

Giordano Bruno - Britannica Reference

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BRUNO, GIORDANO (c. 1548-1600), Italian philosopher of the Renaissance, was born near Nola in the village of Cicala. Little is known of his life. He was christened Filippo, and took the name Giordano only on entering a religious order. In his fifteenth year he entered the order of the Dominicans at Naples, and is said to have composed a treatise on the ark of Noah. Why he submitted to a discipline palpably unsuited to his fiery spirit we cannot tell. In consequence of his views on transubstantiation and the immaculate conception he was accused of impiety, and after enduring persecution for some years, he fled from Rome about 1576, and wandered through various cities, reaching Geneva in 1579. The home of Calvinism was no resting-place for him (T. Dufour, *Giordano Bruno à Genève*, Geneva, 1884), and he travelled on through Lyons, Toulouse and Montpellier, arriving at Paris in 1581. Everywhere he bent his energies to the exposition of the new thoughts which were beginning to effect a revolution in the thinking world. He had drunk deeply of the spirit of the Renaissance, the determination to see for himself the noble universe, unclouded by the mists of authoritative philosophy and church tradition. The discoveries of Copernicus were eagerly accepted by him, and he used them as the lever by which to push aside the antiquated system that had come down from Aristotle, for whom, indeed, he had a perfect hatred. Like Bacon and Telesio he preferred the older Greek philosophers, who had looked at nature for themselves, and whose speculations had more of reality in them. He had read widely and deeply, and in his own writings we come across many expressions familiar to us in earlier systems. Yet his philosophy is no eclecticism. He owed something to Lucretius, something to the Stoic nature-panteism, something to Anaxagoras, to Heraclitus, to the Pythagoreans, and to the Neoplatonists, who were partially known to him; above all, he was a profound student of Nicolas of Cusa, who was indeed a speculative Copernicus. But his own system has a distinct unity and originality; it breathes throughout the fiery spirit of Bruno himself.

Bruno had been well received at Toulouse, where he had lectured on astronomy; even better fortune awaited him at Paris, especially at the hands of Henry III. He was offered a chair of philosophy, provided he would receive the Mass. He at once refused, but was permitted to deliver lectures. These seem to have been altogether devoted to expositions of a certain logical system which Bruno had taken up with great eagerness, the *Ars Magna* of Raimon Lull. With the exception of a satiric comedy, *Il Candelajo*, all the works of this period are devoted to this logic—*De Umbris Idearum*, *Ars Memoriae*, *De compendiosa architectura et complemento artis Lullii*, and *Cantus Circaeus*. To many it has seemed a curious freak of Bruno's that he should have so eagerly adopted a view of thought like that of Lull, but in reality it is in strict accordance with the principles of his philosophy. Like the Arabian logicians, and some of the

scholastics, who held that ideas existed in a threefold form—*ante res, in rebus* and *post res*—he laid down the principle that the archetypal ideas existed metaphysically in the ultimate unity or intelligence, physically in the world of things, and logically in signs, symbols or notions. These notions were shadows of the ideas, and the *Ars Magna* furnished him with a general scheme, according to which their relations and correspondences should be exhibited. It supplied not only a *memoria technica*, but an *organon*, or method by which the genesis of all ideas from unity might be represented intelligibly and easily. It provided also a substitute for either the Aristotelian or the Ramist logic, which was an additional element in its favour.

Under the protection of the French ambassador, Michel de Castelnau, sieur de Mauvissière, Bruno passed over in 1583 to England, where he resided for about two years. He was disgusted with the brutality of English manners, which he paints in no flattering colours, and he found pedantry and superstition as rampant in Oxford as in Geneva. Indeed, there still existed on the statute a provision that "Masters and Bachelors who did not follow Aristotle faithfully were liable to a fine of five shillings for every point of divergence, and for every fault committed against the logic of the Organon." But he indulges in extravagant eulogies of Elizabeth. He is generally said to have formed the acquaintance of Sir Philip Sidney, Fulke Greville and other eminent Englishmen, but there has been much controversy as to the facts of his life in London. It seems probable that he lived in the French embassy in some secretarial or tutorial position. He may conceivably have met Bacon, but it is quite incredible that he met Shakespeare in the printing shop of Thomas Vautrollier. In Oxford he was allowed to hold a disputation with some learned doctors on the rival merits of the Copernican and so-called Aristotelian systems of the universe, and, according to his own report, had an easy victory. The best of his works were written in the freedom of English social life. The *Cena de le Ceneri*, or Ash Wednesday conversation, devoted to an exposition of the Copernican theory, was printed in 1584. In the same year appeared his two great metaphysical works, *De la Causa, Principio, ed Uno*, and *De l'Infinito, Universo, e Mondi*; in the year following the *Eroici Furori* and *Cabala del Cavallo Pegaseo*. In 1584 also appeared the strange dialogue, *Spaccio della Bestia Trionfante* (*Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*), an allegory treating chiefly of moral philosophy, but giving the essence of Bruno's philosophy. The gods are represented as resolving to banish from the heavens the constellations, which served to remind them of their evil deeds. In their places are put the moral virtues. The first of the three dialogues contains the substance of the allegory, which, under the disguise of an assault on heathen mythology, is a direct attack on all forms of anthropomorphic religion. But in a philosophical point of view the first part of the second dialogue is the most important. Among the moral virtues which take the place of the beasts are Truth, Prudence, Wisdom, Law and Universal Judgment, and in the explanation of what these mean Bruno unfolds the inner essence of his system. Truth is the unity and substance which underlies all things; Prudence or Providence is the regulating power of truth, and comprehends both liberty and necessity; Wisdom is providence itself in its supersensible aspect—in man it is reason which grasps the truth of things; Law results from wisdom, for no good law is irrational, and its sole end and aim is the good of mankind; Universal Judgment is the principle whereby men are judged according to their deeds, and not according to their belief in this or that catechism. Mingled with his allegorical philosophy are the most vehement attacks upon the

established religion. The monks are stigmatized as pedants who would destroy the joy of life on earth, who are avaricious, dissolute and the breeders of eternal dissensions and squabbles. The mysteries of faith are scoffed at. The Jewish records are put on a level with the Greek myths, and miracles are laughed at as magical tricks. Through all this runs the train of thought resulting naturally from Bruno's fundamental principles, and familiar in modern philosophy as Spinozism, the denial of particular providence, the doctrine of the uselessness of prayer, the identification in a sense of liberty and necessity, and the peculiar definition of good and evil.

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In 1585-1586 he returned with Castelnau to Paris, where his anti-Aristotelian views were taken up by the college of Cambrai, but was soon driven from his refuge, and we next find him at Marburg and Wittenberg, the headquarters of Lutheranism. There is a tradition that here or in England he embraced the Protestant faith; nothing in his writings would lead one to suppose so. Several works, chiefly logical, appeared during his stay at Wittenberg (*De Lampade combinatoria Lulliana*, 1587, and *De Progressu et Lampade venatoria logicorum*, 1587). In 1588 he went to Prague, then to Helmstadt. In 1591 he was at Frankfort, and published three important metaphysical works, *De Triplici Minimo et Mensura; De Monade, Numero, et Figura; De Immenso et Innumerabilibus*. He did not stay long at Prague, and we find him next at Zürich, whence he accepted an invitation to Venice from a young patrician, Giovanni Mocenigo. It was a rash step. The emissaries of the Inquisition were on his track; he was thrown into prison, and in 1593 was brought to Rome. Seven years were spent in confinement. On the 9th of February 1600 he was excommunicated, and on the 17th was burned at the stake.

For more than two centuries Bruno received scarcely the consideration he deserved. On the 9th of June 1889, however, as a result of a strong popular movement, a statue to him was unveiled in Rome in the Campo dei Fiori, the place of his execution.

To Bruno, as to all great thinkers, philosophy is the search for unity. Amid all the varying and contradictory phenomena of the universe there is something which gives coherence and intelligibility to them. Nor can this unity be something apart from the things; it must contain in itself the universe, which develops from it; it must be at once all and one. This unity is God, the universal substance,—the one and only principle, or *causa immanens*,—that which is in things and yet is distinct from them as the universal is distinct from the particular. He is the efficient and final cause of all, the beginning, middle, and end, eternal and infinite. By his action the world is produced, and his action is the law of his nature, his necessity is true freedom. He is living, active intelligence, the principle of motion and creation, realizing himself in the infinitely various forms of activity that constitute individual things. To the infinitely actual there is necessary the possible; that which determines involves somewhat in which its determinations can have existence. This other of God, which is in truth one with him, is matter. The universe, then, is a living cosmos, an infinitely animated system, whose end is the perfect realization of the variously graduated forms. The unity which sunders itself into the multiplicity of things may be called the *monas monadum*, each thing being a *monas* or self-existent, living being, a universe in itself. Of these monads the number is infinite. The soul of man is a thinking monad,

and stands mid-way between the divine intelligence and the world of external things. As a portion of the divine life, the soul is immortal. Its highest function is the contemplation of the divine unity, discoverable under the manifold of objects.

Such is a brief summary of the principal positions of Bruno's philosophy. It seems quite clear that in the earlier works, particularly the two Italian dialogues, he approached more nearly to the pantheistic view of things than in his later Latin treatises. The unity expounded at first is simply an *anima mundi*, a living universe, but not intelligent. There is a distinct development traceable towards the later and final form of his doctrine, in which the universe appears as the realization of the divine mind.

Bruno's writings had been much neglected when Jacobi brought them into notice in his *Briefe über die Lehre Spinozas* (2nd ed., 1879). Since then many have held that Descartes, Spinoza and Leibnitz were indebted to him for their main principles. So far as Descartes is concerned, it is highly improbable that he had seen any of Bruno's works. Schelling, however, called one of his works after him, *Bruno*.

Bibliography.—The chief edition of the Latin works is that published at the public expense by F. Fiorentino, F. Tocco and H. Vitelli (Naples, 1879-1891), which superseded that of A.F. Gfrörer (Stuttgart, 1834, incomplete). The Italian works were collected by A. Wagner (Leipzig, 1830), and a new edition was published by P. de Lagarde (Göttingen, 1888-1889); also *Opere Italiane*, ed. Croce and G. Gentile (1907 foll.), with notes by the latter. In Germany, *Gesammelte Werke*, trans. L. Kühlenbeck (1904 foll.). English translations:—The *Spaccio*, by Morehead, not as has been supposed by J. Toland (dated 1713, but probably printed earlier and very rare); of the preface to *De l' Infinito* (J. Toland in posthumous works); *Eroici Furores*, L. Williams (1888). There are also French and German translations.

The chief English work on Giordano Bruno is that of J. Lewis McIntyre (London, 1903), containing life, commentary and bibliography. See also C. Bartholmess, *J. Bruno* (Paris, 1846-1847); Domenico Berti, *Giordano Bruno da Nola* (2nd ed., 1889); H. Brunnhofer, *Giordano Brunos Weltanschauung* (Leipzig, 1883); M. Carrière, *Philosophische Weltanschauung der Reformationszeit*, pp. 411-494 (2nd ed., 1887); F.J. Clemens, *Giordano Bruno und Nicolaus von Cusa* (Bonn, 1847); Miss I. Frith, *Life of Giordano Bruno the Nolan* (London, 1887); C.E. Plumptre, *Life and Works of Giordano Bruno* (London, 1884); Chr. Sigwart, in *Kleine Schriften*, 1st series, pp. 49-124, 293-304; A. Riehl, *G. Bruno* (1889, ed. 1900; Eng. trans. Agnes Fry, 1905); Landsbeck, *Bruno, der Martyrer der neuen Weltanschauung* (1890); Owen, in *Sceptics of the Italian Renaissance* (London, 1893); C.H. von Stein, *G. Bruno* (1900); R. Adamson, *Development of Modern Philosophy* (Edinburgh and London, 1903); G. Louis, *G. Bruno, seine Weltanschauung und Lebensauffassung* (1900); O. Juliusberger, *G. Bruno und die Gegenwart* (1902); J. Reiner, *G. Bruno und seine Weltanschauung* (1907). The most important critical works are perhaps those of Felice Tocco, *Le Opere Latine di Giordano Bruno* (Florence, 1889), *Le Opere Inedite di Giordano Bruno* (Naples, 1891), *Le Fonti piu recenti della filos. del Bruno* (Rome, 1892). See also H. Höffding, *History of Modern Philosophy* (Eng. trans., 1900); J.M. Robertson, *Short History of Freethought* (London, 1906); G. Gentile, *Giordano Bruno nella Storia*

della cultura (1907). For other works see G. Graziano, *Bibliografia Bruniana* (1900).

(R. Ad.; J. M. M.)