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**Albertson, David: Cusanus Today.** Thinking with Nicholas of Cusa between Philosophy and Theology. Foreword by Jean-Luc Marion. Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press 2024. 374 S., kt. € 83,16 ISBN: 978-0-8132-3611-1

The figure of Nicholas of Cusa has undergone a remarkable transformation in modern and late-modern reception. Whereas in the nineteenth century German theologians and philosophers still presented him as a forerunner of modernity—often as a “German Descartes avant la lettre”—twentieth-century philological work on the critical edition has increasingly situated him within the context of late medieval preaching, mysticism, and contemplative theology. The volume under review takes its point of departure precisely from this tension: how can Cusanus be understood historically as a medieval author while at the same time continuing to function as an exceptionally fruitful interlocutor for modern and postmodern modes of thought?

This is not the first attempt to chart the remarkable reception history of Cusanus in the twentieth century—with significant antecedents in the nineteenth—but it is the first volume to present this late-modern reception systematically within the English-language academic discourse. The richness and heterogeneity of this reception are, however, so overwhelming that no overview can plausibly claim to offer a comprehensive systematization. This volume rightly refrains from such a claim. Rather, it presents itself as a carefully composed mosaic, in which different lines, voices, and modes of appropriation are brought into view.

That Jean-Luc Marion authored the foreword is, in this respect, highly significant. His characterization of Cusanus as “our anachronistic predecessor” functions as a hermeneutical key for the entire project. The volume explicitly distances itself from a purely historicizing approach and legitimates a methodologically controlled anachronism, in which Cusanus’s thought is mobilized to illuminate contemporary questions. In particular, the themes of iconicity, visibility, and invisibility—central to contemporary phenomenology—receive sustained attention. This emphasis is not only understandable but also convincingly motivated.

The three-part structure of the volume reflects this orientation. The first part addresses the modern reception of Cusanus in Germany. A particularly surprising and illuminating contribution is that of John R. Betz, who reconstructs an alternative reception history through the little-studied line from Johann Georg Hamann to Erich Przywara. Rather than reading Cusanus through the dominant trajectory of German Idealism, Betz shows how his thought operates within a counter-tradition that resists totalizing rationality. Extending into the interwar period with Przywara, this line offers sharp insights into the theological-speculative power of Cusanus beyond the framework of the modernity discourse.

The second part broadens the perspective both geographically and disciplinarily, with contributions on receptions of Cusanus outside Germany and even beyond Europe. Figures such as Kitaro Nishida, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan, and Michel de Certeau appear here as interlocutors. David Albertson's contribution on Cusanian topology in de Certeau is particularly rich and incisive, yet it simultaneously leaves an intriguing possibility unexplored. Precisely in the case of de Certeau, one might have developed a line that does not primarily follow the phenomenological trajectory, but instead foregrounds the discursive, historical, and spiritual fault lines of modernity. In this respect, the contribution makes visible how strongly the volume as a whole—perhaps inevitably—is shaped by a phenomenological horizon. Along similar lines, a more explicitly systems-theoretical reception of Cusanus—such as one engaging the work of Niklas Luhmann—remains largely absent from the volume despite its potential to complement the phenomenological perspectives that otherwise dominate the systematic sections.

The third part, "Thinking with Cusanus," contains explicitly systematic contributions by contemporary thinkers. Here again, the emphasis falls strongly on phenomenology and iconicity, culminating in the concluding essay by Cyril O'Regan. This focus is substantively defensible, yet it somewhat diminishes the mosaic-like character that distinguishes the earlier parts of the volume. Moreover, explicitly theological reflection remains relatively limited in this section, despite the promising subtitle "Thinking with Nicholas of Cusa between Philosophy and Theology." An important exception is the compelling contribution by John Milbank, who, from the perspective of Radical Orthodoxy, convincingly demonstrates how Cusanus can still be made theologically productive today outside a strictly phenomenological framework.

From a methodological perspective, the volume also raises an implicit question about the status of reception history itself. By foregrounding twentieth-century appropriations of Cusanus, the book demonstrates that reception is not merely a secondary phenomenon, but a constitutive dimension of Cusanus's ongoing intellectual significance. At the same time, it invites further reflection on how such reception-historical approaches relate to systematic theological interpretation, a question that remains open and productive throughout the volume.

More fundamentally, the volume underscores the fact that historical authors are always read from within contemporary constellations of questions and concerns. Rather than concealing this hermeneutical condition, the book productively foregrounds it, thereby contributing to a broader philosophical reflection on how premodern thinkers can meaningfully function within present-day debates. Even if additional interpretive possibilities could have been explored, the volume succeeds in clarifying the philosophical stakes involved in reading Cusa. It thereby reinforces the insight that reception history is not merely secondary to interpretation, but an integral dimension of the life of philosophical and theological texts.

The major achievement of this volume lies in its persuasive demonstration that the classical modernity debate, which long dominated Cusanus scholarship, is too narrow to sustain the speculative richness of his thought. Cusanus emerges here not as merely modern, but as a structurally contemporary thinker who persistently resists definitive classification. At the same time, the late-modern reception of Cusanus remains so rich and multilayered that a single volume inevitably hovers between philosophical-historical overview and systematic synthesis. That the reader finishes the book with an immediate desire for a sequel is therefore not a shortcoming but a genuine compliment: the volume succeeds in awakening the desire to continue thinking with Cusanus—even if the attempt to

fix his contemporary significance occasionally risks rendering that creative movement somewhat static.

Über den Autor:

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