



Seminar

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*Individualization, Subjectivity and Reform:
Nicholas of Cusa and the Erfurt Carthusians
in the Fifteenth Century*

Tuesday, 17 March 2020, 2:15 p.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala
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S W E D I S H
C O L L E G I U M
for ADVANCED STUDY

ABOUT MIKHAIL KHORKOV

Mikhail Khorkov studied history and philosophy in Moscow and Karlsruhe, earning his PhD in Moscow in 1999. From 2001 to 2013, he taught as an Associate Professor of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy at the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia. In addition, he was a Fellow at the Max-Weber-Kolleg für kultur- und sozialwissenschaftliche Studien, Universität Erfurt (2016–2017) and Senior Fellow at the Polish Institute of Advanced Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw (2017–2018). In 2012, he was elected to the Board of the International Society for the Study of Medieval Philosophy (SIEPM), and in 2018 he became Vice President of the Max-Scheler-Gesellschaft e.V. (MSG). His research areas include the history of medieval and Renaissance philosophy, history of religious thought, phenomenology, and philosophical anthropology.

Khorkov's most recent publications include "*Eckhardus theutonicus in latinum translatus: Lateinische Übersetzungen der deutschen Texte von Meister Eckhart und ihre Bedeutung für die Eckhart-Rezeption im 15. Jahrhundert*" (*Meister-Eckhart-Jahrbuch* 11, 2017); "Harmony of Intellect and Disharmony of Soul in German Mystical Texts of the Late Middle Ages" (*Micrologus* 25, 2017); and "Self-consciousness and Conscience in the Writings of Henry Suso and John Tauler", in *Veritas et subtilitas. Truth and Subtlety in the History of Philosophy* (Bochumer Studien zur Philosophie 59, Amsterdam, 2018).

During his stay at SCAS, Khorkov's research activities will focus on a project dedicated to the study of intellectual controversies between Nicholas of Cusa and the Erfurt Carthusians documented in a number of fifteenth-century manuscripts from Swedish and other European libraries.

ABSTRACT

Nicholas of Cusa's contacts with the Erfurt Carthusians most likely began during his legation journey to Germany (1451–1452) when he visited Erfurt, where he stopped for almost two weeks. It is known that he met there two leading Carthusians, Jacob de Paradiso and John de Indagine, and discussed with them a series of questions that seem to concern not only practical issues of the observant monastic reform, but also theoretical problems of nature of mystical experience, contemplation, meditation, and role of philosophy (especially ancient philosophy, first of all, Plato and Aristotle) for a contemplative religious life. Nicholas of Cusa presented his rationalistic theory of wisdom and mystical theology in his *De idiota* dialogues written in the summer of 1450 shortly before his journey. It is not excluded that they were written in connection with the preparation of his legation journey to Germany and primarily addressed to the Erfurt Carthusians. In contrast, Jacob de Paradiso and John de Indagine expressed their affective and irrationalistic views of wisdom in their writings on mystical theology written around 1450–1451. Nicholas of Cusa could not accept their theory of mystical theology as an irrational and affective experience and their individualized understanding of wisdom. At the same time, in his *De idiota* dialogues he used the figure of the wise Layman, which was also typical for the writings of the Erfurt Carthusians, and their criticism of university theology and mundane sciences.

Faced with a difficult political situation in Germany, one which required him to be better prepared for his legation journey, Cusanus tried to find arguments in his dialogue with the Erfurt Carthusians that would enable him to attract them to his side in the matter of monastic reform. For this purpose, he used the same figures of thought in his writings of the summer of 1450 which were also typical for the texts composed by the Erfurt Carthusians. At the same time, Nicholas of Cusa resorted to arguments that did not allow him to abandon his own rationalist position. So, he found the arguments in favour of direct knowledge of the Divine in Plato's dialogues, which his Erfurt discussion partners could not read at that time. Apparently, such a thoughtful strategy helped him to find new reliable allies among the Erfurt Carthusians for his plans to reform the monasteries in Thuringia and Saxony. But no less important is the fact that at the same time each of the participants in the discussion had no reason to abandon their main theories. Perhaps this is the reason why the Erfurt Carthusians were able to easily get Nicholas of Cusa's *De idiota* dialogues into their library.