On the art-historical context of such images, see Ewa Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth: History, Symbolism, and Structure of a 'True' Image* (Oxford: 1991), as well as Lasse Hodne, "Omnivoyance and Omnipresence: Word and Vision according to Nicholas of Cusa and Jan van Eyck," *Icon* 6 (2013), 237–246.

text it was meant to supplement. As David Albertson has demonstrated, the debate surrounding this icon animates philosophical disputation even today.[3] Marion's phenomenological interpretation of iconicity can itself be framed in response to Emmanuel Falque's claim that what is at stake in *De visione Dei* is not the theological category of the icon, but the much broader aesthetic field of painting.[4]

Yet, as Donald F. Duclow has argued, Cusanus' painting must be viewed as part of a larger tapestry of images. Alongside the icon, we can identify the mirror and the clock, as well as the wall upon which they all hang.[5] The first three appear to occasion in us parallel forms of temporal experience: the eyes of the icon see us before we see them; the mirror reflects our likeness before we see ourselves in it; the clock measures out the time of our lives before we finish living them. The wall, however, symbolizes the simultaneous contradiction of what Cusanus calls the coincidence of opposites.[6] It is the boundary between a finite realm where words like "before" and "after" make sense and a divine infinity that transcends such terms.

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[3] David Albertson, "Before the Icon: The Figural Matrix of *De visione Dei*," in *Nicholas of Cusa and Times of Transition: Essays in Honor of Gerald Christianson*, ed. Thomas M. Izbicki, Jason Aleksander, and Donald F. Duclow (Leiden: 2019), 262–285.

[4] Emmanuel Falque, "L'omnivoyant: Fraternité et vision de Dieu chez Nicolas de Cues," *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 98, no. 1 (2014), 37–73.

[5] Donald F. Duclow, "Cusanus' Clock: Time and Eternity in *De visione Dei*," *Akten des Forschungskolloquiums vom 8 bis 11 November 2012* (Trier: 2016), 135–146.

[6] On the *coincidentia oppositorum*, see Duclow, "Nicholas of Cusa's Conjectural Neoplatonism," in *Masters of Learned Ignorance: Eriugena, Eckhart, Cusanus* (Burlington: 2006), 229–

Time therefore runs differently along the wall than it does when it comes to the gaze of the icon. For Marion, the temporality of seeing oneself as having already been seen by the icon presumes duration, not the simultaneity of contradiction. It assumes the drawn-out structure of a call and its response. God's eyes call us from beyond time; we respond in time through retrospection. Yet the wall stands fast in the simultaneity of its contradictions. To understand the relationship between the duration of the icon and the simultaneity of the wall, we need to pay closer attention to Cusanus' clock. With Duclow as our guide, we will see that the concept of the clock—which is distinct from the existence of any given clock—is what enables Cusanus to connect the timelessness of God's gaze to the time in which we all recognize each other as having been seen by that same infinite gaze.

1 The Intersubjective Icon

Marion's approach is at once phenomenological and theological. On the one hand, he wants to show that *De visione Dei* answers questions that Nicholas himself would not have thought to ask. A proper understanding of the icon can, for instance, help us grasp some of Marion's own terms of art. On the other hand, Marion suggests that the specifically Christian framework of Cusanus'

244, especially 235–236: "Yet far from abandoning dialectic, Nicholas simply distinguishes between non-contradiction and coincidence as the logics appropriate to reason and intelligence. He clarifies three points: (1) that reason's distinctions apply to finite concepts and creatures; (2) that the creature is not identical to the creator; but (3) that opposites do coincide *within* God. […] But from *de Coniecturis* onwards, Cusanus says that God is *above* the coincidence of opposites, which provides a way toward the vision of God above all opposition and coincidence."

account is more than window-dressing. We cannot simply strip it away in order to unveil a de-contextualized core of rational argumentation. Instead, Marion's reading of Cusanus aims to shed some light on why phenomenology needed to take its theological turn in the first place.

What attracts the phenomenologist to this particular text is the intentional structure of iconicity it brings to the surface. As it turns out, this structure only makes sense if we treat the icon as a theologically determined object, rather than as a painting like any other. When we flip through a catalog of watercolors at auction, our relation to each piece is one of evaluation and substitution: we replace the artworks with their market value and decide whether or not to make a bid. Other paintings, however, might draw us into a relationship of receptivity. An image with all-seeing eyes (*figura cuncta videntis*), for example, occasions in us the feeling that we are being acted upon.[7] This is true of the Veronica, though it is arguably just as true of Roger van der Weyden's fifteenth-century fresco in Brussels, for which the painter's own face might have served as the model of its own *figura cuncta videntis*.[8] But what is different about the Veronica is

[7] Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* (hereafter DVD), *Praefatio*, § 2 (h VI, 5; Bond 235), cited in Marion, "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen," 310. The English translation is taken from Nicholas of Cusa, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. Lawrence H. Bond (Mahwah NJ: 1997), 263. Albertson, "Before the Icon," 268–269, 283–285, argues that the geometrical sense of *figura* sheds the most light on what Cusanus was doing in his account of the icon.

[8] Marion, "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen," 310; Albertson, "Before the Icon," 263, note 4, points (inter alia) to Erwin Panofsky, "'Facies illa Rogeri maximi pictoris,'" in *Late Classical and Medieval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend*, ed. Alfred Neumeyer

that its *figura* "bears the universal gaze of God—in this case, the gaze of Christ as an all-seeing face."[9] Or as Nicholas himself put it: "I see in this painted face an image of infinity."[10] It makes a difference, in other words, whether it is the eyes of Roger van der Weyden or the eyes of Jesus looking back at you.

Marion therefore rejects de-theologized interpretations of Cusanus' account of icons. His primary target is Falque, who reduces the icon to a painting in order to make a broader point about the intersubjectivity involved in our relationship to all-seeing images. While Marion chides Falque for ignoring the sanctity of the icon, he too remains interested in the intersubjective relations involved. Both Marion and Falque are drawing upon the earlier work of Michel de Certeau on intersubjectivity in Cusanus.[11] What all three thinkers join each other in seeing is the fact that, in order to experience the full effect of the Veronica, the Tegernsee monks would have had to rely not just upon God, but also upon each other. Only by way of conversational exchange could they confirm for one another that they had each undergone the same sensation of seeing and being seen at the same time. The infinite gaze of the eyes of Jesus would itself, then, appear to be intersubjectively constituted (or at least intersubjectively verified).

(Princeton: 1955), 392–400; Michael E. Moore, *Nicholas of Cusa and the Kairos of Modernity: Cassirer, Gadamer, Blumenberg* (Santa Barbara: 2013), 31–32, notes 63–64.

[9] Marion, "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen," 310.

[10] DVD 15, § 61 (h VI, 51–52; Bond 263).

[11] Michel de Certeau, "The Gaze of Nicholas of Cusa," trans. Catherine Porter, *Diacritics* 17, no. 3 (Autumn 1987), 2–38.

Cusan intersubjectivity struck Falque as a *fraternité* capable of grounding our experience of the infinite not "in God first of all, but in man or in the other."[12] In sharing with others my sense of the painting's acting upon me and delimiting the finitude of my own gaze, even as it retains its own infinite gaze upon all others, I would be engaging in the collective human act of positing, negotiating, and maybe even overcoming the distinction between the finite and the infinite. I would be encountering that which is divine in humankind, rather than God per se. For Marion, this humanistic reading misses the point. The faith the Tegernsee brethren have in each other is grounded on the firmer foundation of their shared fidelity to the same God. As the eyes of the Son look upon each brother, they invite him first of all into a relationship of filiation under a shared Father. The *fraternité* that emerges out of the brethren's human intersubjectivity is therefore founded upon this participation in divine filiation.[13]

The inescapability of the Son is what leads Marion to dismiss any diminishment of the icon to the status of a painting. Falque's attempt to sever Cusanus from his theological context is tempting, insofar as it would allow us to apply his insights to a broader range of settings. At the

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[12] Falque, "L'Omnivoyant," 65, cited in Marion, "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen," 309.

[13] Marion, "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen," 309, note 11: "Aside from its non-theological character, [Falque's] 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?"

same time, it risks obscuring the fact that the devotional character of the icon matters.[14] While Marion is harsh in his dismissal of Falque, he is correct to note that we could not substitute another painting for the face of Jesus and expect the intentional structure of iconicity to remain the same. As Albertson puts it, “Marion wagers his entire reading” of the text on the argument that “Nicholas’ painting of an all-seeing figure must also be an icon.”[15]

Marion translates this language of iconicity into his own terminology of “the reduction to givenness,” the “erotic reduction,” and the “erotic phenomenon.”[16] Our relationship with the icon is one of receptivity, not objectifying desire. It is a question of love, not lust. The eyes of Jesus look upon us lovingly, picking each of us out as someone beloved and thereby constituting us as a beloved community. “And this is why,” says Marion, “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

[14] Marion, “Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen,” 312, note 23, calls Falque’s reading a “disappointing misinterpretation.”

[15] Albertson, “Before the Icon,” 265.

[16] Marion, “Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen,” 330: “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.”

happens, of me) in his final essence as lover."[17] 1 John 4:16 equated God with love; Augustine told us that we are what we love; Cusanus reminds us that what loves us makes us what we are.[18]

When the brethren at Tegernsee looked at the Veronica, then, they did not see an object. They saw themselves being seen (and loved) by God. They saw themselves as a *fraternité* of finite beings constituted by an infinite gaze. They saw that Jesus had been looking at them before they thought to look for Jesus. Yet this primordiality of divine vision is not predatory. God's eye pre-dates us, but it does not predate us. As Marion writes, "the gaze does not objectify or allow itself to be measured objectively, but gives itself and is received."[19] The objectifying leer seeks to take, whereas the icon's gaze is self-giving. God is not objectifying us, but rather giving us the gift of love that constitutes us as an intersubjective community. What we need to do is learn how to receive that gift by responding to the call of divine vision.

2 Call and Response

It might sound like mixing sensory metaphors to start talking about responding to a call when we are supposed to be describing what it feels like to see oneself being seen. Yet Marion and Cusanus alike appeal to the aural in making sense of the visual. Just as the eyes of God are open before we gaze into them, so God has already spoken before those with ears to hear start listening. Even human speech appears to play a role in our encounter with the eyes of Jesus. As

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[17] Marion, "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen," 330.

[18] Marion, "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen," 331: "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."

[19] Marion, "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen," 331.

de Certeau and Falque and Marion agree, intersubjective communication proved integral to the Tegernsee monks' recognition of themselves as all being seen by the same infinite gaze. Their response to the divine call ran through their responsiveness to one another, as they conversed about their own experiences. But these conversations, whether with God or with fellow members of our beloved community, take time.

Marion's introduction of vocation into his account of vision should be read in conversation with Jean-Louis Chrétien's *The Call and the Response*.[20] For Chrétien, the call is no ambient noise. It is, as Bruce Ellis Benson phrased it, a "call that wounds."[21] Receptivity is written into the rhythm of divine vocation. Our speech is best understood not as spontaneous self-expression, but as a response to this antecedent wound. "We speak only for having been called, called by what there is to say," writes Chrétien, "and yet we learn and hear what there is to say only in speech itself."[22] It is not unlike the sense of being affected by a painting. Chrétien quotes the seventeenth-century artist Roger de Piles on what it feels like to be gripped by art. "A genuine painting is therefore one that calls us, so to speak, by taking us off guard," insofar as "we cannot help ourselves from going up to it, as though it had something to say."[23]

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[20] Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne A. Davenport (New York: 2004).

[21] Bruce Ellis Benson, "Chrétien on the Call that Wounds," *Janus Head* 14, no. 1 (2015), 77–88.

[22] Chrétien, *Call and Response*, 1.

[23] Chrétien, *Call and Response*, 36, cites Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes*, ed. J. Thuillier (Paris: 1708), 9. As Chrétien adds in his note: "But is the dialogue really with the figures? Do these exhaust the painting's power to summon us?" Consider the similar (though not identical) example given in his essay "Retrospection:" the mid-nineteenth-

For Marion, the pull of the icon outweighs any other kind of painting. "The icon's gaze indeed weighs on me, but not as it would crush an object," he observes, "Rather it weighs on me because it calls me and it follows me."[24] Responding to the icon requires only that we recognize it as an icon, rather than a quotidian artefact or an objectified idol. It is not an object to be viewed by this or that finite subject, but the source of an infinite gaze that radiates outward to the entire community. If we focus on the infinite gaze rather than the accidental qualities of the image (its lines or its shades of colour), we are already beginning to respond to the call emanating from the divine visage. "In fact," says Marion, "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."[25]

Cusanus had long ago anticipated this connection between seeing and speaking. "*Et occurrit mihi, Domine*," he mused, "*quod visus tuus loquatur; nam non est aliud loqui tuum quam videre tuum.*"[26] The Lord's gaze speaks. For God, to see and to speak are not to be distinguished. It might therefore make sense for us to mix our sensory metaphors and respond to

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century *Jacob Wrestling with an Angel* by Eugène Delacroix, a case where the task of the artwork appeared to the artist as an assault he had to undergo, rather than as the fruit of his own subjective creativity. See "Retrospection," in Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, trans. Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: 2002), as well as the discussion in Benson, "Call that Wounds," 85–86.

[24] Marion, "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen," 325.

[25] Marion, "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen," 325.

[26] DVD 10, § 38 (h VI, 35; Bond 252).

the call by seeing ourselves as being seen by God. The task of responding to the divine now seems somewhat less intimidating. It is not a question of finding the strength to talk back to God, but of acknowledging a gift that has already been given. Through the icon, the infinite gives itself to the finite; insofar as the finite recognizes infinity in the eyes of Jesus, the gift has been well and truly received.

What makes it hard to respond to God, though it requires us to do little more than receive a gift, is the fact that we too often interpret the gift as a threat. We worry that the antecedent gaze of God is trying to master us, robbing us of our sovereign faculties of perception. According to what Marion calls the "principle of absolute power," the sovereign gaze seeks to determine what counts as present or absent in its court or its perceptual purview.[27] Seduced by that dream of sovereignty, we might hallucinate that we are competing with one another for the divine spotlight, as if God only noticed those worthy of notice. The proper response to that kind of call would be a mad rush to occupy centre-stage, with disastrous ethical and political results. Yet the divine gaze is given to all; it is not a scarce resource. There is no competing with or for God. The icon was never trying to master us or make us master each other. It was calling to us.

Even though this call rings out from a timeless source, we need time to respond to it. The same was true of the brethren at Tegernsee, who intersubjectively ascertained that they had indeed all seen themselves being seen by the infinite. In plainer speech: they sat down and talked about the experience the icon had occasioned in them. As de Certeau put it less plainly, "the

[27] Marion, "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen," 329: "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."

protocol of a verbal agreement" within a community of interlocutors would have to be "made up of successive acts."[28] Succession implies temporal duration, which matches up quite well with the drawn-out process of calling and responding. The time it takes us to respond to God's call might, in other words, be coterminous with the time it takes us to share with each other our faith in having heard such a call in the first place.

Attributing duration to the temporality of vocation makes a good deal of sense. Attributing it to the experience of seeing an icon might be somewhat more surprising, since we tend to think of sight as occurring in near-instantaneous fashion. Yet vision too takes up time, albeit in smaller doses. As we have seen, the intentional structure of iconicity in particular seems to require a certain span of time in order to play out. It takes longer than the blink of an eye to see oneself as having already been seen by God. We are not, then, dealing with a mystical 'now' or a time-breaking instant that ruptures the continuum in the name of radical simultaneity. If Cusanus had insisted upon instantaneous vision in this context, then it would indeed be difficult to make space for temporal duration.[29] As soon as the brother at Tegernsee saw himself as being

[28] De Certeau, "The Gaze," 19. He also writes of the "three rational moments" structuring the monks' experience as they first see the icon, then see themselves being seen by the icon, and finally move on to the stage of "saying" and "believing" (i.e., the stage of intersubjective communication and verification of shared experience). It is unclear, however, whether these "rational moments" would map on to "temporal moments."

[29] As Jason Aleksander has reminded me, Cusanus explicitly works motion into his instructions to the brethren, who are told to occupy various cardinal positions (east, south, west) and cycle through those positions in order to fully appreciate the icon. See DVD, *Praefatio*, § 3 (h VI, 5; Bond 236), as well as Lee Miller's chapter on pilgrimage in this volume.

seen, he would be swept up in the immanentized eschaton of a quasi-eternal *Augenblick*, and the distance between the finite creature and the infinite creator would evaporate.

Yet the seer and the seen, the speaker and the listener, the lover and the beloved have always benefited from a certain distance between them. This distance can be temporal as well as spatial. We need a bit of temporal distance between the various movements Cusanus has mapped out for us in his description of an encounter with an all-seeing icon. These movements—the awkward first glance, the recognition that infinity is staring back, the conversation about what has just taken place—need to arise and pass away at their own proper pace. They cannot take place all at once. God sees everything simultaneously, but we do not.[30] Simultaneity seems to belong to the divine, whereas duration remains the province of the finite.

In his letter to Kaspar Aindorffer (the abbot at Tegernsee), Nicholas made simultaneity central to his claim that mystical theology must surmount the rational principle of non-contradiction.[31] Reason tells us that no one thing can exist and not exist at the same time (*simul*). That *simul* is more important than it seems. For one thing to exist and not exist at different

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[30] DVD 1, § 5 (h VI, 10; Bond 237). "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 eiconae seu apparentiae apparenter."

[31] Marion, "Seeing, or Seeing Oneself Seen," 308, citing K. Meredith Ziebart, *Nicolaus Cusanus on Faith and Intellect: A Case Study in the Fifteenth-Century Fides-Ratio Controversy* (Leiden: 2014), 161–162. On Aindorffer's correspondence with Cusanus, see Margot Schmidt, "Nikolaus von Kues im Gespräch mit den Tegerseer Mönchen über Wesen und Sinn der Mystik," in *Das Sehen Gottes nach Nikolaus von Kues: Akten des Symposions in Trier vom 25. bis 27. September 1986*, ed. Rudolf Haubst (Trier: 1989), 25–49.

times—that is, at distinct instants posited along a temporal continuum for purposes of measurement—is in no way a contradiction. In fact, finite beings have a tendency to exist for a while and then cease existing. But what reason cannot suffer is the possibility that one and the same thing might be and not be at the same time.

Yet meditating on the simultaneous being and nonbeing of the very same thing is what mystical theology is all about, says Cusanus. We could even say that this is what it means to walk the *via negativa*. First comes kataphatic assent: God is. Then comes the dark night of the soul: God is not. Finally, after the requisite amount of self-abnegation, we come to see that God both is and is not. Gregory of Nyssa anticipated these three stages in his *Vita Moysis*.[32] Moses sees God first as light (the burning bush), then as darkness (the pillar of smoke), and finally as something that defies both categories atop Mount Sinai. Cusanus preferred to chart out a trajectory taking us from one pole of a contradiction to the other (a dialectical journey that also takes time), eventually arriving at a place where all opposites coincide in perfect simultaneity. He found precedent for such a *coincidentia oppositorum* not just in Exodus, but also in Genesis.

In Gen. 3:24, God evicts Adam and Eve from Paradise, with an angel and a flaming sword barring future re-entry. As Duclow explains, Cusanus developed his image of the "wall of

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[32] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (San Francisco: 2006); Duclow, "Gregory of Nyssa and Nicholas of Cusa: Infinity, Anthropology, and the *Via Negativa*," in *Masters of Learned Ignorance*, 275–282. On *Lichtmetaphysik* in Cusanus, see Clyde Lee Miller, "The Metaphor of Light and the Light of Metaphor," in *Nicholas of Cusa and Times of Transition*, 286–300.

paradise" as a "gloss" on this account.[33] On our side of this "wall," out here in the exilic world of temporality, the logic of simultaneous non-contradiction must hold. However, once we reach the wall, which "symbolizes the limit-situation of thinking," the old truths may no longer apply.[34] The simultaneous presence of contradictories becomes possible. But this would require us to cease moving from pole to pole in the binary oppositions usually said to structure our thought. We would have to hold a proposition and its opposite in mind at the very same time. In order to think the simultaneous presence of contradictories, our own thinking might need to abandon its dialectical duration and attain a simultaneity of its own.

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[33] Duclow, "Anselm's *Proslogion* and Nicholas of Cusa's Wall of Paradise," in *Masters of Learned Ignorance*, 283–292, here 284.

[34] Duclow, "Nicholas of Cusa's Wall of Paradise," in *Masters of Learned Ignorance*, 285: "The 'external,' finite region by its very nature has an end or limit, which the wall of paradise represents, and beyond which is divine infinity. Finitude, limit, and infinity thus constitute a dialectical pattern, within which thinking is continually in motion. Cusanus uses the wall of paradise to illustrate this motion: 'I go in from creatures to You the creator, from effects to their cause; I go out from You the creator to creatures, from the cause to the effects. I go in and go out simultaneously when I see that going out is going in, and that going in is simultaneously going out.' In sum, Cusanus's wall of paradise symbolizes the limit-situation of thinking; it is the fluid boundary where thinking oscillates between finite opposition and infinite unity. And in this oscillation, thinking discloses the common genesis of thinking and being in actual, divine infinity." Here Duclow cites 11, § 45–46 (h VI, 39–41).

3 The Clock in the Wall

Insofar as we are timebound beings, we remain beholden to duration, which seems well suited to the time of call and response or intersubjective conversation. Intellectually, however, we appear to be capable of thinking past duration to timeless simultaneity. This need not mean we succeed in stepping outside of the river of time entirely, but it does suggest our minds are capable of touching upon timelessness even as we continue living in time. In order to collapse these opposing aspects of our temporal experience into a unified chronology, Cusanus augmented his account of the icon with the concept of the clock.

Fifteenth-century authors could already draw on the example of mechanical clocks in places like Padua and Pavia.[35] Duclow argues that Cusanus himself would have encountered clocks in "Basel, Brixen, and Rome," as well as Frankfurt and Nuremberg.[36] The *horologium* suggested new ways of thinking about classical problems concerning the relationship between the timeless and the temporal. According to Duclow, the question that still plagued Cusanus was:

> since God conceives and speaks only once and eternally, 'how is it […] that all things do not exist simultaneously, but many come into being successively? How do so many diverse things exist out

[35] The same can be said of some fourteenth-century authors. Heinrich Suso wrote a treatise called the *Horologium Sapientiae*, which Frank Tobin has categorized as a work partly inspired by actual clocks and partly inspired by the pre-existing literary convention of structuring 24 chapters around the 24 hours of the day. See Tobin's Introduction to Heinrich Suso, *The Exemplar, with Two German Sermons*, trans. Tobin (Mahwah NJ: 1989), 34–35.

[36] Duclow, "Cusanus' Clock," 136.

of a single concept?' In other words, how can we reconcile the eternity of God's creative 'concept' with time's multiplicity and succession?[37]

The Word or *Logos* is timeless.[38] What it creates by speaking, however, lives and dies in time. How are we to rectify this asymmetry between atemporal eternity and temporal succession?[39] The clock, wagers Cusanus, might hint at a possible connection between that which stands firm in its place and all those other things which tick on past as the seconds pass. One clock is enough, after all, for us to keep track of countless hours and minutes and seconds. There is a rough sense in which the clock is a singularity capable of representing an open-ended temporal multiplicity. In the *horologium*, we find a vestige of the *Logos*, since both concepts mediate between timeless eternity and the temporal world in which they find themselves incarnated.

[37] Duclow, "Cusanus' Clock," 138, citing DVD 10, § 41 (h VI, 37; Bond 253).

[38] Cusanus, following Augustine, usually takes *aeternitas* to be strict timelessness, although he sometimes treats it as infinite duration, which can cause confusion. See Duclow, "Cusanus' Clock," 138, citing DVD 10, § 41 (h VI, 37; Bond 253).

[39] On the impossibility of divine succession, see DVD 10, § 41 (h VI, 38; Bond 254), cited in Duclow, "Cusanus' Clock," 139: "For in eternity, in which you [God] conceive, all temporal succession coincides in the same now [*nunc*] of eternity. Therefore, nothing is past or future where future and past coincide with the present." On the same page, Duclow also cites DVD 10, § 42 (h VI, 38; Bond 254): "one is not almighty in whose thought earlier and later occur, so that one first conceives one thing and afterward another."

Even the most sophisticated clock, however, can be reduced to a body moving through time. The movements of its parts are simply motions by which we measure other motions, ranging from objective astral realignments to our psychological impressions of time passing. We measure durations by comparing them to other durations. The simultaneity embodied by the clock is therefore only an approximated caricature. Yet it was the concept of the clock, not actual clocks, that mattered for Cusanus. "The simple concept of a most perfect clock," he writes, "directs me so that I might be more delightfully caught up to the vision of your concept and your word. For the simple concept of a clock enfolds all temporal succession."[40]

As Duclow explains, the concept of the clock expresses the idea that time has an order, which is different from the actual flow of time. The ticking of the clock is an arbitrary metric contingent upon material motions, whereas the conceptual ordering of time stands outside of the timestream. To us, it might seem like the striking of the sixth hour is earlier than the striking of the seventh, both of which occur later than the striking of the fifth. In the concept of the clock, however, 'earlier' and 'later' are held in place as simultaneous (chrono-)logical descriptors. Neither designation is itself earlier or later, since both exist in the timeless realm of logic.

Cusanus frames his concept of the clock in terms of enfolding (*complicatio*) and unfolding (*explicatio*).[41] The simultaneous concept enfolds successive duration within itself. Like a mathematical formula, the enfolded concept obtains at any given time in a successive series ($t_1 \ldots t_2 \ldots t_n$). Yet the truth of neither the formula nor the concept can be reduced to the mutable existence of any object tarrying on in time. In the case of the clock, the unfolding of its concept

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[40] DVD 11, § 43 (h VI, 39; Bond 254–255), cited in Duclow, "Cusanus' Clock," 140.

[41] Duclow, "Cusanus' Clock," 140: "In Cusanus' terms, this concept 'enfolds all temporal succession / *complicat omnem successionem temporalem*."

allows us rationally to measure particular durations by appealing to a general standard of successive duration, which standard would obtain regardless of whether or not there are any actual successions occurring whatsoever.

In making this argument about the clock-concept, Cusanus was building on distinctions drawn by earlier waves of Neoplatonic philosophers of time. As Elizabeth Brient has shown, the notion of a non-temporal ordering principle for temporal succession can already be found in the late ancient writings of Iamblichus and Proclus, both of whom were developing the distinction between time and timeless eternity laid out in Plotinus' *Enneads*.[42] Iamblichus posited an absolute or "non-temporal time" between time and eternity, which would be lodged in the *Nous* and "structured in a static order of earlier and later."[43] Proclus supports this depiction in the *Elements of Theology*, while clarifying (in his *Parmenides* commentary) that noetic time is

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[42] Elizabeth Brient, "Between Time and Eternity: Neoplatonic Precursors to Cusanus' Conception of 'Non-Temporal Time' in *De aequalitate*," in *Nicholas of Cusa and Times of Transition*, 242–261. In *De aequalitate* (1459), Cusanus addresses the problem of time in a slightly different fashion than he had in 1453's *De visione Dei*. See also: Plotinus, *Enneads III.1–9*, trans. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge: 1980), 3, 7; Richard Sorabji on Iamblichus in *Time, Creation, and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (London: 1983), 33–45; and Proclus, *Elements of Theology: a Revised Text with Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, ed. E.R. Dobbs (Oxford: 1992), 227–228.

[43] Brient, "Between Time and Eternity," 245.

"absolute and non-relative."[44] Like the concept of the clock, non-temporal time contains the order of diachronic succession, without itself ever falling into the flux of change.[45]

A modern conversation-partner for Cusanus can be found in J. M. E. McTaggart, whose essay "The Unreality of Time" laid the groundwork for subsequent analytic philosophy of time. McTaggart distinguishes between the A-Series and B-Series, which correlate to tensed and non-tensed ways of speaking about temporal succession.[46] Foregrounding the tense-structure assumed by certain languages, we might prefer to frame succession in terms of past, present, and future, as if these were objectively agreed-upon categories. Or we might opt to arrange objects according

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[44] Brient, "Between Time and Eternity," 249, citing *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: 1987), VII, 1217, as well as Werner Beierwaltes, "Cusanus und Proklos," in *Nicolò Cusano agli inizi del mondo moderno* (Florence: 1971), 137–140.

[45] Brient, "Between Time and Eternity," 249, argues that, for Proclus, non-temporal time even includes the past-present-future tense-structure of language, although it prefigures these as 'powers' rather than as proper tenses. We can call these powers "the perfective, the cohesive, and the revelatory. These three powers are co-present in Absolute Time—'time as a whole'—but are divided up in the time of soul, where temporal entities participate each separately as past (perfective), present (cohesive), and future (revelatory). Further, this triadic structure of absolute Time is itself an image of the triadic structure of Eternity."

[46] John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time," *Mind* 17, no. 68 (1908), 457–474. McTaggart was a British Hegelian. It is not impossible that some Neoplatonic resonances could still be heard in his own idealism.

to the simpler dichotomy of earlier and later, which Cusanus sometimes does. Yet McTaggart also mentions a C-Series, which reconfigures the 'earlier-later' dichotomy of the B-Series into a conceptual order. Cusanus' concept of the clock seems to anticipate McTaggart's C-Series, which we can think of as a logical sequence, rather than a temporal succession.[47] Duclow likens it to a "program" that guides the functioning of actual clocks and therefore the structuring of temporality for human purposes.[48]

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[47] McTaggart suggests that the C-Series relies upon intellectual representations, though he concedes that the fundamental reality of the C-Series is not yet known. Consider these ominous words near the end of "Unreality of Time," 474: "But the question whether such an objective C series does exist, must remain for future discussion. And many other questions press upon us which inevitably arise if the reality of time is denied. If there is such a C series, are positions in it simply ultimate facts, or are they determined by the varying amounts, in the objects which hold those positions, of some quality which is common to all of them? And, if so, what is that quality, and is it a greater amount of it which determines things to appear as later, and a lesser amount which determines them to appear as earlier, or is the reverse true? On the solution of these questions it may be that our hopes and fears for the universe depend for their confirmation or rejection."

[48] Duclow, "Cusanus' Clock," 141, 143: "However, Nicholas' image works quite differently. Rather than focusing on the clock as an independent, perpetual motion machine, it emphasizes the interplay between the clock and its concept. The clock's concept plays a dual role: 1) it holds the clock and all times within its unified present; and 2) it itself remains present and orders the clock's striking of the successive hours. In this sense, the clock incarnates the clockmaker's unifying concept as it marks each moment and hour."

Cusanus remains aware that human purposes can render time notoriously subjective. As Brient informs us, it is the human element that best demarcates between the Iamblichean-Proclean and Cusan models of absolute or non-temporal time.[49] While time should (at least according to an objective sense of temporality) flow objectively from the future back into the past, the order and duration of events is not equally clear to each observer. This is why historians can argue about the date of a battle and football hooligans can disagree about how much injury time is warranted. Cusanus, however, fits this perspectivalism into the enfolding and unfolding of the concept of the clock.

The subjectivism of time is not so unlike the intersubjectivity of those Tegernsee monks who once gazed upon the face of Christ. The fact that we all experience time differently does not mean that time does not exist. It does, however, suggest we need to engage in successive acts of intersubjective dialogue in order to arrive at a shared conception of temporality.[50] This is one of the many gifts that has been given to the human mind. And all who possess such a mind should be able to receive it. As Duclow reminds us, however, it is only by approaching the wall of paradise that we can transform our finite, subjective experience of temporality into the

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[49] Brient, "Between Time and Eternity," 253: "Rather, like Iamblichus and Proclus before him, Cusanus posits a primary, intellectual time, situated between the absolute unity of divine eternity and the temporal unfolding of created things in nature. But whereas Iamblichus and Proclus had conceived of this primal, intellectual time as an independent formal principle, an intermediary between the divine One and the cosmos, Cusanus understands intellectual time to be a form of the human mind itself. The human mind, Cusanus writes, recognizes *itself* as 'non-temporal,' intellectual time." The italics are Brient's.

[50] Recall de Certeau, "The Gaze," 19.

overarching coincidence of objective time. “Indeed,” he says, “only from this vantage point at the door in the wall surrounding paradise—where perspectives themselves coincide—can we create both the ‘concept of a most perfect clock’ and clocks themselves.”[51]

4 Conclusion

As Duclow suspected, then, it is the concept of the clock in Cusanus that enables the human mind to make sense of the relationship between the timeless and the temporal. When we invoke ‘the human mind,’ however, we need not mean some solipsistic subject. As De Certeau and Falque and Marion agree, intersubjective communities are quite able to uncover objective truth on the basis of subjective difference. The eyes of the icon gaze upon us all, but we only become aware of that thanks to one another. The same clock keeps time for all; that too we know only thanks to one another. In art as in timekeeping, perspectivalism is not an obstacle to truth, but an invitation to discern the boundaries of what is true on the basis of many points of view.

Yet conversations, as we have seen, take time. This is true of intersubjective verifications of shared experience; it is also true of the conversations God starts with us. Duclow’s Cusan clock helped us make sense of the temporal tensions unearthed by Marion. By way of Chrétien, Marion can inspire us in turn to supplement conceptual clock-time with the temporality of the call and its response. Just as mirrors never show the thing itself, so clocks never tell time itself. Even when we regard the clock lodged in the wall of paradise, we are still looking *per horologio in aenigmate*. God nevertheless continues to dwell in the garden beyond the walls, where the bells of paradise toll.

[51] Duclow, “Cusanus’ Clock,” 145.

The ticking of actual clocks might be about as irrelevant to the temporality of call and response as the time of day at which Marion gave his Watanabe lecture was to his argument.[52] Recall what once made us anxious about iconicity: the gaze of the icon was perceived as a threat to our own sovereignty. The same anxiety plagued our ability to respond to the divine call, insofar as God's speaking first was interpreted as a threat to our own spontaneity. As Cusanus saw, however, it was never a question of trying to master the icon before the icon masters us. We would fail to master the icon, should we be foolish enough to try. We are its objects more so than it is ours. Clocks, meanwhile, fail to master temporality. This is obviously true of the mechanical clock, but it might also be true of the conceptual clock. No matter how rigorous our logical principle for ordering diachronic succession becomes, it falls short of capturing the duration presumed by our retrospective response to the divine call. Even after regulation time ends, extra time remains. We hear it not so much as the blowing of the whistle or the tolling of the bells as the call to prayer, which can also be heard emanating over the wall of paradise at times.

[52] It must nevertheless be conceded that the precise date and time of Marion's lecture (5:15 on 5/15/15) does seem to suggest some kind of numerological significance.