BRUNIANA & CAMPANELLIANA
SUPPLEMENTI, XVI · STUDI, 8

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CONTENTS

Leen Spruit

BODILY AROUSAL, EMOTION AND TRANQUILLITY IN BRUNO'S *EROICI FURORI*

Emotions are threads of mental life which define who we are in our mind's eye as well as in the eyes of the others. Emotions change our view of the world and formulate intentions to change the world. When we are in the throes of emotion, it is because something important is occurring, and much of the mind's resources are brought to bear on the problem. Emotion creates a flurry of activity all devoted to one goal. Thoughts alone, unless triggered by the emotional system, do not do this. When challenging emotional situations, we do not have spare mental resources. The whole self gets absorbed in the emotion, which mobilitates and synchronizes the soul's activities.

Since the 1970s, the emotions have been among the most intensively debated topics in philosophy of mind, psychology and neurology. Contemporary systematic research stimulated historical study of theories, discussions and controversies developing in Ancient, medieval and early modern texts.[1] Scholarly interest in Bruno's conception of the will and and its relationship with intellect has been lively discussed during the last couple of decads,[2] but no analytic treatment of his views on emotion has been available so far. This paper aims at filling this gap, scrutinizing from a historical perspective Bruno's remarks on emotions in *De gli eroici furori*.

Some preliminary caveats are essential for our investigation. First, Bruno did not develop a comprehensive theory of emotion in any of his works, dwelling explicitly on the nature, origin or precise relationship of emotion with other mental acts and dispositions. Yet, the crucial role that affects and affection play in two of his books, *De gli eroici furori* and *De vinculis in genere*, suggests at least a cluster of underlying views on the nature of emotions and of their role in human life. Second, the terminology Bruno used for emotions centeres upon *affetto* and *affezione*,[3] terms which only partially correspond with the Ancient and medieval terms for passion[4] and with the modern term emotion. Generally, *affetto* stands for sentimental inclination, movement of the soul or an intensively felt sentiment. Third, as is well known the great tradition of Platonic love had a crucial impact on Bruno's theorizing in *De gli eroici furori*.[5] However, he also

[1] See *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy*, eds. J. Sihvola and T. Engberg-Pedersen, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998; R. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind. From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000; M. Nussbaum, *The Upheavals of Thought. The Intelligence of Emotion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001; *Emotions and Choice from Boethius to Descartes*, eds. H. Lagerlund and M. Yrjönsuuri, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002; Simo Knuutila is preparing an all-encompassing study of emotion in Ancient and medieval thought.

[2] See L. Spruit, *Il problema della conoscenza in Giordano Bruno*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 1988, ch. iv, section 2; S. Otto, *Die Augen und das Herz. Der philosophische Gedanke und seine sprachliche Darstellung in Brunos* Heroischen Leidenschaften, in *La filosofia di Giordano Bruno. Problemi ermeneutici e storiografici,* Convegno Internazionale Roma, 23-24 ottobre 1998, Atti a cura di E. Canone, Firenze, Olschki, 2003, pp. 17-45; M. Ciliberto, *Il gioco degli occhi e del cuore negli* Eroici Furori, in Idem, *L'occhio di Atteone. Nuovi studi su Giordano Bruno*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2002, pp. 95-109; E. Canone, *Il dorso e il grembo dell'eterno. Percorsi della filosofia di Giordano Bruno*, Roma-Pisa, Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 2003, p. 94f.

[3] See M. Ciliberto, *Lessico di Giordano Bruno*, Roma, Edizioni dell'Ateneo & Bizzarri, 1975, pp. 18-21.

[4] Passion has a more precise metaphysical value in Bruno's philosophy; see the quotes from *De la causa, principio et uno* in M. Ciliberto, *Lessico di Giordano Bruno*, cit., pp. 894-895.

[5] See J. Ch. Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love: The Context of Giordano Bruno's «Eroici Furori»*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1958.

endorsed a central view of Peripatetic moral philosophy, that is, the primacy of the intellect over the will. Moreover, in the aforenamed work Bruno presented long quotes from Epicurus on tranquillity and from Lucretius' famous picture of the evils of love. Finally, as Granada has shown, several insights borrowed from Seneca's letters can be traced.[1] Thus, Bruno's is an essentially eclectic position, merging various strands from Ancient and medieval philosophy. A summary view of the development of modern research on emotions is useful for a first selection of issues raised by Bruno's remarks on affect and affection in *De gli eroici furori*.

Modern debates on emotion originate with William James' ground-breaking essay *What is an emotion?*, published in 1884.[2] James conceived of an emotion in terms of a sequence of events that starts with the occurrence of an arousing stimulus and ends with a passionate feeling, a conscious mental experience. The essence of his proposal was premised on the fact that emotions are often accompanied by bodily responses (racing heart, tight stomach, sweaty palms, tense muscles) and that we can sense what is going on in the inside of our body much the same as we can sense what is going on in the outside world. James argued that we do not tremble because we are afraid or cry because we are sad, but we are afraid because we tremble and sad because we cry. Thus, emotion is a mental reaction on bodily arousal. James' theory dominated the debates on emotion till it was questioned in the 1920s by Walter Cannon.[3] Subsequently, behaviourist psychologists treated emotions, like other mental processes, as dispositions without causal power, that is, as ways of acting in certain situations, and thus the emotions were not recognized as legitimate phenomena for scientific investigation. In the early 1960s, Stanley Schachter and Jerome Singer suggested that bodily arousal was crucial in the genesis of an emotional experience, but not in the way James had proposed. These two social psychologists argued that emotional feelings result when we explain bodily states to ourselves on the basis of cognitive interpretations (so-called attributions) about what the external and internal causes of bodily states might be. The real impact of their work was not so much that it explained where our emotions come from but instead that it revitalized an old notion, that was implicit in the philosophical writings of Ancient and modern authors (Aristotle, Epicureans, Stoics, Descartes, Spinoza), namely that emotions might be cognitive interpretations of situations. The success of their efforts is exemplified by the fact that the psychology of emotion, to this day, is mostly about the role of cognition in emotion.[4] This approach has been questioned by Robert Zajonc, who demonstrated that affective reactions can take place in the absence of conscious awareness of the stimuli.[5] Subsequently, Antonio Damasio argued convincingly for the cognitive value of emotions in taking everyday decisions.[6] And recently also Joseph LeDoux, in his research on fear, has shown that emotional meaning of stimuli can begin to be appraised before the perceptual system has fully processed the stimuli.[7]

[1] Significant examples are in *Furori*, in OIB II 625, 627, 654, 657-660, 676, 681, 688-690. See also M. A. GRANADA, *Giordano Bruno y la Stoa: ¿una presencia no reconcida de motivos estoicos?*, «Nouvelles de la République des Lettres», XIII, 1994, pp. 123-151.

[2] W. JAMES, *What is an emotion?*, «Mind», IX, 1884, pp. 188-205.

[3] W. B. CANNON, *Bodily Changes in Pain, Hunger, Fear, and Rage*, vol. II, New York, Appleton, 1929.

[4] S. SCHACHTER, J. E. SINGER, *Cognitive, social, and physiological determinants of emotional state*, «Psychological Review», LXIX, 1962, pp. 379-399.

[5] R. B. ZAJONC, *Feeling and thinking: Preferences need no inferences*, «American Psychologist», XXXV, 1980, pp. 151-175.

[6] A. DAMASIO, *Descartes' Error. Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, New York, Grosset-Putnam, 1994.

[7] See J. LEDOUX, *The Emotional Brain. The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*, New York, Touchstone, 1998 (first ed. 1996).

This summary review of the developing modern research into emotions offers several interesting hints for an analysis of the conceptions underlying Bruno's observations on emotion in *De gli eroici furori*, more specifically those regarding (1) the impact of bodily arousal and the related conflict in the soul between rational forces and irrational drives, (2) the cognitive dimension of emotion, and finally (3) the issue of a balanced and rich mental life.

1. Bodily arousal and civil war

Bruno frequently stressed that emotion depends on a previous cognitive act, because we cannot love objects we are not acquainted with.[1] Yet, several passages suggest that emotions can be generated unconsciously, in particular, when the soul is largely immerged in material reality.[2] Thus, emotional states can be brought about by biological or sensory events. As is well known, the emotions caused by bodily arousal or change alone are mostly seen by Bruno as detrimental to mental life. However the circuit between inferior and superior layers in reality not only entails the soul's descent into the body,[3] but also guarantees its ascent, because the divine is reflected in material reality, thus qualifying the latter as starting point for the soul's hunt after divine beauty.[4]

The connection between bodily change, emotions and cognitive representations has various aspects. It entails that emotions are represented in various ways. They may result in mental representations, but they can also be identified by responses of the motor system, causing, for example, determinate facial expressions.[5] Bruno acknowledged that emotions are highly sensitive to contextual and personal factors. As a rule, emotions are correlated to the general constitution of every man: «l'affetto seguita la ragione della specie».[6] According to Bruno, emotions, like other mental acts, run on a scale, that is «secondo gli gradi di maggior o minor lume di cognizione et intelligenza.»[7] This does not only mean that the 'quality' of one's emotions consti-

[1] *Furori*, OIB II 506 and 576.

[2] *Furori*, OIB II 556: «[…] furor d'atra bile che fuor di conseglio, raggione et atti di prudenza lo faccia vagare guidato dal caso e rapito dalla disordinata tempesta [...]». See also pp. 551-552 on the threefold Platonic raptus and the three types of love, and p. 583 ff. on animal and divine affect.

[3] Notice that Bruno endorsed Plotinus' view on the relation between soul and body; cf. *Furori*, OIB II 569: «Dicono gli Platonici che due sorte de nodi con gli quali l'anima è legata al corpo. L'uno è certo atto vivifico che da l'anima come un raggio scende nel corpo; l'altro è certa qualità vitale che da quell'atto resulta nel corpo». See also p. 712: «l'anima con la gemina facultade mette in execuzione doi uffici: l'uno de vivificare et attuare il corpo animabile, l'altro de contemplare le cose superiori». See also *Lampas trig. stat.*, BOM 1050: «Tale est anima, quae simul descendit in inferiora, quae vivificet, et ascendit ad superiora, quae contempletur». The background of these views is in Ficino, *In Enneades* IV 4, 19, in *Opera, & quae hactenus extitêre, & quae in lucem nunc primùm prodiêre omnia*, Basileae, Ex officina Henricpetrina, 1576 (reprint: Torino, Bottega d'Erasmo, 1983), p. 1743.

[4] *Furori*, OIB II 551-552: «Sai bene che il rapto platonico è di tre specie, de quali l'uno tende alla vita contemplativa o speculativa, l'altro a l'attiva morale, l'altro a l'ociosa e voluptaria: cossì son tre tipi d'amori; de quali l'uno dall'aspetto della forma corporale s'inalza alla considerazione della spirituale e divina, l'altro solamente persevera nella delettazion del vedere e conversare; l'altro dal vedere va a precipitarsi nella concupiscenza del toccare». Cf. p. 627: «Talmente venendo l'anima in pensiero di ricovrar la bellezza naturale, studia purgarsi, sanarsi, riformarsi: e però adopra il fuoco, perché essendo come oro trameschiato a la terra et informe, con certo rigor vuol liberarsi da impurità; il che s'effettua quando l'intelletto vero fabro di Giove vi mette le mani essercitandovi gli atti dell'intellettive potenze». See also p. 647: bodily beauty is a shadow of divine beauty.

[5] Cf. *Spaccio*, OIB II 184: «Però, come nell'umana specie veggiamo de molti in viso, volto, voci, gesti, affetti et inclinazioni: altri cavallini, altri porcini, asinini, aquilini, buovini; cossì è da credere che in essi sia un principio vitale, per cui in potenza di prossima passata o di prossima futura mutazion di corpo, sono stati o sono per esser porci, cavalli, asini, aquile, o altro che mostrano; se per abito di continenza, de studii, di contemplazione et altre virtudi o vizii non si cangiano e non si disponeno altrimente». Cf. *Cantus*, BOL II,I 186.

[6] *Furori*, OIB II 595.

[7] *Furori,* OIB II 597; cf. p. 631: «Certo come son gli gradi delle nature et essenze, cossì proporzionalmente son gli gradi delle specie intelligibili, e magnificenze de gli amorosi affetti e furori».

tutes a clear indication for the level of one's overall spiritual life,[1] but entails also the possibility of contrast in the soul between opposite or partially opposite emotional drives, such as the «appetito razionale» and the «concupiscenza sensuale».[2] The 'civil war' in the soul is apparently inspired to the Platonic idea of a division of the soul into an inferior and irrational part, on the one hand, and a superior and rational part, on the other. Let us examine some relevant, previous positions regarding the soul-body complex and emotion.

Plato divided the human soul in three parts, the reasoning (*logistikon*), the spirited (*thumoeides*), and the appetitive (*epithumêtikon*).[3] Ideally, the reasoning part should govern the entire soul. The appetitive part pursues immediate sensual pleasure, whereas the intermediate part is the seat of emotion connected with self-assurance and self-affirmation. In his earlier dialogues, especially *Phaedo*, Plato was inclined to see all appetites and emotions as changes in the body, thus stressing their irrational nature.[4] In *Phaedrus*, by contrast, the simile of the two horses, which represent the spirited and appetitive parts of the soul, and the charioteer, which represents reason, gives a more positive role to the emotions, at least in regard to erotic appetite.[5] Erotic desire involves a complex selective response of the whole soul: the unruly horse has an important motivating role.

Aristotle held that bodily changes may be vehicles for emotions.[6] However, emotional feelings are not primarily perceptions of physical reactions.[7] Both early and later Stoic philosophers, most noticeably Chrysippus and Seneca, distinguished emotions from mere physical feelings, such as contractions and expansions, defining the former as judgement, which involves an additional mental operation, that is, assent to (unvoluntary) appearances (*phantasia*, *species*, *visum*, *visio*).[8] Plotinus regarded emotions as the product of the body-soul complex. Since the body in question is a living body, «with a trace of soul»,[9] Plotinus had no difficulties with ascribing psychological attributes to it. Obviously, Plotinus' strategy is to dissociate the soul from physical affections as much as possible. The soul may perceive affections without being affected by them: what happens in the soul is not genuine change at all but activity, more precisely: an inner activity merely triggered by events outside.[10] Since the rise of Peripatetic psychology in the 13th century emotions are described in relation to two motivational powers of the sensitive soul, namely, the concupiscible and the irascible, which are Latin translations of Plato's lower parts of the soul. After Avicenna, it was the established use to treat them as faculties. Albert the Great regarded emotions as passions in being causally dependent qualities. They are misleadingly called motions, since they are generated by alternations and they give rise to bodily changes. In Aquinas, the emotions are reactions of the sensitive part of the soul and play no role in the intellectual deliberation of how to act in a particular situation.[11]

[1] *Furori*, OIB II 599.
[2] *Furori*, OIB II 610.
[3] *Republic*, 435a-441c, 580d-583a.
[4] *Phaedo*, 65e, 66b-c.
[5] *Phaedrus*, 246a-256d.
[6] *De anima*, 403a25-b19.
[7] *Rhetoric*, II, 1-11.
[8] J. ANNAS, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford, University of California Press, 1992, pp. 103-120; R. SORABJI, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, cit., pp. 27-54.
[9] H. J. BLUMENTHAL, *Plotinus' Psychology. His Docrine of the Embodies Soul*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, pp. 61-62.
[10] See *Enneads*, III 6, 26 and 28; IV 4, 28; I 1, 53. For discussion, cf. E. K. EMILSSON, *Plotinus on the emotions*, in *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy*, cit., pp. 339-363.
[11] *Emotion and Choice*, cit., «Introduction», p. 15; S. KNUUTILA, *Medieval theories of the passions of the soul*, in *Emotion and Choice*, cit., pp. 49-83, on pp. 70-72.

The background for Bruno's view of the war in the soul is in Plato and in the Scholastic assimilation of Platonic doctrine, rather than in Plotinus.[1] Bruno defined the (intellectual) will as a captain on a ship governing with the helm of reason the emotions of the inner faculties against the gulfs of the lower drives («empiti naturali»). Unlike Plato, the problem to account for inner conflict did not lead Bruno to dividing the soul in parts. A similar view of the soul would in fact have contradicted the unitary view of the human soul underlying most of his criticisms of the traditional faculty psychology in other works, such as *Sigillus sigillorum*[2] and *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo*.[3] Plato's componential model seems to mistake the problem for its solution. He explained inner conflict by postulating parts of the soul, without noticing that some of the most puzzling of our inner conflicts put the emotional 'part' against itself.[4] By contrast, Bruno's view of human soul as a single force (*vis*) does not exclude the possibility of the soul being in emotional conflict, that is, oscillating between rival impulses and judgements.[5] The soul is diversified but functions as a whole. Therefore, emotions are not to be attributed to a hypothetical irrational part of the soul over which the agent has no control.

2. The cognitive dimension of emotion

Bruno's view of man is centered upon the intimate relationship between perception and cognition, on the one hand, and affection or emotion, on the other. Already in *Cena*, he qualified cognition and emotion as the basic acts of mental life: «doi sono gli atti de la vita: cognizione et affetto.[6] Elsewhere, in *De vinculis in genere*, he defined «affectus» as «cognitio practica».[7] Emotion originates in appraisal or evaluation, that is, some sort of perceptual or cognitive act:

> Veramente l'intendere, il vedere, il conoscere è quello che ascende il desio, e per consequenza per ministerio de gli occhi vien infiammato il core: e quanto a quelli fia presente più alto e degno oggetto, tanto più forte è il foco e più vivaci son le fiamme.[8]

The emotions of the *furioso* are not objectless moods, but involve always thought about an object combined with thought about the object's salience. Bruno suggested a strict correlation between emotions and value-laden cognitive states. He did not endorse, however, a strictly cognitive theory of emotions, as was developed, for example, by the Stoic philosophers.

The majority of the Stoics distinguished between sensations and emotions, because the former do not require assent of the mind, while the latter do. They held that emotions are mistaken evaluative judgements of the rational soul, based on the habit to regarding one-self as the center of the world. By contrast, later authors, among whom also the Stoic Posidonius, held that emotions without judgement can occur on the basis of mere appearances.[9] Subsequently, Seneca developed the concept of first move-

[1] Plotinus ascribed emotions to the body-soul complex and argued for the thesis that the soul cannot be affected by the affections, even though they may change the soul's dispositions and indeed morally corrupt it. See also section 3.

[2] *Sig. sigill.*, BOL II,II 172-180.

[3] Now in OIB II 405-475.

[4] R. DE SOUSA, *The Rationality of Emotion*, Cambridge (Ma)-London, The MIT Press, 1987, pp. 26-27.

[5] Bruno analyzed the impact of emotions in his theory of contractions; see *Sig. sigill.*, BOL II,II 180-193, in particular pp. 183-186.

[6] *Cena*, OIB I 442.

[7] *De vinculis*, BOM 482-483.

[8] *Furori*, OIB II 700; see also pp. 576, 668 and 712.

[9] Posidonius criticized Chrysippus' doctrine of emotions, since it was unable to explain: (1) impulses being excessive, (2) variation in emotional reaction, (3) fading of emotion, and (4) the (emotional) effects of music. See SORABJI, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, cit., pp. 109-132.

ments, which permitted to distinguish between bodily arousal (defined as first movements) and emotion which involves the mind's assent to appearances. The close link between cognitive and emotional acts was crucial also in medieval authors. After the spread of the works of Avicenna and the translations of Aristotle the standard view of Scholastic philosophy came to be that emotions have cognitive causes and that they involve feelings, behavioural suggestions and bodily affections. According to Albert the Great, emotions are acts of the sensitive motive powers which are actualized by the estimative faculty (the Avicennean *aestimatio*). When the cognitive cause ceases to exist, the emotion vanishes. Similarly, Thomas Aquinas, probably one of Bruno's proximate sources, held that emotions are acts of the sensitive motive powers (appetite) caused by external objects through the evaluation of the *cogitativa* and necessarily accompanied by the motions of the heart and the spirits. Later Scholastics, among whom several 14th-century Franciscans, focussed on issues regarding ultimate enjoyment and eternal punishment in after-life and gave up the sharp distinction between emotional and volitional phenomena.[1]

Bruno's position suggests an interaction between cognitive representations and affective acts, rather than a stimulus-to-feeling sequence. Emotion which is not sustained by intellectual cognition may lead a person terribly astray.[2] But once emotion is triggered by a cognitive act, it is seen as capable of influencing the mind:

> Certo ch'il cor acceso e compunto fa sorger lacrime da gli occhi, onde come quelli accendono le fiamme in questo, quest'altro viene a rigar quelli d'umore.[3]

And of meliorating its intellectual activity:

> «Putto irrazionale» si dice l'amore non perché egli per sé sia tale; ma per ciò che per il più fa tali suggetti, et è in sugetti tali: atteso che in qualumque è più intellettuale e speculativo, inalza più l'ingegno e più purifica l'intelletto facendolo svegliato, studioso e circonspetto, promovendolo ad un'animositate eroica et emulazion di virtudi e grandezza: per il desio di piacere e farsi degno della cosa amata.[4]

The function of emotion is essentially different from intellectual thought or reasoning, namely to bestow meaning to circumstances of our lives, and to that of the *furioso* in particular. Perception, belief and cognition provide a person with a picture of the world it inhabits. Emotion, however, provides a person with an orientation or attitude to the world and thus plays a key role in guiding a person's aspirations. Emotions, although depending on other mental acts as to their origin, have an overwhelming influence on every other aspect of mental life, shaping our perception, memories, thoughts and dreams. Emotional feelings and responses are stronger than perception and thoughts, because they depend on a stronger input.[5] This explains, according to Bruno, but he is

[1] Knuutila, *Medieval theories of the passions of the soul*, cit., pp. 70-78.

[2] *Furori*, OIB II 734: «[…] deriva dal fuoco dell'affezzione, onde alcuni si fanno impotenti et inabili ad apprendere il vero, con far che l'affetto precorra a l'intelletto. Questi son coloro che prima hanno l'amare che l'intendere: onde gli avviene che tutte le cose gli appaiano secondo il colore della sua affezzione; stante che chi vuole apprendere il vero per via di contemplazione deve essere ripurgatissimo nel pensiero».

[3] *Furori*, OIB II 701. Cf. p. 713, where Bruno observes that the eyes have two offices: «l'uno de imprimere nel core, l'altro de ricevere l'impressione dal core; come anco questo ha doi ufficii: l'uno de ricevere l'impressioni da gli occhi, l'altro di imprimere in quelli».

[4] *Furori*, OIB II 537; cf. p. 558: «[…] poi ritorna pure a forzarsi con la voluntade verso là dove non può arrivare con l'intelletto».

[5] *Furori*, OIB II 735: «Per questo è da dire che gli affetti molto sono potenti per impedir l'apprension del vero, quantumque gli pazienti non se ne possano accorgere: qualmente avviene ad un stupido ammalato che non dice il suo gusto amaricato, ma il cibo amaro. – Or tal specie de cecità è notata per costui, gli occhi del quale

certainly not alone in endorsing this view, why we have so little control over emotional reactions, and why they may have useful as well as pathological consequences.[1]

3. Extirpation, moderation, tranquillity

The Ancient philosophers debated not only the nature but also the value of emotions. Plato and Aristotle took it for granted that it is impossible to get rid of emotions. Consequently, they argued for strategies of moderation of our emotions. Emotions reveal us as vulnerable to events that we do not control. This led the Stoics to the view that it was better to extirpate them. They believed that one can learn to live without emotions, which they regarded as false judgments: the edification of reason and rational habits (*eupatheia*) and the extirpation of spontaneous emotions are the basic constituents of a good life.[2] The main debate was thus between those who held that emotions are useful in moderation (*metriopatheia*) and the Stoics position that most emotions are pernicious and should be eradicated (*aphateia*). The Epicureans held that freedom from bodily pain and freedom from mental disturbance jointly constitute the good.[3] In a crucial passage of *De gli eroici*, Bruno quotes Epicurus and Lucretius, endorsing their view of happiness:

> Cicada. Più stimo io l'essere in tranquillità e fuor di molestia che trovarsi in una sì forte tolleranza.
>
> Tansillo. È sentenza d'Epicurei la qual se sarà bene intesa non sarà giudicata tanto profana quanto la stimano gli ignoranti; atteso che non toglie che quel ch'io ho detto sia virtù, né pregiudica alla perfezzione della costanza, ma più tosto aggionge a quella perfezzione che intendono gli volgari: perché lui non stima vera e compita virtù di fortezza e constanza quella che sente e comporta gl'incommodi: ma quella che non sentendoli le porta; non stima compìto amor divino et eroico quello che sente il sprone, freno o rimorso o pena per altro amore, ma quello ch'a fatto non ha senso de gli altri affetti: onde talmente è gionto ad un piacere, che non è potente dispiacere alcuno a distorlo o far cespitare in punto. E questo è toccar la somma beatudine in questo stato, l'aver la voluptà e non aver senso di dolore.[4]

Subsequently, Bruno defended this view against the 'vulgar' opinion on the Epicureans quoting Epicurus' letter to Idomeneus written on his deathbed.[5] In my view, these

son alterati e privi dal suo naturale, per quel che dal core è stato inviato et impresso, potente non solo ad alterar il senso, ma et oltre l'altre tutte facultadi de l'alma, come la presente figura dimostra».

[1] See the nine types of blindness in *Furori*, OIB II 715-737.

[2] See Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, cit., *passim*, and Knuutila, *Medieval theories of the passions of the soul*, cit., p. 51.

[3] Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, 127-132: «We must reckon that some desires are natural and others empty, and of the natural some are necessary, others natural only; and of the necessary some are necessary for happiness, others for the body's freedom from stress, and others for life itself. For the steady observation of these things makes it possible to refer every choice and avoidance to the health of the body and the soul's freedom from disturbance, since this is the end belonging to the blessed life. For this is what we aim at in all our actions – to be free from pain and anxiety. […] For what produces the pleasant life is not continuous drinking and parties or pederasty or womanizing or the enjoyment of fish and the other dishes of an expensive table, but sober reasoning which tracks down the causes of every choice and avoidance, and which banishes the opinions that beset souls with the graetest confusion» (trans. in A. A. Long & D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. I: *Translations of the Principal Sources, with Philosophical Commentary*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 113-114). See also Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, II, 1-61 and Cicero, *De finibus*, I, 55.

[4] *Furori*, OIB II 624; cf. the fifteenth contraction in *Sig. sigill.*, BOL II,II 192 ff.

[5] *Furori*, OIB II 624; cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, with an English translation by R. D. Hicks, 2 vols., Cambridge (Ma)-London, Harvard University Press and William Heinemann, 1979-1980, vol. II, X, 22: «Here is the letter to Idomeneus which he [*scil*. Epicurus] wrote on his death-bed: 'I wrote this to you on that blessed day of my life which was also the last. Strangury and dysentery had set in, with all the extreme intensity of which they are capable. But the joy in my soul at the memory of our past discussions was enough to counterbalance all this. I ask you, as befits your lifelong companionship with me and with philosophy: take

quotes on tranquillity are related to Bruno's approval of Lucretius' ideas about abstinence in (bodily) love,[1] and they become plainly intelligible only when read in the light of Plotinus' views on the elimination of affections and the mystical union.

Plotinus thought that it is philosophy's task to make the soul free from affection, that is, to purify the soul eliminating the affections to the extent this is possible.[2] The perfect soul seeks similarity with Nous and the One, which are apathetic. However, when the superior part of human soul lives in the intelligible spheres, it receives special noetic faculties analogous to the lower sense faculties. Through these mystical powers an apathetic soul can have supersensitive experiences.[3] At this level, intellectual contemplation, love and happiness coincide:

> This contemplation is intellect in love (*nous eron*), when it goes out of its mind, drunk with nectar. Then it falls in love, made simple and transformed into happy feeling (*eupatheia*) by satiety.[4]

This description of happiness corresponds exactly to what Bruno said about the *furioso* completely absorbed by his object in virtue of divine love and contemplation.[5] Thus, the goal of human life is discussed in essentially Neoplatonic terms, but the road to arrive at this level is not a typically Plotinian high-way. Like Epicurus, Bruno regarded absence of pain and mental distress as necessary conditions for happiness.

The main point in life for the Epicureans is to achieve the pleasure of 'tranquillity', *ataraxia*, an untroubled state which is threatened by emotional upset. Some emotions depend completely on beliefs which Epicurus claims are false, and will therefore disappear with these beliefs. The most spectacular example is love.[6] We can see when we read Lucretius' analysis of love,[7] how important it is for the Epicureans to bring about the deep, and sometimes hidden and dark, aspects of the emotion.[8] Similarly, when quoting precisely some salient lines of Lucretius' account, Bruno underlines the importance of facing and understanding the sources of emotion triggered by bodily arousal. The heroic lover, like the Epicurean wise, will be free from the disturbance of emotion in our everyday sense, and motivated by emotions (intellectual love) which have been transformed by a total restructuring of the beliefs that sustain them.[9]

care of the children of Metrodorus'» (transl. in Long & Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, cit., pp. 150-151) Subsequently, Bruno observes on pp. 624-625: «Et è cosa manifesta che non ponea felicità più che dolore nel mangiare, bere, posare e generare, ma in non sentir fame, né sete, né fatica, né libidine. Da qua considera qual sia secondo noi la perfezzion de la costanza: non già questo che l'arbore non si fracasse, rompa o pieghe; ma in questo che né manco si muova: alla cui similitudine costui tien fisso il spirto, senso et intelletto, là dove non ha sentimento di tempestosi insulti».

[1] *Furori*, OIB II 637, where Bruno quotes Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, IV, 1063-1064, 1067-1069, 1073-1074: «But it is fitting to flee from images, to scare away what feeds love, to turn the mind in other directions […] nor to cherish care and certain pain for yourself. For the sore quickens and becomes inveterate by feeding, daily the madness takes on and the tribulation grows heavier […] Nor does he who avoids love lack the fruit of Venus, but rather he takes the advantages which are without penalty». See in this context also *De vinculis in genere*, BOM 470: «[…] Epicuro voluptas Veneris impura iudicatur, quia dolorem et inexplebile desiderium… concomitatur, et tristis eam consequitur lassitudo».

[2] E. K. Emilson, *Plotinus on the emotions*, in *The Emotions in Hellenistic Philosophy*, cit., pp. 339-363.

[3] J. Dillon, *Aisthêsis noêtê: A doctrine of spiritual senses in Origen and in Plotinus*, in Id., *The Golden Chain*, Hampshire, Vivarium, 1990.

[4] Plotinus, *Enneades*, VI 7, 35.

[5] For the soul drinking divine nectar, see *Furori*, OIB II 579 and 710.

[6] Another significant example is the (ill-based) fear for death, also referred to by Bruno in *Furori*, OIB II 681; see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, X, 125: «Foolish, therefore, is the man who says that he fears death, not because it will pain when it comes, but because it pains in the prospect».

[7] *De rerum natura*, IV, 1037-1287.

[8] J. Annas, *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*, cit., pp. 195-196.

[9] *Ibidem*, pp. 198-199.

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This summary inspection of *De gli eroici furori* reveals that Bruno's ideas about emotions incorporate aspects of several traditions, including Platonism, Aristotelianism and Epicureanism. Bruno acknowledged that emotions have physiological bases and correlates.[1] No bodily state qua bodily state is an emotion, however. Emotional responses can occur without the involvement of thinking and reasoning. But for the *furioso*, similar feelings represent a real danger: to be droven into carnal lust or madness. Consequently, Bruno drew a sharp distinction between heroic and vulgar love. The latter is a bodily response to external stimuli, while the former is a cognitively constrained emotion unfolding only when the soul detaches itself from ill-based emotional sollicitations and enabling it to hunt the supreme good.

[1] See the dialogue between heart and the eyes, and the analysis of the nine types of blindness in *Furori*, Part II, dialogues 3 and 4, OIB II 699-737.