

A micrological reading of the Later Cusanus

History of Early Modern Philosophy in its current state reveals – as does the history of philosophy as a whole – an impressive variety of approaches. On one essential feature, however, most of them tend to agree: Be it the history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*), the history of knowledge, the research on intellectual constellations (*Konstellationsforschung*), the history of philosophical problems (*Problemgeschichte*), the global approach in the history of philosophy, or the history of ideas – all of them adopt a macrological rather than a micrological focus. That is to say: Most of these approaches are less concerned with dissecting the argumentative pathways and logical intricacies of the texts. Rather than analysing internal relations within the texts, they are concerned more with the contextual frameworks in which the texts are situated and situate themselves. Micrological perspectives on the contrary – writing a commentary for instance – have become less prominent in recent times. This also holds true for research on Cusanus. That this research came into existence at all is, in a sense, a result of the very emergence of some of the aforementioned macrological approaches. For pivotal figures in Cusanus research have been instrumental in the development or revival of these approaches: Think, for example, of Ernst Cassirer's groundbreaking work in the history of problems, think of Hans Blumenberg's philosophical history of science, of Werner Beierwaltes' approach in the history of concepts, or, not least, of Kurt Flasch's reshaping of intellectual history. All of these authors have made seminal contributions to Cusanus research. A distinctly micrological perspective, on the contrary, has yet to be developed – which is all the more surprising when considering that the historical-critical edition by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences has provided an excellent basis for meticulously tracking the chain of thought in a Cusanian text sentence by sentence, including its opaque passages. The aim of my paper is to demonstrate that such a micrological approach is particularly valuable when interpreting Cusanus' later works.

A hallmark of these texts is undoubtedly Cusanus' relentless search for new terms to express the first principle – terms, which serve him also as *nomina dei*. In concepts such as *non-aliud*, *possest*, or *posse ipsum*, Cusanus seeks to articulate this first principle in a consciously a-traditional fashion. Scholars, however, have often tried to highlight the continuity of these terms with the tradition, pre-eminently with the (Neo-)Platonic tradition. While this continuity is in some sense undeniable, it does not, as I aim to demonstrate, exist in the sense that has thus far been assumed. My paper will develop this argument delving into the example of the *non-aliud* (the Not-Other). Usually this concept is understood as a mere version – Cusanus' version – of the Proclean *unum*. Following this interpretation, scholars tried to trace back the origin of the *non-aliud* to Cusanus' reading of Proclus (documented in his *marginalia*). I argue that this interpretation obscures the distinctiveness of the concept. To view it preferably in terms of (*begriffsgeschichtliche* and *problemgeschichtliche*) continuity with the Proclean One obfuscates the ends this concept serves within the Cusanian text itself. Here Cusanus does not attempt to inscribe his approach into the Neoplatonic 'henology' of the tradition. He attempts to go beyond it, indeed to ground it. The alleged continuity is thus not due to Cusanus' attempting to fit into the Neo-Platonic conception of unity. Rather he seeks to show that this very conception of unity is, in turn, logically dependent upon his own conception of the Not-Other. But this uniqueness of the Cusanian approach is to be grasped, I claim, only through a non-distant, micrological re-reading of the relevant passages in *De li non aliud* and of Cusanus' marginal notes on Proclus. The purpose of this paper is thus to demonstrate the value of such an approach in contrast to a perspective rooted in macrological approaches, which, I believe, tend to prioritize a certain type of historical continuity over others and over discontinuity.

*keywords: Nicolaus Cusanus; first principle; micrological reading*