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GIORDANO BRUNO (1548 – 1600)

Cause, Principle and Unity

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

ROBERT DE LUCCA

Duke University

Essays on Magic

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

RICHARD J. BLACKWELL

St Louis University

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

ALFONSO INGEGNO

University of Florence



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when you will surprise me with your swift mortal blow, with your menacing scythe, let me stretch my hands forth to where there is no trace seen of black Chaos: thus, you will not appear good, nor appear bad.]

DE L'AMORE

Amor, per cui tant'alto il ver discerno,
ch'apre le porte di diamante e nere,
per gli occhi entra il mio nume, e per vedere
nasce, vive, si nutre, ha regno eterno.

Fa scorgere quant'ha il ciel terr' ed inferno,
fa presente d'absenti effigie vere,
repiglia forze, e, trando dritto, fere,
e impiaga sempre il cor, scuopre ogn'interno.

O dunque, volgo vile, al vero attendi,
porgi l'orecchio al mio dir non fallace,
apri, apri, se puoi, gli occhi, insano e bieco.

Fanciullo il credi, perché poco intendi;
Perché ratto ti cangi, ei par fugace;
Per esser orbo tu, lo chiami cieco.

[On love

Love grants me such a lofty vision of the truth that he makes the black doors of diamond open: through the eyes the god enters, and it is to see that he is born, lives, is fed, and reigns forever. He reveals all of heaven, hell and earth; makes appear true images of the absent; regathers strength to hit with a direct blow, always wounds the heart and reveals all that is hidden. Therefore, base mob, attend to the truth: lend your ears to my words, which do not deceive. Open, open if you can, your mad and squinting eyes. You call him a child, because you understand so little; because you are so inconstant, he seems fickle to you; your own sightlessness makes you call him blind.]

UNTITLED

Causa, principio, et uno sempiterno,
onde l'esser, la vita, il moto pende,
e a lungo, a largo e profondo si stende
quanto si dic'in ciel, terr'ed inferno;

con senso, con raggion, con mente scerno
ch'atto, misura e conto non comprende
quel vigor, mole e numero, che tende
oltr'ogn'inferior, mezzo e superno.

Cieco error, tempo avaro, ria fortuna,
sord'invidia, vil rabbia, iniquo zelo,
crudo cor, empio ingegno, strano ardire
non bastaranno a farmi l'aria bruna,
non mi porrann'avanti gli occhi il velo,
non faran mai ch'il mio bel sol non mire.

[O, you sempiternal cause, principle and one, whence depend being, life and movement, and whence in length, breadth and depth extends all that which is in heaven, on earth and in hell: with sense, reason and spirit I discern that act, measure and reckoning do not comprehend that force, mass and number which transcends all that is lowest, middle or highest. Blind error, greedy time, adverse fortune, deaf envy, vile rage, hostile zeal, cruel hearts, perverse spirits, bizarre passions will not suffice to obscure the air before me, nor place the veil before my eyes, nor ever stop me from beholding my beautiful sun.]

Giordano Bruno, Nolan
Cause, principle and unity

First dialogue

Speakers: Elitropio, Filoteo, Armesso

ELITROPIO. Like felons used to the darkness, who come up to the light when freed from the depths of some gloomy tower, many trained in common philosophy, and others, will be clutched by fear, seized with astonishment and (unable to stand the new sun of your shining concepts) thoroughly unsettled.

FILOTEO. It is not the fault of the light, but of their sight: the more excellent and beautiful the sun, the more hateful and harshly unwelcome it will be to night-witches' eyes.

ELITROPIO. In your hope of raising us out of the blind abyss, into the sight of the open, peaceful and tranquil stars that shine with such beautiful variety against the cerulean mantle of heaven, Filoteo, you have picked an uncommon, unusual and difficult venture. And though the helping hand of your compassion is held out to us men, the ungrateful will still attack

you in ways that are as varied as the many animals generated and nourished within the gentle earth's ample and maternal bosom; for it is clear that the human species displays, in the particularities of its individuals, the variety of all other species together. In each of our individuals, the whole is present more explicitly than in the individuals of other species. Thus, some, as soon as they feel the fresh air, like the bleary-eyed mole, will tunnel straight back down into the earth to seek their natural, inky depths. Others, like night birds, on seeing the vermilion ambassadress of the sun come up in the east, will be forced by the weakness of their eyes to repair to their dingy retreats. All creatures banished from the presence of the celestial lights and doomed to the eternal chasms, cages and caverns of Pluto – all animals, called by the horn of the fearsome Erynnis, Alecto, will spread their wings and flee headlong to their dwellings. But the animals born to behold the sun, having waited out the hated night, will give thanks to the merciful heavens and, prepared to gain within the globose crystals of their eyes the rays for which they have so long waited and pined, will adore the east, not only with unwonted adoration in their hearts, but with voices and hands. Men will begin to speak when from the east's gilded balcony, handsome Titan has let loose the fiery steeds who cleave the sleepy silence of the moist night. The docile, defenceless and simple sheep flocks will bleat; the horned oxen will bellow, heeded by their rustic ox-herders; and Silenus' quadrupeds will start to bray, frightening the stupid Giants again for the gods' benefit. Tossing in their muddy beds, the boars will deafen us with their obstinate grunting. Tigers, bears, lions, wolves and the cunning fox poking his head from the cave will behold from their high deserts their flat hunting grounds, and will let forth from ferocious breasts their roars, growls, snarls, howls and cries. In the air and on the fronds of branchy trees, the roosters, eagles, peacocks, cranes, doves, blackbirds, crows, sparrows, nightingales, magpies, ravens, cuckoos and cicadas will lose no time responding, re-echoing with their earsplitting chatter. Still further, from their mobile, liquid dominions, the white swans, the many-hued water fowl, the swift razor-bills, the marsh ducks, the honking geese and the carping frogs will disturb our ears with their din, such that the warm sunlight diffused in the air of our privileged hemisphere will find itself attended, greeted and perhaps plagued by cries as numerous and as varied as are the breaths that drive them out from the hollows of their respective breasts.

FILOTEO. It is not only common, but necessary and natural that every animal utters its own cry. Beasts cannot form regulated accents and artic-

ulated sounds like men, since their physical makeup, nourishment and tastes are dissimilar.

ARMESSO. Please give me a chance to speak also: not about light, but of some circumstances that, far from comforting the senses, injure the feelings of whoever observes and reflects. For your own peace and quiet (that I wish for you with fraternal affection), I would not want these speeches of yours to be made into comedies, tragedies, laments, dialogues, or what have you, like the ones that circulated openly a while ago, and forced you to stay shut up in your homes.

FILOTEO. Speak frankly.

ARMESSO. I have no intention of speaking like a holy prophet, as an abstruse oracle, like an apocalyptic visionary or the she-ass of Balaam¹ beholding the angel. Nor will I discourse as if I were exhilarated by Bacchus or swollen with wind by the sluttish Parnassian muses, nor like a Sibyl impregnated by Phoebus, nor like a prognostic Cassandra,² nor as if Apollonian rapture had seized me from my toenails to the hair on my head, nor like the seer illuminated in the oracle or Delphic tripod, nor like wise Oedipus,³ probed in the riddles of the Sphinx, nor as a Solomon before the enigmas of the queen of Sheba,⁴ nor like Calchas,⁵ interpreter for the Olympian council, nor as a Merlin possessed, nor as one emerged from the cave of Trophonius.⁶ Instead, I will speak in common, vulgar language, like a man who has had other things on his mind than to go about distilling the juice of his brain and cerebellum to the point of withering his *pia mater* and *dura mater*. What I mean is that I will talk as one who has no wits but his own, and to whom not even the garden- or kitchen-variety gods among the celestial court condescend to cast a straw, though they heap their favours *ad infinitum* even on their horses – those gods, I say, that ordinarily show themselves more intimate, more familiar and congenial with us. I mean Bacchus, or the drunk mounted on the ass, or Pan, or Vertumnus, or Faunus, or Priapus: the ones who neither drink ambrosia nor taste nectar (unappreciative of nymphs and pure water), but quench their thirst at the bottom of the barrel with sour wines.

ELITROPIO. Too long a preface.

ARMESSO. Patience: the conclusion's swift. To put an end to this, I would like to say that I will offer you words that need no deciphering, as if they had been distilled, passed through an alembic, condensed in a double-boiler

¹ Numbers 28. ² Virgil, *Aeneid*, II, 246–7. ³ Seneca, *Oedipus*, vv. 92–3 and 101–2.

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and sublimated with a prescription of the quintessence, but such words as my wetnurse hammered into my skull – a woman as thick-skinned, big-chested, wide-hipped, ample-bellied and broad-bottomed as that Londoner I caught sight of in Westminster, who possessed such ample mammeries, like hot water bottles for her stomach, that they seemed the halfboots of the immense Saint Paragorio, and which if tanned would match a pair of Ferrarese bagpipes.

ELITROPIO. That is quite enough for a preface.

ARMESSO. Well, then, to come to the rest – leaving a little to one side observations and opinions concerning light and the potential splendor of your philosophy – I would like to hear from you in what terms you wish us to greet, in particular, that brilliant doctrine which shines forth from *The Ash Wednesday Supper*. What animals are those that perform in *The Ash Wednesday Supper*? Are they aquatic, aerial, earthly or lunatic? And, leaving aside the observations of Smitho, Prudenzio and Frulla,⁷ I would like to know if they are wrong or right, who claim that you bark like a rabid dog, in addition to sometimes playing the monkey, sometimes the wolf, sometimes the magpie, sometimes the parrot, now this animal, now that, mixing grave and serious words, moral and natural, ignoble and noble, philosophic and comic.

FILOTEO. Do not be surprised, brother, for the scene was indeed a supper, where brains are guided by the passions aroused by the flavours and odours of food and drink. The supper will be verbal and spiritual as a logical consequence of its material and corporeal guise. The dialogue has parts as different and various, therefore, as those which ordinarily comprise that other supper. The former has conditions, circumstances, and means of its own that are as peculiar to it as those of the latter may be.

ARMESSO. Help me get at your meaning, please.

FILOTEO. In the one case (as is fitting and proper), there are the salads and main dishes, fruits and common victuals, hors d'oeuvres and spices, warm and cold, raw and cooked, food of aquatic and terrestrial origin, cultivated and wild, ripe and green, food for the healthy and for the ill, dishes for gourmets and dishes for the hungry, ones that are light and substantial, bland and salted, tart and sweet, bitter and mild. Similarly, in the other case and by a certain analogy, contradictions and differences have appeared, suitable to the various stomachs and tastes of those whom it may please to take part in our symbolic banquet, so that no one can complain

⁷ Secondary characters in *The Ash Wednesday Supper*.

of having attended in vain, and whoever does not like one thing can help himself to another.

ARMESSO. True. But what is your answer if, in addition, at your banquet, at your supper, things appear that are good neither for salads nor main dishes, nor good as fruits or fillers, neither cold nor hot, raw nor cooked, good for neither the healthy nor the sick, stuff that should never have left the hands of the cook or confectioner, stuff that stirs no appetite and satisfies no hunger?

FILOTEO. You will see that, in this, our supper does not differ from any other that may be dished out. As with that other, as you are savouring your meal, you might scald your mouth with a bite that is too hot, so you have to either spew it back out or bandy it about your palate with tears and crying until you can give it that cursed shove in order to speed it down your gorge, or you jar some tooth, or you bite into your tongue at the same time as your bread, or else there is a piece of grit that breaks up and sticks between your teeth, forcing you to spit out the whole mouthful. Perhaps some hair or whisker off the cook glues to your palate and makes you nearly vomit, or else a fishbone lodges in your gullet and makes you wheeze, or another small bone lodged sideways in your throat threatens to suffocate you. To our and to everybody's displeasure, analogous and equivalent things have been found at our supper. All that is due to the sin of the first man, Adam. Because of our ancestor, perverse human nature is condemned to find disgust joined to delight.

ARMESSO. Spoken with sanctity and piety. But what is your answer to those who call you a raging cynic?

FILOTEO. I will concede the point readily, at least in part.

ARMESSO. But you know that it is less dishonourable for a man to undergo abuses than to inflict them?

FILOTEO. Yet it is enough that my actions are labelled vengeance, and the others' abuse.

ARMESSO. Even the gods are liable to receive insults, suffer censure, and bear reproach; but to insult, censure and reproach are the business of people who are low, mean, cowardly and worthless.

FILOTEO. True. That is why we do not injure, but rather rebutt the injuries that are cast, not so much at us but at condemned philosophy, proceeding in such a way that other insults are not added to those already received.

ARMESSO. So you want to act the biting dog, so that no one dares molest you?

FILOTEO. Exactly, because I desire peace, and unpleasantness displeases me.

ARMESSO. Yes, but they deem that you proceed with too much severity.

FILOTEO. That is to prevent them from coming back, and to daunt others from coming to dispute with me or someone else, and treating our demonstrations with such expedients.

ARMESSO. The offence was private, the retaliation public.

FILOTEO. None the less just for that. Many errors are committed in private, which are then justly chastised in public.

ARMESSO. But that way you end up ruining your reputation, and making yourself more blameworthy than those others, because the world will declare you impatient, fantastic, daft and bizarre.

FILOTEO. It does not matter, as long as they stop harassing me from now on, and if I shake the club of the cynic at them, that is so they will let me go about my business in peace. It is clear they do not want to do me kindnesses, but they should not exercise their coarseness on me.

ARMESSO. But do you think it is fitting for a philosopher to set about avenging himself?

FILOTEO. If those who harassed me were a Xanthippes, I would be a Socrates.

ARMESSO. Don't you know that patience and long-suffering does everyone good, and that through them we become like heroes and celebrated gods, who, according to some, defer their vengeance, and according to others, neither take revenge nor give way to anger?

FILOTEO. You are wrong to think I cared to have revenge.

ARMESSO. What then?

FILOTEO. I was concerned with correcting – an activity that also makes us similar to gods. You know that Jove ordered poor Vulcan to work even on holidays, so that his cursed anvil goes on receiving the fierce blows of the hammer eternally. No sooner is one raised than another comes smashing down, so that the righteous thunderbolts used to chastise the guilty and unlawful are never in short supply.

ARMESSO. There is a difference between you and Jove's blacksmith, husband of the goddess of Cyprus.

FILOTEO. It is enough, in any case, that I am perhaps not unlike the gods in patience and long-suffering. And those qualities were put to the test in this affair, in that I never gave full rein to my scorn and never spurred on my anger.

ARMESSO. To be castigator – of the multitude, especially – is not the job of just anyone.

FILOTEO. Add to that: especially when he has nothing to do with the multitude.

ARMESSO. They say that you must not be an agitator in a country not your own.

FILOTEO. And I say two things: first, one should not kill a foreign physician because he tries to administer cures not administered by the natives; second, I say that the true philosopher's country is all the world.

ARMESSO. But if they consider you neither philosopher nor physician nor countryman?

FILOTEO. That does not make me any the less so.

ARMESSO. Who will vouch you that?

FILOTEO. The gods who have put me here, I who find myself here, and those who have eyes to see me here.

ARMESSO. Your witnesses are very few and little-known.

FILOTEO. The true physicians are indeed few and little-known, while all these people are truly ill. And I repeat that they have no right to inflict or to allow others to inflict such treatment on those who offer honest merchandise, foreigners or not.

ARMESSO. Few are acquainted with this merchandise.

FILOTEO. Pearls are no less precious for that reason, nor do we, therefore, dedicate less effort rallying to their defence, to save and vindicate them with all our might from the trampling of swine. May the gods favour me, Arnesso, since I have never carried out acts of vengeance out of sordid self-love or low self-interest, but out of devotion for the offended majesty of my beloved mother, philosophy. False friends and false children (for there is no worthless pedant, do-nothing phrasemaker, stupid faun or ignorant hack who does not aspire to be numbered among her family by showing up loaded with books, growing out his beard, or getting up prosopopoeical by other means) have wasted her so away that, among the common people, philosopher rhymes with impostor, quack, swindler, good-for-nothing, charlatan and howling pedant, good only as home entertainment or country scarecrow.

ELITROPIO. Indeed, philosophers as a race are rated by most men as more despicable than house chaplains sprung up from the dregs of humanity, who, however, disgrace the priesthood far less than the philosophers, chosen from among every sort of beast, have shamed philosophy.

FILOTEO. So let us praise the ancient race. Philosophers then had so much value that from their ranks were recruited lawmakers, counsellors and kings. And the counsellors and kings were such that from those functions they were elevated to the priesthood. In our age, most of the priests are such that they themselves are discredited, and do discredit to the divine laws; nearly all the philosophers we see are worth so little that they are disparaged along with their science. What is worse, a multitude of scoundrels, like a mass of nettles, have grown used to smothering with poisonous mirages what little truth and virtue get revealed to the few.

ARMESSO. I know no philosopher who gets so aroused in favour of discredited philosophy, nor do I perceive any, Elitropio, as impassioned by his science as Teofilo. What would happen if all other philosophers had the same character, I mean if they had so little patience?

ELITROPIO. Those others have not made so many discoveries, nor do they have as much to preserve or defend. They can easily devalue philosophy that is worthless, or what is nearly worthless, or that which they do not know; but one who has found truth, which is a hidden treasure, is inspired by the beauty of that divine face and grows jealous to defend her against plunder, negligence and contamination. Just so, a miser may conceive a passion for gold, diamonds and carbuncles, or a man for the beauty of a foul woman.

ARMESSO. But let us get back to our subject and arrive at the *quia* [why]. They say of you, Teofilo, that in your supper you criticize and insult a whole city, an entire province, a complete kingdom.

FILOTEO. That, I never thought, never intended, never did. If I had ever thought, wished or done so, I would condemn myself with utmost severity and bend over backwards to make a thousand disavowals, retractions and disclaimers; not only if I had insulted a noble and ancient-realm such as this, but any other, however great its reputation for barbarism. And I mean not only if I had offended any city, however widespread its reputation for incivility, but even if I had insulted any class whatsoever, however savage it was held to be, or even any one family, however inhospitable it was considered. There cannot be a race, kingdom, city or house where contrary and opposing manners do not exist, and to which one can assign the same temperament to all, such that it is impossible for one man to find pleasure in what displeases another.

ARMESSO. As far as I am concerned, I have read, re-read and meditated upon all you have said (although on some points, I do not know just why, I

find you a bit excessive), and you seem to me for the most part to proceed with moderation, reason and discernment; but the noise has spread as I have set out.

ELITROPIO. That noise of this and other things has been bandied about through the meanness of some of those who felt themselves touched. Eager to take revenge, but conscious of the weaknesses of their arguments, their doctrine, their intelligence and their strength, they not only fabricate as many lies as they can, to which no one but their like gives credit, but they try to enlist partisans by making out that your condemnation of some individuals constitutes a pervasive insult.

ARMESSO. I think, on the contrary, there are people, not without wisdom and judgement, who gauge the insult universal because you indicate certain manners as belonging to people of this or that nation.

FILOTEO. But what are these alleged manners? Are not similar or worse ones, not to mention manners much more peculiar in genus, species and number, found in the most excellent parts of the world? Would you claim that I were abusive and ungrateful toward my own country, if I said that in Italy, in Naples or Nola, similar or more criminal manners can be found? Would you say that I had abused that blessed realm, often set at the head and the right hand of our globe simultaneously, governor and tamer of the other nations (and ever regarded by us and by others as mistress, nurse and mother of all the virtues, disciplines, humanities and the qualities of modesty and courtesy), when esteemed poets, themselves, have justly sung its praises, but yet do not shrink from calling her, if the occasion requires, mistress of all vice, error, greed and cruelty?

ELITROPIO. This is certainly in keeping with the precepts of your philosophy, by virtue of which you maintain that contraries coincide both in principle and in reality. Thus, minds most suited to high, worthy and generous enterprises will fall, if they are perverted, into extreme vice. Moreover, we generally find the rarest and choicest wits amongst the most foolish and ignorant folk, and there where the people are generally the least civil and the most lacking in courtesy, we find, in some individual cases, extreme civility and good manners – so that, in one way or another, many nations seem to have received an equal measure of perfections and imperfections.

FILOTEO. What you say is true.

ARMESSO. And yet, Teofilo, I am distressed, as are many others, that in our friendly nation you have come up against the kind of people who have so irked you that you vent your complaints by means of a sooty supper,

instead of having met those, much more numerous, who would have shown you how much our country (even if it is presented by your countrymen as *penitus toto divisus ab orbe*⁸ [utterly cut off from the whole world]) is disposed to all literature, arms, chivalry, humanities and courtesy. We venture with all our strength not to be inferior to our ancestors in those domains, nor to be outclassed by other nations – especially those who believe themselves naturally endowed with noble manners, science, arms and civility.

FILOTEO. On my faith, Armesso, I neither would nor could contradict anything you say, neither with words, nor with reasonings, nor in conscience. You defend your cause with extreme modesty and keen argument, rather than attacking me out of some sort of barbarous pride. Thus I deplore all the more the fact that the individuals of whom we have been speaking have given me occasion to pain you, and others of honourable and humane temperament. I am beginning to feel sorry that those dialogues were ever published, and, if it will please you, I will see to it that they are circulated as little as possible.

ARMESSO. My pain, like that of other very noble souls, stems so little from the publication of those dialogues that I would willingly undertake to have them translated into our tongue, in order to serve as a lesson for those few among us who are so lacking in education and manners. Maybe, on seeing with what nerve their impertinent attacks are received and how inappropriate they are, and with what traits they are described, even if they choose not to change tack and follow the examples and the lessons of the best and brightest men, they might at least amend their ways and imitate them out of the shame of being identified as part of that number. They might learn that honour and courage are not forged by the capacity and the art of molesting but by quite opposite behaviour.

ELITROPIO. You show much ability and shrewdness in defence of your country, and in contrast to the crowd of those poor in arguments and wisdom, you know how to recognize and appreciate others' merits. But Filoteo does not seem to me as deft in defending himself and protecting his reputation. As nobility and rusticity differ, just so opposing effects are to be expected and feared from them. On one hand, a Scythian oaf will manage to look wise and will be celebrated for his success if, leaving the banks of the Danube, he goes away, bearer of audacious reproaches and legitimate complaints, to put to the test the authority and majesty of the Roman

⁸ Virgil, *Bucolics*, I, 66: 'et penitus tot divisos orbe Britannos' ('(the Britons) isolated at the end of the world').

Senate, which, if it finds in his censure and invective occasion to accomplish an act of high prudence and magnanimity, does its severe critic the honour of a colossal statue. On the other hand, a Roman senator and gentleman would demonstrate very scarce wisdom in abandoning the mild banks of the Tiber, even armed with legitimate complaint and completely justified reprimand, to go try the Scythian oafs, who would seize the occasion to build, at his expense, towers and Babels of arguments of the utmost baseness, insolence and infamy, unleashing popular fury and stoning him in order to show other nations how much difference there is between dealing with human beings and with those who are merely made in their image and likeness.

ARMESSO. Let it never come to pass, Teofilo, that I could or should consider it proper for me, or anyone else endowed with even greater judgement than myself, to take up the cause of those who are the object of your satire under the pretext that they are of our nation, which some natural law impels us to defend. I will never admit – nor could I ever be anything but the enemy of anyone who makes such a claim – those people as countrymen. Our nation is comprised exclusively of people as noble, civil, polite, educated, measured, humane and reasonable as those of any other place. Even if such people exist within our borders, surely they are nothing but filth, scum, dirt and swine; part of the kingdom, or city, only in the sense that the bilge is part of a ship. We should not, therefore, bother ourselves overmuch about such individuals, because in doing so we might grow as injurious as they are. Among their ranks I include numerous priests and doctors, some of whom certainly become gentlemen, thanks to their doctorates. But most of them, who before did not dare show their rude authority, come boldly and arrogantly out into the open, later becoming harder and more presumptuous when they rise to the titles of literary men and priests. Hence, it is no wonder that you see swarms of those who, despite their priesthood and their doctorate, retain more of the herd, the flock and the stable than actual ploughmen, goatherds and grooms. Thus, I would have preferred you had not attacked our university so harshly, condemning it as a whole, so to speak, without regard for what it once was, and can or will be in future, and is, in part, today.

FILOTEO. Have no fear. Although on this occasion we looked primarily at your university, it commits no worse errors than others whose members consider their academy superior, but which produce asses dressed up with diadems and hacks decked with rings under the title of doctors, for the

most part. However, I do not dispute the great value of your university's original statutes, nor the beauty of its programme of studies, nor the majesty of its ceremonies, nor the fine organization of its works, nor the solemnity of its traditions, not to mention other qualities which serve to honour and embellish any university, and for which it must doubtless be considered the finest in Europe and, therefore, the world. And I cannot deny that, as far as fineness of spirit and sharpness of wit are concerned, both of which Britain produces naturally here and there, your university really is similar to, and may be on par with, the best schools elsewhere. We have not forgotten, either, that speculative studies first flourished here, before spreading to other parts of Europe, nor that its princes of metaphysics (though barbarous of tongue and cowed by profession) have disseminated the splendour of a most rare and noble part of philosophy, in our day nearly extinct, to all the universities of non-barbarous countries. But one thing concerns me that seems annoying and comical at the same time. Although I have not found doctors more Roman and more Attic than these here, still, for the most part, they boast that they are the opposites of their forerunners, resembling them in nothing – those predecessors who, caring little for eloquence or grammatical rigour, devoted themselves entirely to speculative research, called by these current doctors 'sophismata'. As for myself, I prize the metaphysics of these latter more, in which they surpassed their teacher Aristotle – notwithstanding the fact that it is impure, and dirtied with certain empty arguments and theorems that are neither philosophical nor theological, but the products of idle or badly-used intellects – than what the others today can bring us, with all their eloquence and Ciceronian declamatory art.

ARMESSO. Those arts are not to be belittled.

FILOTEO. True, but if we have to choose between the two, I set the culture of the mind, however mean it may be, over that of words and phrases, however eloquent.

ELITROPIO. Your comment brings Fra Ventura to mind. Commenting on the Gospel passage '*reddite quae sunt Caesaris Caesari*'⁹ [render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's], he cites on that occasion the names of all the coins circulating at the time of the Romans, with their imprints and their weights – names that he had come across in I do not know what damned annals or opuscles, more than a hundred and twenty of them – in order to show us the range of his studies and the power of his memory. At the end

⁹ Matthew 22, 21.

of his sermon some fine fellow accosted him and said, 'Reverend father, lend me a carline.' To which he answered that he belonged to an order of mendicants.

ARMESSO. What's the point of this story?

ELITROPIO. I mean that those who are versed in the science of names and phrases but do not worry about things are astride the same ass as that reverend father of asses.

ARMESSO. I think that, apart from the study of eloquence, in which they outshine all their predecessors and are unsurpassed by their contemporaries, they are neither destitute in philosophy nor in other speculative disciplines. Without ability in these, they cannot be promoted to any rank, because the university statutes, to which they are bound by oath, resolve that '*Nullus ad philosophiae et Theologiae magisterium et doctoratum promoveatur, nisi epotaverit e fonte Aristotelis*' [Let no-one who has not drunk of the Aristotelian fountain be promoted to the title of master and doctor of philosophy and theology].¹⁰

ELITROPIO. Ah, but I will tell you what they have done to avoid perjuring themselves. To one of the three fountains of the university they have given the name *Fons Aristotelis* [Aristotelian fountain], they have called another *Fons Pythagorae* [Pythagorean fountain], and the third is dubbed *Fons Platonis* [Platonic fountain]. Since the water to make beer and ale is drawn from these three fountains, as well as the water for horses and cows, it follows that nobody who has spent three or four days in those study rooms or colleges fails to drink, not only of the Aristotelian fountain, but also of the Pythagorean and Platonic.

ARMESSO. Too true, unfortunately. So it happens, Teofilo, that doctors come as cheaply as sardines, since they are made, found and hooked with little trouble. The herd of doctors today being thus (leaving aside the reputation of some of them, such as Tobias Matthew,¹¹ Culpepper,¹² and others whose names I have forgotten, distinguished alike for their eloquence, their doctrine and their high courtesy), the result is that the title of doctor, far from crediting one with a supplementary degree of nobility, places one under

¹⁰ No such formula is found in the *Statuta antiqua Universitatis Oxoniensis*, ed. Gibson (Oxford, 1931). Aristotelian doctrines are, however, stressed in the statutes.

¹¹ Tobias Matthew (1546–1628), President of St John's College from 1572 to 1577, Dean of Christ Church from 1576 to 1584, and Vice-Chancellor of Oxford in 1579. Promoted to Dean of Durham in 1583 and named Bishop of York in 1606.

¹² Martin Culpepper, Professor of Medicine and Rector of New College from 1573 to 1599, Dean of Chichester from 1577, and Vice-Chancellor of Oxford in 1578.

the suspicion (unless one is known personally) of having a completely opposite nature and character. Hence, it happens that even men noble by birth or by accident, and enriched by the principal part of nobility which is learning, are ashamed to be promoted to the title of doctor, and so content themselves with merely being learned. You will find many more of these in the courts than you will among the pedants at the university.

FILOTEO. You will find both kinds everywhere there are doctors and priests, Armesso, so hold your complaining. Those who are true doctors and true priests, even if of modest origin, can only gain in civility and nobility, because knowledge is the most expedient way of making the human soul heroic. The more those others thunder from on high with *divum pater* [divine father], like the giant Salmonius,¹³ the more clearly they reveal their rudeness, strutting like satyrs or fauns dressed in purple, with that horrendous and imperial majesty, after having determined from the height of their magisterial chair to what declension *hic* [this, masc.], *haec* [this, fem.] and *hoc nihil* [this, nothing] belong.

ARMESSO. Let us change the subject. What is that book in your hand?

FILOTEO. Some dialogues.

ARMESSO. The *Supper*?

FILOTEO. No.

ARMESSO. What, then?

FILOTEO. Others where the themes of cause, principle and unity are treated according to our system.

ARMESSO. Who are the speakers? Are there, by any chance, some other devils in it like Frulla or Prudenzius, who will land us into trouble again?

FILOTEO. Rest assured that, except for one of them, they are all very peaceable, honest subjects.

ARMESSO. So that from what you say we will still have to pick some thorns out of these dialogues?

FILOTEO. No doubt. But you will be scratched where it itches, instead of pricked where it hurts.

ARMESSO. What else?

FILOTEO. Here you will meet, as first speaker, that erudite, honest, affable, polite and faithful friend Alexander Dicsono, who proposes the subject of the debate, and whom the Nolan loves as his own eyes. He is introduced as the one who furnishes Teofilo with his subject. Then Teofilo (who is myself) comes second, profiting by the occasion to make

¹³ See Virgil, *Aeneid*, 585–6.

distinctions, give definitions and carry out demonstrations concerning the theme proposed. Thirdly, you have Gervasio, not a philosopher by profession, but who likes to pass the time by attending our discussions; a person of indifferent odour who finds everything Poliinnio does comic, and from time to time gives him full rein to express his folly. The latter sacrilegious pedant is the fourth speaker; being one of those stern censors of philosophers, he claims to be a Momus, passionately attached to his flock of students, reputed to be a follower of Socratic love, an eternal enemy of the female sex. He considers himself, therefore, in order not to seem involved with physics, an Orpheus, a Musaeus, a Tityros, an Amphion. He is one of those who, when they have put together a beautiful conceit, composed an elegant little epistle or made off with a nice phrase from the Ciceronian kitchen, are at once Demosthenes come back to life, Tullius rejuvenated, Sallust who lives again, or an Argus who makes out every letter, every syllable and every word. He is Rhadamanthus who *umbras vocat ille silentium* [calls the shadows of the silent], or the Cretan king Minos who *urnam movet* [shakes the drawing-urn].¹⁴ He is one of those men who puts every word to the test, and who mounts a debate around every phrase, saying that these are poetic, these sound comic, these are oratic; this is sweet, that is sublime, this other one is *humile dicendi genus*¹⁵ [humble oratory genre]; this harangue is harsh, it would be lighter if composed like this, such and such a writer is not eloquent, he is little read in the ancients, *non redolet Arpinatum, desipit Latium*¹⁶ [he does not smack of Arpinum, he lacks knowledge of Latin]. This word is not Tuscan, neither Boccaccio, nor Petrarch, nor other approved authors use it. One should write ‘omo’ and not ‘homo’, not ‘honour’ but ‘onour’, ‘Poliinnio’ instead of ‘Polihimnio’. This kind of thing fills him with triumph, self-satisfaction and utmost pleasure with whatever he does. He feels himself a Jove who, from his high perch, gazes down on and contemplates the lives of other men, subject to so many errors, calamities, miseries and vain strivings. He alone is happy, only he lives a heavenly life, when he contemplates his divinity in the mirror of a *Spicilegium*,¹⁷ a *Dictionarium*, a

¹⁴ See Virgil, *Aeneid*, vi, 432–3: ‘quaesitor Minos urnam movet; ille silentium/consiliumque vocat ...’ (‘Minos reigned as the presiding judge, moving the drawing-urn, and called a jury of the silent ones ...’).

¹⁵ *Humile dicendi genus* is the first of the three *genera dicendi* which Cicero distinguishes in his *tripertita varietas* of styles of oration.

¹⁶ Cicero, born in Arpinum, sixty miles south-east of Rome. See the anti-Ciceronian satire of Erasmus, the *Ciceronianus* (1528).

¹⁷ Title of a work by L. G. Scoppa, the *Spicilegium*, which dates from 1511.

Calepino,¹⁸ a *lexicon*, a *Cornucopiae*,¹⁹ a *Nizzolio*.²⁰ Endowed with such self-sufficiency, he alone is everything, while each of us is but one. If he happens to laugh, he calls himself Democritus; if he by chance cries, he calls himself Heraclitus; if he argues, he baptises himself Chrysippus; if he reasons, his name is Aristotle; if he forges chimeras, he becomes Plato; if he bellows out some paltry speech, he is Demosthenes; if he expounds Virgil, he is Maro. So he corrects Achilles, approves Aeneas, reprehends Hector, exclaims against Pyrrhus, laments Priam, accuses Turnus, excuses Dido, praises Achates, and finally, while *verbum verbo reddit* [he translates word for word], chaining together his barbarous synonyms, *nihil divinum a se alienum putat* [he maintains that nothing divine is alien to him]. He then descends haughtily from his chair, as if he had put the heavens in order, reformed worlds, organized senates and tamed armies. He is sure that, if it were not for the injustice of the times, he would convert into action what he has accomplished in thought. *O tempora, o mores!*²¹ [O age, o manners!] How rare are they who understand the nature of participles, adverbs and conjunctions! How much time has flowed by without discovering the reason, the true cause, that makes the adjective agree with the noun, the relative join together with the antecedent, and the rule which places it at the beginning or end of a sentence, and the frequency and order in which one must slip in those interjections *dolentis* and *gaudentis* [of pain and joy], 'heu', 'oh', 'ahi', 'ah', 'hem', 'ohe', 'hui' and other seasonings, without which the whole discourse is totally bland!

ELITROPIO. You can say whatever you like, and think as you wish, but I hold that in order to be happy in this life, it is better to imagine oneself Croesus, and be poor, than to imagine oneself poor, and be Croesus. Is it not more conducive to beatitude to have a slattern you think beautiful and who satisfies you, rather than a Leda or a Helen who bores you and whom you end up abandoning? What does it matter, then, to those people, whether they are ignorant and ignobly occupied, when their happiness is in direct proportion to their own self-esteem? The ass likes fresh grass and the horse barley, just the same as you who like white bread and partridge; the hog is

¹⁸ Name of the lexographer Ambrogio Calepino, whose *Dictionarium* (which appeared before 1510) was so often reprinted during the 16th century that 'calepino' became synonymous with 'dictionary'.

¹⁹ Literally, 'horn of plenty', an allusion to Nicolò Perotti, *Cornucopiae sive commentaria linguae latinae* (Venice, 1489) and often reprinted during the 15th and 16th centuries.

²⁰ *Nizzolio*, a synonym during the 16th century for 'Ciceronian lexicon'; See Mario Nizzoli, *Observationum in M.T. Ciceronem Prima [Secunda] pars*, (1535), reprinted several times.

²¹ Cicero, *Catilinam*, 1, 2.

as happy with his acorns and slops as Jupiter with nectar and ambrosia. Do you want, by chance, to disabuse them of their agreeable folly when, in return for the cure, they come and break your head? I will leave aside the question of which is folly: the illusion, or its cure. A Pyrrhonist once said, 'Who knows whether our state is not death, and that of the alleged dead, life?' Who knows if true happiness and true beatitude do not consist of the due linking and taking apart the parts of a phrase?

ARMESSO. The world is such that we play Democritus at the expense of the pedants and grammarians, and diligent courtiers play at being Democritus at ours, while unthinking monks and priests democratize at everybody's expense. The pedants mock us, give-and-take, we sneer at the courtiers, and everybody at the monks. The outcome is that, since one is a fool in the eyes of the other, we are all fools, differing by species, but concordant *in genere et numero et casu* [in their genus, number and case].

FILOTEO. Just so censure differs in manner, kind and degree. Yet we must bend our knees and bow our heads before that most harsh, severe, horrendous and frightening censure of our arch-pedagogues. It is towards them we must turn our gaze and lift our hands, sighing, calling out, weeping and begging for mercy. Thus, it is to you that I turn, to you, who hold in your hand the caduceus of Mercury in order to resolve controversies; to you, who settle the differences that arise between men and gods. You, Menippos, who, from your seats on the moon's globe, look down on us with narrowed eyes from on high, noting our actions with repugnance and scorn. You, shield-bearers of Pallas, standard-bearers of Minerva, Mercury's stewards; you, Jupiter's custodians, Apollo's milk brothers, Epimetheus' co-thieves, Bacchus' bottlers, Euhan-criers' horse-grooms; you, who scourge the Edonides, spur on the Thyiades, excite the Maenads, seduce the Bassarids; you, the riders of the Mimallonides, copulators of the Egerian nymph, moderators of enthusiasm, demagogues of wandering peoples, decipherers of the Demogorgon, Dioscures of fluctuating disciplines, treasurers of the Pantamorpheus and bullock-emissaries of the highpriest Aron: to you we recommend our prose, submit our Muses, our premises, subsumptions, digressions, parentheses, applications, clauses, periods, constructions, adjectives and epithets. O you, sugarwater vendors, who ravish our spirits with your sweet little refinements, binding fast our hearts, fascinating our minds, and delivering our prostituted souls to the lupanar; you, who submit our barbarisms to your wise judgement, stick our solecisms with your arrows, staunch our malodorous chasms, castrate our

Silenes, clap our Noahs into breeches, emasculate our macrological discourses, patch up our ellipses, curb our tautologies, temper our acyrologies, excuse our escrologies, pardon our perissologies, forgive our cacophonies. I, again, conjure you all, all of you in general and you in particular, Poliinnio: halt that slanderous rage and that criminal hatred you feel towards the most noble female sex; do not ruin all that the world possesses of beauty, all that which heaven contemplates with countless eyes. Pull, pull yourselves together and recover your wits, by which you might see that your animosity is nothing but a professed madness and frenetic passion. Is there anyone more senseless and stupid than a man who doesn't see the light? Can there be a madness more miserable than becoming, on account of sex, the enemy of nature herself, like that barbarous king of Sarza, who, having learned from your kind, declared:

Nature can make nothing perfect, since she is herself a woman.²²

Consider somewhat the truth, lift your eyes to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and note the contradiction and opposition that exists between the one and the other; see what men are and what women are. You hold, on one hand, the body, masculine, to be your friend, and the soul, feminine, your enemy. On one hand, you have chaos, masculine, and on the other, organization, feminine. Here, sleep, masculine; there, wakefulness, feminine. On one side, forgetfulness, and on the other, memory. Here, hate, there, friendship; on this side, fear, on the other, serenity; on one hand, rigour and on the other, kindness; here, anger, there, calm. On one side, error, on the other, truth; here, imperfection, there, perfection; here, hell, there, happiness; on this side, the Poliinnio the pedant, on the other side, Poliinnia the Muse. In short, all the vices, imperfections and crimes are masculine, and all the virtues, merits and goodnesses are feminine. Hence, prudence, justice, strength, temperance, beauty, majesty and dignity, both in grammatical gender and in our imagination, as well as in our descriptions and paintings, are all feminine. But to leave aside these theoretical reasonings concerning grammar and nomenclature so appropriate to your argument, and to come to what is natural, real and practical, one example alone should serve to bridle your tongue and shut your mouth, yours and those of your many cohorts: imagine if someone should ask where you will

²² Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, xxvii, 120, slightly adapted by Bruno, who has, 'Natura non può far cosa perfetta, / poi che natura femina vien detta.' Ariosto writes, 'veggo che (natura) non può far cosa perfetta, / poi che Natura femina vien detta.'

find a man who surpasses, or is even equal to, this celestial Elizabeth, England's ruler. She is so highly endowed, elevated, favoured, protected and supported by the heavens that physical or verbal efforts to overthrow her are both vain. There is no one in the kingdom so worthy and so heroic among the nobility, nor anyone so gifted among those who wear the gown, or so wise among the counsellors. For corporal beauty, knowledge of vernacular and learned tongues, grasp of the arts and sciences, vision in governing, grandeur of such great and long-lasting authority and other natural and civic virtues, the Sophonisbas, Faustinas, Semiramises, Didos, Cleopatras and all the earlier queens that Italy, Greece, Egypt and other parts of Europe and Asia can boast are trivial compared to her. Her results and her successes, which the present age cherishes with honest wonderment, bear witness to this. While across Europe's back flow the wrathful Tiber, the threatening Po, the violent Rhine, the bloody Seine, the turbid Garonne, the frenzied Ebro, the furious Tagus, the tumultuous Meuse and the unquiet Danube, she, with her splendid vision, has been able, for more than five lustres, to calm the great Ocean, which, in its constant ebb and flow, calmly and gladly gathers the beloved Thames to its bosom, flowing on unchecked and fearless, gaily and confidently twisting between its verdant banks. So then, to start over again ...

ARMESSO. Quiet there, Filoteo, quiet. Do not strain yourself adding water to our ocean and light to our sun. Quit showing yourself so abstract (not to mention worse) in your polemic against those absent Poliinnios. Instead, give us some examples from the dialogues you have here, so we do not idle away our hours today.

FILOTEO. Take them and read.

End of first dialogue

Second dialogue

Speakers: Dicsono Arelio, Teofilo, Gervasio, Poliinnio

DICSONO. Please, master Poliinnio, and you, Gervasio, do not keep interrupting our discussions.

POLIINNIO. *Fiat* [Agreed].

GERVASIO. Surely I cannot stay quiet if he, the *magister* [master], speaks.

DICSONO. You say then, Teofilo, that everything which is not a first principle and a first cause, has a principle and a cause?