

## *Introduction*

### BEGINNING AS NEGATION IN THE ITALIAN DIALOGUES OF GIORDANO BRUNO

SUPPOSE THAT AN AUTHOR HAS written a book dedicated to a figure of importance—for example, the French ambassador in London in the year 1584. The book opens with a gesture of almost theatrical physicality: the author represents himself as handing his book respectfully to his patron. It is a present. Without further ado, he starts to outline its contents. It is a supper (the reader knows that from the title, *La cena de le ceneri / The Ash Wednesday Supper*): but what kind of a supper is it? The author of the book, who has already revealed himself on the title page as Giordano Bruno, at this point launches into a scintillating, half ironic description, not of what his book is, but of what it is not.<sup>1</sup> Both classical and Biblical antiquity are eliminated in a trice as the reader learns that the supper in question is *not* a celestial banquet with Jupiter as its host, *nor* a supper in Paradise with our first parents, Adam and Eve. The first sentence, which occupies half the opening page of the book, continues by summarily deleting a string of other celebrated, mythical suppers, thus ushering the reader into the reality of the modern world. The second sentence modulates from straight negatives into a series of contraries or opposites, each of which negates the other. The supper is, at the same time, large and small, sacrilegious and religious, Florentine-lean and Bolognese-fat, comic and tragic, as well as many other contrary adjectives besides. The third sentence elaborates a little further toward a positive stance: the supper is going to be hard on the Aristotelians because the Peripatetics smell; on the other hand, it is possible to eat and drink with the Pythagoreans and the Stoics, respectively.<sup>2</sup> Something can thus be salvaged of classical antiquity. What this leads to for Bruno, however, is *not* the New Testament any more than the Old. For there too we find a negative: the book may be called *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, but it is *not* a supper of ashes. Only at that point does the reader finally start to learn what the supper really was and is: a symposium hosted by Sir Fulke Greville, among whose guests were two absurd Neoaristotelian scarecrows who will be derided mercilessly throughout the text. This remarkable opening gambit is brought to an end with the claim that the satire that animates the narrative is not to be seen as an end in itself. At the heart of

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the book, Bruno claims, there is serious speculation, rational and moral, metaphysical and mathematical, as well as a natural philosophy.

This beginning of Bruno's text is the beginning of his preface, or his *Proemiale epistola*, only. The beginning of the text proper, or of the first of the five dialogues of which it is composed, is elaborated in terms of a semiserious excursus on the significance of the number two. Before engaging with this further beginning, it needs to be noticed that recent critical consensus tends toward a reading of Bruno's six Italian dialogues written and published in London as a composite whole. In that case, the narrative developed from these beginnings is brought to its end in the equally remarkable final pages of the last of these dialogues, the *Heroici furori*, or *Heroic Frenzies*. There Bruno brings his story to its climax in a moment of ecstatic vision on the part of nine blind philosophers who have left Italy and arrived on the banks of the river Thames. The chief nymph of the place (commonly considered as an image of Queen Elizabeth I, the by then almost mythical Virgin Queen) sprinkles on their eyes a liquid contained in a vase given the philosophers at the beginning of their journey by Circe, who had struck them blind. The powerful but obscure magic of Circe had not been sufficiently strong to allow her to open the vase and restore the philosophers' sight. That only the English nymph is empowered to do.<sup>3</sup>

It should be noticed here that the power of the English nymph remains a double power symbolized by her two shining eyes, images of beauty and truth. The ecstatic moment of illumination that closes this cycle of philosophical texts thus remains in the world of multiplicity, completing what Bruno had already announced in the opening page of the *Supper* as a natural philosophy. Furthermore, the ending recalls the beginning as a modern version of Pythagoreanism insofar as the moment of illumination is presented in terms of music, with all the philosophers playing on their various instruments in an ecstatic vision of a newly infinite universe pervaded by a spirit of rational unity and harmony. Beginnings beget endings, not only of texts but also of the world itself. Bruno remembers this from what was clearly an intense study of the Bible in his early monastic years. Even as he repudiates the theological and spiritual message of both the Old and the New Testaments, he incorporates into his own philosophical vision, and his own texts, the sense of Genesis and Apocalypse. Yet at the same time, he denies them, for his own infinite universe is eternal in time. Although the single bodies in it are born and die, time itself stretches to eternity in a rapturous celebration of eternal life *in this world*.<sup>4</sup>

Back to a beginning, then, that is certainly more than just a beginning of a text, but not a representation of a beginning of time itself. Rather, the first dialogue of *The Ash Wednesday Supper* begins by picking up the

contraries of the *Proemiale epistola* and celebrating, in part seriously and in part ironically, the number two: the conceptual or logical starting point of a world of multiplicity.<sup>5</sup> Again what is being stressed is the Pythagorean root of Bruno's thought: not for nothing does *The Ash Wednesday Supper* itself define Bruno's own philosophical "school" of thought as "the Pythagorean school and our own." For Pythagoras is considered to have given us the theory that what gives form to the Unlimited is Limit: an idea that finds its major expression in the discovery of the numerical ratios that determine the intervals of the musical scale. Another field of study in which the ancient Pythagoreans discovered the idea of limits was medicine, given that the body is governed by opposites such as hot and cold, wet and dry. The good physician finds the proper blend between these contraries, obtaining a reconciliation or harmony among opposites, according to an analogy between the human body and a musical instrument. In a famous page of Plato's *Phaedo*, Simmias, the Pythagorean philosopher from Thebes who has come to Athens to comfort Socrates in his last moments, claims that the body is strung like a musical instrument, negatives such as hot and cold, wet and dry, taking the place of high and low in music.<sup>6</sup> Behind this Pythagorean discourse lies the idea that all things are numbers and that this principle applies throughout an infinite and eternal cosmos. The explicit Pythagorean reminiscences that color Bruno's beginnings of both the *Proemiale epistola* and of Dialogue 1 of *The Ash Wednesday Supper* prepare the reader for Bruno's own cosmological discourse. For Bruno in this work, in the course of intense discussion with his scandalized Neoaristotelian opponents, will extend the new Copernican idea of heliocentricity to an infinite, eternal universe inhabited by an infinite number of worlds. Multiplicity, we might say, is taken by Bruno to both its cosmological and its logical extreme.

If *The Ash Wednesday Supper* was immediately considered a "scandalous" text already within the Elizabethan culture of Renaissance England where it was originally written and published, that was largely because it denied the creation story of the Bible. Bruno himself underlines this in the opening of the fourth dialogue of his work, where it is pointed out by the Englishman Smitho that the Divine Scriptures in many places suppose and state exactly the opposite with respect to the cosmological hypotheses put forward by Theophilus, the character who stands here for Bruno himself.<sup>7</sup> Yet it should be remembered that alternative creation myths, alternative stories of the beginning of the world, were not absent from the culture of early modern Europe. Much emphasis has been placed in recent years on the importance of the texts forming the so-called *Hermetica*, such as the *Pimander*: a dialogue in which an alternative creation myth is proposed by Hermes Trismegistus. Marsilio Ficino was so struck with the *Pimander* that, in 1471, he used the name as the title of

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his entire collection of Latin translations of the Hermetic texts from the original Greek. The work of Frances Yates has established that Bruno was certainly reading the Hermetic texts in Ficino's Latin translation, so it is worth pausing a moment to look briefly at this alternative myth of the beginnings of the world.<sup>8</sup>

At one point in the *Pimander*, Trismegistus sees within himself, in his mind, the light and an innumerable number of Powers, a limitless world and the fire enveloped in an all-powerful force. He asks Pimander: "The elements of nature—whence have they arisen?" Pimander replies, "From the counsel of god, which having taken in the word and having seen the beautiful cosmos, imitated it, having become a cosmos."<sup>9</sup> And so the mind of god, existing as life and light, brought forth a second mind, or craftsman, who being the god of fire and breath, fashioned the seven governors, who envelop with their circles the sensible world. Now the mind, the father of all beings, gave birth to a man similar to himself, whom he loved as his own child. When he saw the creation that the craftsman had fashioned in the fire, the man wished also to produce a work, and permission to do this was given him by the father. Then the man leaned over the cosmic framework and showed to lower nature the fair form of god. When she saw that he had in him the inexhaustible beauty of the form of god, nature smiled and embraced the man, and thus they became lovers.

Such is the Hermetic account of the beginnings of the universe, in which the fires in the firmament above come to coincide, as in an embrace, with the fires in the firmament below. Now that we know, as Bruno did not, that these texts belong to the first centuries of Christianity, and not to the ancient world, we can see how they have absorbed the spirituality of the opening of the Gospel of St. John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." There are, however, important differences in the Hermetic account that make it into a definitely alternative version of the beginnings of the universe with respect to the Biblical story. For example, there is the idea of limitless elements existing in a preceding state of powerful chaos before the action of a chain of demiurgic creators, who include a demiurgic man himself. Then there is, as Frances Yates pointed out in some recently published notes on her reading of the *Hermetica*, a total absence of any idea of sin and redemption: the demiurgic man is marvelously beautiful, and nature smiles with love at seeing his shadow fall over the world.<sup>10</sup> We are a long way here from the anguished guilt of Adam and Eve, or from a nature that, to use Milton's phrase, "sighing through all her works gave signs of woe."<sup>11</sup> Yet it can, in my opinion, be fairly claimed that the Hermetic texts played a larger role in the final three Italian dialogues, which develop Bruno's moral philosophy, than in the first three concerned with his cosmology. In the final three dialogues, the *Hermetica* are explicitly cited;

in *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, they are not. Although the “embrace” of the world above and the world below becomes an important element in Bruno’s cosmology, he seems mostly to have used in *The Ash Wednesday Supper* the Hermetic idea of a universe without limits, particularly the image of a cosmos seen as an infinite circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. This image actually derives from a twelfth-century Latin text called the *Book of Twenty Four Philosophers*, full of Hermetic reminiscences, but not included in Ficino’s volume of canonical Hermetic texts.<sup>12</sup> If we want to find the alternative philosophical tradition most consistently opposed by Bruno to the Biblical account of beginnings, we should look elsewhere.

Within the culture of the early modern world, we find the survival of yet another account of the beginnings of the universe that had never entirely disappeared, even during the long centuries of the so-called Middle Ages. For there was one Platonic text known throughout the Middle Ages: the *Timaeus*, or the text in which Plato outlines his mythological account of the creation of the universe. The best known of the Latin versions of the *Timaeus* that survived into the Middle Ages was by Calcidius, which included an annotated commentary. So it is interesting to note that Plato’s alternative creation myth never completely disappeared from view, even during an era dominated by the Christian faith in Biblical narrative. This is largely because Calcidius, possibly a fourth-century Spanish ecclesiastic (although little is known about him), was clearly working in a cultural context of Christianizing Neoplatonism that attempted to incorporate Platonic ideas into the Christian doctrines.

Bruno is likely to have been familiar with Plato’s *Timaeus* since his early monastic years in Naples.<sup>13</sup> By the time he reached London, however, he was thinking about cosmology in philosophical rather than theological terms. It was not so much the details of the creation story at the hands of yet another demiurge, told by Timaeus in Plato’s text, that interested him. Rather it was the Pythagorean strand in Plato himself that comes out so elegantly and forcefully in the opening gambit of Socrates, who starts off this dialogue from the phenomenon of numbers: “One, two, three, but where, my dear Timaeus, is the fourth of those who were yesterday my guests ... ?”<sup>14</sup> Plato’s beginning of the *Timaeus* must rate by any standards as a stroke of literary genius. The passage from unity to multiplicity is lightly balanced by the passage from the indeterminate two to the determinate, empirical, even banal problem of the number of guests present at the time. The apparently casual conversational tone covers with a smile the statement of the philosophical problem underlying the whole text: that of the vexed relationship between an eternal and unchanging unity and the phenomenological multiplicity of the world and the passing of time. Hans Georg Gadamer, one of the major Platonic

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commentators of the last century, and himself a philosopher of note, has written on these opening pages of the *Timaeus* in a book titled *Dialogue and Dialectic*:

The doctrine of the indeterminate Two is a doctrine of the primordial discrepancy between essence and phenomenon, a discrepancy which is as inchoately expressed in the *Timaeus* as it is in Parmenides' doctrinal poem, a poem which appends a description of the dual world of oppositions to the Eleatic teaching on unity.<sup>15</sup>

It is surely with a deliberate if ironic glance at this beginning of the *Timaeus* that Bruno begins his own first cosmological work by comparing innumerable opposites within the natural world, followed by his semiserious excursus on the number two—that is, by introducing his reader at once into a world characterized by a sign of negativity. For once you move conceptually beyond *one* to the idea of *two*, you have something that is *not-one*. As Bruno's Theophilus explains, citing explicitly Pythagoras, the first coordinates in the universe are always two, not one, for which reason two has to be considered as a mysterious number.<sup>16</sup> It is perhaps symbolic that Bruno explicitly cites the *Timaeus* twice in *The Ash Wednesday Supper*. Once, Plato in the *Timaeus* appears after a list of Pythagorean philosophers, as someone who, even if timidly and obscurely, upheld the idea of an earth that moves rather than staying still at the center of the universe. Bruno emphasizes the fact that Copernicus himself had quoted Plato's *Timaeus* in this sense. The second citation occurs when Bruno is arguing for the eternity of his universe: an argument he reinforces by claiming that Plato in the *Timaeus* held that the stars are not subject to dissolution. Although disagreeing with the idea of a universe created in time, and with the idea of a demiurgic creator (in that, he was closer to Aristotle than to Plato), Bruno leaves his reader in no doubt as to the importance of Plato's *Timaeus* as a source for his own cosmological discourse.<sup>17</sup>

For example, Bruno also, like Plato, dwells on the importance of the number four. For as in Plato's discussion concerning the natural universe, his dialogue too is composed ideally of four participants. Both Plato and Bruno are undoubtedly remembering the particular significance given to the number four by the Pythagorean philosophy, whose number symbolism considered the square of two as containing all possible contraries and therefore as standing for the entire ocean of multiple being.<sup>18</sup> This great ocean of multiplicity, which Bruno thinks of as reflecting an infinite substance, is impregnated with a principle of negativity that the mind attempts to resolve in a spirit of dialectic and dialogue. Bruno would certainly have had in mind Plato's Socrates, who arrives at his conclusion that he knows nothing only by constant questioning and doubting; the

necessary foundation from which he attempts to rise to a perception of certain and true ideas. Plato's pupil Aristotle would, on the contrary, substitute the form of the dialogue with the treatise, despising the Pythagorean opposites that he felt lead only to confusion and uncertainty. In his *De monade, numero et figura* published in Frankfurt in 1591, and based on mystical Pythagorean number symbolism, Bruno himself will write of the number two that it is the first foundation of all numbers according to which there is one thing on this side and another on that, a subject and an object, something subtracted and something added, so that now concord and agreement will no longer be possible, as division has entered between you and me. Aristotle claims in his *Metaphysics* that the original pairs of Pythagorean contraries were ten, and rejects later additions by disciples such as Alcmaeon. The contraries listed by Aristotle are limited and unlimited, odd and even, one and many, right and left, male and female, rest and motion, straight and curved, light and darkness, good and bad, square and oblong.<sup>19</sup> Substituting Platonic dialectic with syllogism as his basic logical tool, Aristotle proposes a philosophy that aims at moving beyond this dualistic uncertainty in order to arrive at undeniable truths.

It is interesting to notice that an analogous divergence regarding the principle of negativity emerges once again within the modern world. In the seventeenth century, Descartes, in the second of his *Rules to Guide the Intelligence*, claims that doubt appertains to any zone in which there is a lack of consensus, or when the opinions of two people concerning the same thing are in contrast with one another.<sup>20</sup> For Descartes, such a situation of doubt equals one of falsehood in which it is not possible to talk of real knowledge. However, such a premise leads Descartes to find certainty only in mathematics, in particular in arithmetic and geometry—the only two arts, Descartes claims, to which his rule is capable of leading. Descartes thus has to sacrifice much in order to maintain his idea of knowledge as something essentially positive, an assertion of certainty. Negativity, pertaining to doubt and falsehood, is banished to the realm of an imperfect world of pragmatics that, for Descartes, has nothing to do with a true philosophy. It is interesting at this point to remember that Descartes, in his only known mention of Bruno, included him with other renaissance *novatores* whose many maxims he found too often contradictory. He claimed that there was no reason to read their works.<sup>21</sup>

Bruno would reappear seriously on the philosophical scene, as indeed on the literary one, only in the post-Kantian culture of European Romanticism, when his was widely considered as a prophetic voice of a new modernism. This is not the place to retell an already established story. Yet it can be useful here to remember that in England at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of the major English poets of the Romantic period and also a philosopher of some note, became a

dedicated reader of Bruno. One of the most original aspects of Coleridge's interest in Bruno regarded his dialectic, or what Coleridge called his "polar logic": a triangular progression of thought that moves from the thesis to the antithesis, to resolve itself in a moment of identity or synthesis, or what Bruno called a "resolution of contraries."<sup>22</sup> In a nowadays little read, and sadly undervalued, biographical introduction to Bruno's life and thought, Dorothea Singer cites Coleridge on this subject:

Every power in nature and in spirit must evolve an opposite, as the sole condition of its manifestation: and all opposition is a tendency to re-union. This is the universal law of polarity or essential dualism, first promulgated by Heraclitus, and two thousand years afterwards republished and made the foundation of Logic, of Physics and of Metaphysics by Giordano Bruno. The principle may be thus expressed. The identity of thesis and antithesis is the substance of all being; their opposition the condition of all existence, or being manifested, and every thing or phenomenon is the exponent of a synthesis as long as the opposite energies are retained in that synthesis.<sup>23</sup>

Coleridge jumps straight from Heraclitus to Bruno, although modern commentators have noticed the intervening contributions to the subject of a polar logic by such medieval figures as Raymond Lull, whose picture logic deeply influenced Bruno, and Nicholas of Cusa, who offered Bruno a logical vocabulary in which to express his theory of the coincidence of opposites.<sup>24</sup> This gradual emergence of an idea of a modern polar logic is a theme that, some years after Coleridge, would be taken up and developed in his *History of Philosophy* by Hegel—a history that collects together material from his lectures in Berlin delivered in 1829–1830. Hegel thought that Bruno had not fully developed the triadic movement of the history of thought, but that he had made a remarkable attempt to do so—making what Hegel calls "a great beginning of the effort to think unity" through the thesis that matter "has life in itself." Hegel revalued Bruno's art of memory for its effort to found the principles according to which the mind develops multiple systems of symbols and images, even if he found the energy and creative force of Bruno's mind more impressive than the results he obtained. The danger, according to Hegel, was that the moments of an infinite and eternal world process are only "collected" or "enumerated," and not developed into a fully logical progression of thought. In spite of such criticisms, however, Hegel, like Coleridge, saw in Bruno a thinker who had laid the foundation stones of a new logic and dialectic that would lead on to the idealism of the modern world: to a new philosophy of the mind.<sup>25</sup> By the time that Hegel gave his lectures on the history of philosophy in Berlin, Bruno's modern reputation was assured, and the foundations were laid for modern editions of his works to appear and for the first full-scale biographies.<sup>26</sup>

Before Hegel, figures in Germany such as Jacobi, Buhle, and Schelling had promoted Bruno as an important figure in the philosophical tradition, and Goethe had done so in a literary context.<sup>27</sup> However, it is Hegel's treatment of Bruno that is of special interest for its insistence on the importance of the negative in the context of a polar logic. So it is interesting here to remember Hegel's own celebration of negativity in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.

In his famous preface to that work, Hegel acknowledges what he calls "the tremendous power of the negative." He identifies the negative with "the pure I," or that part of the self that produces the pure energy of thought. The passage goes on to associate the power of the negative—closely associated with the passage of time—with the phenomenon of death, considered by Hegel as "of all things the most dreadful." But, Hegel continues:

the life of the spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking at the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being.<sup>28</sup>

Only when the negative has been consciously engaged with, becoming an essential part of being rather than merely cast aside in fear, does Hegel feel that he can go on to define the process by which the mind rises to a higher form of perception of a fully synthetic unity. A recent commentator on Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, J. N. Findlay, has this to say about Hegel's concern with the essential importance of negation:

On Hegel's basic assumptions negation, in a wide sense that covers difference, opposition, and reflection or relation, is essential to conception and being: we can conceive of nothing and have nothing if we attempt to dispense with it. But negation in this wide sense always operates with a unity, which is not as such divisible into self-sufficient elements, but is totally present in each and all of its aspects, and we conceive nothing and have nothing if we attempt to dispense with this unity.<sup>29</sup>

Let us now return to Bruno—not in the sense of considering him as a "precursor" of Hegel, in the naive and unfashionable nineteenth-century use of that interpretative category, but nevertheless bearing in mind that he was an author known to and commented on by Hegel. One of the works by Bruno that Hegel would certainly have read, because large parts of it had been translated into German by Jacobi at the end of the eighteenth

century, was the second Italian dialogue written and published by Bruno in London in 1584: *The Cause, Principle, and One*. In this work, Bruno considers the metaphysical implications of the natural philosophy he had just presented in *The Ash Wednesday Supper*. The cause, particularly the final cause lying behind the world of phenomena, and the unity of a final vision of the whole, or the one, are always present to Bruno as the ultimate goal of the philosophical endeavor. Yet he sees the human mind as living out its destiny, its inevitable fate, within a world of irregularities and inexactitudes, of conflicting realizations, such as Timaeus had described in Plato's dialogue. The first coordinates in the universe are always two, not one, as Bruno's natural philosopher, Theophilus, had maintained at the beginning of *The Ash Wednesday Supper*. Theophilus, however, is also a lover of god, as his name implies, and although Bruno denies divine inspiration, he does believe in a world soul of Neoplatonic derivation, or a rational principle at work within the infinite vicissitudes of the natural world. Bruno thus underlines the necessity for the human mind to search for the illumination of ever higher forms of beauty and truth by progressing from simple to always more sophisticated visions of an infinite whole. This can be done only by progressing dialectically through ever more complex forms of contraries. So, in conclusion, Bruno writes in the final dialogue of *The Cause, Principle, and One*, "he who wants to know the greatest secrets of nature should observe and examine the minima and maxima of contraries and opposites."<sup>30</sup>

Hegel would speak of "tarrying with the negative," and would define such tarrying as the magical power that converts the negative to being. It is difficult to believe that he had not read the page of *The Cause, Principle, and One* on which Bruno declares that the most profound form of magic is that which knows how to perceive contraries within the point of union.<sup>31</sup> The word "magic" here is not used in its more usual sense as a definition of the irrational powers or qualities of an objective world. Rather, it is used to define that leap of the imagination by which the inquiring intellect achieves a vision of truth as unity, only to move beyond that unity in the recognition of a yet higher play of antitheses. Bruno goes on to define the *sommo bene*, or the highest good, as "the highest form of appetite, the highest perfection, the highest beatification consisting in a unity that complicates everything." Here, the word "complicates" derives, according to common sixteenth-century usage, directly from the Latin, meaning not a difficulty or a problem, but rather the inclusion of opposing strands into one whole, or a complex intertwining of contrary forces. Bruno's greatest good thus includes, rather than excludes, the negative, without which, as Hegel would repeat after him, we can conceive nothing.<sup>32</sup>

The importance of the negative for Bruno is underlined precisely by the fact that, as we have seen, he emphasizes that importance at the very beginning of his six Italian dialogues, written and published in London between 1584 and 1585. The beginning of his first text in that sequence corresponds not so much to a cosmic beginning, which was denied by his conviction of the eternity of his infinite universe, as by a logical or conceptual beginning. The passage from the one to multiplicity, or that “primordial discrepancy between essence and phenomenon,” as Gadamer called it, becomes the starting point of the philosophical journey narrated in the six ensuing dialogues. The journey is not going to be simple or linear, not a straight path from darkness to light. It leads the reader through a labyrinth of contradictions and negations, of arduous and often frustrated inquiry that only occasionally finds its climax in a moment of genuine illumination, such as the vision of an infinite universe that the nine philosophers achieve together, at the climax of the *Heroici furori*, on the banks of the river Thames. The fact that these characteristics of Bruno’s inquiry are underlined in an apparently light-hearted preface, finding their literary expression in an extraordinary piece of virtuoso writing with what are already baroque ramifications, should not deceive the reader as to the seriousness of Bruno’s intentions.<sup>33</sup> It is, indeed, Bruno himself who draws attention to the underlying seriousness of his comic vein in *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, asking his reader to consider:

that this dialogue tells a story. It narrates occasional events, walks, meetings, gestures, sentiments, speeches, proposals, replies, arguments that are both sensible and absurd. Everything is subjected to the rigorous judgment of our four speakers, so that nothing of any importance is left without a comment. Consider also that there is no superfluous word here, for in every part there is a harvest to be gathered of things of no small importance, perhaps more so precisely where it seems least likely.<sup>34</sup>

#### NOTES

1. For the pages discussed in this paragraph, see Bruno (2002), vol. 2, 431–32.
2. Bruno’s anti-Aristotelian polemic found one of its strongest expressions during his second visit to Paris in 1586, and was considered so scandalous that he had to leave France for Germany. See Bruno (2007). For his positive readings of both the Pythagoreans and the Stoics, see “The Pythagorean School and our Own” in Gatti (1999) and the “Nota sopra el uso de Séneca por Giordano Bruno” in Granada (2005).
3. See chapter 6, “The Sense of an Ending in Bruno’s *Heroici furori*,” in this volume.

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4. For the pages of the *Furori* discussed earlier, see Bruno (2002), vol. 2, 738–53.

5. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 442–44.

6. See Plato, *The Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1961, 68–69.

7. See Bruno (2002), vol. 1, 522–28.

8. See Yates (1964). Ficino's collection of Hermetic texts with the addition of the *Asclepius* can be consulted in English in *Hermetica*, trans. and ed. Brian Copenhaver, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

9. See *Hermetica*, op. cit., 2.

10. See Frances Yates, "Notes on *Camillo and Hermes Trismegistus*," ed. Hilary Gatti, in *Annali della Scuola Normale di Pisa*, Classe di Lettere e Filosofia, series IV, vol. VI, I, 2001, 171–93.

11. See Milton's account of the fall in *Paradise Lost*, bk. IX.

12. See *Hermetica*, op. cit., xlvii.

13. On the Neoplatonism of Bruno's early years in Naples, see Rowland (2008), 38–61.

14. For the *Timaeus*, see Plato, *The Collected Dialogues*, op. cit., 1151–1211.

15. See Hans Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, trans. and ed. P. Christopher Smith, New Haven–London, Yale University Press, 1980, 206.

16. See Bruno (2002), vol. 1, 442.

17. *Ibid.*, 494 and 556.

18. For Bruno's thoughts on the number four, see the *De monade*, his work on Pythagorean number symbolism. In particular, Bruno (2000c), 302–28.

19. See Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, bk. I, (A) 986a1, in *The Complete Works*, op. cit., vol. II, 1559.

20. Descartes' *Regulae ad directionem ingenii* (*Rules to Guide the Intelligence*) appeared posthumously in a Dutch translation in Amsterdam in 1684, and then in Latin in the same town in 1701.

21. See René Descartes, *Tutte le lettere 1619–1650*, ed. Giulia Belgioioso, Milan, Bompiani, 2005, 158.

22. For Coleridge on Bruno, see chapter 10, "Romanticism: Bruno and Samuel Taylor Coleridge," in this volume.

23. This passage was first published in Coleridge's short-lived intellectual review, *The Friend*; see Singer (1950). Singer's discovery of this important passage is mentioned in Calcagno (1998).

24. On Bruno and Lull, see Cambi (2002). On Bruno and Cusanus, see Mancini (2000), 245–74.

25. Antonio Corsano, in an important study of Bruno's mind in its historical context, underlines the "audacity" of his thought, particularly when "he converts impossibility into necessity and negation into an absolute affirmation." See Corsano (1940), 145.

26. See the ample section on Bruno in Hegel's history of philosophy: G.W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (1833), in *Werke*, Frankfurt am Maine, Suhrkamp, 1979, vol. 12.

27. For this German revival of Bruno, see Ricci (1991).

28. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. and ed. J. N. Findlay, Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 1977, 19.
29. See the foreword to *ibid.*, ix.
30. See Bruno (1998), 100.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, 101.
33. For the baroque elements in Bruno's writings, see Barbieri Squarotti (1958).
34. Bruno (2002), vol. 1, 438. My translation.