

cosmogony, all tied into orbit around their Unmoved Mover, was in fact infinitely large – a vast continuum consisting of sun after sun, star upon star, eccentric to one another and all in independent movement. This was the startling germ of a modern vision, and the more conservative, theologically grounded thinkers of the sixteenth century viewed it with alarm as opening an attack on the very idea of a God-centred universe.

It is difficult for anyone in the twenty-first century to grasp how radical Bruno's proposal that the stars we see at night are other suns, identical in nature to our own, seemed over four hundred years ago. The idea of a plurality of worlds, which we have no difficulty in accepting, was not merely novel but threatening in the sixteenth century.