

Reflections on the *De vinculis in genere*, by Giordano Bruno

At Oxford University, Giordano Bruno's brief, obscure but very profound work, *De vinculis in genere*, is considered a cornerstone of modern political thought – on the par with Machiavelli's Prince. In fact, many Anglo Saxon and Middle European historians and intellectuals consider *De vinculis in genere* modernity's most intelligent and insightful political work. The London School of Economics uses it as a core text because of its usefulness in understanding behaviour patterns in contemporary social life. Man, created by nature as a being who "desires" and tries to find fulfilment and completion outside of himself, is at the centre of Giordano Bruno's work. Man's desire is of a connective nature, it seeks union, and thus is primarily erotic – in the most spiritual and all comprehensive meaning of the word – and is capable of accepting both instinctual elements and ethereal and mystical contemplations. For this reason, among its many characteristics, the *Eros* is capable of creating fanciful mental images both in one's own mind (as originator) and in that of others (those who as loved ones benefit from their lovers' *Eros*). This is because the *Eros* is an experience that can kindle and spill over into psyche of other persons. In interpersonal relations this capacity for erotic suggestion allows for the creation of links and ties as for example, and in various forms, between two lovers, two friends, among members of a group or a political party, between a leader and his followers. And in politics it is the *Eros* – and not reason as Aristotle would have it – that is the essence of the connective tissue that ties together all of the parts of the whole, meaning society. Seen from this angle, the point of encounter between those who wield power and those who yield it finds a place of compensation and equilibrium – the so-called consensus. A politician does not base his decisions so much on force and violence as on the art of consensus. And a politician can achieve this if the will of the people is taken into account. Government with consensus on reciprocal guarantees – that's what we see in advanced democratic systems, notwithstanding any distortions.

Evolved democratic countries usually commission sophisticated and detailed market research on everything: to interpret the tastes and tendencies of their citizens and, above all, to understand their hidden desires, their secret pleasures. Advertising is full of erotic messages, some blatant, some subliminal. It is government by manipulation of the consumers and by life style inducements. Basically, the shift from Machiavelli's logic to Bruno's consists in a recalibration of the image of man and how he functions in society.

From Machiavelli's brute force with an infinite potential for vice and virtue to Bruno's capacity for desires and infinity. The driving mechanism is the *Eros*, in all its variations, and its grasp on the rational and the imaginary mind. It is imagination that conquers the political throne, not force. And so the politician becomes the clockmaker of man's dreams and aspirations, of clubs, associations and social groups. His aim is to create, identify, channel and guide the desires that spring from man's erotic nature. In addition to reflection, this system also has an "operating" element. It is here that the philosopher/politician takes on the roles of artist/magician. A modern leader takes command, but not in the rigid Machiavellian way nor in Gramsci's variation of party-prince. For Bruno, gaining and maintaining power is a "magical" operation (in the true sense of the word) because while the end is the same (having control of the situation) what changes is the means (persuasion). Just like a lover casts a magic net around the object-subject of his love with gestures, words, services and gifts, so "society's magician" casts the net of his fantastic vision over the world to capture his "prey" by means of his consent. In Machiavelli's republican vision, the citizen is, at the most, a complacent subject, in Bruno's the citizen is a lover to be conquered and tied. Bruno calls this chain of operations "vincolare" (to win) and his procedures are given the generic name for ties, that is "vincula". Politics is not the Machiavellian science of command and power but the art to understand how to manipulate the mind of people and individuals. Bruno deals with the problem from the manipulator's point of view. He is the theoretician par excellence of modern politics. Centuries later, it will be up to Sigmund Freud (in his famous work on mass psychology and analysis of the ego, 1921) to study the same psychological phenomena and the relation between power from the point of view of individuals (and not politicians) the masses and the individual. While Machiavelli's Prince is the ancestor of the adventurer-politician, Bruno's magician is the prototype for the impersonal systems of mass media, self-censorship, global manipulation and brain trusts that fascinate and control the masses

of western democracies. The magician's capacity to control citizens is in direct proportion to his knowledge of them and his ability to tap into what they desire the most. And this applies both to groups of citizens taken as a whole and to each individual citizen. All of humanity filters through the love-*Eros* funnel, which is deemed stronger than the will. (It is in this sense that Bruno is Nietzsche and nihilism's strongest adversary because the love-*Eros* principle is a universal one that ties everything in the universe to everything in the universe and thus to its creator to whom everything is tied. The desire for power of Nietzsche's man finds fulfilment in the abyss into which he sinks due to a lack of support or ulterior goals. Bruno's erotic man, however, is not lubricious or satanic. He can love wealth, sex, and power in its many forms, both erotically and voluptuously, but these dimensions, which – ultimately – are only marginal ones do not extinguish his drive. According to Bruno, everything leads back to love as the vital essence of the universe. What about jealousy? It is the self-love of someone who does not tolerate superiority or quality in others. Modesty? It is love of honesty. Hate? It is the opposite of love. In neo-platonic terms, Bruno leads all forms of emotion, sentiment and humanity back to the *Eros*, the one and only *daemon magnus*. If all of this is but a variation on a single theme and everything leads back to the universal *Eros*, those who possess and understand it are capable of possessing and dominating everything in the world, even inter-personal and inter-subjective relationships. The *De vinculis in genere* lists, studies and interprets (from a magical and interested point of view) every type of relationship possible between individuals and groups of individuals. Therefore, it is an encyclopaedic catalogue, a practical manual – in fact, the manual – to achieve this superior form of knowledge that unites science and art in a supreme synthesis.

Bruno's magician is the well where all the subterranean rivers of the individual and social *Eros* come together in an infinite network of connections. In the US (the western democracy whose internal policies have applied and still apply the procedures described in Bruno's book) the search for power and its affirmation is made on the basis of consensus. Man's *Eros*, imagination and faith are the three foundations of this detailed work of progressive connection. They are the three pillars upon which every day research institutes labour incessantly to monitor American social changes. Politicians and financiers view the outcomes of these studies as oracles and they use them to develop their strategies. In 1974, after the first serious tensions in the Middle East and the oil crisis, the Gallup Institute, after a poll, indicated that 56% of the American population held entertainers in greater esteem than politicians, perhaps because the latter are more willing to compromise than certain celluloid gunslingers.

If we revisit the US's history we will see that among the politicians that followed the poll we find as president the former actor Ronald Reagan and the current governor of California, Schwarzenegger, he too a former actor. Power moulds and re-moulds until it takes on the shape of the beloved or the lover because its reason for being is its survival, and widening towards erotic and spiritual satisfaction. Nowadays consensus is the democratic weapon that in this way allows for increasing development of the parts with reciprocal enjoyment and zero bloodshed. But much more could be said about this consensual "orgasm" between elected politicians and electoral body. As Wilhelm Reich pointed out in his work on mass psychology and Fascism, it is an orgasm that under the Nazi and Stalinist regimes became a collective trance. To what degree this Bruno type of universal erotic coupling of both politics and society is democratic in content is still a matter of debate and reflection among the scholars of the London university, given their fear of dictatorial, totalitarian or even populist deviations in its application. These academics, and among them Dahrendorf, and the now deceased Eliade and his disciple Couliano, are just the latest scholars to consider the *De vinculis in genere* a masterpiece.

The first to recognize the importance of Bruno's text were the Rosicrucians, as indicated in the texts of P. Arnold and F. A. Yates on the movement's history.