

# Croatian philosophy and science in the European context between the 12th and 20th century

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## Giordano Bruno and Plotinus on World Soul

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### Abstract

Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) and his Croatian contemporary Franciscus Patricius (1529-1597) or Patrizzi (Frane Petrić) have been recognized as eminent figures of Renaissance philosophy. Their innovative work incorporates not only elements of their contemporary intellectual tradition, but also embraces a reconsideration of antiquity through a novel interpretation of ancient Greek thought. Although Bruno and Patrizzi were contemporaries, the relation between the two philosophers is still unexamined in modern scholarship.

In Bruno's and Patrizzi's explorations of a new intellectual and scientific world, pre-Platonic thinkers and Neoplatonic philosophers are some of their central sources of inspiration. From the Neoplatonic tradition, the philosopher who is highly acknowledged by Giordano Bruno is Plotinus (204-270 BCE); the "prince of Plato's school" (*princeps Plotinus*). It is noteworthy that throughout Giordano Bruno's work, his attitude towards Plotinus is always affirmative, with direct references to the Neoplatonist and key notions of the *Enneads*. In particular, Bruno refers by name to Plotinus twenty-six times with special mention in the works: *The Shadow of Ideas* (1582), *Cause, Principle and Unity* (1584), *The Heroic Frenzies* (1585), *On Magic* (1589-1590). Bruno discusses Plotinus' metaphysics, psychology, cosmology and anthropology and especially Plotinus' theories of intellect, soul, matter, memory and the nature of human being.

In particular, Plotinus' theory of the soul seems to be a key notion in Bruno's thought. Plotinus vividly describes the *psyche* as an "amphibious" nature (*Ennead* IV.8.4); an intelligible being having a "double life" existing at the same time in the intelligible and the perceptible realms (*Ennead* IV.8.8.11-13). Plotinus divides theoretically the Hypostasis of Soul, the third hypostasis of being, in World Soul and Individual Souls (*Ennead* IV.8.2). Whereas the Individual Souls govern with struggle the lower in purity and unity perceptible bodies, the World Soul cares and directs the higher universal body without effort through its pure intelligible power and light (*Ennead* II.9.7-8). Giordano Bruno refers to Plotinus' theory of the World Soul that governs without struggle the universal body (*Cause, Principle and Unity*), while he also recognizes the ontological priority and intelligibility of the Plotinian Soul (*The Heroic Frenzies*).

As my study of Patrizzi is at its first stage, this lecture is not related to Patrizzi per se, but mostly to Giordano Bruno and the Plotinian impact on his philosophy. According to my first insight into the philosophy of Patrizzi, since the third part of his *Nova de universis philosophia* is dedicated to the World soul (*Pancosmia*) therefore an analysis on Bruno's and Plotinus' view of the World Soul might contribute to a better

understanding of Patrizzi's conception of the World Soul. I shall argue that the Plotinian World Soul, as a primal, intelligible and unified being, influences Giordano Bruno's view of the ontological unity, intelligibility and homogeneity of the World Soul as well as the conception of the material universe as a unified intelligible whole. It is concluded that Bruno's reception of Plotinus' *Enneads* enlightens not only Bruno's ontology, psychology and metaphysics but also Plotinus' importance in Renaissance philosophical and scientific tradition.

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