ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ/RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi 65:2 (2024), 553-582
DOI: 10.33227/auifd.1515595

Cusanus on the Doctrine of the Image of God: Human Mind as the Living Image, Equality, and Identity in Difference*

İHSAN BERK ÖZCANGİLLER
İstanbul Medeniyet Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi, Türkiye
İstanbul Medeniyet University, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Turkiye
berk.ozcangiller@medeniyet.edu.tr
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3458-772X

Abstract
The relationship between God and humans has been a matter of controversy that interests both philosophers and theologians alike. Establishing a relationship between the infinite God and finite human is particularly challenging if one admits that God and humans are substantially different from each other. The biblical doctrine of the image of God responds to this challenge by stating that the relationship between God and humans is a kind of likeness or assimilation. This doctrine does not only establish the nature of the relationship between God and humans but also views both God's and humans' nature in a particular way and determines humans' purpose and distinguishing feature in relation to God. While there is a very long and extensive tradition focusing on identifying the similarities and differences between God and humans to determine the precise relationship between them in light of this doctrine, this paper will focus on Nicolaus Cusanus' original contribution to this long-lasting debate. In order to emphasize Cusanus' differences from his predecessors, I will present a general historical background of the doctrine of the image of God. In particular, I will point out the main tenets of Greek and Latin patristic traditions by identifying their differences and shared assumptions. Additionally, I will briefly present Augustine's dynamic account of the image of God, which holds an important place both in the discussion among these traditions and in the development of Cusanus' doctrine of the human mind as the living image of God. As this paper will demonstrate, Cusanus improves upon Augustine's account by allowing humans to be considered as an equal image of God, which was attributed only to Jesus by Augustine. Cusanus thinks that the human mind can be considered equal to the divine mind because it demonstrates characteristics of free creative activity and being the cause of something from nothing in cognition. Moreover, to elaborate Cusanus' original contribution to this debate, I will explain how the human mind reflects the triadic nature of divine mind in itself through its cognitive activity by giving a detailed account of Cusanus' theory of cognition as assimilation. This explanation will also show how reading Cusanus' theory of cognition as assimilation alongside the concept of equality exhibits the principle of 'identity in difference' in both the nature of the human mind and its relationship with the divine mind.

Keywords: Philosophy of Religion, Image of God, Human Mind, Living Image, Assimilation, Cognition, Equality, Identity in difference.

Geliş/Recieved: 13.07.2024 Kabul/Accepted: 13.10.2024

Cusanus'ta Tanrı'nın Sureti Öğretisi: Canlı Suret olarak İnsan Zihni, Eşitlik ve Ayrımda Özdeşlik
Öz
Tanrı ve insan arasındaki ilişki, hem filozofların hem de teologların üzerinde durduğu önemli tartışma konularından birisidir. Bu tartışma içerisinde, Tanrı ve insanın tözsel olarak birbirinden farklı olduğunu kabul edersek, sonsuz olan Tanrı ile sonlu olan insan arasında bir ilişki kurmak zorlaşmaktadır. Kitab-ı Mukaddes'e dayanan Tanrı'nın sureti doktrini, Tanrı ve insanlar arasındaki ilişkinin bir tür benzerlik veya benzeşim olduğunu belirtmekle bu probleme bir yanıt sunmaktadır. Bu doktrin, Tanrı ve insan arasındaki ilişkinin doğasını tanımlamakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda hem Tanrı'nın hem de insanın doğasını belirli bir bağlamda değerlendirir ve insanın Tanrı ile olan ilişkisinde amacının yanı sıra ayırt edici yanına da işaret eder. Bu doktrin ışığında, Tanrı ve insanlar arasındaki ilişkiyi tanımlamak için aradaki benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları ortaya koymaya odaklanan kadim ve kapsamlı bir gelenek olmakla birlikte, bu makale Nicolaus Cusanus'un bu uzun soluklu tartışmaya yaptığı özgün katkıya odaklanacaktır. Bu bağlamda ilk olarak Cusanus'un seleflerinden farkını vurgulamak için, Tanrı'nın sureti doktrininin genel tarihsel arka planını sunacağım. Özellikle, Yunan ve Latin patristik geleneklerinin ana ilkelerini, farklılıklarını ve ortak varsayımlarını göstereceğim. Buna ek olarak hem söz konusu gelenekler arasındaki tartışmada hem de Cusanus'un Tanrı'nın canlı sureti olarak insan zihni öğretisinin gelişmesinde önemli bir yere sahip Augustinus'un dinamik Tanrı'nın sureti açıklamasına kısaca değineceğim. Bu makalede gösterileceği üzere, Cusanus insanların da Tanrı'nın eşit sureti olarak kabul edilebileceğini ileri sürmekle, bu özelliği yalnızca İsa'ya atfeden Augustinus'un suret öğretisini genişletmiştir. Cusanus bilişte özgür yaratıcı etkinlik ve yoktan bir şeyin nedeni olma özelliklerini gösterdiği için insan zihninin ilahi zihne eşit görülebileceğini düşünür. Tanrı'nın sureti tartışmasında Cusanus'un özgünlüğünü ortaya koyarken, ayrıca Cusanus'un benzeşim olarak biliş öğretisini detaylandırarak, insan zihninin bilme etkinliği aracılığıyla tanrısal zihnin üçlü doğasını nasıl yansıttığını açıklayacağım. Bu açıklama aynı zamanda, Cusanus'un benzeşim olarak biliş anlayışının eşitlik kavramıyla yeniden okunmasının, hem insan zihninin doğasında hem de onun ilahi zihinle ilişkisinde 'ayrımda özdeşlik' ilkesini nasıl sergilediğini gösterecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Felsefesi, Tanrı'nın Sureti, İnsan Zihni, Canlı Suret, Benzeşim, Biliş, Eşitlik, Ayrımda Özdeşlik.

Introduction

The doctrine of "the image of God" (*imago Dei*) has been a matter of long-lasting controversy that dates back to the *Old Testament,* and it has influenced and continues to influence many thinkers to this day.[1] The original

*A part of this article was presented in the Colloquium series held by the Department of Philosophy at the University of Bonn on July 9, 2024. I am deeply grateful to Prof. Dr. Christoph Horn and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Saniye Vatansever for their valuable guidance and insightful comments throughout this study.

[1] The debates on this doctrine intensified among Christian theologians and philosophers especially in Late Antiquity and continued to be one of the most important issues in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The reason for the intensification of the debates on the image of God in Late Antiquity and especially among Christian thinkers can be explained by the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity was developed during this time.

text from which this doctrine arise is Genesis, 1:26, "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."[2] Because of this statement in the Genesis, 1:26, the question of whether the image in this statement refers to Jesus, the Trinity, or at the same time human being, comes to the fore. And, if the human being can be thought of as an image of God, then the next question is, which aspect of the human being (body, mind, soul, intellect) is the image of God? In other words, the doctrine of the image of God fundamentally concerns identifying this image, understanding its nature and the function it plays.

In addition to these questions, the debate on the image of God in Genesis, 1:26, where the terms 'image' and 'likeness' are treated separately and sometimes in opposition to each other, forms the basis of this discussion. As will be clear, the origin of the distinction between 'image' and 'likeness/assimilation' is due to the dynamic or static nature of the terms preferred in the Greek and Latin translations of the Hebrew word *demuth* (דְּמוּת) found in Genesis, 1:26. In this discussion Augustine (354-430) with his dynamic and gradual theory of the image of God constitutes one of the main reference points because he rejects the commonly accepted assumption that the terms 'image' and 'likeness'/'assimilation' refer to completely separate states. He also claims that in addition to Jesus, human beings are an image of God. Although man naturally bears a likeness to God because he is an image, Augustine thinks that man will never have equality with God in essence because unlike Jesus there is a substantial difference between man and God.

After a brief explanation of the historical background to Nicolaus Cusanus' (1401-1464) account of the image of God, I will argue that by arguing for the equality between divine mind and human mind (source and image), Cusanus develops upon Augustine's influential account of the doctrine of image. As I will demonstrate, by presenting us with an account of cognition as assimilation, Cusanus emphasizes the concept of equality in relation to cognition and shows that both the human mind and human mind's relationship to God exhibits "identity in difference." Therefore, in order to

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[2] In the English translation of Genesis, the terms "image" and "likeness" are used to refer to "*eikōn* (*εἰκών*)" and "*ὁμοίωσις* (*homoiōsis*)," respectively that are used in the Greek translation of Genesis. In the Latin translation of Genesis, 1:26, the terms "image" and "likeness" correspond to "*imago*" and "*similitudo*". Genesis, 1:26 Latin translation: "*et ait faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram.*" See "Genesis," *The Latin Vulgate Old Testament Bible*, https://vulgate.org/ot/genesis_1.htm (10.07.2024). Genesis, 1:26 Greek translation: "*καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός Ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ᾽ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ᾽ ὁμοίωσιν.*" See "Genesis," Bible Hub, https://biblehub.com/sepd/genesis/1.htm (10.07.2024).

understand Cusanus' original contribution to the debate on the Doctrine of Image of God, we need to know about his account of cognition, its relation to equality and how the mind exhibits identity in difference, which reflects God's triadic nature.

Although Cusanus' views on the doctrine of the image of God have been extensively discussed in English and especially in German literature, when we look at words that focus on Cusanus' understanding of the mind as a living image and examine his theory of assimilation/cognition that emphasize the importance of the concept of equality, we see that there is a lack of emphasis on the relationship of equality with cognition as assimilation, which takes the form of "identity in difference."[3] While it is beyond the scope of this article to situate Cusanus' account of mind in a tradition that extends to modern philosophy, this reconstruction of Cusanus' account of mind as an identity in difference will allow Cusanus to be placed as one of the significant figures in the discourse on the relationship between the mind/intellect and identity in difference (or unity in difference), spanning from Plotinus to Hegel.[4] For these reasons, this article aims to fill a gap in the literature.

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[3] In *Identität und Differenz*, Werner Beierwaltes examines the principle of identity and difference in Cusanus' philosophy, but he does not analyze the principle of identity in difference in relation to the thesis that the human mind is an image and it has an equality relationship with its source. See: Werner Beierwaltes, *Identität und Differenz*, 105-143. In *Der negative Selbstbezug des Absoluten*, Max Rochstock provides a detailed examination of the relationship between negation and the Absolute in Cusanus' metaphysical and ontological thought. In particular, he explicated the Absolute's relationship with itself by focusing particularly on the movement of the negation of negation or double negation. While the concept of the double negation as the negation of negation within the Absolute can be related to identity in difference, Rochstock does not use the term "identity in difference" in his text. Furthermore, Rochstock's main objective in this book is to present an alternative to Beierwaltes' interpretation, and to demonstrate how the Absolute relates to itself on the grounds of metaphysics and ontology. In that regard, his main goal drastically differs from the objective of the current article, which aims to demonstrate that the relationship between the human mind, as an image, and the Absolute can be accunted for by appealing to the principle of identity in difference.

[4] The principle of identity in difference, which I claim emerges in Cusanus' understanding of the mind, fundamentally appears within the Neoplatonic tradition through Plotinus and most comprehensively in Hegel's philosophical system. The important point here is that the connection between Cusanus' understanding of the mind and the principle of identity in difference has not been prominently highlighted in the historical process from late antiquity to the modern period, yet as I show in this article Cusanus' works constitute a crucial moment for this debate. Since the main objective of this article is to present the relationship between human mind and God by appealing to the principle of identity in difference, situating Cusanus in this aforementioned tradition falls beyond the spheres of this article.

1. Preliminary Remarks on the Doctrine of Image of God and Cusanus' Account of the Living Image of God

In the debate on the image of God in Genesis, 1:26, one of the major discussions concerns the terms 'image' and 'likeness' and their relationship to each other. The terms 'image' and 'likeness' are generally treated separately and sometimes in opposition to each other.[5] On the one hand, the origin of the distinction between 'image' and 'likeness'/'assimilation' is due to the dynamic or static nature of the terms preferred in the Greek and Latin translations of the Hebrew word *demuth* (דְּמוּת) found in Genesis, 1:26 of the *Old Testament*.[6] On the other hand, the distinction between 'image' and 'likeness'/'assimilation' is due to the insertion of the conjunction "and" between these words in both the Greek and Latin translations of the *Old Testament*, leading to the conclusion that they must indicate two different states.[7]

Regarding the difference in translations of the Hebrew word *demuth*[8] into Greek and Latin, we see that instead of using the term *homoiōma* (*ὁμοίωμα*), which has a static meaning of "likeness", Greek translations prefer to use the term *homoiōsis* (*ὁμοίωσις*), which means "assimilation" or "making alike," which conveys dynamism. In line with this translation, in the Greek commentary on Genesis, 1:26, the term "assimilation" emphasizes that humans, created in the image of God, are not directly similar to God but have the potential to become alike.[9] In this respect, in the Greek patristic tradition, the term 'assimilation' (*homoiōsis*) carries a dynamic meaning and has greater significance compared to the term 'image' (*eikōn*). This is because, in the Greek patristic tradition, being an image of God is something granted to

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[5] Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform, Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers*, 83; Robert A. Markus, " 'Imago' and 'similitudo' in Augustine," *Revue d' Etudes Augustiniennes Et Patristiques,* 126; Bernd Irlenborn, "Der Mensch als zweiter Gott? Anmerkungen zur imago dei-Lehre des Nikolaus von Kues," 8; Gioia Luigi, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate*, 236.

[6] See: Andrew Louth, "Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition. Edited by Jared Ortiz. (Studies in Early Christianity.) Pp. Xii 315. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019. 978 0 8132 3142 6," 835-837.

[7] Kallistos Ware, "'In the Image and Likeness': The Uniqueness of the Human Person," 55.

[8] See: Alexander Altmann, "'Homo Imago Dei' in Jewish and Christian Theology."

[9] Being an image is a given state at the beginning, at creation, whereas assimilation is not given initially but can only be achieved over time and ultimately attained at the end. The origin of this distinction is sometimes attributed to the heretical Valentinian Gnostics. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, 83. However, at the center of the discussion on the distinction between the terms image and assimilation/likeness, Church Father Irenaeus is often pointed to. Markus, "'Imago' and 'similitudo' in Augustine," 126.

humans at creation and it is a static state,[10] whereas assimilation refers to a higher state that a person can achieve through her deeds in the end.

While the Greek translation of Genesis, 1:26 prefers the word 'assimilation' (*homoiōsis*) to translate *demuth*, in the Latin translations the word *similitudo*, which has a static meaning and already means similarity, was preferred.[11] In this regard, in the Latin patristic tradition's interpretation of Genesis, 1:26, focus on the likeness (*similitudo*) to God, which points to a static and immediately granted state. With this change in translation and meaning, the emphasis on activity in the Greek patristic tradition undergoes a transformation in the Latin patristic tradition, particularly in Augustine. Additionally, in the Latin patristic tradition a significant debate concerning the identity of the 'image' emerges. Accordingly, the sole and perfect image, in the Latin patristic tradition, is the second person of the Trinity (*persona*), the Son or Jesus.[12] As for humans created by God, they can only approach the image (*ad imaginem*) of God and are thus considered merely a reflection of the image. Due to this pursued distinction between 'likeness' and 'image', the Latin patristic tradition appears to continue the differentiation between 'assimilation' and 'image' found in the Greek patristic tradition. Consequently, in both traditions, the concepts of image and likeness/assimilation present us with different perspectives regarding our relationship to God.

Augustine, who occupies a unique place in the discussions on the doctrine of the image of God, rejects the assumption that the terms 'image' and 'likeness'/'assimilation' refer to completely separate states[13], which is the common assumption in both patristic traditions. Augustine differs from

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[10] In the distinction made between image and assimilation within the Greek patristic tradition, the emphasis on the dynamism of assimilation and the emphasis on the static nature of the image can be explained as follows. Every human being, as an image (mind or intellect), has the potential to reflect its source; however, the act of reflecting its source depends on being active. In this sense, the image remains static or potential as long as it does not act. When a human mind, as an image, becomes active in both theoretical and practical ways, it begins to move toward its source and reflect it better and better. Without this activity, due to the deficiency in reflecting its source, the image remains static.

[11] Genesis, 1:26 Latin translation: "*et ait faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram et praesit piscibus maris et volatilibus caeli et bestiis universaeque terrae omnique reptili quod movetur in terra*". "Genesis," *The Latin Vulgate Old Testament Bible*.

[12] Gerald P. Boersma, *Augustine's early theology of image : a study in the development of pro-Nicene theology*, 2.

[13] Augustine notes that it is customary to consider the difference between image and likeness. However, he himself does not see any difference between them, except that Moses used two different words to refer to the same thing. Aurelius Augustinus, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Quaestionum in Heptateuchum libri VII*, Corpus Christianorum, 5.4,16. The reason Augustine does not see a difference between these two terms is that he believes there can be no image without likeness. However, he also adds that not every likeness is an image.

the Greek patristic tradition by rejecting the view that there can be an image of God being in God's likeness, and he also differs from the Latin patristic tradition by asserting that in addition to Jesus, human beings are an image of God. In order to argue for this claim, he puts forward his own dynamic and gradual theory of image. According to Augustine, since every image contains likeness and man is an image of God from birth, the feature of being in likeness to God is inherent in man. However, this likeness is not a complete likeness of man to God. Because, according to Augustine, only the Son bears complete likeness (equality/*aequalitas*) to the Father within the framework of the Trinity. In this context, the only image of God that also has equality is Jesus.[14] Although man naturally bears a likeness to God because he is an image, he will never have equality with God in essence because there is a substantial difference between him and God. However, man as an image, is not a static image, but a structure that can move towards absolute likeness and thus become more and more similar to God. As a result, Augustine synthesizes the main components of both Greek and Latin Patristic traditions in his doctrine of the image of God, through his analysis of the concepts of image, likeness, and equality.

As for Cusanus, he continues the Augustinian view of the dynamism of the human mind as an image. However, he also expands the scope of Augustine's account of the image of God. While Augustine attributes likeness with equality solely to Jesus, Cusanus, as we will see in the next section, extends his account of the image of God and attributes likeness with equality to the human mind as well. In doing so, Cusanus develops the idea that the likeness-bearing image increasingly resembles its source, within the context of his unique doctrine of the mind's power of assimilation (*assimilatio*)[15]. Before examining his contribution to the doctrine of the image of God, however, it is important to notice some of the distinguishing features of his account that separates his account.

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[14] Through the analysis of the terms image and likeness, Augustine distinguishes humans from God's other creations and asserts humans as the image of God. By analyzing the concept of equality, he also clearly differentiates the human image from the image of Jesus. He distinguishes Jesus as a perfect image with equality from humans who are images without equality. In this way, Augustine is not in full opposition to the common views of the Latin Patristic tradition. For an analysis of the concepts of image, likeness, and equality, see: Aurelius Augustinus, *De Diversis Quaestionibus Octoginta Tribus / Dreiundachtzig verschiedene Fragen*, 74.

[15]The term "*assimilatio*" is more suitable for the Latin translation of the Greek term "*homoiōsis*" (*ὁμοίωσις)* in the Bible, as it conveys the sense of development or movement better than the term "*similitudo*," which does not adequately express this dynamism.

In the discussion about the doctrine of the image of God, Cusanus can be associated with numerous sources that influenced him. These sources range from the Middle Platonists, Neoplatonists' and Christian philosophers' interpretations of Plato's doctrine of likeness to God (*homoiōsis Theōi.*) [16] in *Theaetetus*, to the commentaries on Genesis, 1:26 by Christian thinkers. Cusanus' original thought in this discussion lies in synthesizing Platonism, Aristotelianism, Neoplatonism, and the ideas of Christian thinkers. Although Cusanus was influenced by previous major schools of thoughts or thinkers, he explicitly states that he is not a direct follower of any of them. Cusanus' thought, specifically his doctrine of the human mind as the living image of God, signifies a stage that incorporates previous views while at the same time presenting something novel. Some argue that the doctrine of the image of God (*imago Dei*) took a sharp turn in Cusanus, and that in the Christian tradition, human self-understanding was achieved for the first time by considering the relationship between the source and the image not only "vertically but also horizontally."[17] However, as I will argue, Cusanus's original understanding of the image-source (or human mind-divine mind) relationship allows us to have a new perspective that encompasses previous theories on image, rather than representing a sharp turning point negating the previous views.

Cusanus' original model of the horizontal relationship between source and image in the discussion of the image of God is based on his comparison between the human mind and the mind of God. In order to establish a horizontal relationship model between the source and image, Cusanus focuses on three common characteristics between human and divine mind, namely creativity,

[16] Another important point regarding the concept of assimilation is that the term *ὁμοίωσις* (*homoiôsis*) appears in Plato's work *Theaetetus* with the expression "assimilation to God" (*homoiōsis Theōi*) even before the *Old Testament* was translated into Greek. This notion subsequently influenced Christian philosophers and others following Plato. Plato. "Theaetetus," 176a-b. For Plato's concept of assimilation to God, See: Jedan, C. "Metaphors of Closeness: Reflections on Homoiôsis Theôi in Ancient Philosophy and Beyond"; Algis Uzdavinys, "Introduction," xv.; Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethic, Old and New*, 52-71; Paolo Torri, "The telos of Assimilation to God and the Conflict between theoria and praxis in Plato and the Middle Platonists."

[17] Irlenborn, "Der Mensch als zweiter Gott?," 382.

freedom[18] and being the cause of something.[19] Cusanus situates these three characteristics within the cognitive activity that manifests the power of assimilation. Through his analysis of the mind's cognitive activity, Cusanus manages to demonstrate that the image (the human mind) has a fundamental power of assimilation. In Cusanus' account of the human mind, the power of assimilation (*assimilatio*) emphasizes dynamism and becomes a part of the human mind as the image. In this respect, the immanence of assimilation within the image (the human mind) distinguishes Cusanus' doctrine from the Greek Patristic tradition, which situates assimilation (*homoiōsis)* in opposition to the image. That is why Cusanus' proposal to think of the power of assimilation inherent in the image of God can be viewed as a synthesis of Augustine's dynamic doctrine of image and the Greek Patristic tradition's doctrine of assimilation (*homoiōsis*) that emphasizes active likeness. As Cusanus states in *De Mente,* human mind's cognitive activity is also related to human's self-knowledge or the command to "know thyself." In cognition, after all, the human being gradually progresses to self-knowledge and from there to knowing her own source (God) through the power of assimilation (*assimilatio)* inherent in the image (the human mind).

In order for the cognitive activity of the human mind to start, humans must first receive external stimuli through the body. Although these stimuli activate the mind, the mind still accomplishes cognition through its own power. In other words, in order to yield the fruits of cognitive activity (concepts), the mind conceptually enfolds all things within itself. The mind carries the conceptual likenesses of everything within its power. However, for this power to be manifested the mind must be stimulated by sensible objects. For this reason, when the mind is embodied and stimulated by sensible objects, it simultaneously assimilates these objects with the concepts it holds within its power, i.e., it transforms them into conceptual

[18] In his comparison between the human mind and the divine mind, Cusanus particularly emphasizes vitality and freedom. According to some commentators, a similar emphasis on freedom of the mind in comparison between the human mind and the divine mind can also be found in Gregory of Nyssa and Raimundus Sabundus. See: Isabelle Mandrella, "Viva imago. Der Einfluss des Raimundus Sabundus auf die cusanische Metapher der viva imago"; Francisco Bastitta Harriet, *An Ontological Freedom*, 189-207. In this article, while agreeing with the views of these commentators, we will demonstrate that in Cusanus's comparison between the human mind and the divine mind, he emphasizes freedom as manifested in human cognitive activity.

[19] Gregory of Nyssa also thinks that the fundamental similarity between humans and God is freedom and being the cause of own actions. See: Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: On the Human Image of God*, 4, 162-163. For the use of the Greek term "*to autexoúsion* (*τὸ αὑτεξούσιον)*," which denotes self-determination in decision-making, free choice, and generally freedom, in the Eastern Patristic period, See: Cyril Hovorun, "Two Meanings of Freedom in the Eastern Patristic Tradition."

objects. Since the mind, as the image of Unity, is equality, it equalizes or coincides [*coincidentia*] the initial difference between the external objects and itself with each other. In this movement, the mind operates simultaneously in the relationality between unity and plurality. In other words, the mind, in the act of concept formation and assimilation, unfolds what it enfolds in cognition and enfolds what it unfolds. In other words, it brings the plurality created by God under unity through the unifying power given to it by God. Simultaneously, the mind's power of unity or encompassing, when stimulated by the plurality created by God, unfolds the concepts that the mind holds within itself. Human mind's understanding depends on its ability to establish relationality between unity and plurality. This relationality keeps the mind continually active and prevents it from being a static substance. In this regard, the mind is not a static substance in which cognitive activity takes place but is itself the very act of activity and relationality. As Cusanus puts it, the human mind is a living substance.[20] Ultimately, the human mind is a thinking and living substance, and it demonstrates its vitality in cognition. In cognition, the fundamental power of the mind is assimilation. In fact, for Cusanus, cognition is assimilation.[21]

In accordance with the principle of 'like is known by the like,'[22] the ultimate aim in cognition is to establish the likeness between the source and the image to form a relationship between the human mind and the divine mind. In other words, the image's goal is to reflect its source in the best possible way by becoming as similar to it as possible. The human mind, while operating as a whole in its cognitive activity with this reflective purpose, mirrors or knows everything within its self-created conceptual world through the mediation of the power of assimilation, in a manner appropriate to its different faculties (sense, imagination, reason, and intellect). In this way, the human mind acquires knowledge about the universe, itself and God,

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[20] Cusanus, *De Mente*, 5.80. In references to Cusanus's works, a numbering system that uses book/chapter and paragraph numbers, rather than page numbers, will be employed. According to this numbering system, the English source is Nicholas of Cusa, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, Vols. I-II. The Latin source is Nikolaus von Kues, *Werke: Neuausgabe des Strassburger Drucks von 1488*, Vol. 1. Additionally, for Latin, German, and English, the online resource "Opera: Werke," Cusanus Portal, https://urts99.uni-trier.de/cusanus/content/werke.php, has been used.

[21] Cusanus, *De Venatione Sapientia*, 17.50.

[22] Aristotle, "On the Soul," I.2.404b15-20; Additionally, the following phrase, which likely influenced Cusanus, is found in *the Hermetica* regarding the principle that like is known by like and the concept of humans being similar to God: "Thus, unless you make yourself equal to god, you cannot understand god; like is understood by like." Hermes Trismegistus, *Hermetica: the Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation, with notes and introduction*, 41.

respectively, within the limits of the conceptual world made by its own creative power. In cognitive activity, humans are creative and thus have this limitation, but precisely because they are creative, they gradually become more and more similar to their source through the power of assimilation in the mind. In other words, the human mind returns from the otherness of the universe, which it initially encounters as its first object, back to itself. This activity of the human mind, which involves the negation of the otherness through its cognition as assimilation, is the main principle of knowledge.[23] In other words by knowing the universe the human mind makes the other identical to itself, i.e. it makes it "not-other". However the human mind preserves its difference from the not-other. As is clear, with its representation of itself as an identity-in-difference, the mind realizes that its conceptual creation is both identical and yet different from itself. Through this realization the human mind also attains the symbolic knowledge of God, who is the creator of everything, as the non-other.

The objective of this movement of the human mind is to return to her source, namely God and to recognize God as the non-other. As an important part of this return, the human mind imitates God as infinity and reflects Him in itself. However, this reflection is not static but a living, dynamic one. Through creativity and freedom in this living or dynamic reflection, the mind accomplishes its return to God. This dynamism is primarily realized in the cognitive activity of the human mind as a living image and through the power of assimilation that underpins this activity.[24] In its free creation based on its power of assimilation, that is, in cognition, the mind gradually becomes independent of the other, thus approaching both itself and the things in themselves, and in this way, it also approaches God. In other words, the human mind as the image becomes more and more similar to its source.

In cognition, the mind (the image) imitates God, the source of its life, with the aim of uniting with Him. The more the mind creates by relying on its own resources, the more it becomes similar to God, who creates freely and

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[23] As Max Rohstock points out the negation of otherness is considered to be the main principle of both knowledge and being. However, in his book *Der negative Selbstbezug des Absoluten,* Rohstock argues that the main principle is the Absolute is both opposite and against opposites that transcends all oppositions. According the Rohstock, Cusanus describes the relationship between the Absolute and all finite beings aenigmatically through negation. See especially the section "1.2. Die andersheitliche Negation als Fundament der cusanischen, "Differenzontologie."

[24] Josef Stallmach also argues that the reason for the mind's display of creative spontaneity in Cusanus's is the mind's power of assimilation. See: Josef Stallmach, "Die cusanische Erkenntnisauffassung zwischen Realismus und Idealismus," 50-53.

unconditionally, and whose thinking and creating are one.[25] Thus, in order for the human mind as a living image of God, to reflect its source within itself and to attain union with Him,[26] it has to exhibit these characteristics as much as possible. Just as God, who desires to be known, is known through His works, the human mind, in the pursuit of increasing its degree of unity with its source, will first know itself through its original creative works and thereby achieve its assimilation to God.

Certainly, as Augustine also notes, since the infinite God is not within any ratio, approaching Him does not mean covering a spatial distance. Therefore, the union of the human mind as an image with God (the source) depends on the degree to which humans reflect God within themselves through their creative and free activity.[27] On the other hand, no matter how unconditional the human mind's free creation in cognition is, the fact that the infinite God cannot be compared to the finite[28] indicates that the mind can never fully reflect God in itself with complete equality. Nevertheless, since the human mind is an image of God, who is infinite, creative and free, its free creative activity has the potential for continual development, and for reflecting its source with increasing perfection. This suggests that, in one sense, the human mind, like all created beings, is infinitely distant from God, yet, in another sense as an image of God, it has the potential to infinitely approach Him. This potential, which refers to the reflection of 'coincidence of opposites' [*coincidentia oppositorum*] or 'identity-in-difference', manifests in the mind's free and creative cognitive activity[29], leading to the dynamic reflection of God within the human mind.

The human mind as a living image does not only have the potential to become increasingly similar to God, but also intrinsically desires the union

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[25] Cusanus, *De Sapientia*, I.18.

[26] For a detailed study on the union with God in Nicholas of Cusa please see: Nancy J. Hudson, *Becoming God: The Doctrine of Theosis in Nicholas of Cusa.*

[27] See: Isabelle Mandrella, "Der Mensch bei Nicolaus Cusanus," 178.

[28] Cusanus, *De Docta Ignotantia*, I .3.9.

[29] Michael Stadler states that human's creation is the result of the activity of understanding, and the differentiated world (*differenzierte Welt*) created by humans is a *modus cognoscendi* of the infinite world created by God. See: Michael Stadler, R*ekonstruktion einer Philosophie der Ungegenständlichkeit. Zur Struktur des Cusanischen Denkens*, 49. Stadler is correct in asserting that the human mind, in order to understand existence, engages in the activity of differentiation as an exercise of its cognitive power. However, the mind can achieve understanding as a force that simultaneously differentiates and unites. In this respect, as an image of the triune God, the mind in its cognitive activity simultaneously manifests both unity/sameness and plurality/difference, thereby reflecting its source within itself. This reflection is demonstrated in the application of its cognitive activity.

with its source through its power of assimilation.[30] When considered as an image, the human mind must be dynamic because a static image of an infinite source would be a flawed image. The characteristic of an image is to reflect its source in the best possible way. Moreover, the reason why God creates His image is because He manifests Himself through His image and is known by it.[31] In this context, while the source aims to produce an image that can best reflect itself, the image created for this purpose, when it is aware that it is a living image, also strives to reflect its source better. Note that, for this goal to be achieved, the image must become aware of its own nature as an image. This awareness is gained through the cognitive activity of the image, which is created to know its source. Naturally, for this cognitive activity to best reflect its source, it requires the power of assimilation, as the image seeks to resemble its source. The process of creation that the image undertakes to resemble its source or to reflect it in the best possible way is cognition, and cognition gives this image its vitality. Thus, through its cognitive activity the image becomes a conscious entity, pursuing a specific purpose, capable of self-activation, and development.

Ultimately, humans as the living image of God can become aware of themselves as being an image and know that they have a source of life (Absolute Life) and naturally desire to become more similar to their source to be more alive. This desire for union with the source is already implanted in humans at creation. As the image of God, the mind's fundamental desire for union with God is ultimately a desire for knowledge. This desire for knowledge leads the mind to its first object as otherness, namely the world, then to itself as the non-other, and finally to its absolute source without otherness, i.e., God. In this process, the foundational cognitive power of assimilation enables the mind's assimilation first towards the other (external), and then gradually towards itself (internal), and ultimately towards God.

So far, we have focused on Cusanus' account of the human mind as a living image and its purpose in general terms. In the next section, to analyze the

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[30] Cusanus, *Sermo* CLXIX; Cusanus, *De Venatione Sapientiae*, 17.50.

[31] The idea that God desires to be known, and thus creates the universe and subsequently humanity, holds a significant place in Sufi traditions as well. While the focus of this study is not to draw a direct relationship between Cusanus and Sufi traditions, exploring this topic could undoubtedly open new avenues and enrich the discussion. For further reading on the theme of God's desire to be known in Sufi traditions, see: İbrahim Hakkı Aydın, "Kenz-i Mahfi". An important Sufi thinker often compared to Cusanus in this regard is Ibn al- 'Arabī, whose discussion in the chapter on Adam in *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* is particularly helpful for seeing the similarities between these thinkers. See: *Ibn al-'Arabī, Ibn al-'Arabī's Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam: an annotated translation of "The bezels of wisdom*," 14-26.

progressive assimilation of the human mind to God in cognition, we will first examine Cusanus' characterization of the human mind as equality of Oneness (God). In particular, we will explain why the mind as equality is an image and how it differs from other created beings (unfoldings).

2. Image as Equality in Relation to the Image as Unfolding: Human Mind's Relation to Universe

Cusanus' account of the living image encompasses and transcends previous teachings. By attributing equality to the human mind, Cusanus develops upon Augustine's dominant perspective influencing many up until Cusanus.[32] In the Latin Christian tradition, Augustine recognizes the human as the image of God within the context of a source-image relationship. However, Augustine's account of the image of God does not attribute equality to humans. While Cusanus is influenced by Augustine's doctrine of the image in many aspects, as we will see, he presents an alternative theory to this dominant view. In this regard, Cusanus' account of the living image of God signifies a novel contribution to the debates on the doctrine of the image of God. With Cusanus' theory including equality, humans' self-conception in relation to God is presented not only in "vertical direction but also in a horizontal direction."[33]

Hence, before discussing Cusanus' theory of assimilation, it is important to explain why he considers the human mind to be an image rather than an unfolding (*explicatio*) as plurality (*pluralitas*). The key triad of concepts here are equality (*aequalitas*), image, and unfolding. This triad can be somewhat related to Augustine's analysis of image, likeness, and equality in his theory of image. In this respect, we can relate in Cusanus' concept of unfolding to likeness. Cusanus considers the human mind as an image rather than an unfolding because he associates the mind with equality, which is the image of Oneness.[34] Unlike an image, unfolding, for Cusanus, is characterized as plurality. In other words, plurality manifests itself as unfolding or likeness.[35]

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[32] In his article comparing the understanding of the image of God in Augustine and Cusanus, Johann Kreuzer emphasizes the centrality of the relationship between the human mind as the image of God and cognitive power in Augustine before Cusanus. He notes that Augustine developed his understanding of the human mind as the image of God particularly through the doctrines of memory and the inner word. See: Johann Kreuzer, "Der Geist als Imago Dei bei Augustinus und Cusanus," 65. In the understanding of the human mind as the image of God in Augustine and Cusanus, as Kreuzer mentions, the possession of cognitive activity is the common point. However, as we will see in the later sections of the article, Cusanus takes the human mind further in its relationship with God based on this cognitive power, beyond the point set by Augustine.

[33] Irlenborn, "Der Mensch als zweiter Gott?," 382.

[34] Cusanus, *De Mente*, 4.74

[35] Cusanus, *De Mente*, 4.74.

In his explanation of the image, Cusanus also refers to the universe, which contains plurality (otherness), as an image of God. The first place where the divine mind reveals itself, despite containing otherness, is the universe, and because of its orderliness, Cusanus refers to the universe as the first and exact image. However, in Cusanus' thought, the image signifies equality, not plurality. Therefore, how should we interpret Cusanus's evaluation of the universe as the first and exact image of God?

While interpreting the universe as the first and exact image of God, Cusanus emphasizes the orderliness within plurality (unfoldings) of the universe. He likens the orderliness of the universe as an image to the orderliness of an army, which reveals the practical wisdom of its commander more than anything else.[36] According to this analogy, the universe, by exhibiting orderliness, is an image that reveals the divine mind behind it. However, this image has a shortcoming. The universe is the first image, but there is a categorical difference between the universe and God in terms of their creativity. The creativity of the universe is not about creating from nothing but rather about recreating or generating.[37] The universe reflects its source by displaying orderliness as a manifestation of unity within plurality, but it remains as an incomplete reflection of its source because it lacks free creative activity. The universe's status as an image is not inherent to itself. Instead its status as an image depends on being perceived by the human mind that perceives the order within it, and sees the immanent unity within its plurality. Since the perceiving mind resembles unity, it can discern the unity within plurality.

Consequently, the universe, with its inherent regularity, is like an inanimate image that clearly reveals the divine mind behind it. Since the universe is created based on regularity and repetition, it is not developmental. Therefore, it lacks the ability to increasingly resemble its source. In this form, even though the universe is the first and exact image of its source, it would not be incorrect to say that it is merely a faint reflection

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[36] Cusanus, *De Venatione Sapientiae*, 32.95. See: *De Possest*, 72. In the orderliness or lawfulness of the universe, the divine mind is manifested, and through this manifestation or image, one reaches the mind or God that determines the laws. In other words, the invisible makes itself visible and reveals itself through the visible. The origins of this line of thought can be traced back to Plato's Timaeus, a work that greatly influenced Cusanus, Middle Platonism, Neoplatonism, and many Christian medieval thinkers. As stated in *Timaeus* 92c, the universe, filled with both mortal and immortal beings, was created as a visible, living entity, encompassing visible living creatures. In this sense, the universe is a visible god created in the image of the intelligible god. See: Plato, *Timaeus*, 92c.

[37] Rüfner Vinzens, "Homo secundus Deus. Eine geistesgeschichtliche Studie zum menschlichen Schöpfertum," 262.

of God. In this respect, the universe as plurality, while distinct from its source (Oneness), nonetheless originates from it.[38] That is why the universe as plurality reflects Oneness (its source), albeit imperfectly.

The human mind, based on the reflection of the universe as a ladder, sublates the distinction between the underlying divine mind (unity) and the universe (unity-in-plurality) in cognition, presenting both itself and the universe as images of God.[39] By conceiving the lawfulness, order, and beauty within the universe, humans ascend towards the underlying unity or truth beyond plurality. Conversely, God descends, so to speak, through the human mind in order to be known. In this process of knowing, the human, created as the knowing substance, sublates [*tollere*] the universe, which is posited as the first and exact image of God through cognition. This sublation occurs in the construction of the human's own conceptual world, which is realized through mind's power of assimilation, enacting a creative activity similar to divine creativity. The human mind's construction of the conceptual world is its domain of freedom, similar to God's. Thus, in its cognitive activity human mind reveals its distinction from the universe through the act of free creativity, presenting itself not as an unfolding (plurality) but as the true image of God (the image of Oneness). Despite the similarity, Cusanus also emphasizes the sharp distinction between the human mind and the divine mind. For instance, he compares the difference between the creative activity of the divine mind and that of the human mind to the difference between seeing and making. The divine mind brings things into existence from nothing by conceiving, whereas the human mind brings forth not the things themselves but their likenesses by conceiving.[40] Although the human mind cannot bring forth things into existence ontologically, it can create their likenesses from itself epistemologically. For the mind, through its power of assimilation, makes concepts of things that were neither pre-existing within itself nor acquired externally.

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[38] Explaining Cusanus' account of the relationship between the universe and God falls beyond the sphere of this article. However for a clear account of Cusanus' symbolic (mathematical) explanation of the relationship between the universe and God, please refer to Pál Sándor, "Welt und Gott," 59-73.
[39] On this subject, Falckenberg writes as follows [translation by me]: "Just as redemption is to the theologian, so is knowledge the counterpart of creation to our philosopher. The world exists for the sake of knowledge. In creation, the infinite gives itself over to the finite; in the process of knowledge, it takes itself back from the finite. Knowledge is the return of the world to God." See: Richard Falckenberg, *Grundzüge der Philosophie des Nicolaus Cusanus mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Lehre vom Erkennen*, 5. According to Christoph Horn, also in Plotinus, the aim is to abolition of otherness and union with the One. See: Christoph Horn, "Einheit und Vielheit," 193. See: Plotinus, *The Enneads*, VI.9.8:32-35.
[40] Cusanus, *De Mente*, 7.99.

By focusing on the creative activity in human cognition, Cusanus establishes a sense of equality between the human mind and the divine mind.[41] By doing so, he adds a new dimension to the discussion and challenges Augustine's thesis that humans are an unequal image of God.[42] With this contribution, Cusanus makes it possible for humans to approach God, who is otherwise felt as the Other and completely transcendent. Certainly, Cusanus acknowledges the insurmountable ontological distance between God and humans, as well as other created beings. However, he allows humans to be considered as equality to God due to humans' free creativity in cognition.[43] Given this equality due to their shared creative activity, the original distinction between God and created beings can be replaced with the distinction between the divine-human mind and other created beings.[44]

In a sense, while Augustine posits a sharp distinction between the unequal image of God (human mind) and the equal image of God (Jesus), Cusanus replaces it with his distinction between the human mind as the

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[41] Cusanus' conception of equality in he context of his statement that the human mind is the equality of Unity differs from his conception of equality in the context of his discussion of the Trinity. When speaking about the Trinity, Cusanus describes Unity as the Father, Equality as the Son, and Union as the Holy Spirit. Although the description of the Son as equality has been accepted since Augustine, Cusanus takes it to another level when he argues that not only the Son but also the human mind can be considered as the equality of Unity. Note however, that the equality in this context differs from the equality of the Son with the Father in the Trinity. In the case of the persons of the Trinity, the Father and the Son share the same essence, whereas the human mind, naturally, does not share the same essence with God. Hence, the equality in this context differs from the essential unity-equality relationship between the Father and the Son. Human mind as the image of God reflects the image of the divine Trinity. Hence, the human mind represents both the equality of Unity and the image of divine equality, bearing within it the image of Unity, Equality, and Union, as they are in God's Trinity. The equality within the human mind, which reflects the Trinity, manifests itself in its cognitive activity. The human mind possesses a capacity for cognition allowing it to become increasingly similar to its source through its unique creative activity. This potential for infinite development allows the human mind to reflect infinity in its cognitive creation and thus to be considered, in one sense, as the equality of Unity. However, it is important to note that, no matter how much progression occurs, there can be no direct comparison between the finite and the infinite because comparisons are possible only among finite things. As something finite, the human mind can never achieve absolute likeness or identity with the Absolute. Cusanus discusses this concept in *De Docta Ignorantia* I.3, where he elaborates on the nature of knowledge that the human mind can attain regarding this relationship.

[42] Irlenborn, "Der Mensch als zweiter Gott?," 392.

[43] For Cusanus, the human mind is genuinely the equality of Oneness (unitas). See: Cusanus, *De Mente*, 6.93.

[44] According to Thierry of Chartres, who was influenced by Neoplatonism and is one of the sources that influenced Cusanus's thought, *explicatio* (unfolding) is the common determination of all created beings, including the human mind. In this respect, Cusanus presents a different view from the concept of the image as understood by both Augustine and Thierry of Chartres. This is another piece of evidence for the originality of Cusanus's understanding of the image. See: Thiery of Chartes, "Lectiones in Boethii librum de Trinitate II 4-5," 155.

equal image of God and plurality (universe) as the unequal image of God. Plurality or universe, according to Cusanus, is a likeness or unfolding of God that contains no equality whatsoever. In contrast, humans, by possessing a mind, and thereby exhibiting creative cognitive activity based on assimilation exhibits the features of being both image and equality of God. Contrary to the human mind, the universe is an image that lifelessly reflects its source in a mirror or depicts its source in a static manner. A static image is entirely dependent on its source and lacks the ability to initiate its own motion. Therefore, it does not have the capability to become more similar to its source. In contrast, the human mind is a living image. This means that, in cognitive activity based on the power of assimilation, humans are creative, free, and they are the source of the conceptual world their mind produces.[45] Thus, as the true image of the divine mind, the human mind is 'the living mirror' (*vivum speculum*) of God.[46] Because this mirror is alive, it can become aware of its nature as an image and thereby move itself towards its source in order to gradually attain ever more resemblance. In this way, it has the potential to reflect its source in the best possible manner. Cusanus presents the following analogy between the human mind as a living image and plurality as a dead image:

> [The situation is] as if the painter were to make two images [of himself], one of which was dead but seemed actually more like him, and the other of which was less like him but was alive—i.e., was such that when stimulated-to-movement by its object, [viz., himself, the original], it could make itself ever more conformed [to the object].[47]

As expressed in this quotation, although the human mind may initially resemble its exemplar less than the dead image that appears to be more like God, it is, nonetheless, superior to the static image of the universe because it is alive. In this respect, the human mind is the sole/true image of God. Additionally, everything in the universe (God's unfoldings) becomes an image through the human mind. For Cusanus, God creates the universe to be known through it. However, the universe as plurality can reflect God and serve God's purpose only if it is brought under unity by humans' cognition as

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[45] Cusanus, *Sermo* CCLI: " ... freedom dwells in the mind, as the mind holds the principle of its actions within itself and is the lord of its action as Damascenus says. The mind has this freedom because it has been created in accordance with the image of God. If you consider it closely you will discover that the first cause put its likeness as cause into freedom in such a way that it should be a living image or cause that has been caused."

[46] Cusanus, *De Mente*, 5.87; Cusanus, *De Visione Dei*, 8.32; Cusanus, *De Ludo Globi*, 2.119.

[47] Cusanus, *De Mente*, 13.149.

assimilation. This in turn reveals the role of humans in this world, they are created to facilitate the transition from the plurality of the universe to unity.

In order to illustrate human's role in the world and the relationship of the human mind with equality as the image of Oneness, Cusanus uses the analogy of the first portrait of an unknown king, which serves as the original for all subsequent portraits. As he writes,

> [The situation is] as if the primary image of an unknown king were the exemplar of all the other images depictable in accordance with the primary image. For God's knowledge, or "face," is descendingly disclosed only in the mental nature [i.e., in mind], whose object is truth; and it descends further only by way of mind, so that mind is both an image of God and an exemplar for all the images-of-God that are [ontologically] subsequent to it. Hence, to the extent that all things subsequent to the simplicity of mind partake of mind, to that extent they also partake of the image of God. Thus, mind, in and of itself, is an image of God; and all things subsequent to mind [are an image of God] only by way of mind.[48]

As this passage clarifies, the unknown king represents God while the king's first portrait represents the human mind. Since all the other portraits have to be produced through the mediation of the first portrait, they are subsequent to it and can resemble the unknown king to the degree that they resemble the first portrait. As there cannot be an ontological similarity or comparison between the unknown king and his first portrait, Cusanus thinks that there is no proportion or comparison between the finite human mind and the infinite God. In this sense, there can be no ontological equality between the human mind and the divine mind either. Nevertheless, as this analogy conveys, there is a similarity between the unknown king and the first portrait as well as the first portrait and all the others subsequent to it. Similarly, even if there is a similarity between the human mind and the divine mind, this similarity is restricted to a few features and everything else (i.e., the unfoldings) in the universe are similar to God to the degree that they are similar to the human mind and exit through the mediation of our unique cognitive activity.

Even though the human mind is not the true origin of the existence of things, it creates things in the conceptual world based on its cognitive power due to its role as the primary exemplar in giving unity or meaning to the plurality. In this conceptual world, the human mind is not merely an imitator. Just like God, who is the creator and the primary exemplar in the real world,

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[48] Cusanus, *De Mente*, 3.73.

the human mind is the creator and primary exemplar of the conceptual world.[49] Since plurality can only become an image of God through the human mind, and thereby partially reflect God, the human mind is the mediation (equality) in which God (as unity) manifests Himself. In another sense, through its cognitive activity, the human mind facilitates the return of plurality (as otherness) and itself (as both otherness and sameness) back to God. Within the boundaries of the conceptual world created by the human mind, the human mind becomes the focal point where both itself and things enter into a relationship with God.[50] Thanks to creative cognitive activity, the human mind reveals itself as the image of God (Unity) through equality. In the next section, we will see that because the human mind, as a living image, is characterized as equality, it also exhibits a structure that contains the union of identity (sameneness) and difference.

3. Living Image as the Union of Identity and Difference

In the previous section, we saw that due to its free creative cognitive activity Cusanus considers the human mind as equality of God. For Cusanus, equality is considered to be the image of Unity (God) because it is a single repetition of Unity. In this single repetition, there is no intermediary (or mediator) between Unity and equality as the image.[51] The relationship between Unity and equality is direct, in the sense that there is nothing external between God and the human mind. However, equality as a single repetition of Unity, is not the Unity itself. Consequently, equality contains an element of difference that is not present in the absolute sameness/identity [*idemptitas*] of Unity. As an image, equality, while sharing in the sameness of Unity through similarity, is not Unity itself, i.e., it contains difference. Yet, since equality springs from Unity and is an image of it, it also contains unity and, in that respect, sameness. In brief, equality exhibits the union of sameness and difference, between unity and plurality/otherness. For this

[49] Cusanus states that with this characteristic, the mind is created as if the Divine Creative Art wanted to create itself. Since the infinite Creative Art is infinite, it cannot create something other than itself, so what is created becomes its image. See: Cusanus, *De Mente*, 13.148.

[50] Irlenborn, "Der Mensch als zweiter Gott?," 397.

[51] Prior to Cusanus, Augustine stated in De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus that the relationship between the human mind and God is direct, with no other nature intervening (nulla natura interposita). He adds that nothing is in a closer relationship with God. However, unlike Cusanus, he does not use the concept of equality in any way to describe the relationship between the human mind and God. See Aurelius Augustinus, *De Diversis Quaestionibus Octoginta Tribus / Dreiundachtzig verschiedene Fragen,* 51.2.

reason, Cusanus defines the human mind associated with equality as the coincidence (*coincidentia*) of unity and otherness, sameness and difference.[52]

In this context, the mind as equality is actually positioned between the absolute Unity/Sameness (the Enfolding) and plurality/otherness (the unfolding).[53] In other words, it is neither purely One nor purely many, but is capable of relating to both Unity and plurality. Thus, in cognition, the mind simultaneously achieves both enfolding (or internalizing) and unfolding (or externalizing). Consequently, the mind is equally aligned with both sides, contains both sides within itself, and simultaneously excludes both sides.[54] In this regard, the human mind, as the equality of Unity, is a power that exists in relationality.

Human mind's dual capability for enfolding (unifying) and unfolding (differentiating) simultaneously explains why it is associated with equality as the image of Unity and underscores the importance of the concept of relationality for the existence of the mind. [55] For the mind exists precisely in this in-between state, in relationality, and in activity.[56] In order for the mind as relationality and equality to realize its functions, it has been placed in a body, where it can become active. By being in a body, the mind, in accordance

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[52] Cusanus, *De Mente*, 7.97, 15.158. Cusanus also relates the mind's sameness and otherness to the concept of number and subsequently compares the mind to a number. In his article addressing Cusanus's relationship with Plato and Pythagoreanism, Christoph Horn notes that, while Cusanus is anti-Platonic in many respects, he belongs to the Platonic tradition grounded in Pythagoreanism when it comes to the concept of numbers. Horn explains that Cusanus's understanding of mathematical numbers as being from the mind supports this and shows that he is not anti-Platonic. Cusanus continues the Platonic tradition of distinguishing between ideal and mathematical numbers. By accepting the reality of ideal numbers, Cusanus aligns with Plato, but by considering mathematical numbers as constructs of the human mind, he demonstrates a constructivist view. According to Horn, Cusanus sees a source-image relationship between these two different concepts of numbers, akin to the difference between the divine and human minds. See Christoph Horn, "Cusanus über Platon und dessen Pythagoreismus," 14. Cf. İhsan Berk Özcangiller, "Cusanus'ta İkinci Tanrı Olarak İnsan ve Ölçme Edimi," 71-75. For a detailed analysis of the relationship between mathematical cognition and theological cognition and the progression of the mind toward knowledge of God through mathematical cognition, see Yalçın Koç's work *Theograhia'nın Esasları: Teoloji ve Matematik İnşa'sı Üzerine Bir İnceleme.* In this work, contrary to Cusanus, Koç argues that church theology cannot be established through mathematical enlightenment and offers a critique of Cusanus's view of mathematical enlightenment. Since Cusanus' account of mathematical cognition falls beyond the spheres of this study, I will not go into the details of Koc's influential work. See: Yalçın Koç, *Theograhia'nın Esasları: Teoloji ve Matenatik İnşa'sı Üzerine Bir İnceleme*, 453-530.

[53] In *De Mente*, Cusanus states that the limit and measure of everything originate from the mind. See: Cusanus, *De Mente*, 1.57. Of course, this limit is not related to the essential existence of things but rather to the things within the conceptual world created by human cognitive activity.

[54] See: Stephan Grotz, "Der Geist als angleichende Kraft (De mente c. 7 und 8),"133.

[55] Cusanus, *De Mente*, 15.158.

[56] See: Michael Stadler, "Zum Begriff der mensuratio bei Cusanus. Ein Beitrag zur Ortung der cusanischen Erkenntnislehre," 121-122.

with its characterization as equality, manifests itself in the union of unity–plurality and enfolding–unfolding.

So far, we saw that the human mind, through cognition as assimilation, reveals itself as a power that establishes relationality, that is, the simultaneity of sameness and difference, their union, and coexistence. Due to this feature, Cusanus characterizes the human mind as the equality of Absolute Unity or Absolute Sameness. In *De Genesi*, Cusanus raises the following question: How can the Same, which makes things the same, also bring about differentiation? And in response to this question, he states that in the Absolute Same, difference (distinction) is the Same.[57] Additionally, since the Same is only capable of making things the same and cannot be multiplied, it becomes evident that the movement of making the same can only occurs through assimilation. That is why Cusanus concludes that because the Same cannot be multiplied, it calls the non-Same to itself. Since the Same cannot be reached by the non-Same, the latter is transformed and elevated to the Same. This transformation and elevation of the non-same, as will be clear, occurs through assimilation to the Same. Hence, in order to understand the absolute Same's (God's) relationship to everything else, we need to understand Cusanus' account of assimilation in this context.

Cusanus explains assimilation as follows: "Now, assimilation indicates a certain coinciding of (1) the Same's descent toward what is not the Same and (2) what-is-not-the-Same's ascent toward the Same. Therefore, creation, or genesis, can be called an assimilation for Absolute Being itself."[58] Since Unity, which is also the Absolute Sameness, cannot be multiplied, created beings naturally exist in terms of plurality. Nevertheless, at the origin of plurality lies Sameness or Unity, as both self-identity and difference from others. While plurality does not contain Absolute Sameness itself, it nevertheless reflects Absolute Sameness by being the same as themselves. Since the Absolute Sameness makes each thing the same with itself and thereby, makes each thing what it is and not another, the plurality, otherness, and diversity among things ultimately arise from the Absolute Sameness. However, as previously mentioned, this plurality, even though it reflects its source, Unity or Absolute Sameness, is insufficient in resembling it. This is because plurality's movement does not originate from itself. Therefore, this plurality

[57] Cusanus, *De Genesi*, 1.149.
[58] Cusanus, *De Genesi*, 1.149-150.

remains as such unless the unity within this plurality is brought forth by something else.

In contrast, God, the source of plurality, as Absolute Sameness and Unity, is neither other nor contains otherness. Therefore, plurality originating from the source should also be essentially devoid of otherness. Thus, the human mind, as the image of Absolute Sameness, emerges as a complementary power to reveal or actualize this lack of otherness. When complemented with Cusanus's account of assimilation, we can conclude that the movement of descending and ascending in God's relationship with plurality (or the created universe) is facilitated by the cognitive activity of the human mind.

In cognition, the human mind does not possess any innate or given conceptions and it does not merely conform to the objects passively. Nor is it a power that contains *a priori* formal structures that makes the objects fit into these molds. In that regard, cognition, for Cusanus, is neither solely the mind's conformity to the object nor the object's conformity to the mind. Instead assimilation, for Cusanus, involves both activities, i.e., the mind assimilates objects to itself and it assimilates itself to objects. In that regard, though its power of assimilation the mind actively brings forth both of these activities and their unity. As Cusanus articulates, in our minds, the capability to be assimilated (*posse assimilari*), the capability to assimilate (*posse assimilare*), and the connection between these two are one and the same.[59] The union of these different capabilities of mind in cognition can be characterized as the 'identity in difference', which is the distinguishing feature of the human mind.

With this feature of mind in cognition, the mind's ultimate purpose is to know or to understand its source, which is the mind's highest function. Understanding or knowing, according to Cusanus, is making of the mind. In that activity of making, the mind requires the existence of both the form and the matter for its activity. That is why the mind first assumes the existence of matter, to which Cusanus refers as "capability to be made," which needs to be followed by the form, i.e., the power to make. Finally, by combining or uniting these two, namely the form and matter, the mind understands or knows a thing.[60] As a result, for Cusanus, our mind cannot achieve

[59] Cusanus, *De Mente*, 11.133.
[60] Cusanus, *De Mente*, 11.133.

understanding unless it is within a triune.[61] When this is accomplished, Absolute Sameness, which contains no otherness, appears in the human mind, i.e., in Its image. As is clear, the human mind in its cognitive activity exhibits the union of making others the same with itself and being itself the same with others, and thereby contains both sameness (identity) and others (difference) and their union in its nature. In that regard, the human mind as the living image reflects God's triadic nature in its activity of assimilation or cognition.

In addition to reflecting God's triadic nature, the human mind through its power of judgment (*vis iudicaria*), which plays a role in cognition, also allows the mind to reflect the free activity of the divine mind. This power of judgment, according to Cusanus, is the power that emerges simultaneously with the mind's encounter with objects. In that sense, the power of judgment does not rely on ready-made concepts or *a priori* that predetermine cognition, but instead produces judgments from itself. With this power, the mind forms its own judgments.[62] Thus, even though the mind, united with the body, is stimulated to move by an external object, its movement occurs as a result of the judgments produced by this power of the mind. That is way the mind, which carries within itself the source of its actions and controls its own activities, can be considered free in its activity. This ability for free activity is possible because the First Cause (God) has placed its likeness within the mind, and thus "the mind is a living image or a caused cause."[63] Note that the mind is described as a living image of God partly because of its ability to reflect a triune God through its act of cognition, and partly because it is a caused cause that freely moves itself.

As mentioned before, the mind as a living image, through its cognitive activity based on assimilation or the movement of making the same, realizes its ultimate purpose of understanding its source, Absolute Unity or Sameness. By doing so the mind, as the living image, approaches its source and achieves self-realization. Through cognition we also manifest free creativity, which appears to be the fundamental power of the divine mind. Hence, cognition makes it possible for us to approach God or for God to become visible in the mind. As Cusanus puts it, while God creates the realities

[61] The fact that the mind, as the image of God, also carries a trinity within itself and reflects various triads is particularly significant in Augustine's *On the Trinity* (*De Trinitate)*, especially in books 8-15. See Augustine, *On the Trinity, Books 8-15*.
[62] Cusanus, *De Mente*, 4.77.
[63] Cusanus, *Sermo*, CCLI.

of things, we are creators by assimilation.[64] In this creative cognitive activity based on the power of assimilation, humans are imitators of God.[65]

In this context, it is important to consider not only the creativity of the mind, but also the extent of its freedom in this creativity. God is the creator who creates freely. In His free creation, God is naturally not encompassed by anything else and moves solely by His own will, containing no otherness within Himself. When man, too, manifests a high degree of freedom that is not limited to otherness yet encompassing otherness within themselves, they draw closer to God, and reflect Him as fully as possible within themselves. However, humans cannot reflect God completely, because God is a being without otherness, while the human mind is not. In the end, the human mind is not the perfect equality of God, but rather it is God's equality as a living image approaching God. That is why the highest level at which the human mind can reflect God as Absolute Sameness or Unity is as the human mind's 'identity-in-difference.'

Conclusion

As we have seen, Cusanus' unique understanding of the image of God depends upon his conception of the human mind as a living image, which demonstrates human minds' equality to God by elaborating the mind's ability to create by assimilation, which is a fundamental power of cognition. In this respect, Cusanus' account of the doctrine of the image of God encompasses and transcends previous teachings on this topic. More specifically, with his conception of the "living image of God" Cusanus shows how the previously separated concepts of 'image' and 'assimilation' can be synthesized through cognition as assimilation in the living image.

With his understanding of the human mind as a living image and his doctrine of assimilation or cognition as the fundamental power of the mind, Cusanus continues the Augustinian view of the dynamism of the human mind

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[64] Cusanus, *Sermo* CLXIX: "….we are creators by assimilation. Just as God the creator creates and forms truly through thought and thinking, we produce the resemblances of things through our intellect and show in the arts that we work with resemblances. And in the same way that God enfolds in his actuality everything which is or can be, our intellect enfolds the resemblances of all things in its power and explicates them by assimilation. This is what understanding means."

[65] Cusanus, *De Mente*, 2.62. See: Krieger, Gerhard, "Conceptus absolutus. Zu einer Parallele zwischen Wilhelm von Ockham, Johannes Buridan und Nicolaus Cusanus," 15. Kurt Flasch emphasizes the combination of the doctrine of imitating nature with the creative activity of the human mind in Cusanus. According to Flasch, Cusanus unites two opposing elements in the human mind's creative activity that produces concrete works. On the one hand, artworks or craft objects are likenesses of our creative mind; on the other hand, they are images of the inner nature of the thing. See: Kurt Flasch, "Ars imitatur naturam. Platonischer Naturbegriff und mittelalterliche Philosophie der Kunst," 291.

as an image, but he also expands the scope of Augustine's account. While Augustine attributes likeness with equality solely to Jesus, Cusanus extends his account of the image of God and attributes likeness with equality to the human mind as well. Cusanus' doctrine of the image of God is based particularly on his comparison between the human mind and the divine mind. As we saw, the prominent shared features in this comparison are creativity, freedom, and being the cause of something. By incorporating the concept of equality, Cusanus attributes these three characteristics to the human mind as a living image and to its cognitive activity in his unique source-image (God-human mind) relationship. Thanks to the equality between human mind and divine mind, we can consider the relationship between the image and its source not only in a vertical direction but also in a horizontal direction.

What is particularly striking in Cusanus' account of cognition as assimilation is that the mind in cognition exhibits the union of 'making plurality the same with itself' and 'being the same with plurality.' Mind's dual ability to assimilate and to be assimilated in cognition, and thereby to unify the pluralities and to make itself a plurality (by way of creating concepts) allows it to exhibit (i) unity (identity), (ii) plurality (difference) and (iii) their union in its nature. The union of these different capabilities of mind in cognition can be characterized as the 'identity in difference'. These capabilities refer to the same power of assimilation, which can be thought as a power of identification which can simultaneously take two different forms (i) minds assimilation/identification to the other (plurality) and (ii) others' (plurality's) assimilation/identification to mind. Mind's ability to internalize objects and externalize itself is a necessary function of the mind not only to cognize the universe, but also to have cognition of itself and finally God. For the mind cannot cognize unless it assimilates itself to things and is assimilated by them. When the mind recognizes itself (unity) as the source of plurality (concepts), it sees that this plurality is also identical with itself (unity). The fact that the mind can view itself as identical and yet different from itself, shows that it exhibits identity in difference, not only in relation to the universe and divine mind, but also in relation to itself. Through this realization of the mind of its own triadic nature, which includes unity, plurality and their union, the human mind as the living image manages to reflect the triune God in its activity of assimilation or cognition, which constitutes the mind's ultimate purpose.

Çıkar Çatışması / Conflict of Interest:	Yazar, çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmiştir. / The author declared that there is no conflict of interest.
Finansal Destek / Grant Support:	Bu çalışma Tübitak 2219 Doktora Sonrası Araştırma Bursu kapsamında Bonn Üniversitesi'ndeki araştırma sürecinde üretilmiştir. / Supported by the TUBİTAK 2219 Postdoctoral Research Fellowship, this article was developed during the research period at the University of Bonn.
YZ Kullanım Beyanı / Declaration of AI use:	Yazar, yapay zeka destekli teknolojileri bu makalenin erken taslağında yalnızca dil desteği amacıyla kullandığını beyan etmiştir. / The author declares that AI-assisted technologies were used solely for language editing purposes in an earlier draft of this paper

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