Leo Catana, 'Giordano Bruno's hermeneutics
Observations on the bible in de monade (1591)'
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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.
according to merits. VI. The Anagogical, which leads from the signifying elements of one text or of a part of the text or of a book, to things in another part of the text or to things in another book: Likewise, from the meaning of visible things, it draws out that which should be conceived from order, from communion, from concatenation, and from the analogy of things to things and from things. VII. The Prophetic, which, from the basis of past things, explains or understands the state of present things, or which makes statements or judgements about what is absent or in the future by means of that which is before one’s eyes or exists in the present; lacking instruments, simply by means of the excitement of the voice and the saying of words does [the person speaking prophetically] express [his inspiration]. VIII. The Mystical, which, in the guise of enigma and expressions inaccessible to all, conceals the senses mentioned [above] and which is revealed to few or none presently. This sense the Jews call cabalistic. IX. The Tropological.9

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

The range of texts to which the theory can be applied

Precisely which texts can be interpreted according to these nine levels of meaning? Bruno does not explicitly mention the Bible, but ‘divine utterances’ (divinae vocis), which he distinguishes from their manifestation, the nine meanings (sensus).10 The expression ‘divine language’ may refer to the language, or voice, of the Judaeo-Christian God, as laid down in the Bible, but it may equally well refer to the language, or voice, of non-Judaeo-Christian gods. In this passage Bruno, perhaps prudently, avoids stating explicitly whether he is referring to the Bible exclusively, or to the Bible and other divinely inspired but non-biblical texts as well. However, immediately afterwards he states that these nine meanings are found ‘in any divine utterance (such as the ones of Moses, Job, David, Solomon and other Hebrews similar to them)’, that is, texts from the Bible, or, to be more precise, from the Old Testament.11 Bruno adds, however, that the utterances of ‘Hesiod, Orpheus, Homer, the Sibyls and [other] inspired persons’ can also be interpreted by means of his theory about the nine levels of meaning.12 The latter are, of course, all pagan figures from ancient Greek culture, to whom I shall return in a moment.
The writings attributed to them are undoubtedly non-biblical. Hence, Bruno’s theory about the nine levels of meaning can be applied to all divinely inspired texts, biblical texts or otherwise.

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

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

The second non-biblical figure mentioned is Orpheus – a pre-Homeric poet in Greek mythology, the son of Apollo and the muse of epic poetry, Calliope, endowed with such wonderful musical ability that he could charm animals and make rocks and trees move. With his music he even persuaded the goddess Persephone to release Eurydice from the underworld. Orpheus is attributed a series of hymns, which were translated into Latin by the Florentine Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino (1433–99). More importantly, Ficino gave Orpheus a prominent role in his lineage of prisci theologi or ‘ancient theologians’, according to which the Egyptian Hermes Trismegistus had passed on his knowledge about divinity and nature to Orpheus, who, in turn, had passed it on to Aglaophemus, from whom it was transmitted to Pythagoras, thence to Philolaos, and, finally, to Plato. Ficino presents ‘Thrice-Great’ Hermes as...
a contemporary of Moses, thence implying parallel Jewish and pagan
traditions sharing insights into the nature of things.19

Orpheus plays a considerable role in Bruno's thought. He refers to
Orpheus's marvellous skill on the lyre that enchanted animals and made
trees move;20 he alludes to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, subject-
ing it to his philosophical agenda; and he praises Orpheus as a poet who,
like Hesiod and Homer, composes his verses independently of Aristotle's
poetics.21 More importantly, Bruno latches on to Ficino's interpretation
of Orpheus as a key figure in the *prisca theologia*. In Bruno's eyes,
Orpheus was an important exponent of this ancient theology and
thereby associated with Hermes Trismegistus.22 Due to his association
with the ancient theology, Orpheus had insights which he shared with
the biblical Moses; particularly into natural philosophy – namely, an
insight in conformity with Bruno's Neoplatonic conception of the
hypostasis Mind as universally animating by means of the World Soul.23

By putting Orpheus on equal footing with biblical figures like Moses,
Job, David and Solomon, Bruno probably intended to integrate the
Hermetic and Neoplatonic conception of divinity, and its relationship to
nature and man, into his hermeneutic theory for divinely inspired texts.
In this way Bruno's exegetical theory is a counterpart to his philosophy,
in which Hermeticism and Neoplatonism are central elements.

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

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

These references to biblical figures, in particular to Job, as well as to
non-biblical Greek figures, suggest that Bruno did not reduce the content
of divinely inspired texts to the field of morality, thus leaving natural phi-
losophy outside; on the contrary, Bruno also wanted to emphasise the
insights into the natural world, transmitted in divinely inspired texts,
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. 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. 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. 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.

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.’

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 vari-
ously 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 concor-
dant 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 mean-
ing 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 quo-
tation 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 architectora 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.
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]. While this list is not completely identical to the one given in the passage translated above, it is extremely close. 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). 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.

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].

In this analogy Bruno introduces the Neoplatonic idea of the relationship between body and soul, according to which the former is within the latter, 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 considera-
tions. According to Origen, scripture is endowed with three meanings: lit-
eral, moral and allegorical (or anagogical). Just as a human being is com-
posed 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. 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 sim-
ilarity 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. 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. In *De geneesi ad
litteram*, for instance, Augustine proposes four levels of scriptural inter-
pretation, the literal (or historical), allegorical, analogical and etiological:

There are four ways of explaining the Law that are conveyed by cer-
tain students of the Scriptures. The names of these four ways can be
artculated in Greek and defined and explained in Latin: historically,
allegorically, analogically, and etiologically. 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.
This theory was phrased slightly differently in the High Middle Ages by several authors, Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) among them. Aquinas distinguishes the literal sense from the spiritual sense of the Bible. The literal sense comprises, according to Aquinas, the first and the two last meanings mentioned by Augustine, that is, the literal, analogical and etiological meanings; the spiritual sense is identical with what Augustine calls the allegorical meaning, though Aquinas adds that it also comprises an anagogical and a tropological meaning.

Bruno was trained within the Dominican Order, in which Aquinas’s writings were authoritative, being a student at the Order in Naples between 1563 and 1576. One of the aims of this Order was to train students to preach and this was facilitated through obligatory courses on ecclesiastic rhetoric, which lasted for at least one year. It may well have been this teaching that introduced Bruno to the tradition of biblical exegesis. Certainly, he was not only familiar with the Summa theologiae, in which Aquinas had transmitted Augustine’s exegetical theory, but also held Aquinas in great esteem. Bruno’s first list of nine levels of meaning bears a strong similarity to their theories, and the historical, anagogical, analogical (included in the anagogical meaning) and tropological meanings from his list also occur in theirs. Hence three (or four, depending on how the analogical meaning is counted in Bruno’s list) out of the nine meanings look back to Augustine and Aquinas, which strongly suggests that Bruno was familiar with the medieval tradition of biblical exegesis, a feature hitherto ignored by Bruno scholars. But what about the remaining six meanings – the physical, metaphysical, ethical, legal, prophetic and mystical senses – where do they come from?

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


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 vocii, cui omnes sensus (nempe infinte significanti, non ut ut nostrae definita intentione prolatae dictiones) iure optimo congruant sub quocumque, qui verbis expressius aperitur, sensu, quem literalem scholastici appellant; quorum primus est HISTORICUS, quem Thalmaticum dicunt ludaei, qui res gestas Dei, Numinum, et hominum aperit. II. PHYSICUS rerum sensibilium naturam et ordinem insinuans. III. METAPHYSICUS, qui res divinas definit, vel de isdem aliqaud demonstrat. IV. ETHICUS, qui ea ad mores et exempla, quibus in nobis ipsis et ad alios reformemur, edicit. V. LEGALIS, qui
affectus, opera, cultus, et ceremonias instituit, et aliis pro meritis distribuere et redistribuere ordinat. VI. ANAGOGICUS, qui res unius scripturae vel partis vel voluminis signantur res alterius scripturae partis atque voluminis complectitur: a sensu item rerum visibilium extollit percipiendum ex ordine, communione, concatenatione, et analogia rerum ad res et a rebus. VII. PROPHETICUS, qui per ea, quae de praeteritis habentur, rerum praesentium statum explicat aut etiam intelligit vel qui de absentibus atque de futuris dicit vel etiam iudicat, per ea quae coram sunt vel praesentia: vel absque mediis sola concitazione vocis, literaeque dictamine furit. VIII. MYSTICUS, qui sub aenigmate, et omnibus enumeratis sensibus impervio dictamine, claudit ea quae paucis vel nulli in praesentia revelantur: quem sensum Cabalisticum appellant Iudaei. IX. TROPOLOGICUS.’ Unless noted otherwise, all translations in this chapter are my own.


13. For early allegorical interpretations of Homer, see De Lubac, Exégèse médiévale, vol. 1.2, pp. 374–76. For the allegorical interpretation of Philo and Origen, see ibid., vol. 1.1, pp. 198–207, and vol. 1.2, p. 376.

14. For allegorical interpretations in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, see De Lubac, Exégèse médiévale, vol. 1.2, pp. 385–87, 391–93 (Homer); vol. 1.2, p. 376 and vol. 2.2, pp. 183 n. 7, 197 (Hesiod); vol. 1.2, p. 376, and vol. 2.2, 183 n. 7 (Orpheus); vol. 2.2, pp. 237–38 (Virgil); vol. 2.2, pp. 127, 187, 212–13, 233 (Ovid).


18. For Orpheus’s hymns, see Guilelmus Quandt (ed.), Orphei Hymni (Berlin: Weidmann, 1955). For Ficino’s translation, see Ilana Klutstein, Marsilio Ficino
et la théologie ancienne. Oracles Chaldaïques, hymnes orphiques, hymnes de Proclus


repentino furore accensorum ut vasa divinitatis eloquentis essent), sed etiam
novies novem debebis adtendere, quandoquidem hi sensus non solum ad
literae (grammaticae nempe rationis) expressionem sunt divisi: sed et certe
in omnibus insiti, impliciti, adnexi, uniti.' This principle of interpretative
pluralism was also stated in his De gli eroici furori argomento, in BOeuC,
vol. 7, p. 15.


37. The illustration is from De monade x, in BOL, vol. 1.2, p. 458.

38. Cf. Giordano Bruno, De compendiosa architectura et complemento artis Lullii, in
BOL, vol. 2.2, p. 15.

39. For this combinatorial wheel of Lull, see Roger Friedlein and Anita Traninger,
‘Lullismus’, in Gert Ueding (ed.), Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik 5
(Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2001), cols. 654–55, who present a
graphical figure almost identical to the one in Bruno’s De monade, chapter ten.

40. Bruno, De monade, in BOL, vol. 1.2, pp. 458.8–10: ‘Ibi A significat Historiam,
B Physicam, C Metaphysicam, D Ethicam, E Legem, F Allegoriam, G
Analogiam, H Prophetiam, I Secretum.’

41. There are some minor differences between the first list of nine meanings
in De monade x, in BOL, vol. 1.2, pp. 456.15–457.6 and the second list of
nine meanings on p. 458.8–10: (i) in the second list, F, the sixth meaning,
refers to the allegorical sense, which is not mentioned explicitly in the
first list at all. Instead, the sixth meaning in the first list is the anagogical
meaning. This change from anagogy to allegory can be explained by the
fact that some medieval exegetes had conceived anagogy as comprised in
allegory, as explained in De Lubac, Exégèse médiévale, vol. 1.1, pp. 140–41.
(ii) In the first list the prophetical meaning features as the seventh mean-
ing, whereas it features as the eight meaning in the second list. Instead,
the analogical meaning is listed as the seventh meaning in the second list.
In the first list analogy is mentioned in relation to the sixth meaning,
anagogy. (iii) In the first list the ninth meaning is the topological mean-
ing; this meaning is left out of the second list, where we instead find
the secret meaning. These two meanings, the topological and the secret,
are almost synonymous, as far as the former denotes a turning away from
the literal to a non-literal, metaphorical meaning, hence a meaning,
which is ‘hidden’ or secret.


43. For the union of meanings, see De monade x, in BOL, vol. 1.2, p. 457.7–13.

unam partem in uno, secundum aliam in alicuius spatio atque loco; anima vero
(sicut vox et sonus) ut est in toto, et in quacunque parte, tota est. Quinimo
sicut anima a corpore non comprehendetur; sed sine modo (quem quilibet
possit digna audire) corpus comprehenedit: ita et divinus sensus per divinam
literam non definitur, sed in sua infinitate et absolutione 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.


48. Origen, *De principiis* 4.2.4 [11], in Herwig Görtemanns and Heinrich Karpp (eds.), *Origenes Vier Bücher von den Prinzipien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976), pp. 708–11. This tripartition of the human being can be found in 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

49. Bruno refers to the ninefold order of angels in *De monade*, in *BOL*, vol. 1.2, p. 453.18–23 and to the nine muses on pp. 454.22–455.5. Similarly, Agrippa of Nettesheim, in Vittoria Perrone Compagni (ed.), *De occulta philosophia libri tres*, (Leiden, New York and Cologne: Brill, 1992), p. 285 describes the ninefold order of muses and angels, as well as discussing the number nine in the Bible, though he provides no theory of nine levels of meaning in holy scripture.

50. For Augustine's biblical exegesis, see De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, vol. 1.1, pp. 177–87.


53. For Bruno's entry to the Dominican Order, see Firpo, *Il processo*, p. 156.


57. The analogical meaning is mentioned within the sixth meaning, the analogical meaning. In Bruno's second list, he presents the analogical meaning as the seventh meaning.


60. The Book of Job is singled out as a text with authority within the natural sciences. Similarly, Bruno mentions Job's writings as examples of divinely inspired texts with a physical meaning in his hermeneutic theory in *De monade*, chapter ten, where the physical meaning is listed as the second meaning. Similar to this example from the biblical Book of Job, Bruno also mentions three non-biblical but divinely inspired authors, whose writings 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 natural philosophy to each of these three pagan authors.
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