



The Layman on Wisdom and the Mind (Renaissance Reformation Texts in Translation)

Nicholas of Cusa

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Nicolas of Cusa (1401-1464) was a theologian, philosopher, Canon lawyer, and Church reformer. Born in Kues, Germany, and educated in Italy and Germany, Cusanus stands on the border between medieval scholasticism and Renaissance philosophy. Although he is deeply influenced by medieval writers including Albert the Great, Ramon Lull, and Meister Eckhart, he eschews the scholastic method of composition, often preferring the dialogue form favored by the humanists. Cusanus dedicates his philosophical writings to the exploration of the limits of the mind in its pursuit of absolute truth. The lack of proportion between the limits of human reason and the infinity of absolute truth means that man can only have an approximate knowledge of God and the eternal truths that exist in the divine mind. Recognizing the limits of reason stimulated Cusanus to develop a new philosophical analysis of mind that depends heavily in grasping the superior power of the human intellect over that of reason. The intuitive power of the intellect allows man to step over the limits of calculative reason and by employing a method Cusanus called "learning ignorance" to develop a new logic of infinity. This new way of thinking, often expressed in mathematical symbols and analogies, is designed to develop human insight into the infinity of God.

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