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Giordano Bruno's Hermeneutics: Observations on the Bible in *De Monade* (1591)

Leo Catana

Giordano Bruno's observations on the Bible can be contextualised within the history of science. According to Bruno, the Bible is primarily a book on morality, not a book on natural philosophy.¹ Hence, natural philosophers should carry out their examination of nature independently of biblical authority. There are, admittedly, exceptions to this general view – he considers the Book of Job, for instance, an important work on natural philosophy.² Such exceptions have not, however, prevented posterity from interpreting Bruno as an early spokesman for the freedom of philosophers to reflect independently of the Bible with regard to natural phenomena, this view being regarded as a proleptic feature in his interpretation of the Bible, anticipating later influential figures in the science–religion debate like Galileo Galilei (1564–1642).³

Although this picture of Bruno (1548–1600) and his comments on the Bible is true and important, it is incomplete. For in *De monade, numero et figura liber*, printed in Frankfurt in 1591, Bruno assigns nine levels of meaning to the Bible and to other divinely inspired texts.⁴ Some of these nine meanings are clearly taken from the medieval tradition of biblical exegesis. Thus, in addition to the above-mentioned proleptic aspect of Bruno's comments on the Bible, there is also a retrospective aspect. This retrospective aspect has received far less attention than the former. The passage in *De monade* exposing Bruno's theory of nine levels of meaning in the Bible, and in other divinely inspired texts, has not been considered in the authoritative studies on biblical exegesis by Lubac, Harrison and Griffiths.⁵ Moreover, the passage in *De monade* exposing this hermeneutics has not been studied by Bruno scholars, neither by those working on his Bible commentary, nor by those working on his *De monade*.⁶ I intend to do so in this essay.

Bruno's theory of nine levels of meaning in divinely inspired texts

De monade is divided into eleven chapters. The first contains a dedication and a few remarks about the intention of the work. Chapters two to eleven deal with the numbers one to ten in consecutive order. Bruno assigns various symbolic senses to each number. Chapter two deals with number one, the monad, chapter three with number two, the dyad, and so on, up till chapter eleven, which deals with number ten, the decad. Chapter ten deals with number nine, the ennead, and this is where we find Bruno's theory about the nine levels of meaning in the Bible and in other divinely inspired texts.

The sequence of numbers dealt with in *De monade*, as well as their symbolic meanings, can, at least in a loose sense, be understood against the background of Neoplatonic and Pythagorean inspiration, according to which the One is the origin of multiplicity in an ontological sense. The composition of *De monade* is probably intended to mirror the descent from the One to multiplicity and offers the opportunity to make different statements about philosophical, theological and literary symbolism traditionally assigned to the respective numbers one to ten.⁷

Bruno assigns various symbolic meanings to the number nine – for instance, the nine muses and the ninefold order of angels, both of which he returns to outside *De monade*.⁸ He also assigns a symbolism to the number nine in *De monade* which is not dealt with at all in any other of his writings, namely the symbolism of the nine levels of meaning in biblical and other divinely inspired writings:

Nine are the ways in which the divine language [manifests itself], in which, according to the Supreme, all of the meanings unite under each [of the nine meanings], which is revealed by more expressive words in a meaning that the scholastics call the literal (for [His language] signifies infinitely, and is not, as our [language], [delivered in] extended utterances through a definite intention.) Among these nine meanings, the first is the HISTORICAL, which the Jews call Talmud, and which reveals the acts of God, divine powers and men. II. The PHYSICAL, which conveys the nature and order of sensible things. III. The METAPHYSICAL, which defines divine things or demonstrates other things from these. IV. The ETHICAL, which, in this way, brings forth customs and examples, with which we should conform with regard to ourselves and with regard to others. V. The LEGAL, which formally defines affects, works, cults and ceremonies, and which regulates distribution and redistribution

1 according to merits. VI. The ANAGOGICAL, which leads from the signi-
 2 fying elements of one text or of a part [of the text] or of a book, to
 3 things in another part of the text or to things in another book:
 4 Likewise, from the meaning of visible things, it draws out that which
 5 should be conceived from order, from communion, from concatena-
 6 tion, and from the analogy of things to things and from things. VII.
 7 The PROPHEPIC, which, from the basis of past things, explains or
 8 understands the state of present things, or which makes statements
 9 or judgements about what is absent or in the future by means of that
 10 which is before one's eyes or exists in the present; lacking instru-
 11 ments, simply by means of the excitement of the voice and the say-
 12 ing of words does [the person speaking prophetically] express [his
 13 inspiration]. VIII. The MYSTICAL, which, in the guise of enigma and
 14 expressions inaccessible to all, conceals the senses mentioned [above]
 15 and which is revealed to few or none presently. This sense the Jews
 16 call cabalistic. IX. The TROPOLOGICAL.⁹

17
 18 This quotation needs some explanation. Over the following pages
 19 I shall make some observations regarding (i) the range of texts to which
 20 the theory can be applied; (ii) the infinity and profundity of divine
 21 language; (iii) the application of the theory and (iv) the sources for the
 22 nine individual levels of meaning.

23 **The range of texts to which the theory can be applied**

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24
 25 Precisely which texts can be interpreted according to these nine levels of
 26 meaning? Bruno does not explicitly mention the Bible, but 'divine utter-
 27 ances' (*divinae voci*), which he distinguishes from their manifestation,
 28 the nine meanings (*sensus*).¹⁰ The expression 'divine language' may refer
 29 to the language, or voice, of the Judaeo-Christian God, as laid down in
 30 the Bible, but it may equally well refer to the language, or voice, of non-
 31 Judaeo-Christian gods. In this passage Bruno, perhaps prudently, avoids
 32 stating explicitly whether he is referring to the Bible exclusively, or to the
 33 Bible and other divinely inspired but non-biblical texts as well. However,
 34 immediately afterwards he states that these nine meanings are found 'in
 35 any divine utterance (such as the ones of Moses, Job, David, Solomon
 36 and other Hebrews similar to them)', that is, texts from the Bible, or, to
 37 be more precise, from the Old Testament.¹¹ Bruno adds, however, that
 38 the utterances of 'Hesiod, Orpheus, Homer, the Sibyls and [other]
 39 inspired persons' can also be interpreted by means of his theory about
 40 the nine levels of meaning.¹² The latter are, of course, all pagan figures
 41 from ancient Greek culture, to whom I shall return in a moment.

1 The writings attributed to them are undoubtedly non-biblical. Hence,
 2 Bruno's theory about the nine levels of meaning can be applied to all
 3 divinely inspired texts, biblical texts or otherwise.

4 The extension of these exegetical rules to cover biblical and non-
 5 biblical texts was, I assume, something of a novelty compared with earlier
 6 biblical exegesis. On the other hand, medieval biblical exegesis did not
 7 originate *ex nihilo*, but drew on previous hermeneutic theories. Already
 8 prior to the first century AD, Homer had been interpreted allegorically,
 9 and this is probably one of the sources from which the Jewish exegete
 10 Philo (c. 20 BC–c. AD 50) and later the Christian Origen (c. 185–c. 254)
 11 derived the basic idea of allegorical interpretation.¹³ Pagan authors like
 12 Homer, Hesiod, Orpheus, Virgil and Ovid were also read allegorically in
 13 the Middle Ages, and subsequently in the Renaissance.¹⁴ Later on,
 14 Francis Bacon (1561–1626) also endeavoured to decipher the meanings
 15 of Greek myths by interpreting them allegorically.¹⁵ Hence, Bruno's
 16 extension of the exegetical rules to non-canonical texts was not
 17 unprecedented, even though the complex hermeneutic theory devel-
 18 oped by him cited above may well have been new.

19 Bruno's conception of biblical figures, and texts, as divinely inspired
 20 is self-explanatory. But what do Bruno's references to non-biblical fig-
 21 ures reveal to us? The first figure mentioned is one of the earliest known
 22 Greek poets, Hesiod, who lived around 700 BC, purported author of the
 23 *Works and Days*, describing the farming year and its activities and
 24 the *Theogony*, treating the genealogy of Greek gods, a work Hesiod
 25 claims he was called upon to sing by the muses.¹⁶ Bruno makes it clear
 26 that he perceives the poet Hesiod as a divinely inspired person who, like
 27 Job, was endowed with profound insights into nature and, as evidence
 28 of this, evokes his poetic images of the universe's primordial chaos.¹⁷

29 The second non-biblical figure mentioned is Orpheus – a pre-Homeric
 30 poet in Greek mythology, the son of Apollo and the muse of epic poetry,
 31 Calliope, endowed with such wonderful musical ability that he could
 32 charm animals and make rocks and trees move. With his music he even
 33 persuaded the goddess Persephone to release Eurydice from the under-
 34 world. Orpheus is attributed a series of hymns, which were translated
 35 into Latin by the Florentine Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino (1433–99).¹⁸
 36 More importantly, Ficino gave Orpheus a prominent role in his lineage
 37 of *prisci theologi* or 'ancient theologians', according to which the
 38 Egyptian Hermes Trismegistus had passed on his knowledge about
 39 divinity and nature to Orpheus, who, in turn, had passed it on to
 40 Aglaophemus, from whom it was transmitted to Pythagoras, thence to
 41 Philolaos, and, finally, to Plato. Ficino presents 'Thrice-Great' Hermes as

1 a contemporary of Moses, thence implying parallel Jewish and pagan
2 traditions sharing insights into the nature of things.¹⁹

3 Orpheus plays a considerable role in Bruno's thought. He refers to
4 Orpheus's marvellous skill on the lyre that enchanted animals and made
5 trees move;²⁰ he alludes to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, subject-
6 ing it to his philosophical agenda; and he praises Orpheus as a poet who,
7 like Hesiod and Homer, composes his verses independently of Aristotle's
8 poetics.²¹ More importantly, Bruno latches on to Ficino's interpretation
9 of Orpheus as a key figure in the *prisca theologia*. In Bruno's eyes,
10 Orpheus was an important exponent of this ancient theology and
11 thereby associated with Hermes Trismegistus.²² Due to his association
12 with the ancient theology, Orpheus had insights which he shared with
13 the biblical Moses; particularly into natural philosophy – namely, an
14 insight in conformity with Bruno's Neoplatonic conception of the
15 hypostasis Mind as universally animating by means of the World Soul.²³
16 By putting Orpheus on equal footing with biblical figures like Moses,
17 Job, David and Solomon, Bruno probably intended to integrate the
18 Hermetic and Neoplatonic conception of divinity, and its relationship to
19 nature and man, into his hermeneutic theory for divinely inspired texts.
20 In this way Bruno's exegetical theory is a counterpart to his philosophy,
21 in which Hermeticism and Neoplatonism are central elements.

22 The third non-biblical figure mentioned is Homer. As stated above,
23 Bruno praises Homer for a poetry that transcends poetic rules, as all
24 good poetry should.²⁴ On rare occasions Bruno also extols Homer for his
25 insights into the natural world.²⁵

26 The final reference to non-biblical authority is to the Sibyls, the
27 prophetesses of ancient Greece, famous for their oracular utterances in
28 ecstatic states while under the influence of a god. In the Renaissance,
29 Ficino associated the Sibyls with his idea of an ancient theology by refer-
30 ring to Lactantius (c. 240–320), who had compared Hermes Trismegistus
31 with a Sibyl.²⁶ Bruno likewise refers to the Sibyls in the classical sense, as
32 inspired by Apollo, though whether his citation of the Sibyls as examples
33 of non-biblical but divinely inspired figures also has this particular
34 Ficinian connotation, relating the Sibyls to an ancient theology, is an
35 open question.²⁷

36 These references to biblical figures, in particular to Job, as well as to
37 non-biblical Greek figures, suggest that Bruno did not reduce the content
38 of divinely inspired texts to the field of morality, thus leaving natural phi-
39 losophy outside; on the contrary, Bruno also wanted to emphasise the
40 insights into the natural world, transmitted in divinely inspired texts,
41 even though he occasionally distances himself from that interpretation.²⁸

Hence the modern effort to see Bruno as a precursor of Galileo's approach to Bible reading probably lacks balance – perhaps a strained effort to retroject Galileo's interpretation onto Bruno and see Bruno's reading as a 'forerunner' to the modern interpretation of the Bible.²⁹ My re-evaluation of his exegetical approach to scripture would be in accordance with the fact that Bruno praises the Book of Job for its insight into the natural world, that the pagan figures Hesiod, Homer and Orpheus are similarly praised, and that 'Physics' also features among the nine levels of meaning in his hermeneutic theory in *De monade*.

The infinity and profundity of divine language

Having established the wide range of texts on which Bruno's theory about nine levels of meaning can be employed, I turn to my second point, Bruno's conception of divine language as profound and infinite.

Immediately before Bruno lists nine levels of meaning in the quotation above, he states that the divinity's language 'signifies infinitely, and is not, as our [language], [delivered in] extended utterances through a definite intention'. Elsewhere in this chapter of *De monade*, he affirms the discrepancy between our limited human powers of understanding, on the one hand, and the profundity of divine utterances (including those recorded in the Bible), on the other.³⁰ Bruno's emphasis on the profundity of divine utterances may well draw on several medieval sources – Origen and Alcuin (735–804), for instance, had stressed the incomprehensible profundity of scripture.³¹ Bruno refers explicitly to Origen in the context of biblical exegesis in *La cabala del cavallo pegaseo*, a work dating from 1585, so we know that Bruno was familiar with Origen's exegetical considerations by the time of the composition of *De monade*, published in 1591.³²

John Scotus Eriugena (c. 810–77) carried on this tradition stretching back to Origen, underlining that holy scripture contains an infinity of meanings: 'For there is a manifold and infinite understanding of divine eloquence. Take, for example, the case of the peacock's feathers. One single marvellously beautiful collection of numberless colours can be seen in one single spot, and this comprises just a small portion of this same peacock's feathers.'³³

On the basis of this idea of Origen and Eriugena, several medieval authors had underlined the fecundity of scripture and hence the plurality of understandings of scripture. Henri de Lubac, author of the most important study of medieval exegesis, thus points out that this idea continues to exert a considerable influence up till the Renaissance. Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64), for example, wrote in a letter dating from 1452: 'The inexplicable fecundity of Divine Scripture is diversely

explained by diverse writers, so that its infinity might shine forth variously in a great number of ways; there is, however, only one divine word that sheds its light on everything.³⁴ This idea of Eriugena and Cusa is close to that of Bruno, in that he also stresses the profundity of the divine utterance (although he holds that it can manifest itself in non-biblical as well as biblical texts), and to the extent that he strives to work out a hermeneutic theory whose mnemonic technique is concordant with the plurality of meanings in divinely inspired writings, as we shall see over the next few pages.

The application of the theory

Immediately after Bruno has presented his list with nine meanings, he explains how it is possible to arrive at a plurality of interpretations by combining these nine meanings internally:

Not only are there nine meanings in any divine utterance (such as the ones of Moses, Job, David, Solomon and other Hebrews similar to them; [the utterances] of Hesiod, Orpheus, Homer, Sibyls and [other] inspired persons are like the vessels of an eloquent divinity); but you should also expect nine times nine [meanings], since these meanings are not only divided according to the expression of the word (whether considered grammatically or theoretically), but [these nine meanings] are certainly engrafted upon, infolded in, connected to and united to all the other [meanings].³⁵

As we have already seen, Bruno's theory about the nine levels of meaning is not only applicable to biblical texts, but also to texts written by divinely inspired pagan authors. These latter are, as he says in the quotation above, to be regarded as 'vessels' for an eloquent divinity – an idea well known from his Italian dialogues.³⁶ Moreover, Bruno claims in this quotation that these nine meanings can be combined internally and illustrates his point with a combinatory wheel (Figure 6.1).³⁷

This combinatory wheel resembles the mnemonic wheel (Figure 6.2) used in Bruno's *De compendiosa architectura et complemento artis Lullii* (Paris, 1582).³⁸

These wheels are probably inspired by Ramon Lull (1232–1315), who produced a mnemonic device in the form of a combinatory wheel, similar to the one used in Bruno's *De monade*, chapter ten.³⁹ What we see here in *De monade* is thus a mnemonic device employed in the field of exegesis – probably unprecedented in the tradition of biblical exegesis, and certainly not discussed in the literature on Bruno's mnemonics.

Figure 6.1 Giordano Bruno, *De monade, numero et figura liber* (Frankfurt, 1591), courtesy of the British Library

Figure 6.2 Raymundi Lullii, *Opera ea quae ad adinventam ab ipso artem universalem, scientiarum artiumque* (Strasbourg, 1598), p. 2. Private collection of Peter Forshaw

In the illustration from *De monade*, reproduced above, we see nine letters, A to I, which are internally connected by lines. In the centre we possibly see the nine letters put together, perhaps denoting the union of these nine meanings. Bruno explains that 'A signifies the historical

[meaning], B the physical, C the metaphysical, D the ethical, E the legal, F the allegorical, G the analogical, H the prophetic, [and] I the secret [meaning].⁴⁰ While this list is not completely identical to the one given in the passage translated above, it is extremely close.⁴¹ By means of this combinatory wheel, Bruno added yet another facet to his hermeneutical theory, namely a mnemonic technique of combination, enabling the exegete to arrive at a plurality of meanings.

In order to explain this interpretative pluralism, Bruno distinguishes between the divine utterances and the words expressing such utterances. The divine utterance itself is not, Bruno holds, restricted in meaning but comprises all nine levels of meaning simultaneously as illustrated by the layers of letters at the centre of the illustration above. In this sense it represents the Johannine notion of God as 'omnia in omnibus' (all in all).⁴² The human mind, however, is unable to comprehend all these nine levels simultaneously, for which reason the divine utterance has to be accommodated to the cognitive limits of mankind. This accommodation takes place by way of the meanings of words expressing divine utterances, i.e. the nine senses. So, even though we as human beings can only conceptually distinguish between nine levels of meaning successively, in the divine utterance these nine levels exist in combination and unity at one and the same time.⁴³

Bruno explains that the relationship between the divine utterance and its expression is analogous to the relationship between the human soul and body:

Whereas one part of the body is in one place and time, another part of the body in another place and time, the soul (like the voice and sound) is in all, in whatever part, and is complete. Indeed, the soul is not comprised in the body, but comprises it, though not in a specific manner (like one who is able to hear worthily). In the same way the divine utterance is not defined by the divine letter, but, in its infinity and transcendence, remains outside and above [the letter].⁴⁴

In this analogy Bruno introduces the Neoplatonic idea of the relationship between body and soul, according to which the former is within the latter,⁴⁵ which ensouls and transcends the human body. Similarly, he states in this quotation, the divine utterance ensouls and transcends its manifestations, for example, the letters of the Bible. Where does this theory come from?

Origen, to whom Bruno refers in the context of biblical exegesis elsewhere, had presented an analogy between scripture and the human being, though

an analogy very different from the one in Bruno's hermeneutic considerations.⁴⁶ According to Origen, scripture is endowed with three meanings: literal, moral and allegorical (or anagogical).⁴⁷ Just as a human being is composed of body, soul and spirit, so, Origen claims, does the literal meaning of the Bible correspond to the human body; the moral meaning to the human soul; and the allegorical, or anagogical, meaning to the human spirit.⁴⁸ Bruno certainly makes his readers think of Origen's analogy, although he interprets it according to his own philosophical and theological agenda.

The sources for the nine individual levels of meaning

So much for the sources and the application of Bruno's theory about nine levels of meaning. In this final section I shall consider another point, namely the sources for the nine respective levels of meaning.

One obvious source is Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim (1486–1535) and his *De occulta philosophia libri tres*, first published in 1510. In Book Two, Agrippa assigns various symbolic meanings to a series of numbers stretching from one to twelve. There is a striking similarity between the symbolism assigned to these numbers in Agrippa's chapters and the symbolism assigned to the numbers one to ten by Bruno in *De monade*. That also applies to number nine, where Bruno presents the symbolism of the nine muses and the ninefold order of angels – precisely as Agrippa does in *De occulta philosophia*. However, in his chapter dealing with the number nine, Agrippa does not make any statements about nine levels of meaning in the Bible.⁴⁹ So Bruno's theory about the nine levels of meaning does not come from Agrippa.

Medieval biblical exegesis is a more likely source. As is well known, Augustine (354–430) proposed his theory of four senses of scripture, which became canonical in the Middle Ages, and which may also, directly or indirectly, have had an influence on Bruno's own theory.⁵⁰ In *De genesi ad litteram*, for instance, Augustine proposes four levels of scriptural interpretation, the literal (or historical), allegorical, analogical and etiological:

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There are four ways of explaining the Law that are conveyed by certain students of the Scriptures. The names of these four ways can be articulated in Greek and defined and explained in Latin: historically, allegorically, analogically, and etilogically. History is when a deed that has been done on the part of either God or man is recounted. Allegory is when the words are understood figuratively. Analogy is when harmonious agreement between the Old and New Testaments is shown. Etiology is when the causes of the words and deeds are rendered.⁵¹

1 This theory was phrased slightly differently in the High Middle Ages
 2 by several authors, Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) among them. Aquinas
 3 distinguishes the literal sense from the spiritual sense of the Bible. The
 4 literal sense comprises, according to Aquinas, the first and the two last
 5 meanings mentioned by Augustine, that is, the literal, analogical and
 6 etiological meanings; the spiritual sense is identical with what
 7 Augustine calls the allegorical meaning, though Aquinas adds that it
 8 also comprises an anagogical and a tropological meaning.⁵²

9 Bruno was trained within the Dominican Order, in which Aquinas's
 10 writings were authoritative, being a student at the Order in Naples
 11 between 1563 and 1576.⁵³ One of the aims of this Order was to train
 12 students to preach and this was facilitated through obligatory courses on
 13 ecclesiastic rhetoric, which lasted for at least one year.⁵⁴ It may
 14 well have been this teaching that introduced Bruno to the tradition of
 15 biblical exegesis. Certainly, he was not only familiar with the *Summa the-*
 16 *ologiae*, in which Aquinas had transmitted Augustine's exegetical theory,
 17 but also held Aquinas in great esteem.⁵⁵ Bruno's first list of nine levels of
 18 meaning bears a strong similarity to their theories,⁵⁶ and the historical,
 19 anagogical, analogical (included in the anagogical meaning)⁵⁷ and tropo-
 20 logical meanings from his list also occur in theirs. Hence three (or four,
 21 depending on how the analogical meaning is counted in Bruno's list) out
 22 of the nine meanings look back to Augustine and Aquinas, which
 23 strongly suggests that Bruno was familiar with the medieval tradition of
 24 biblical exegesis, a feature hitherto ignored by Bruno scholars. But what
 25 about the remaining six meanings – the physical, metaphysical, ethical,
 26 legal, prophetic and mystical senses – where do they come from?

27 I have not been able to find any direct source for Bruno's nine levels
 28 of meaning, only scattered sources giving some of these nine meanings.
 29 One source is Eriugena, who lists four meanings, of which at least three
 30 occur in Bruno's list, namely the literal, ethical and physical. In addition,
 31 Eriugena also lists a theoretical meaning, which may be identical with
 32 Bruno's metaphysical sense.⁵⁸ Honorius Augustodunensis (fl. between
 33 1106 and 1135) stipulates five modes of meaning in the Bible, among
 34 which we find the prophetic, which also appears in Bruno's list.⁵⁹
 35 Although these sources suggest that Bruno picked up on meanings which
 36 had been identified in the earlier tradition of biblical exegesis, heteroge-
 37 neous as it is, there is, at least to my knowledge, no single source which can
 38 explain all nine levels of meaning in divinely inspired texts listed in *De mon-*
 39 *ade*, chapter ten. The theory presented there, as well as its application, may
 40 well be Bruno's own invention, congruent as it is with his own philosophy.

41

Conclusion

Bruno reforms medieval biblical exegesis on three counts: he increases the number of levels of meaning from four to nine; he expands the range of texts to which exegesis can be applied to include non-biblical texts; and he works out a mnemonic device, a combinatory wheel, in order to uncover a plurality of meanings in divinely inspired texts. The examples of non-biblical texts that can be subjected to his hermeneutic theory (Hesiod, Orpheus, Homer, the Sibyls) suggest that he was particularly keen to include works belonging to the Hermetic and Neoplatonic traditions, which informed large parts of his own philosophy.

In his reform of medieval exegesis, Bruno was neither in line with traditional Catholic practice (since he not only added new levels of meaning to the traditional four meanings, but also put pagan texts on equal footing with biblical texts), nor was he in line with Protestant exegesis (since he neither embraced Luther's reduction of the traditional four senses to one, the literal, but rather increased the four senses to nine); nor did he regard the Bible as a uniquely inspired text, but also counted pagan texts as divinely inspired. Instead, Bruno worked out his own exegesis on the basis of traditional sources and in agreement with his philosophical agenda.

As noted above, it has often been said about Bruno's reading of scripture that he did not regard the Bible as a work on natural philosophy, but as one on morality, and that this attitude looked forward to the position favoured by people like Galileo, who did not assign the Bible authority within the realm of natural philosophy. I think such an interpretation is slightly misleading. Firstly, because Bruno seems to be unresolved regarding the authority of the Bible, in some places claiming that it has no authority within natural philosophy but only within moral philosophy; elsewhere claiming that it does indeed have authority – along with other divinely inspired texts – within the realms of both natural and moral philosophy.⁶⁰ Secondly, even though such a distinction seems important to posterity, it may not have been as significant for Bruno. It may well have been more important to him to include non-biblical but divinely inspired texts – an inclusion, which may be hard to comprehend in an age in which we tend to reject the fundamental notion of divinely inspired writings. However, this idea was obviously crucial to a mind like that of Giordano Bruno.

Notes

1. Giordano Bruno, *La cena de le ceneri*, in Giordano Bruno, *Oeuvres complètes*, edited by Yves Hersant and Nuccio Ordine, vol. 2. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1993), pp. 191–97. Henceforth this edition of Bruno’s Italian works will be referred to as *BOeuC*.
2. Bruno, *La cena*, pp. 197–201.
3. For this interpretation, see Felice Tocco, *Le opere latine di Giordano Bruno esposte e confrontate con le italiane* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1889), p. 311; Felice Tocco, *Le fonti più recenti della filosofia del Bruno* (Rome: Accademia dei Lincei, 1892), p. 26; Hélène Védérine, *La conception de la nature chez Giordano Bruno* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1967), p. 162.
4. Giordano Bruno, *De monade numero et figura, secretioris nempe physicae, mathematicae et metaphysicae elementa*, in Giordano Bruno, *Opera latine conscripta*, edited by Francesco Fiorentino, Vittorio Imbriani, Carlo M. Tallarigo, Felice Tocco and Gerolamo Vitelli, vol. 1.2 (Naples: Morano, Florence: Le Monnier, 1879–91), pp. 456.15–457.6. Henceforth I refer to this edition of Bruno’s Latin works as *BOL*.
5. Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l’Écriture*, 2 vols. in 4 parts (Paris: Aubier, 1959–64); Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Richard Griffiths (ed.), *The Bible in the Renaissance: Essays on Biblical Commentary and Translation in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).
6. Tocco, *Le opere*, p. 200 states that ‘E infine nove sensi o significati può trovare in ogni libro chi voglia uscirà dalla spiegazione letterale’ – referring in note 5 to Bruno, *De monade*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2, pp. 456 and 458 – but does not make clear that Bruno is referring to the Bible and to other divinely inspired texts and erroneously claims that the nine senses can be found in any book. Saverio Ricci, *Giordano Bruno nell’Europa del Cinquecento* (Rome: Salerno, 2000), pp. 442–43 briefly mentions the nine meanings in *De monade*, but provides no analysis.
7. For Bruno on the role of numbers in relation to nature, see *De monade*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2, p. 332.22–27. For the Neoplatonic and Pythagorean idea that man can cooperate with nature through numbers, see *De monade*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2, p. 334.2–5. See also Giordano Bruno, *Sigillus sigillorum*, in *BOL*, vol. 2.2, pp. 214.26–215.5.
8. For the nine muses, see *De monade*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2, pp. 454.22–455.5. For the ninefold order of angels, see *ibid.*, p. 453.18–23, where he refers to pseudo-Dionysius’s order from *The Celestial Hierarchy*, chapters 6–7.
9. Bruno, *De monade*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2, pp. 456.15–457.6: ‘Novem divinae voci, cui omnes sensus (nempe infinite significanti, non ut ut nostrae definita intentione prolatae dictiones) iure optimo congruunt sub quocumque, qui verbis expressius aperitur, sensu, quem literalem scholastici appellant; quorum primus est HISTORICUS, quem Thalmuticum dicunt Iudaei, qui res gestas Dei, Numinum, et hominum aperit. II. PHYSICUS rerum sensibilibium naturam et ordinem insinuans. III. METAPHYSICUS, qui res divinas definit, vel de eisdem aliquid demonstrat. IV. ETHICUS, qui ea ad mores et exempla, quibus in nobis ipsis et ad alios reformemur, edicit. V. LEGALIS, qui

- 1 affectus, opera, cultus, et ceremonias instituit, et aliis pro meritis distribuere
 2 et redistribuere ordinat. VI. ANAGOGICUS, qui res unius scripturae vel par-
 3 tis vel voluminis significantes res alterius scripturae partis atque voluminis
 4 complectitur: a sensu item rerum visibilium extollit percipiendum ex ordine,
 5 communione, concatenatione, et analogia rerum ad res et a rebus. VII.
 6 PROPHETICUS, qui per ea, quae de praeteritis habentur, rerum praesentium
 7 statum explicat aut etiam intelligit vel qui de absentibus atque de futuris
 8 dicit vel etiam iudicat, per ea quae coram sunt vel praesentia: vel absque
 9 mediis sola concitatione vocis, literaeque dictamine furit. VIII. MYSTICUS,
 10 qui sub aenigmate, et omnibus enumeratis sensibus impervio dictamine,
 11 claudit ea quae paucis vel nulli in praesentia revelantur: quem sensum
 Cabalisticum appellant Iudaei. IX. TROPOLOGICUS.' Unless noted other-
 wise, all translations in this chapter are my own.
- 12 10. Bruno makes a similar distinction between divinity's voice (*vox*) and its man-
 13 ifestation to us (*sensus*) in *Summa terminorum metaphysicorum* 45, in *BOL*, vol.
 14 1.4, pp. 66.26–675. In *De la causa, principio et uno*, in *BOeuC*, vol. 3, p. 151,
 15 Bruno compares the universally animating World Soul with a voice filling a
 physical space.
- 16 11. For Bruno on Job, see *La cena*, in *BOeuC*, vol. 2, pp. 197–201. For Bruno's use
 17 of David's Psalms, see Hilary Gatti, 'La Bibbia nei dialoghi italiani di Bruno',
 18 in Eugenio Canone (ed.), *La filosofia di Giordano Bruno. Problemi ermeneutici e*
 19 *storiciografici. Convegno Internazionale, Roma, 23–24 ottobre 1998* (Florence: L. S.
 20 Olschki, 2003), pp. 200–201. For Bruno's use of the Song of Solomon, see
 21 Nicoletta Tirinnanzi, 'Il Cantico dei Cantici nel *De umbris idearum* di Giordano
 22 Bruno', in Eugenio Canone (ed.), *Lecture Bruniane I-II del Lessico Intellettuale*
 23 *Europeo (1996–1997)* (Pisa and Rome: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici
 Internazionali, 2002), pp. 287–306.
- 24 12. Bruno, *De monade*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2, p. 457.7–13, as quoted in n. 39 below.
- 25 13. For early allegorical interpretations of Homer, see De Lubac, *Exégèse médié-*
 26 *vale*, vol. 1.2, pp. 374–76. For the allegorical interpretation of Philo and
 27 Origen, see *ibid.*, vol. 1.1, pp. 198–207, and vol. 1.2, p. 376.
- 28 14. For allegorical interpretations in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance,
 29 see De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, vol. 1.2, pp. 385–87, 391–93 (Homer);
 30 vol. 1.2, p. 376 and vol. 2.2, pp. 183 n. 7, 197 (Hesiod); vol. 1.2, p. 376, and
 31 vol. 2.2, 183 n. 7 (Orpheus); vol. 2.2, pp. 237–38 (Virgil); vol. 2.2, pp. 127,
 32 187, 212–13, 233 (Ovid).
- 33 15. See Barbara Carman Garner, 'Francis Bacon, Natalis Comes and the
 34 Mythological Tradition', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 33
 35 (1970), 264–91.
- 36 16. Hesiod, *Theogonia* 22–25.
- 37 17. Bruno regards Hesiod as a poet, like Orpheus. See Giordano Bruno, *De rerum*
 38 *principiis*, in *BOL*, vol. 3.2, p. 511.1–5. He refers to Hesiod's idea of the
 39 primordial chaos in his *Camoeracensis acrotismus seu rationes articulorum physi-*
 40 *corum adversus Peripateticos Parisiis propositorum*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.1, pp. 73.16,
 124.18–24; *Lampas triginta statuarum*, in *BOL*, vol. 3.1, pp. 10.1–2, 160.15–18;
 41 *Figuratio aristotelici physici auditus*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.4, p. 176.3–4. For Hesiod on
 the primordial chaos, see *Theogonia* 116.
18. For Orpheus's hymns, see Guilelmus Quandt (ed.), *Orphei Hymni* (Berlin:
 Weidmann, 1955). For Ficino's translation, see Ilana Klutstein, *Marsilio Ficino*

AQ3

AQ4

- 1 *et la théologie ancienne. Oracles Chaldaïques, hymnes orphiques, hymnes de Proclus*
 2 (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1987), pp. 55–110.
- 3 19. Marsilio Ficino, 'Argumentum Marsilii Ficini florentini, in Librum Mercurii
 4 Trismegisti, ad Cosmum Medicem, Patriae Patrem', in Marsilio Ficino, *Opera*,
 5 2 vols. (Basel: Henricpetrina, 1576; facsimile reprint, Paris: Phénix Éditions,
 1999), vol. 2, p. 1836.1–28.
- 6 20. Bruno, *Lampas triginta statuarum*, in *BOL*, vol. 3.1, p. 65.11–14; *De imaginum, sig-*
 7 *norum et idearum compositione*, in *BOL*, vol. 2.3, p. 249.18–21.
- 8 21. Bruno, *Sigillus sigillorum*, in *BOL*, vol. 2.2, p. 170.8–10; Bruno, *De gli eroici furori*,
 9 in *BOeuC*, vol. 7, pp. 67–69.
- 10 22. Bruno, *De vinculis in genere*, in *BOL*, vol. 3.2, p. 649.13–15; *Theses de magia*, in *BOL*,
 11 vol. 3.2, p. 467.13–15; *De compositione*, in *BOL*, vol. 2.3, p. 276.20–21.
- 12 23. Bruno, *Sigillus sigillorum*, in *BOL*, vol. 2.2, p. 200.18–20; Bruno, *De la causa ii*, in
 13 *BOeuC*, vol. 3, p. 115: 'Orfeo lo [Inteletto universale] chiama 'occhio del mondo',
 14 per ciò che il vede entro e fuor tutte le cose naturali, a fine che tutto non solo
 15 intrinseca, ma anco estrinsecamente venga a prodursi e mantenersi nella propria
 16 simmetria.' As explained by Giovanni Aquilecchia in *De la causa*, n. 32, the attri-
 17 bution of the expression 'occhio del mondo' to Orpheus probably derives from
 18 Ficino's *Theologia platonica de immortalitate animorum*, in Marcile Ficini, *Théologie*
 19 *platonicienne de l'immortalité des âmes*, ed. and trans. Raymond Marcel, 3 vols.
 20 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1964–70), vol. 1, p. 104.
- 21 24. Bruno, *De gli eroici furori*, in *BOeuC*, vol. 7, pp. 67–69.
- 22 25. Bruno, *De l'infinito, universo e mondi*, in *BOeuC*, vol. 4, p. 221.
- 23 26. Ficino, 'Argumentum ... in Librum Mercurii Trismegisti', p. 1836.26–27.
- 24 27. Bruno, *De la causa*, in *BOeuC*, vol. 3, p. 49.
- 25 28. Bruno, *La cena*, in *BOeuC*, vol. 2, pp. 191–97.
- 26 29. Cf. Tocco, *Le opere*, p. 311.
- 27 30. Bruno, *De monade*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2, pp. 457.24–458.3.
- 28 31. Alcuin, *Epistola*, 163, in Jacques-Paul Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, 221 vols.
 29 (Paris: Migne, 1844–55 and 1862–65), vol. 100, cols. 423D–424A. For this theme,
 30 see De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, vol. 1.1, pp. 119–38.
- 31 32. Giordano Bruno, *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo con l'aggiunta dell'asino cillenico* epistola,
 32 in *BOeuC*, vol. 6, p. 7.
- 33 33. John Scotus Eriugena, *De divisione naturae*, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 122, col. 749C:
 34 'Est enim multiplex et infinitus divinatorum eloquiorum intellectus. Siquidem in
 35 penna pavonis una eademque mirabilis ac pulchra innumerabilium colorum
 36 varietas conspicitur in uno eodemque loco eiusdem pennae portiunculae.' Trans.
 37 Mark Sebanc, in Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 1, *The Four Senses of*
 38 *Scripture*, trans. Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans and T & T Clark,
 39 1998), p. 33.
- 40 34. De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, vol. 1.1, 123 n. 10, citing Edmond Vansteenberghé,
 41 'Autour de la Docte ignorance. Une controverse sur la Théologie mystique au
 XV^{ème} siècle', in *Beiträge für die Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des*
Mittelalters (Münster: Aschendorff, 1915), 14, 2–4, p. 111: 'Inexplicabilis divinae
 Scripturae fecunditas per diversos diverse explicatur, ut in varietate tanta eius
 infinitas clarescat; unum tamen est divinum verbum in omnibus relucens.'
- 35 35. Bruno, *De monade*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2, p. 457.7–13: 'Non solum novem sensus
 in quacunque divina dictione (qualis est Mosis, Iobi, Davidis, Salomonis, et
 his similium Hebraeorum: Hesiodi, Orphei, Homeri, Sibyllarumque

- 1 repentino furore accensurum ut vasa divinitatis eloquentis essent), sed etiam
 2 novies novem debetis attendere, quandoquidem hi sensus non solum ad
 3 literae (grammaticae nempe rationis) expressionem sunt divisi: sed et certe
 4 in omnibus insiti, impliciti, adnexi, uniti.' This principle of interpretative
 5 pluralism was also stated in his *De gli eroici furori* argomento, in *BOeuC*,
 6 vol. 7, p. 15.
- 6 36. See *De gli eroici furori*, in *BOeuC*, vol. 7, pp. 119–21.
- 7 37. The illustration is from *De monade x*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2, p. 458.
- 8 38. Cf. Giordano Bruno, *De compendiosa architectura et complemento artis Lullii*, in
 9 *BOL*, vol. 2.2, p. 15.
- 10 39. For this combinatory wheel of Lull, see Roger Friedlein and Anita Traninger,
 11 'Lullismus', in Gert Ueding (ed.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik 5*
 12 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2001), cols. 654–55, who present a graph-
 13 ical figure almost identical to the one in Bruno's *De monade*, chapter ten.
- 14 40. Bruno, *De monade*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2, p. 458.8–10: 'Ibi A significat Historiam,
 15 B Physicam, C Metaphysicam, D Ethicam, E Legem, F Allegoriam, G
 16 Analogiam, H Prophetiam, I Secretum.'
- 17 41. There are some minor differences between the first list of nine meanings
 18 in *De monade x*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2, pp. 456.15–457.6 and the second list of
 19 nine meanings on p. 458.8–10: (i) in the second list, F, the sixth meaning,
 20 refers to the allegorical sense, which is not mentioned explicitly in the
 21 first list at all. Instead, the sixth meaning in the first list is the analogical
 22 meaning. This change from anagogy to allegory can be explained by the
 23 fact that some medieval exegetes had conceived anagogy as comprised in
 24 allegory, as explained in De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, vol. 1.1, pp. 140–41.
 25 (ii) In the first list the prophetic meaning features as the seventh mean-
 26 ing, whereas it features as the eighth meaning in the second list. Instead,
 27 the analogical meaning is listed as the seventh meaning in the second list.
 28 In the first list analogy is mentioned in relation to the sixth meaning,
 29 anagogy. (iii) In the first list the ninth meaning is the tropological mean-
 30 ing; this meaning is left out of the second list, where we instead find
 31 the secret meaning. These two meanings, the tropological and the secret,
 32 are almost synonymous, as far as the former denotes a turning away from
 33 the literal to a non-literal, metaphorical meaning, hence a meaning,
 34 which is 'hidden' or secret.
- 35 42. Ephesians 1:23; 1 Corinthians 12:6.
- 36 43. For the union of meanings, see *De monade x*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2, p. 457.7–13.
- 37 44. Bruno, *De monade x*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2, p. 457.17–24: 'ubi corpus est secundum
 38 unam partem in uno, secundum aliam in alio spacio atque loco; anima vero
 39 (sicut vox et sonus) ut est in toto, et in quacunque parte, tota est. Quinimo
 40 sicut anima a corpore non comprehenditur; sed sine modo (quem quilibet
 41 possit digne audire) corpus comprehendit: ita et divinus sensus per divinam
 literam non definitur, sed in sua infinitate et absoluteione extra atque supra
 illam permanet et extenditur.'
45. In Bruno, *De la causa*, in *BOeuC*, vol. 3, pp. 123–25, the individual human
 soul is compared with the universally animating World Soul; they both
 transcend what they ensoul and remain unaffected by the decay of
 the respective ensouled bodies. Bruno indicates Plotinus as his source for
 this idea.

AQ5

- 1 46. Bruno, *Cabala epistola*, in *BOeuC*, vol. 6, p. 7.
- 2 47. De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, vol. 1.1, pp. 198–201.
- 3 48. Origen, *De principiis* 4.2.4 [11], in Herwig Görgemanns and Heinrich Karpp
4 (eds.), *Origenes Vier Bücher von den Prinzipien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche
5 Buchgesellschaft, 1976), pp. 708–11. This tripartition of the human being can be
6 found in 1 Thessalonians 5:23.
- 7 49. Bruno refers to the ninefold order of angels in *De monade*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2,
8 p. 453.18–23 and to the nine muses on pp. 454.22–455.5. Similarly, Agrippa
9 of Nettesheim, in Vittoria Perrone Compagni (ed.), *De occulta philosophia libri*
10 *tres*, (Leiden, New York and Cologne: Brill, 1992), p. 285 describes the nine-
11 fold order of muses and angels, as well as discussing the number nine in the
12 Bible, though he provides no theory of nine levels of meaning in holy scrip-
13 ture.
- 14 50. For Augustine's biblical exegesis, see De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, vol. 1.1,
15 pp. 177–87.
- 16 51. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 34, col. 222. trans. Mark
17 Sebanc in De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, p. 67.
- 18 52. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1a, Q. 1, Art. 10, Ra. 2, in Thomas Aquinas, *Opera*
19 *omnia*, ed. Roberto Busa, 7 vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstat: Frommann-
20 Holzboog, 1980), vol. 2, p. 187.
- 21 53. For Bruno's entry to the Dominican Order, see Firpo, *Il processo*, p. 156.
- 22 54. Vincenzo Spampanato, *Vita di Giordano Bruno con documenti editi e inediti*,
23 2 vols. (Messina: G. Principato, 1921), vol. 1, pp. 130–31.
- 24 55. For the importance of Aquinas's philosophy to Bruno, see Luigi Firpo, *Il*
25 *processo di Giordano Bruno*, ed. Diego Quagliani (Rome: Salerno, 1993), pp.
26 16–17, 55–57, 60, 168, 177–78, 217, 259, 270–72, 277, 286–87.
- 27 56. See Bruno, *De monade*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2, pp. 456.15–457.6.
- 28 57. The analogical meaning is mentioned within the sixth meaning, the ana-
29 gogical meaning. In Bruno's second list, he presents the analogical meaning
30 as the seventh meaning.
- 31 58. John Scotus Eriugena, *Homilia in prologum S. Evangelii secundum Joannem*, in
32 *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 122, col. 290C.
- 33 59. Honorius, *Selectorum psalmorum expositio*, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 172,
34 col. 273C.
- 35 60. The Book of Job is singled out as a text with authority within the natural
36 sciences. Similarly, Bruno mentions Job's writings as examples of divinely
37 inspired texts with a physical meaning in his hermeneutic theory in
38 *De monade*, chapter ten, where the physical meaning is listed as the second
39 meaning. Similar to this example from the biblical Book of Job, Bruno also
40 mentions three non-biblical but divinely inspired authors, whose writings
41 also contain the nine levels of meaning, including the physical, namely
Hesiod, Orpheus and Homer. As has been shown, it is also possible to find
passages in Bruno's writings in which he attributes knowledge about natu-
ral philosophy to each of these three pagan authors.

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