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ARISTOTLE TRANSFIGURED
Dante and the Structure of the
Inferno and the Purgatorio

by
Donald J. Hambrick

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
August, 1997

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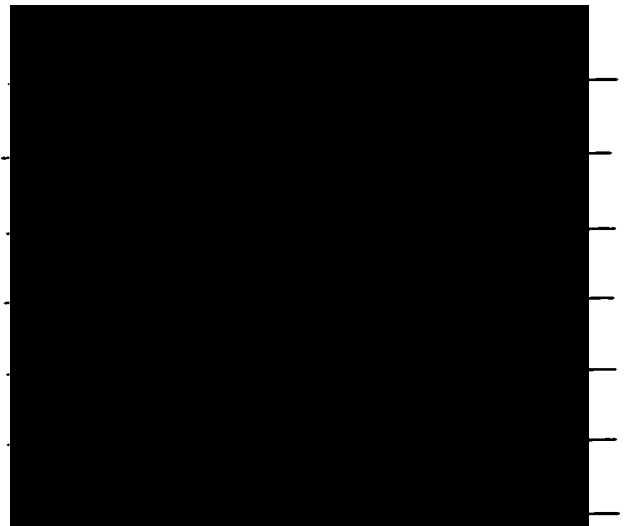
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Dante and the Structure of the Inferno and the Purgatorio"

by **Donald John Hambrick**

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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To Those Who Teach...

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ABSTRACT

Largely because of a reaction against an interpretation of Dante in Aristotelian and Thomistic terms, which were taken to be exclusive of other influences, there has been great neglect of the Aristotelian basis of the Divine Comedy for several decades.

The first aim of this thesis is to show how Dante used Aristotle's ethics as the foundation for the structure of the Inferno and the Purgatorio. The second aim is to show how Dante transfigured this foundation by incorporating it into a mediaeval Christian framework.

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My work in this dissertation owes a great deal to lectures on the Divine Comedy given at King's College by Marguerite (Bourbeau) Kussmaul, Colin Stames and Robert Crouse, to courses on Aristotle taught by Dennis House, and especially to courses on Dante taught by Robert Crouse. It also owes much to the influence of generations of Dante scholars, whose patient work has made the text of Dante remain alive. It was Dorothy Sayers, in my case, who first awakened my interest in Dante's ethics, and convinced me that they are as pertinent today as they were seven centuries ago.

It was Henry Roper who originally suggested that I work towards a doctorate. That was a long time ago, but I have always been sustained by his confidence that I could do what was required. Thereafter, Robert Crouse accepted me as a doctoral student, enabling me to work on Dante, and patiently answering my interminable questions.

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PART ONE : INTRODUCTION

Chapter One: Aristotle Redivivus

(I) Dante and Aristotle

Dante's reliance upon Aristotle has always been recognized. It is present in the final line of the whole Comedy, where, in the Beatific Vision, he writes of "the Love which moves the sun and the other stars."¹ It is present in the point on which all creation depends, and which signifies God.² It is present in St. John's examination on the sources of Dante's charity, the first of which is "philosophic arguments."³ Its presence in the Christian Paradise would lead one to expect that the philosophy of Aristotle pervades the Divine Comedy.

¹Paradiso XXXIII,145:"*l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle*". As Charles Singleton remarks, in his Commentary on Paradiso (Princeton, 1975), n.145, p.590,:"This last verse of the poem bears the image of Aristotle's unmoved mover, the spheres turning in desire of him, being moved by desire of him".

All translations of the Comedy are Singleton's, unless otherwise noted.

²Cf:Paradiso XXVIII,41-42:"...*Da quel punto/depende il cielo e tutta la natura*". This is virtually a translation of Aristotle, from Metaphysics XII, vii,1072b, where Aristotle again talks of the good as final cause.

³Paradiso XXVI,25:"*filosofici argoment*". Singleton,op.cit.,note 25,p.413, sees in these arguments "a statement of what human reason can see, what an Aristotle could teach in this regard, as distinguished from divine revelation".

In the early years of the twentieth century, the role of Aristotle in the poem was explicitly studied, most thoroughly perhaps in the works of W.H.V. Reade, The Moral System of Dante's Inferno (Oxford, 1909) and Giovanni Busnelli, L'Etica Nicomachea e l'ordinamento morale dell'Inferno di Dante (Bologna, 1907), although neither of these men went on to trace the influence of Aristotle's Ethics in the Purgatorio. Thereafter, there was a shift of emphasis, due in part to Bruno Nardi's arguments about the importance of Neoplatonism and Averroism for Dante.⁴ Nardi concluded that these elements precluded the identification of the poet with the more pure kind of Aristotelianism associated with St. Thomas. (Etienne Gilson agreed, although he understood Thomism itself not to have "come out of Aristotelianism by way of evolution, but of revolution").⁵ The synthesis of Christian doctrine and Aristotelian philosophy in the Comedy was imperfect.

Ironically, one development which has renewed the question of Dante's "Thomism" has been the recognition that Thomas's Aristotelianism is itself impure. "In the course of twentieth-century study of scholastic philosophy, the myth of the 'Thomism' of St. Thomas himself was largely dissipated, as historians increasingly emphasized the Neoplatonic sources and aspects of his

⁴Cf: Bruno Nardi, Saggi di Filosofia Dantesca, (Firenze, 1967).

⁵Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages, (New York, 1955), p.365. Cf: also Nardi, op.cit., Introduzione, note 8, p.X.

philosophy and theology".⁶ Consequently, Thomistic Aristotelianism could no longer simply be contrasted with Neoplatonism - or Augustinianism; "rather, all these traditions must be seen as contributing significant dimensions to the Aristotelianism of St. Thomas, and the whole question of Dante's relation to Thomas would have to be reassessed in that light."⁷

Dante's synthesis of Aristotle and Christianity would have to be seen in the light of a common scholastic tradition. As yet, however, very little has been done to show how very closely Dante did, in fact, follow Aristotle. The most impressive work that I know on the subject, Marguerite Bourbeau's L'Amitié dans le Paradiso de Dante (Ph. D. dissertation, Laval, 1987), is unfortunately not yet published. Nor is The Aristotelian Psychology of Dante's Vita Nuova by W. Talivaldis Folkins (M.A. Thesis, Dalhousie, 1994). The only recently published work that I am able to cite is an admirable study by Marc Cogan, entitled "Delight, Punishment, and the Justice of God in the Divina Commedia", and published in Dante Studies CXI, 1993.

The present work will attempt to make clear the extent to which Dante relies on the Ethics of Aristotle in the Inferno and the Purgatorio. The

⁶From "Dante as Philosopher: Thomism, Averroism and Platonism", an unpublished paper by Robert D. Crouse, (Dalhousie Univ., 1991).

⁷Ibid.

thesis will attempt to show that the journey to the bottom of the *Inferno* is structured in terms of the disappearance of the Aristotelian virtues, and that the inverse ascent to the top of Mount Purgatory is structured according to their reconstitution under the aegis of Grace⁸. This has not been done before now, so that the thesis will concentrate upon this question, leaving aside many of the current controversies in Dante studies. Again, because the body of the work will concentrate on this question, no attempt will be made here to summarize the teaching of the Ethics. Instead, since the mediaeval Christian perspective transfigures⁹ this teaching, it is useful to begin with a short historical sketch on the way perspectives did change between the age of Aristotle and the age of Dante.

(II) The self, from *nous* to abstract personality

To Plato and Aristotle, the "true self was *nous*, the principle of reason most fully expressed in the theoretical knowledge".¹⁰ In Aristotle's Ethics,

⁸I am indebted to my thesis supervisor, Robert Crouse, for the key suggestion that Dante organizes the Inferno around the cardinal virtues.

⁹By "transfiguration" I mean primarily the revelation of a new element which illuminates what was already present in something. More specifically, the reference is to the way in which St. Thomas Aquinas and Dante incorporate Aristotelian teaching into the mediaeval Christian vision which transforms it.

¹⁰Charles H. Kahn, "Discovering the Will" in The Question of 'Eclecticism', ed. Dillon and Long (Berkeley, 1988), p. 253.

"the life of the intellect [is] divine in comparison with human life,"¹¹ since the human is of a composite nature. Hence, "it is absurd to think that Political Science or Prudence is the loftiest kind of knowledge, inasmuch as man is not the highest thing in the world."¹² Aristotle's concern with institutions such as Family and State is focused as much upon their mediatory relationship to *theoria* as upon their embodiment of *praxis*.

Charles H. Kahn contrasts this "Platonic - Aristotelian identification of the person with his intellect" with Epictetus' identification of the true self with "moral character and personal 'commitments'",¹³ "with something essentially personal and individualized."¹⁴ In the Hellenistic and Roman worlds after Aristotle's time, philosophy was no longer interested primarily in the institutions which mediated between the individual and the divine principle. Individuals ceased to regard their identity as dependent in principle upon the city-state, since the latter could obviously be destroyed. They developed instead a more confrontational attitude towards the external world, mirrored in their philosophies of Epicureanism, Stoicism, Skepticism and, ultimately, Neo-Platonism.

¹¹Ethics X,vii,1177b. All translations from the Ethics are by H. Rackham.

¹²Ethics VI,vii,1141a.

¹³Kahn, op.cit.,p.252.

¹⁴Ibid.,p.253.

All of these philosophies sought to attain a state of *ataraxia* or imperturbability in the face of the flux of the world, in a kind of immediate unity with the divine principle. James Doull summarizes the change which had taken place. "In this collapse human freedom is no longer a speculative knowledge of life and thought as concretely united, but abstract personality, the self-identity of the individual maintained against passion and particular interests."¹⁵

(III) Rome and the purification of the will

The intensely practical cast of Roman thought comes to light in the Aeneid, with its great stress upon the will. "Fate is ... only the form and process of Jupiter's will The human embodiment of this absolute will is not an Achilles, conscious of the conflict of virtue and mortality, but the triumphant consul, or, most completely, Augustus, in whom, after vanquishing his enemies and bringing to an end a century of civil discord, all military and civil power is effectively united."¹⁶

The mission of Rome was to establish peace in the world. In Book VI of the Aeneid, the best souls in the underworld complete their purification from the contamination of the body only to drink the waters of Lethe - which causes

¹⁵James Doull, "The Christian Origin of Contemporary Institutions", in Dionysius VI, (Halifax, 1982), p. 150.

¹⁶Doull, op.cit., p. 153.

them to forget about the Elysian Fields and to conceive anew the desire to return to the body. Their purpose there is to purify the world, just as the purpose of Stoic philosophy is the purification of the will and the acceptance of Fate.

(IV) The movement of the soul inwards

The tranquility of mind sought by the Romans was not to be discovered in the external world. In philosophy, the Sceptics showed this by proving an ineradicable disjunction between the sensible world and a presupposed inner criterion of truth. Truth had therefore to be discovered by moving inward, to the soul.

The sense of this turning away from the world is explicit in the famous passages in Book VII of St. Augustine's Confessions where he writes about the dilemmas which he encountered because he was unable to think of anything but the material world as real. What freed him from this situation was the proof of the existence of a spiritual world, which he found in the books of the Platonists.

With the discovery of the spiritual world, it once more became a question how it was related to the world of sense. Neo-Platonists often explained the lower world as the product of a sinful will. Plotinus attributed to

this will "acts of illegitimate self-assertion (*tolma*),"¹⁷ made by falling souls. A.H. Armstrong notes that this does not really contravene the law. "It is in accordance with the universal order, which requires that everything down to the lowest level should be ensouled, that souls descend, and appropriate bodies and lower selves are prepared for them."¹⁸ The focus becomes, instead, the nature of the souls themselves, which "want to descend, and are capable of descending, only because they have already a weakness, a tendency to the lower, which seems to be a development of the original *tolma* which carried soul outside intellect."¹⁹

A similar notion is to be found in the works of the Christian, Origen. In his mind, rational souls fall away from their created state and thereby acquire crass bodies, the crasser the greater the distance they fall. There is here also a relationship between the will and the structure of the universe which is quite foreign to the thought of Aristotle. Moreover, the Christian doctrine of creation entailed to Origen the unreality of any supposed independence which the external material universe might have claimed. And by the time of late antiquity, the Neo-Platonist Proclus had come to share this view.

¹⁷A.H. Armstrong, "Plotinus," in The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy, ed. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge, 1967),p.242.

¹⁸Ibid.,p.255.

¹⁹Ibid.

(V) Sin and the will in St. Augustine

In the meantime, St. Augustine formulated the explanation of the constitution of the human soul that came to be authoritative for Latin Christians. According to Albrecht Dihle, what was new in Augustine was his emphasis upon subjectivity. "All Greek theories about sense perception and intellectual cognition tried to establish a firm relation between the individual and the order of being as it was supposed to exist, objectively and independently, outside the perceiving subject. St. Augustine's psychology, as set out in De trinitate, seems to be self-sustaining, at least with regard to man's intellectual activity."²⁰

In consequence, "the triad *memoria, intelligentia, voluntas* accounts for the whole of the human self (*mens*), which is, in the view of St. Augustine, entirely spiritual. The three factors or faculties are inseparably linked and cannot work independently of each other. Intellectual activity would be impossible without the potential of objects of cognition offered by the memory, without the faculty of reasoning, and without the moving force of the will."²¹

In Dihle's interpretation, the will itself is able to become "prior to

²⁰Albrecht Dihle, The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity (Berkeley, 1982),p.125. Dihle notes an exceptionally important result of this. "...Trinitarian theology and human psychology became directly related to each other rather than integrated into a comprehensive doctrine of the order of being". (loc.cit.)

²¹ibid.p.125.

and independent of the act of intellectual cognition,"²² since it no longer needs the reference to an "order of being ... outside of the perceiving subject."²³ It is coordinate with, rather than subordinate to, the intellect.

As such, the will becomes an initiating principle. In the case of the fall of the angels, the "direction of the will ... is thought and spoken of as being independent of the cognition of the better and the worse."²⁴ In the case of man, "created with the ability to distinguish between good and evil and to decide for the better; ... the fall of Adam, resulting from his disobedience to God's commandment and from his attempt to be independent of his Creator, has perverted the will [so that] ... in its present condition, the will of man is bound to choose the worse, regardless of whether or not its owner knows the better."²⁵

Sensual affections can no longer be regarded as evil in themselves. It is, rather "the will of man, which yields to the sensual affections instead of turning to the higher level of reality, which alone is the cause of sin or moral evil."²⁶ Evil itself no longer takes the objective form of a "mere *privatio*

²²ibid.p. 127.

²³ibid.

²⁴ibid.p. 129.

²⁵ibid.p. 130.

²⁶ibid.p. 128.

boni, the absence of good;" this conception has been "replaced by ill will."²⁷

With Adam's sin, the human will had been transformed from a state of "*humilitas* into *superbia* [self-centeredness]."²⁸ It can only be healed through divine grace which "has to precede all intellectual, moral, or practical efforts of man, [so that] ... he can even want to act according to virtue and God's commandment, as he knows he is supposed to do ...".²⁹ This reception of divine grace effects the conversion of the human will. The human is then able to will the known good, and to do it.

Accordingly, the fundamental division in human society is between those who have not been converted and those who have, between "the cities of the proud and the humble respectively."³⁰ These two cities, moreover, are "eschatological realities, ... they have no discernible reality as societies until they shall be separated at the final judgement."³¹

²⁷ ibid.

²⁸ ibid. p.131.

²⁹ ibid.

³⁰ R.A. Markus, "Marius Victorinus and Augustine," in The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy, ed. A.H. Armstrong, (Cambridge, 1967), p.412.

³¹ ibid.

In one way, this is the culmination of that turning away from the world which was such a dominant motif of late imperial times. "The state, as such, no longer has an eternal destiny."³² The world of Virgil has become the world of Plotinus and Augustine.

(VI) The church and secular life in early Mediaeval society

With the progressive destruction of Roman power in western Europe, intense preoccupation with Roman institutions, as was still evident even in Augustine's Confessions and his De civitate Dei, was no longer prominent in theological thought. "It is about early medieval theology rather than about Augustine that the question needs to be asked whether Trinitarian doctrine has anything to do with human life."³³ The reason is this: "The genesis of Christian belief has there passed wholly into the contemplation of an unknowable objective principle Augustine's way to Christian belief was mediated by Roman culture and institutions and by oriental and Hellenic forms of thought. This mediation is dissolved in the ideal of a monastic life which should attain an immediate knowledge of an infinite principle without historical existence."³⁴ The church

³²Ibid.p.411.

³³James Doull, "Augustinian Trinitarianism and Existential Theology" in Dionysius III (Halifax, 1979),p.152.

³⁴Ibid.

itself has finite ends "only incidentally."³⁵

The reason why early mediaeval religion was not entirely alien to secular life was that its "principle was itself altogether concrete."³⁶ The Word had become Flesh. As indicated above, body could no longer be thought of as a separate, negative, principle. In the course of time, "a more developed Christian secularity"³⁷ comes to be formed. "A human nature is defined in distinction from the absolute religious relation. Grace and the theological virtues are thought to be imparted to that nature, whereby it is related to the principle without loss of its difference and finitude."³⁸

(VII) High Mediaeval thought and the world

The new secular Christian society took root in the forests of western Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries at a time when urban life had all but completely disappeared there. In intellectual life, the first dominant

³⁵ibid.

³⁶ibid.,p.153.

³⁷ibid. Further, "the secular interest is so strong that it would bring the sacred doctrine as far as possible within its understanding. In the same spirit the church is given the form of legal and political institution", (p. 154).

³⁸ibid.,p.154. Doull notes that the concept of human nature "is taken from Aristotle and the ancients".

discipline was logic, "an instrument of order in a chaotic world",³⁹ "a revelation both of the powers of the mind, and of the orderliness which lay behind a bewildering complexity of apparently unrelated facts."⁴⁰

Amidst such enthusiasm for logical studies,⁴¹ it was but a matter of time before thinkers would turn to the systematic theological studies which they had inherited from Neo-Platonism,⁴² through such figures as John Scotus Eriugena, and which was to issue into the comprehensive forms of Gothic architecture, theological Summae and the Divine Comedy itself.

It was in this context of a revival of interest in the powers of the human mind that a rational examination of nature began to be developed. There was an epistemological turning to the world, evident for example in Abelard's arguments against the Realists. To Abelard, the forms or universals were not separated from matter in a Platonic manner, but located in the material world, as Aristotle had thought.

³⁹R.W. Southern, The Making of the Middle Ages, (New Haven, 1976),p.179.

⁴⁰Ibid.p.181.

⁴¹For an appreciation of this fascination, see Southern, op. cit.,pp.179-184.

⁴²Cf: W.J. Hankey, God in Himself, (Oxford, 1987) p.7: "But the complete encompassing of the whole circuit of reality within theology, together with its explicit formal ordering into one system, is specifically the work of Proclus".

In spiritual matters, the same concern with logic made itself felt. St. Anselm, for example, gave to the stages of humility " a strictly logical order and a more internal character."⁴³ There was also a turning to the world, with a greater emphasis placed upon the humanity of Christ. This is seen in art with the representation of the crucified Christ gradually replacing images of Christ as ruler of the universe. It is present in the increasingly prominent place of the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, in western devotional life. It takes graphic form at Greccio, where St. Francis built the famous crib where God is shown as a newborn infant.

In this new Europe, there were many reasons why thinkers began to turn to Aristotle. To begin with, "[the] digestion of Aristotle's logic was the greatest intellectual task of the period from the end of the tenth to the end of the twelfth century."⁴⁴ In addition, Aristotle's philosophy placed the foundations of human knowledge firmly within the sensible world rather than simply above it. Moreover, Aristotle took matter to be pure potentiality and not an independent principle. Creation *ex nihilo* became more easily conceivable on this basis.

As a result, after the major part of the Aristotelian corpus had been translated into Latin during the twelfth century, his philosophy had become

⁴³Southern, op.cit.,p.227.

⁴⁴Ibid.,p.181.

influential enough to be attacked at Paris - as early as 1210.

(VIII) The controversy over Aristotle

The objections to Aristotelian philosophy centered around the status of the individual person. Frederick Copleston gave this explanation for the tension between Aristotle and the Christians: "For the Aristotelian philosopher it is the universal and the totality which really matters, not the individual as such ...".⁴⁵ The tension becomes greater in Averroës' interpretation of Aristotle, according to which there is "only one rational soul to all men,"⁴⁶ and even the possible intellect is "separated ... from the soul."⁴⁷ In this case, the rational soul could not be the form of the body, but only operationally present in it. The universal would be only incidentally present in the individual. As Copleston remarks: "The logical consequence of this position is the denial of personal immortality and of sanctions in the next life."⁴⁸

Almost all of the objections to Aristotle, whether well-taken or not, impinged upon a concern with personal responsibility for one's actions. The

⁴⁵Frederick Copleston, S.J., A History of Philosophy, Vol. 2, Mediaeval Philosophy, Part II, (Westminster, Md., 1962),p.149.

⁴⁶Ibid.,p.156.

⁴⁷Purgatorio XXV,64-65: "...*disgiunto / da l'anima...*".

⁴⁸Copleston, op.cit.,p.157.

following proposition, condemned at Paris in 1270, is representative of this: "That all that goes on here below falls under the necessitating influence of the celestial bodies."⁴⁹ The typical questions that arose concerned the scope of worldliness: whether the world was eternal; whether matter was eternal; whether Divine Providence governed individuals as well as species; whether theology was only a lower and more inaccurate form of philosophy.

(IX) St. Thomas

The culmination of the effort to effect a synthesis of Aristotelian thought and Christian doctrine was reached in the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas. The sense of this synthesis is captured by Copleston. Although for Christianity "each human person is ultimately of more value than the whole material universe ... [man's] place as a member of the cosmos ... [may be emphasized] if one adopts, as St. Thomas adopted, the Aristotelian psychology, the doctrine of the soul as by nature the form of the body, individualized by the body and dependent on the body for its knowledge ...".⁵⁰ The stress is still on the individual while the individual is integrated into the world.

The main problem in this lies in the close relation of the soul to the

⁴⁹"The Parisian Condemnations of 1270" in Medieval Philosophy, ed. Wippel and Walter, (New York, 1969),p.366. For Dante's opinion on the issue, see Purgatorio XVI, 61-84, and Paradiso IV, 49-63.

⁵⁰Copleston, op.cit.,p.150.

body - and St. Thomas was inevitably criticized on this account. Moreover, the rational soul must be seen not only as one with the body, but also as separable from it. Kahn comments on how this differs from Aristotle's teaching.

In Aquinas willing (*velle*) stands next to understanding (*intellegere*) as the two intrinsic operations of the soul as such, both of them capable of being performed without any bodily organ (I.77.5). Hence these powers remain in the soul after the destruction of the body (I.77.8). Needless to say, there is nothing corresponding to this in Aristotle (except for his enigmatic remarks about the Active Intellect). Thomas's notion of the soul as an independent substance with its own proper activities is influenced by Neoplatonic as well as by Christian ideas.⁵¹

Specifically, of course, Thomas is most influenced by Augustine.

The triad of memory, will and understanding constitute the human self, for both theologians. Thomas only differs from Augustine in his strong emphasis upon the way that the highest powers of the soul absorb the lower vegetative and sensitive powers so as to form a substantial unity.

Similarly, for Thomas, as for Augustine, the most important human concern is salvation, for which revelation is indispensable. "For the rational truth about God would have appeared only to few, and even so after a long time and mixed with many mistakes; whereas on knowing this depends our whole welfare, which is in God."⁵² And over and above this, our welfare depends on the

⁵¹Kahn, op.cit.,p.243.

⁵²S.T.,I,1,Resp.

revelation of "divine truths surpassing reason ...".⁵³

Yet this does not imply that Aristotle, or philosophy in general, is merely left behind. "Both theologies, theology as philosophy and theology as sacred doctrine, are 'divinely given modes of sharing in one divine science.' In this sharing, philosophical knowledge is subordinate to the knowledge based on Scripture, just as nature is subordinate to grace but always, indeed eternally, presupposed by it, and present with it."⁵⁴

The end to be achieved through theology, the contemplation of the divine principle, is the same to Aquinas as it had been to Aristotle. The difference lies in the confidence of the former that God, in his friendship with man as manifest in the Incarnation, has made the fulfillment of that desire possible.

(X) Aristotle in Paradiso

Dante's Paradiso is about the attainment of that desire. In it, God "draws our wills to what He wills; and in His will is our peace."⁵⁵ God moves us,

⁵³ibid.

⁵⁴Hankey, op.cit.,p.43. The words quoted by Hankey are taken from R.D. Crouse, "St. Thomas, St. Albert, Aristotle: Philosophia Ancilla Theologiae", (Naples,1975), p.183.

⁵⁵Paradiso III,84-85: "... *che'n suo voler ne 'nvoglia./ E'n la sua voluntade e*

and all things, ("both what [He] creates and what nature makes")⁵⁶ by being loved.

This movement, so described by the poet in a typically Aristotelian manner, comes to its desired rest through grace. The manner of the soul's movement under the aegis of grace is succinctly described by Solomon in the Heaven of the Sun. Grace is given gratuitously by God: "It follows, then, that vision must increase, as must the ardor kindled by vision, as must the radiance that ardor gives".⁵⁷ The first effect is the greater knowledge of the good - through Faith. This leads to more intense efforts by the will - through Hope. This in turn leads to greater unity of the will with its object - through Charity.

This is the same order of the powers of the soul as is present in the climax of the whole Comedy. There, infused with the light of glory, Dante sees God face to face. This illumination of his intellect issues, after great effort,⁵⁸ in

nostra pace."

⁵⁶Paradiso III,87: "*ciò ch'ella cria o che natura face*".

⁵⁷Paradiso XIV,49-51: "*onde la vision crescer convene, / crescer l'ardor che di quella s'accende, / crescer lo raggio che da esso vene*". For a detailed treatment of the moments of action according to Aristotle and Aquinas, see Cogan, op.cit..

The translation is from Mark Musa, The Divine Comedy, Vol III, Paradiso, (Harmondsworth, 1984), p. 170..

⁵⁸Cf: Paradiso XXXIII,79-84;133-141. Dante is emboldened to gaze more intently upon the Eternal Light, and ponders how it is that the human image

the peace of his will, as it attains the goal of his desire: "already my desire and my will were revolved, like a wheel that is evenly moved, by the love which moves the sun and the other stars."⁵⁹

The "good of intellect,"⁶⁰ desired by Aristotle, is here attained.

(XI) The purpose of the following chapters

The intent of the following chapters is, first, to trace the degeneration of the will of those who have lost this "good of intellect", in the Inferno, and, second, to trace in the Purgatorio, the progress made towards the attainment of this good by those whose will has been transfigured by grace.

appears in the Trinity. In the end, he is granted his wish when his mind is smitten by a flash of light; (because he cannot achieve his wish through his own human understanding).

⁵⁹Paradiso XXXIII,143-145: "*ma già volgeva il mio disio e' velle, / si come rota ch'igualmente è mossa, / l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle*".

⁶⁰Cf:Inferno III,18: "*il ben de l'intelletto*."

PART 2: THE INFERNO

Chapter Two: In the Valley of the Shadow of Death

(I) Towards the attainment of the Good

"The opening scene of the Comedy is the scene of a conversion: from a dark wood of sin a man faces toward the light at the summit of a mountain, and strives to advance toward that light."¹ That light is "the good of the intellect", (*"il ben de l'intelletto"*),² the light of truth symbolized by the sun in the works of Plato, Aristotle and innumerable Christian writers.³ It is the

¹C.S. Singleton, "In Exitu Israel de Aegypto", in Dante, Ed. John Freccero. (Englewood Cliffs N.J., 1965), p.102.

²Inferno III, 18. Cf: Ethics VI,ii,1139a: "The attainment of truth is indeed the function of every part of the intellect, but that of the practical intelligence is the attainment of truth corresponding to right desire."

³There has been a recent attempt to interpret the appearance of this light in negative terms. Anthony Cassell, in Lectura Dantis Americana: Inferno I, (Philadelphia, 1989) p.19 writes: "A few critics and commentators have read the words "guardai in alto" as a glance towards the sun. They have thus interpreted the gesture as a symbol of conversion (literally, of course, a 'turning toward'), instead of aversion from the Deity" The wayfarer, however, "raises his eyes not to the sun but to the shoulders of a shining mountain bathed in the sun's rays; he sees only reflected light"(Ibid., p.20). Cassell identifies this light as "mirrored" and "deceptive", and the whole image as perverse, indicative of "the pagan notion of an ascent in contemplation". (Ibid.).

Against this it may be said that the image of the sunrise here is a very positive one. There is no evidence that the ascent itself is other than good. Evil is represented by the three beasts who prevent the ascent. Moreover, one should consider the close correspondence between spiritual states and background environment in Dante, especially perhaps in Purgatorio I and Paradiso X, with respect to the rising of the sun.

attainment of that light which constitutes human happiness. Happiness, in turn, is defined by Aristotle as the activity of contemplation,⁴ and by Dante as the Beatific Vision.

For Aristotle, the purpose of the Nicomachean Ethics is to help to guide people to happiness, to "the Good [which] is that at which all things aim,"⁵ by promoting "a certain character in the citizens, namely to make them virtuous, and capable of performing noble actions."⁶ The Comedy has a similar purpose for Dante. This is "to remove the living from the state of misery in this life and to guide them to a state of happiness."⁷ To this end, he invites his readers to reflect on his own progress as a character, from the Inferno to the Paradiso. "If ... the work is considered allegorically," he wrote, "the subject is man as

⁴Cf: Ethics X, vii, 1177a: "But if happiness consists in activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be activity in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be the virtue of the best part of us. Whether then this be the intellect, or whatever else it be that is thought to rule and lead us by nature, and to have cognizance of what is noble and divine, either as being itself also actually divine, or as being relatively the divinest part of us, it is the activity of this part of us in accordance with the virtue proper to it that will constitute perfect happiness; and it has been stated already that this activity is the activity of contemplation." For the self-sufficiency of this activity, Cf. VI, xii, 1144a: "Wisdom produces happiness, not in the sense in which medicine produces health, but in the sense in which healthiness is the cause of health."

⁵Ethics I,i,1094a.

⁶Ethics I,ix,1099b.

⁷"Dante's Letter to Can Grande", in Essays on Dante, Ed. Musa, (Bloomington, Ind., 1964), tr. N. Howe, p.40.

according to his merits or demerits in the exercise of free will he is subject to reward or punishment by Justice."⁸

In short, the opening scene of the Comedy already gives to the reader an image of the goal to be attained in the course of the poem. That goal is common to both Aristotle and Dante.

(II) The three beasts

As Dante's journey begins, he is so "full of sleep"⁹ that he has lost all sense of direction, so it is with relief that he comes to the bright mountain at the end of the dark valley. His way up the mountain, however, is barred by three beasts. The first is "a leopard light-footed and very fleet, covered with a spotted hide."¹⁰ It is a "beast with ... gay skin",¹¹ and he feels some hope towards it,¹² despite the fact that it stands in his path. The second animal is a lion which "seemed to be coming at [him], head high and raging with hunger."¹³ Finally,

⁸Ibid., p.39.

⁹Inferno I,11: "*pien di sonno*".

¹⁰Inferno I,32-33: "*una lonza leggiera e presta molto, / che di pel macolato era coverta*".

¹¹Inferno I,42: "*fiera a la gaetta pelle*".

¹²Cf: Inferno I,41.

¹³Inferno I,46-47: "... *parea che contra me venisse / con la test' alta e con*

and without a moment's pause, comes "a she-wolf, that in her leanness seemed laden with every craving and had already caused many to live in sorrow."¹⁴ It is she who causes Dante to lose hope,¹⁵ a "peaceless beast"¹⁶ which pushes him inexorably back "to where the sun is silent."¹⁷

Anthony Cassell notes that there have been four main interpretations of these three beasts. The fourth and most influential identifies "the *lonza*, *leone*, and *lupa* with the '*tre disposizioni che il ciel non vuole*."¹⁸ The beasts thus correspond roughly "with the 'Aristotelian' categories outlined by Virgil (*Inferno* XI, 81): '*malizia*', '*forza*' or '*matta bestialitade*', and '*incontinenza*,' or fraud, violence, and incontinence. They thus [herald and signify] the three major areas of hell itself."¹⁹ Cassell further notes that some scholars have reversed the roles of the *lonza* and *lupa*. These see "the beast with the gay skin rather as incontinence and the wolf as fraud; since they [consider] fraud to be the most

rabbiosa fame".

¹⁴*Inferno* I,49-51: "*Ed una lupa, che di tutte brame / sembiava carca ne la sua magrezza, / e molte genti fé già viver grame*".

¹⁵Cf: *Inferno* I,52-54.

¹⁶*Inferno* I,58: "*bestia senza pace*".

¹⁷*Inferno* I,60: "*là dove 'l sol tace*".

¹⁸Cassell, *op.cit.*, p.49.

¹⁹*Ibid.* For a thorough discussion of the three other interpretations, see *Ibid.*, pp.45-49.

serious, they thus [leave] this last sin as the obstacle that eventually impedes the wayfarer and brings about his fall to the depths."²⁰ Other critics have argued that "this reversal in the identification of the first and last of the beasts is nowhere supported by Dante's text."²¹

The supposed reversal of *lonza* and *lupa* does, however, follow a clear poetic logic. First, the order of the appearance of the leopard, lion and wolf would correspond exactly to the order of appearance of incontinence, force and fraud in the Inferno as categories of sin. Second, since the sins of incontinence are the lightest, it is hard to imagine that they are symbolized by the she-wolf, the most terrible and forbidding of the beasts. Third, Dante finds the leopard to be sensually attractive, just as he does Francesca, at the beginning of the circles of the incontinent. While he might contend with the lion, it is the wolf which saddens him in thought,²² as would fraud, a thought-out and deliberate category of sin. Fourth, words such as "laden", "*carca*"²³ and "heaviness", "*gravezza*",²⁴

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Cf: Inferno I,57.

²³Inferno I,50.

²⁴Inferno I,52. Cf: also I,99.

associated with the wolf suggest that she really belongs at the bottom of things.²⁵

We are told later that Dante ungirded himself and tried to catch the leopard with his belt,²⁶ just as he ungirds himself again and catches Geryon, the "foul image of fraud",²⁷ whose body is also "painted with knots and circlets".²⁸ This need not mean that the leopard represents fraud. It could just as well signify that the temptation to indulge oneself may quickly lead to what one had not bargained for.²⁹

At any rate, if one adopts either variant of Cassell's fourth interpretation, it is clear that one also has to allow that the three beasts signify the three levels of Aristotelian sin which constitute Dante's journey down to the bottom of Hell.

²⁵The wolf's insatiable appetite also reminds one of Satan, who is precisely at the bottom of things.

²⁶Cf: Inferno XVI,106-108.

²⁷Inferno XVII,7: "*sozza imagine di froda*".

²⁸Inferno XVII,15: "*dipinti ... di nodi e di rotelle*".

²⁹ The system of symbolism is very allusive and flexible in nature. Each animal symbolizes more than a specific category of sin. The wolf, for example, represents avarice as well as fraudulence. Cassell observes that "it is obvious that avarice, like lust and pride, can be indulged in through incontinence, through violence, or even through fraudulence." Op.cit.,p.51.

(III) The appearance of Virgil

Dante is unable to ascend the mountain for the simple reason that he does not know how to avoid the beasts. If he could immediately come to the Good at the top of the mountain, this Good would have to be conceived as an abstraction quite beyond the bounds of human experience as "something existing separately and absolute, [in which case] it clearly will not be practicable or attainable by man."³⁰ Instead, what Dante requires is understanding of the concrete obstacles so that he may overcome them one by one. Such understanding is "the good" that [he found in the dark wood],³¹ offered to him by Virgil, who appears here for the first time.

Virgil's station in Limbo, above the circles of concupiscence, serves to indicate that he has prevailed over the temptations of the three beasts. He is therefore a suitable guide for the journey up "the delectable mountain, the

³⁰Ethics I,vi,1096b. This is one of Aristotle's criticisms of Plato, that the latter does not offer a sufficient mediation between the individual and the Good.

³¹Cf: Inferno I,8: "*del ben ch'i' vi trovar*". Virgil will help Dante to proceed steadily with "the firm foot ... always the lower". (Inferno I,30). "According to Bonaventura and others, the 'foot' or power that moves first is the *apprehensivus*, or the intellect, and therefore is the right. The other or left 'foot' is the *affectus* or *appetitivus* - i.e., the will. [This is] the *pes firmior* or less 'agile'". (C.S. Singleton, Commentary on the Inferno; Princeton, 1989), n.30,p.9. Virgil's aid will strengthen the will, "wounded by concupiscence" (*ibid.*) so that it can better follow the lead of the intellect.

source and cause of every happiness."³² Despite this, the route will begin with a descent, rather than an ascent. The first step is to show Dante the real nature of the sins which weigh him down.

(IV) Dante's cowardice

On preparing to enter into the realms of the dead, Dante compares himself to Aeneas and to Paul and finds himself unworthy. He becomes "like one who unwilld what he has willed / and with new thoughts changes his resolve."³³ Virgil understands at once that his real difficulty is abject cowardice.³⁴ What he lacks is the courage which St. Thomas Aquinas calls "absolute steadfastness of mind" and describes as "a general virtue or rather a condition of each and every virtue ...".³⁵ Dante's situation, indeed, is similar to that confronted by Aristotle's paradigmatic man of courage "who fearlessly confronts a noble death, or some sudden peril that threatens death."³⁶

³²Inferno I,77-78: "il diletto monte / ch'è principio e cagion di tutta gioia".

³³Inferno II,37-38. "...qual è quei che disvuol ciò che volle / e per novi pensier cangia proposta".

³⁴Cf: Inferno II,45-47.

³⁵S.T. IIa, IIae, 123,2 Resp.. St. Thomas refers here to Aristotle, Ethics II, iv, 1105a, where he says that virtue requires "steadfast and unwavering action".

³⁶Ethics III,vi,1115a. Cf: Inferno II,3-4: "and I alone / was making ready to sustain the strife", and Inferno II, 107-108, "Do you not see the death that assails him / on the flood over which the sea has no vaunt?" ; "*non vedi tu la morte che 'l combatte / su la fiumana ove 'l mar non ha vanto?*" Cf: Inferno II,88-93. Beatrice,

The crucial decision that Dante must take is the hinge upon which his journey turns. He must exhibit courage, the first of the cardinal virtues. It occupies the same place here as it does in the Ethics - at the beginning. St. Thomas gives the reason. "In human things the greatest is life, on which all the [other moral virtues] depend. Consequently, fortitude, which masters the emotions in matters of life and death, holds the first place among these moral virtues."³⁷

Here, Virgil is unable to move Dante from his cowardice. The latter is no doubt wary of following a guide who has been "rebellious to His [i.e. - God's] law."³⁸ Natural reason, represented by Virgil, is unable to assure Dante of complete success. Since "mind is never seen to produce movement without appetite,"³⁹ Virgil then tells Dante of the three "blessed ladies"⁴⁰ who have sent Virgil to lead Dante's journey to absolute fruition.

on the other hand, is not afraid of the Inferno. It can do her no harm. Her will is absolutely steadfast.

³⁷S.T., Ia, Ilae. 66, 4. Resp.

³⁸Inferno I,125: "*ribellante a la sua legge*".

³⁹De Anima III, x, 433a.

⁴⁰Inferno II,124: "*donne benedette*".

(V) The three ladies

The three ladies act as Dante's guardians in his quest to pass the three beasts and gain the summit. The whole scene is permeated by the language of courtly love. Virgil himself treats Beatrice as a mediaeval lady, "blessed and ... fair"⁴¹ and prays her to command him. Aristotelian reason is here transfigured by the presence of Christian love, and the origin of the action of the Comedy is described in terms of its heavenly roots.

The first of the three blessed ladies is the Virgin Mary herself, here unnamed, and simply called, in courtly language, a gracious lady, "[*donna*] ... *gentil*"⁴². It is she who has mercy upon Dante when he is beset by sin, and it is through her agency that "stern judgment"⁴³ upon him is not exercised in heaven.⁴⁴

⁴¹Inferno II,53: "*beata e bella*". Virgil's relation to Beatrice mirrors the relationship between nature and grace. The latter brings nature "to perfection, so also natural reason should assist faith as the natural loving bent of the will yields to charity." (S.T., Ia., 1,8, ad 2.)

Grace, of course, presupposes nature. It is fitting that Beatrice reciprocates Virgil's courtesy. She promises to praise him often to her Lord when she returns to the latter's presence. (Cf: Inferno II,73-74).

Dante the pilgrim does not yet think explicitly in such terms, but the ideas are implicit in his attitude towards Virgil as the poetic embodiment of reason and towards Beatrice as the Lady of Mediaeval Romance.

⁴²Inferno II,94.

⁴³Inferno II,96: "*duro giudicio*".

⁴⁴The Virgin, Queen of Heaven, will reappear at the end of the Paradiso. In this

The second of the three ladies is Lucy, here described as "foe of every cruelty",⁴⁵ a description which refers most directly to the ominous presence of the three beasts. Lucy is asked by Mary to go to help "[her] faithful one", "*il tuo fedele*".⁴⁶ Dante owes his allegiance to Lucy, no doubt, because she symbolizes in her person the light, *lux*, which he has seen at the summit of the mountain.⁴⁷

The third lady is Beatrice. It was for her that Dante "left the vulgar throng".⁴⁸ Lucy urges her to go to Dante's aid, since "death ... assails him / on that flood over which the sea has no vaunt".⁴⁹ Beatrice, of course, immediately descends into the Inferno in order to enlist the help of Virgil.

way, the action both begins and ends with her.

⁴⁵Inferno II,100: "*nimica di ciascun crudele*".

⁴⁶Inferno II,98.

⁴⁷Lucy will appear in the middle canticle, to carry Dante to the Gate of Purgatory. Here, too, she acts as an intermediary.

⁴⁸Inferno II,105: "*usci ... de la volgare schiera*".

⁴⁹Inferno II,107-108: "*morte ... 'l combatte / su la fiumana ove 'l mar non ha vanto*". Rachel Jacoff and William A Stephany, in Lectura Dantis Americana: Inferno II (Philadelphia, 1989). p. 50, argue that "Dante's situation is that of one who has crossed the sea (the Red Sea of Exodus typology) but who cannot make the final crossing over the river into the Promised Land until he makes a descent into humility, a descent that will be a death of the old self. Thus the river of death becomes a figure for the whole internal journey that is to follow". This catches

He identifies her as the "Lady of virtue", "*donna di virtu*",⁵⁰ She is to him Lady Philosophy, who is alone able to raise humanity above that realm where fortune dominates.⁵¹ Her appeal to Virgil is stated in these terms. Dante, she says, is "my friend - and not the friend of fortune".⁵²

Lucy identifies Beatrice as "true praise of God", "*loda di Dio vera*".⁵³

This is reminiscent of the Vita Nuova, where she is the very figure of the Trinity.⁵⁴ Indeed, all of her characteristics seem to merge, into that of the Lady of that poem. She returns here to save her lover at the very point when he has become most unmindful of her.⁵⁵

precisely the drama of the moment.

⁵⁰Infemo II,76.

⁵¹Cf: Infemo II,76-78. She lifts humankind to the sphere of the Moon and above.

⁵²Infemo II, 61: "*l'amico mio, e non de la ventura*".

⁵³Infemo II,103.

⁵⁴Dante says that "she was a nine, that is to say a miracle, the root of which, namely the miracle, is the wondrous Trinity itself"; "...*ella era uno nove , cioè uno miracolo, la cui radice, cioè del miracolo, è solamente la mirabile Trinitade*". (My translation).

⁵⁵Cf: Purgatorio XXXI,22-63, where Beatrice accuses Dante of betrayal after her death. It is appropriate that she makes a personal appearance in the Infemo, to speak to Virgil, since it is as a young girl in the flesh that she first led Dante to love God. (Cf: Purgatorio XXXI,22-24).

The theme of the love of Dante for Beatrice is resumed here in the Comedy as the concrete starting point from which the understanding of Dante can grow in depth.⁵⁶ Bourbeau expresses very clearly how this motive force develops in the form of courtly love:

The beauty of the Lady, in being the symbol of virtue, awakens the love of the knight for the good. The numerous trials which he endures voluntarily for his beloved, his friend, effect in him the purification and ennobling of his nature. Beatrice, from every point of view, is Dante's Lady, his friend. It is his love for her which is at the origin of the poet's odyssey through the realms of the beyond.⁵⁷

Beatrice's relationship to Dante is what Aristotle described as the highest form of friendship, based upon such characteristics as (i) wishing a person good for that person's own sake; (ii) promoting the existence of a person and his or her good; (iii) desiring the same things as that person; (iv) sharing the

⁵⁶Once again, there is no question at this point of Dante's theological understanding. The action is couched in the terms of Romance, with which he was thoroughly familiar. This is an important consideration with respect to Mastrobuono's recent criticism of Singleton and Freccero. (Cf: Antonio C. Mastrobuono, Dante's Journey of Sanctification (Washington, D. C., 1990). Mastrobuono's case centers upon the contention that Dante the wayfarer is the recipient of sanctifying grace at the very beginning of his journey rather than at his crossing of the river Lethe at the end of the Purgatorio. There is no doubt that this is true, but there is nothing to suggest that the wayfarer actually understands the nature of the grace extended to him until he meets Beatrice across the banks of Lethe. The drama is one of *Fides quaerens Intellectum*, or as Fergusson put it, a "drama of the mind."

⁵⁷Bourbeau, op.cit., p.47. My translation.

person's joy and sorrows, and (v) frequenting that person's society.⁵⁸

The transfiguration of this natural friendship into Christian love was a capacity of mediaeval Romance from its very beginning. Friedrich Heer, writing of Guillaume of Aquitaine, grandfather of Eleanor and "the first troubadour whose work has come down to us",⁵⁹ states that "[in] Guillaume's love-songs the vocabulary and emotional fervour hitherto ordinarily used to express man's love for God are transferred to the liturgical worship of woman, and vice versa".⁶⁰ By Eleanor's time, courts of love were regularly held in the court at Poitiers. Well born ladies were the judges, who sat on a raised dais. "Below them sat the men, the suitors to the court, prepared to hear lengthy and meticulous disputations on the essence and nature of love and an exposition of a man's duty of service towards his lady."⁶¹ In this context, the notion of ladies having mercy upon their suitors, and going to some trouble to reform their behaviour, is quite natural. This, of course, is exactly how the three blessed ladies act towards Dante.

With such beautiful and powerful women behind him, Dante is finally persuaded to follow Virgil down into the Inferno. He has become

⁵⁸Cf: Ethics IX,iv,1166a.

⁵⁹Friedrich Heer, The Medieval World, tr. Janet Sondheimer, (New York, 1963), p.158.

⁶⁰Ibid., p.159.

⁶¹Ibid., p.173.

"continent", determined now to heed the guidance of reason despite the fears and other emotions which he might feel. As he tells Virgil: "Now on, for a single will is in us both; / You are my leader; you my master and my teacher".⁶²

⁶²Inferno II, 139-140: "*Or va, ch'un sol volere è d'ambidue: / tu duca, tu signore e tu maestro*".

Chapter Three: The Loss of Faith

(I) The Fall

The descent into the Inferno involves the progressive degeneration of the will on a course which Aristotle had mapped out already to a large extent.

Pietro Alighieri writes this about it:

[Dante] will see those who lost the gift of reason, which is God Himself as the ultimate beatitude and truth. In fact, the Philosopher in Book III of On the Soul says that the gift of reason is beatitude itself. And Thomas Aquinas in his Against the Gentiles writes, "It is necessary that the ultimate aim of the universe be the gift of understanding, this gift, then, is the truth."¹

The loss of reason cuts to the very heart of the personality.

Aristotle writes in the Ethics that "it is our reasoned acts that are felt to be in the fullest sense our own acts, voluntary acts. It is therefore clear that a man is or is chiefly the dominant part of himself, and that a good man values this part of himself most."² The loss of the good of the intellect thus involves the loss of self-control or continence. This fall is symbolized by the Gate of Hell with its famous

¹This is Pietro's gloss on Inferno III, 17-18, quoted by Maria Picchio Simonelli in Lectura Dantis Americana: Inferno III (Philadelphia, 1993), p. 21.

²Ethics IX, viii, 11692. It should be noted that while Aristotle usually means by voluntary what the word means in ordinary English, here, by voluntary "in the fullest sense" he refers to the acts of the free person in control of himself. The will not governed by reason, then, is not voluntary - in the fullest sense.

inscription. This tells us that the Inferno was created for those who have renounced the fundamental truths which can be grasped by their own intellect.

When Dante and Virgil proceed through the Gate, the first souls they meet are those who refused to make a firm resolve to obey the behest of reason. Irresolute due to cowardice, they did not embark upon any definite course of action. It is important to note that their situation was precisely like that of Dante at the beginning of Canto II, when it appeared that he was condemning himself to a life of perpetual indecision in the dark wood. What is in question is the fundamental decision about which direction should be taken; in what should one place one's faith.

Indecision is tantamount here to a decision not to do what the Good of the Intellect requires. Dante may have the disobedience of Adam and Eve in mind, since it is at this point that the individual falls into conscious opposition to God. The location here is usually called the Vestibule, in order to distinguish it from the Circles beneath, where positive decisions to sin are made by the sinners. Nonetheless, the Vestibule is within the Inferno, and the wills of those who will only themselves and not God show themselves to be the root of that treason which leads down to the pit below.

Dante locates the fateful indecision primarily in the person of the

one "who from cowardice made the great refusal".³ This is almost certainly Celestine V, and the "great refusal" was his abdication of the papal throne, an act which led to the elevation of Dante's arch-enemy, Boniface VIII, and then to the Babylonian Captivity, which Dante symbolized at the end of the Purgatorio in the figures of the Giant (Philip IV) and the Harlot (Clement V).

Pietro del Morrone, the future Celestine V, had founded, from the poorer classes of his society, what was virtually a new monastic order and integrated it into the Benedictines. When he became pope he made his way into L'Aquila riding on an ass, in imitation of Christ. According to Peter Herde, he was probably influenced by the eschatological ideas of Joachim of Fiore and certainly had links with the Spiritual Franciscans.⁴ He, if anyone, might have been expected to turn the church away from its preoccupation with worldly interests. His abdication was felt as a crippling blow to church reform.

The reason, no doubt, why he is not named in the Comedy is that he had refused (in Dante's mind) to abide by a chosen and reasonable course of action. The absence of acts leading to the formation of a virtuous character deprived him of a definite identity. It should also be remembered that he had

³Inferno III, 60: "*che fece per viltade il gran rifiuto*".

⁴Cf: Peter Herde, "Celestine V" in Storia della Chiesa, vol. XI (Milano, 1994), pp. 101-107.

been proclaimed a Saint before Dante's death. To name him would have been dangerous. That he is included in the Inferno at all is probably a measure of the abhorrence which Dante must have felt toward the abdication.⁵ The church, after all, was the guardian of eternal happiness, and its corruption placed all of human society at risk.⁶

The souls of the indecisive, in company with those angels who remained neutral when Lucifer and his rebel band fought and fell,⁷ are bitten "by gadflies and wasps"⁸ as they rally blindly to an ever-moving banner. The imagery of the banner probably parodies that military standard which the courageous man of Aristotle's Ethics would have followed to the death. Here it is not raised in a definite direction; those who follow it are goaded by external

⁵See Simonelli, op. cit., p. 9 for a discussion of the disgust felt by Dante towards "the great refusal".

⁶It may be argued that Dante chooses a pope rather than an emperor to be the person who makes the initial decision against the Good because the church, as the repository of the Faith ultimately acts as a beacon for all of humanity. The secular power has authority, rather, over the realms of incontinence, violence and fraud, (all the while exercising due deference to the spiritual power). If this is correct, the "Hound" who feeds on "wisdom, love and virtue" "*sapienza, amore e virtute*", (Cf: Inferno I, 100-105) and who will save Italy by thrusting the wolf back into hell (Cf: Ibid. 106-111) is more likely to be an emperor than a churchman. Virgil certainly understands him in secular terms, and thinks of him as achieving what Aeneas did, establishing law and order.

⁷Cf: Inferno III, 36-39.

⁸Inferno III, 66: "*da mosconi e da vespe*".

forces, having themselves no definite will.⁹ Their punishment not only fits the sin; the punishment is the sin.

"All of the damned", writes Marc Cogan, "reenact in their punishments the essence of the sins they committed The descriptions of the punishments provide a visualization of the underlying nature of each sin, making manifest what may have been obscured or concealed in the original act".¹⁰

In terms of the allegorical meaning of the Comedy, the implication is that the punishment is the unending commission of the sin - of the act which is actually being willed. In the Inferno, then, God acts justly and at the same time maintains complete respect for the free will of his creatures. Justice moved the Trinity when it created the Inferno, but people enter the gate to it freely.¹¹ They will their own own punishment.

At the end of Canto III, Dante and Virgil reach the river Acheron, where the souls who "fear not God"¹² gather, to "cast themselves" toward the far

⁹Cf: Inferno III, 52-54

¹⁰Marc Cogan, op. cit., p. 41.

¹¹Cf: Inferno III, 4-6.

¹²Inferno III, 108: "*Dio non teme*".

shore like falling autumn leaves.¹³ They wish this, "for Divine Justice so spurs them / that their fear is changed into desire."¹⁴

The fear they feel is but a more complete fear of the sort that Dante felt when returning back into the dark wood, and the desire which they experience for the other shore comes from their definitive decision to continue to lead the sinful lives which have become their habit. They are the souls who, unlike Dante, have not repented.

Finally, the earth shakes, and "the tear-soaked ground gave forth a wind that flashed a crimson light",¹⁵ as if all four elements, (water, earth, air and fire), were moved from their foundations. Dante falls.

(II) Limbo

When he awakes, he finds himself across the river, on the outskirts of Limbo. He has moved from the realm of cowardice and indecision to the

¹³Cf: Inferno III,112-120.

¹⁴Inferno III,125-126: "*ché la divina giustizia li sprona, / sì che la tema si volve in disio*". Another way of putting this is that the fear is fear of never being able to reach the sunlit summit of the mountain. The desire represents the will, instead, for some finite good, even one which is only an apparent good, evilly taken to be absolute.

¹⁵Inferno III,133-134: "*La terra lagrimosa diede vento, / che balenò una luce vermiglia*".

realm of desire without hope, where the souls are "suspended" ("*sospesi*").¹⁶ But he is still "on the brink of the chasm of pain."¹⁷ He has not yet descended to where reason is consciously subordinated to immediate desire.

Virgil explains who the "suspended" souls are. They "did not sin",¹⁸ but lacked baptism, "the portal of the faith you hold",¹⁹ or right worship of God, if they had lived before Christian times.²⁰ The state of suspension consists precisely in that "without hope [they] live in longing".²¹

It is a mistake to believe that Dante "leaves some obviously virtuous people in Limbo in order to heighten the incomprehensibility of the fate

¹⁶Inferno IV,45; Cf: Inferno II,52.

¹⁷Inferno IV,7-8: "... *'n su la proda mi trovai / de la valle d'abisso dolorosa*".

¹⁸Inferno IV,34: "*non peccaro*". They did not subordinate reason to immediate desire.

¹⁹Inferno IV,36: "*porta de la fede che tu credi*". This is the converse of the Gate of Hell of Canto III.

²⁰Cf: Inferno IV,37-38. Those who did preserve right worship and keep faith were those who acted like the Hebrews of the covenant, who were released from Limbo at the time of the harrowing of Hell. (Cf also Inferno IV,52-63).

²¹Inferno IV,42: "*sanza speme vivemo in disio*". St. Thomas compares lack of hope with lack of faith and lack of charity, and writes that in our present condition it is "more dangerous, since by hope we are withdrawn from evils and led to the goods we should pursue; thus, if hope is taken away, men slide unchecked into vices and are drawn away from virtuous labour". (S.T. II,IIae,20,3 Resp.).

of souls such as Virgil...".²² Dante means their fate to be perfectly comprehensible. They, too, freely choose their punishment, by abandoning the faith that ultimate happiness is attainable. For this reason they sink into "sadness" ("*duof*").²³

Four great poets of antiquity come to welcome Dante and Virgil and to escort them to an area lit by "a fire, which overcame a hemisphere of darkness."²⁴ There, all six poets enter a "noble castle, /seven times encircled by lofty walls / and defended round about by a fair stream."²⁵ Within the gates they reach "a meadow of fresh verdure".²⁶ Dante sees those who fought the wars which issued in the founding of the Roman Empire.²⁷ A little higher he sees "the

²²Rodney J. Payton, A Modern Reader's Guide to Dante's Inferno, (New York, 1992),p.42.

²³Inferno IV,28. The order of sins also follows a certain logic. The poem moves from the will which will not make a decision to the will which decides against the possibility of fulfillment. Then it moves to the will which opposes its immediate desires to this possibility of fulfillment.

²⁴Inferno IV,68-69: "... *un foco / ch'emisperio di tenebre vincia*".

²⁵Inferno IV,106-108: "... *un nobile castello, / sette volte cerchiato d'alte mura, / difeso intorno d'un bel fiumicello*". Even the stream is virtually "suspended". Dante and Virgil cross it "as on solid ground" (Inferno IV,109).

²⁶Inferno IV,111: "*prato di fresca verdura*". The scene is reminiscent of the Elysian Fields as described in Aeneid VI.

²⁷Saladin is the only "outside" figure in this group. He may be placed here to show that the emphasis is meant to be on *praxis*, the active life as such, rather than simply upon the Roman Empire.

Master of those who know, / seated in a philosophic family".²⁸

In brief, what is presented to the reader is the Aristotelian world, divided according to the three main activities of *poiesis*, *praxis* and *theoria*, ("poetry", "practice" [or "politics"], and "theory" [or "contemplation"], with the last activity as the culminating one.)²⁹ In this light, the seven walls which protect the inner citadel probably represent the four cardinal, moral virtues and three intellectual virtues, all from the Ethics.

Although the inhabitants of Limbo are figures of honour and virtue,³⁰ these qualities are insufficient to guarantee their happiness,³¹ and there is also a failure in the life of contemplation as conceived by Aristotle himself. In the Ethics, Aristotle discusses the imperfect grasp which humans have on such a life in an extremely important passage.

Such a life as this ... will be higher than the human level: not in

²⁸Inferno IV,131-132: "... / maestro di color che sanno / seder tra filosofica famiglia".

²⁹Cf: Ethics I,v,1095b-1056a concerning the insufficiency of the active life, and, more emphatically, Ethics VI,vii,1141a-1141b.

³⁰They are "people with grave and slow-moving eyes and looks of great authority [who speak] seldom and with gentle voices". These are characteristics of Aristotle's "magnanimous" man. (Cf: Ethics IV,iii,1125a). For the mention of honour, see Inferno IV,72,73,74,76,80,93 and 100.

³¹Aristotle writes that "even virtue proves on examination to be too incomplete to be the End". (Ethics I,v,1095b).

virtue of his humanity will a man achieve it, but in virtue of something within him that is divine; and by as much as this something is superior to his composite nature, by so much is its activity superior to the exercise of the other forms of virtue. If then the intellect is something divine in comparison with man, so is the life of the intellect divine in comparison with human life.³²

Thus it is that Aristotle is "suspended in that Limbo",³³ in the half-sphere of light, by his own admission.³⁴ His limitation is that of the "beatitude of this life" discussed by Dante in De Monarchia III, 15, the beatitude obtainable "by means of philosophical instruction". The "beatitude of eternal life", on the other hand, is only attainable "through the theological virtues, namely faith, hope and charity".³⁵

After the vision of the "Elysian Fields" of the virtuous pagans, Virgil and Dante descend again; they come "to a part where there is naught that

³²Ethics X,vii,1177b. See also Ethics VI,vii,1141a-1142b, and Ethics X,viii,1178b-1179a.

³³Cf: Inferno IV,45: "... 'n quel limbo ... sospes'".

³⁴This is a central consideration. If it appears incongruous that the Inferno follows an Aristotelian plan throughout, while Aristotle is himself inside the Inferno, the contradiction is removed if he wills to be there, and if the plan of the poem involves the transfiguration of his doctrine - its being seen in a new light.

³⁵Loc.cit. in Monarchia, tr. Federico Sanguineti, (Milano,1985),p.143. Giovanni Busnelli remarked on the matter that for Aristotle the possession of perfect happiness was limited "to the present life, in the way in which it is obtainable to men here below", since we can never be certain of the future. (L'Etica Nicomachaea e L'Ordinamento Morale Dell' Inferno di Dante; Bologna,1907,p.28).

shines".³⁶

³⁶Inferno IV,151: "*in parte ove non è che luca*".

Chapter Four: Incontinence: The Subjection of Reason to Desire

(I) Lust

The entrance to the second circle is guarded by Minos, "horrible and snarling".¹ He judges the souls of each sinner and "then girds himself with his tail as many times as the grades he wills that it be sent down."² His bestial appearance signifies the predominance of the irrational in the circles which follow.

This is a disastrous turn in direction, according to the Aristotelian argument used by Dante. The philosopher had written that we should "do all that man may to live in accordance with the highest thing in him"³ The rational part of the soul, moreover, exhorts those who have difficulty in restraining themselves "to the best course; but their nature seems also to contain another element beside that of rational principle, which combats and resists that principle".⁴ From the second circle on, the focus of the sinners is downwards, and the irrational element

¹Cf: Inferno V,4: "*orribilmente, e ringhia*".

²Inferno V,11-12: "*cignesi con la coda tante volte / quantunque gradi vuol che giù sia messa*".

³Ethics X,vii,1177b-1178a.

⁴Ethics I,xiii,1102b. For the conflict between the two parts of the soul, see Ethics I,xiii,1102a-1103a, and De Anima III,x,433a-433b.

gradually prevails.

The souls in the second circle "subject reason to desire".⁵ They thereby experience a sharper conflict between the two than do the indecisive or the inhabitants of Limbo.⁶ The form of the conflict in this canto is defined more exactly when Virgil points out a soul to Dante; Semiramis, who "made lust licit in her law, / to take away the blame she had incurred."⁷ The self-contradictory nature of her activities is underlined, since what she claims to be lawful and rational is precisely what is foreign to law and reason.⁸

This is also the case in Dante's subsequent conversation with Francesca, when she tells him of Paolo and herself:

⁵ Sapegno in his Commentary on the Inferno (Florence, 1985), note 39,p.56, writes: "And let it be noted that this defines not so much lust specifically, as every sin of incontinence". My translation.

⁶ Unlike the indecisive who follow a whirling banner, the lustful here are actually buffeted by an external force, like birds in a heavy wind. They not only have no hope of rest (like the indecisive), but also no hope "of less pain". (Inferno V,45).

⁷Inferno V,56-57: "*che libito fé licito in sua legge, / per tòrre il biasmo in che era condotta*".

⁸Semiramis is accompanied by Dido, Cleopatra and Paris, among others, most of whom are associated certainly with betrayal of the family, and harm to the city. Dante may be thinking of Aristotle's Politics, where the family is treated as the root of the city. Do the episodes discussed or alluded to here then represent the beginning of the corruption of the city, in Dante's eyes?

Love, which is quickly kindled in a gentle heart,
 seized this one for the fair form
 that was taken from me - and the way of it afflicts me still.
 Love, which absolves no one from loving,
 seized me so strongly with delight in him,
 that, as you see, it does not leave me even now.
 Love brought us to one death.
 Caina awaits him who quenched our life.⁹

Irma Brandeis wrote about this: "There is a doctrine of love expressed in this speech and it is roughly this: that love for a fellow-creature is an irresistible force set in motion by physical beauty."¹⁰ The wind that buffets Francesca is the wind of lust, and her "doctrine" is virtually the same as Guido Cavalcanti's in "*Donna me prega*", where love is said to reside "in the sensitive rather than the intellective soul",¹¹ and is aligned "with death and the dark powers".¹²

⁹Inferno V,100-107:

*Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,
 prese costui de la bella persona
 che mi fu tolta; e 'l modo ancor m'offende.
 Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,
 mi prese del costui piacer sì forte,
 che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona.
 Amor condusse noi ad una morte.
 Caina attende chi a vita ci spense.*

¹⁰Irma Brandeis, The Ladder of Vision, (London, 1960), p.29.

¹¹Theodolinda Barolini, Dante's Poets, (Princeton, 1984), p.143. Cavalcanti's poem is discussed there at length. For the Averroism of the teaching, see above, pp 15-16.

¹²Ibid. p.144.

Dante wishes his readers to think of the second circle in the context of the doctrines and vocabulary of courtly love. Francesca's greeting and Dante's questions to her are both couched in such language,¹³ and the lines quoted above read very much like a courtly *canzone*. Francesca yields to passion while she and Paolo are reading a quintessential passage of mediaeval Romance, where "love constrained Lancelot".¹⁴ Whereas in Canto II we have been told, in courtly language, how Beatrice's intervention was able to raise Dante from his cowardice, here we are shown how a comparable romantic bond has led to the fall of the lovers concerned.¹⁵

Their fall into incontinence is described with great care. When they read about Lancelot, Paolo kissed Francesca, and "that day we read no farther."¹⁶ This is the precise moment at which there is a transition to an act of vice. As Francesca says: "one moment alone it was that overcame us."¹⁷ When Dante

¹³Cf: Inferno V,88 and Inferno V,91-92 for her greeting, and Inferno V,119-120 for Dante's questions.

¹⁴Inferno V,128: "... *Lancialotto come amor lo strinse*".

¹⁵The "*canzone*" about love ends abruptly with a discordant reference to death. (Inferno V,106-107). This may indicate a desire on Dante's part to bring the Averroist doctrine of poems such as Cavalcanti's to the readers' minds. It should also be remarked that there is no ninth line, as one might expect there to be. The *canzone* is somehow incomplete.

¹⁶Inferno V, 138: "*quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante*."

¹⁷Inferno V, 132: "... *solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse*".

writes in Canto XI of incontinence as a disposition which "less offends God",¹⁸ this is the kind of act of which he is thinking - an act which neglects reason due to passion.

His description of the incontinent is very similar to the definition given in the Ethics. "There is a person who abandons his choice, against right principle, under the influence of passion, who is mastered by passion sufficiently for him not to act in accordance with right principle, but not so completely as to be of such a character as to believe that the reckless pursuit of pleasure is right."¹⁹ Aristotle distinguishes the incontinent person from the intemperate. "This is the unrestrained man: he is better than the profligate, and not absolutely bad, for in him the highest part of man, the fundamental principle is still preserved".²⁰ He also notes that "the unrestrained man ... invariably repents his excesses afterwards".²¹

From this vantage point, the main question is whether Francesca is intemperate (profligate) or merely incontinent (unrestrained). The following assessment of her character will prove useful in answering this question. "If Francesca is impenitent - as are all the souls in Hell - there is no element of

¹⁸Inferno XI,84: "*men Dio offende*".

¹⁹Ethics VII,viii,1151a.

²⁰Ibid..

²¹Ethics VII,viii,1150b.

deliberateness in her fault ...".²² Irma Brandeis emphasizes her almost unconscious motion: "Unwittingly, Francesca is what she was: a falling lady - an impulsive lady who falls because she is compliant, and whose compliance bends to the immediate and personal desire, without consultation of reason and without ear for its reminder that her love infringed on other sacred bonds in a context far wider than the personal".²³

She is neither simply incontinent nor simply intemperate. Rather she is shown at the point where an act of incontinence is about to develop into a settled habit of intemperance.²⁴ This hardening of character is a notable feature of many of the sinners of the Inferno, and its importance parallels the importance that Aristotle gave it in the Ethics: "With our dispositions ... though we can control their beginnings, each separate addition to them is imperceptible, as is the case with the growth of a disease".²⁵ Cogan elaborates on this process: "... since all successful actions end in delight, even those pursuing the wrong objects, and since the delight experienced reinforces the desirability of the actions that led to it,

²²Brandeis, op.cit., p.32.

²³Ibid.

²⁴There is little doubt that most of the "lustful" are intemperate. One need only think of Semiramis. Dante calls them incontinent in Canto XI probably because he wishes to stress the progressive sinking into vice by a series of steps (lust, gluttony, avarice, wrath), rather than the final state.

²⁵Ethics III,v,1114b-1115a. Cf. also Ibid.,1113b-1114a.

repeated choice of delights of one quality rather than another eventually establishes fixed habits and characters, whether for good or ill."²⁶ Further, reason becomes subject to desire. "In this way, choice of wrong delights impedes choice, and experience, of proper delights. Even in this world, habit and character are changed only with difficulty. In Heaven and Hell, these characters are beyond change".²⁷

Canto V begins the destruction of temperance, consequent upon the previous destruction of courage. As Aristotle writes, these two "appear to be the virtues of the irrational part of the soul",²⁸ and temperance specifically is "concerned with those pleasures which man shares with the lower animals, and which consequently appear slavish and bestial. These are the pleasures of touch and taste".²⁹

Intemperance is more reprehensible than cowardice. In the words of

²⁶Cogan, op.cit.,p.39.

²⁷Ibid. Cogan refers the reader (in notes 46 and 47,p.50) to Ethics X,v,1175b, for the delight of one activity eliminating attention to a less pleasant activity, and to Ethics VII,x,1152a, for the possibility of reforming the incontinent.

²⁸ Ethics III,x,1117b.

²⁹Ethics III,x,1118b. The transition from touch to taste takes place in the Comedy, of course, in the passage from lust to gluttony.

Aristotle, "profligacy seems to be more voluntary than cowardice"³⁰ in that the latter is exhibited in the face of pain that "destroys the sufferer's nature, whereas pleasure has no such effect".³¹

At the end of the canto Dante swoons, overcome with pity at the fate of Paolo and Francesca, thus imitating their fall downwards into incontinence, and intemperance.³²

(II) Gluttony

"The next stage of self-indulgence is to satisfy the body without even the excuse of a nobler impulse, simply to feed it as an animal does".³³ This gluttony, which is still a matter of "touch and taste", is symbolized in the third circle by Cerberus, the three-headed dog who feeds on anything, including earth.³⁴ The souls here are immersed in the stinking mud, ravaged by Cerberus and pelted by rain. Dante remarks that, of the many punishments, "If any is greater, none is so

³⁰Ethics III,x,1119a.

³¹Ibid. By "voluntary" here, Aristotle seems to mean that the person has more of an immediate opportunity to hearken to "right principle" or reason. As one descends, one always moves to what is more directly contrary to reason.

³²Cf: Inferno V,140-142.

³³Joan Ferrante, The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy (Princeton,1984), p.142.

³⁴Cf: Inferno VI,26.

loathsome".³⁵ Aristotle's opinion of gluttony was similar: "It is persons of especially slavish nature that are liable to this form of excess".³⁶

Dante encounters a fellow Florentine, nicknamed Ciaccio, i.e. pig. Fittingly enough they discuss Florence, a city "so full of envy that already the sack runs over".³⁷ Ciaccio prophesies partisan warfare between the Black Guelfs and the Whites.³⁸ When Dante asks about Farinata and others, all of whom he takes to be Florentine patriots, he is told that they are "among the blackest souls"³⁹ in Hell.

If one remembers that, according to Aristotle's Ethics, "Friendship appears to be the bond of the state; and lawgivers seem to set more store by it than they do justice, for to promote concord, which seems akin to friendship, is their chief aim, while faction, which is enmity, is what they are most anxious to banish",⁴⁰ then, Dante is effectively saying that Florence, swollen with wealth, is nonetheless on the verge of disintegration. The citizens are driven into isolation,

³⁵Inferno VI,48: "... *s'altra è maggio, nulla è sì spiacente*".

³⁶Ethics III,xi,1118b.

³⁷Inferno VI,49-50: "... *piena / d'invidia sì che già trabocca il sacco*."

³⁸Cf: Inferno VI,64-66.

³⁹Inferno VI,85: "*tra l'anime più nere*".

⁴⁰Ethics VIII,i,1155a.

perhaps like the sinners in this canto, and their "parties" betray the unity of the state.⁴¹ The perverse mutuality which was the punishment of lust is on the verge of turning into outright enmity.⁴²

(III) Avarice and Prodigality

The salient feature of the fourth circle, to which Virgil and Dante now descend, is overt conflict.⁴³ There are two groups of souls, the avaricious and the prodigal, both of whom push large rocks with their chests around one of the two halves of a circle. When they reach the end of the semi-circle the rocks carom off each other like billiard balls, with the prodigal unable to rid themselves of their rocks and the avaricious unable to capture the rocks of the prodigals; in either case their own rocks (i.e. - wealth) get in the way of their achieving their goals. They thereupon shout at each other, "Why do you hoard?" and "Why do you squander?",⁴⁴ after which they turn around and repeat the entire action at the other

⁴¹See note 8,p.49 above. Betrayal of family is followed by betrayal of city.

⁴²At the end of the canto the question arises whether the sinners will feel more pain when their bodies are resurrected. Virgil tells Dante to refer to his "science" (Inferno VI,106) "which has it that the more a thing is perfect, the more it feels the good, and so the pain", (Inferno VI,107-108); "*che vuol, quanto la cosa è più perfetta, / più senta il bene, e così la doglienza*".

In other words, Aristotelian science holds that the soul is properly the form of the body. It will be more "complete" when no longer separated therefrom. The gap between the perfection of the body and the distortions of gluttony will be even more apparent.

⁴³For images of conflict, see Inferno VII,28,35,59.

⁴⁴Inferno VII, 30 "*Perché tieni?*" e "*Perché burli?*".

end of the semi-circle.

This image of open partisanship illustrates graphically the relationship of the two opposed vices. "Prodigality exceeds in giving ... and is deficient in getting; meanness falls short in giving and goes to excess in getting."⁴⁵ In juxtaposition they reveal their nature as contrary extremes.⁴⁶ In Aristotelian terms, neither of them "hits the mean",⁴⁷ so that they are destined to eternal frustration.

The desire to accumulate worldly goods, already present in embryonic form among the gluttons, now assumes a more external form. No longer is it a matter simply of touch and taste. It has become more detached and calculating, and its objects are more independent and durable.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Ethics IV,i,1121a.

⁴⁶Virtue consists "essentially in the observance of the mean relative to us, this being determined by principle" (Ethics II,vi,1106b-1107a). Liberality would be the virtue exhibited in matters of wealth.

⁴⁷Cf: Ethics II,vi,1106b. Aristotle uses this image from archery to suggest that the real target is like a bullseye, and that to hit it requires excellent vision and a good deal of practice.

⁴⁸This is partly why Aristotle's doctrine of virtue as a mean is able to be illustrated more adequately in this circle than in the two preceding ones. Temperance in matters of touch and taste is indeed a mean between two extremes, profligacy and insensibility, but insensibility is extremely rare, and does not come to mind as an 'extreme'.

But external goods are subject to the "vicissitudes of fortune".⁴⁹

While the happiness which people seek in them is conceived to be permanent, "the wheel of fortune often turns full circle in the same person's experience".⁵⁰

Frustration is thereby all but inevitable, while fortune, untouched by such frustration, "turns her sphere and rejoices in her bliss"⁵¹ carrying out her duties as the "general minister"⁵² of "all that is contained by the heaven that circles least".⁵³ Her "motions are perfect, which is to say complete circles, whereas the hoarders and wasters, imperfect, go halfway round and then return ...".⁵⁴

(IV) Wrath and Sullenness

Frustration readily turns into physical violence. It is probably for this reason that Dante introduces the "wrathful and sullen" of the fifth circle in the same canto as the "avaricious and prodigal". The latter divide the city by advocating contrary policies with respect to its resources. The former go further, resorting to violence virtually for its own sake.

⁴⁹Ethics I,x,1100b.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Inferno VII,96: "*volve sua spera e beata si gode*".

⁵²Inferno VII,78: "*general ministra*".

⁵³Inferno II,77-78: "*ogne contento / di quel ciel ch'a minor li cerchi sui*". See above, Chapter II, note 52, p.34.

⁵⁴Payton, op.cit., p.68.

Thus, at the end of Canto VII, Virgil and Dante meet "the souls of those whom anger overcame"⁵⁵ at the bottom of a "dismal little stream"⁵⁶ which "boils"⁵⁷ and runs down into the marsh of the river Styx. These souls "rend and snarl at one another [on the surface of the marsh]; at the bottom, the sullen hatreds lie gurgling, unable even to express themselves for the rage that chokes them".⁵⁸

These two groups of souls are almost certainly the "Passionate" and the "Bitter-Tempered" of Aristotle's Ethics: "The excessively quick-tempered are Passionate; they fly into a passion at everything and on all occasions: hence their name. The Bitter-tempered on the other hand are implacable, and remain angry a long time, and keep their wrath in".⁵⁹

⁵⁵Inferno VII,116: "*l'anime di color cui vinse l'ira*".

⁵⁶Inferno VII,107: "*tristo ruscel*".

⁵⁷Inferno VII,101: "*bolle*".

⁵⁸Dorothy Sayers, Hell (London, n.d.). p.114. The sullen bore within them "sluggish fumes" ; "*accidioso fummo*", (Inferno VII,123) even while they were "in the sweet air that is gladdened by the sun"; "*ne l'aere dolce che dal sol s'allegra*", (Inferno VII, 122). They are immersed now in a stream whose name in Greek connotes hatred, and was in Latin interpreted as sadness (*tristitia*). (Cf: Singleton, op.cit., note to lines 106-7,pp.117-118).

⁵⁹Ethics IV,v,1126a.

Dorothy Sayers comments: "This is the last of the Circles of Incontinence. This savage self-frustration is the end of that which had its tender and romantic beginnings in the dalliance of indulged passion".⁶⁰ It is as low as one can go by means of a semi-conscious falling into evil habits. Both the increasing narrowness of the circles as one descends and the confinement of the sinners within the marshy mud indicate the difficulty of further movements. Even the elements seem to have sunken to their limit; the first circle was dominated by a "fire"; the second by wind and air; the third by rain and water (and mud); and now, in the fifth circle the dominant element is mud, i.e. - earth.

The resentment of the sullen has become such a concentrated emotion that it is difficult to consider it as caused simply by a neglect of reason due to passion. It is rather so encompassing that the neglect is virtually due to a conscious attitude and choice.⁶¹ It almost loses the basic quality of incontinence, which implies the retention of sufficient power of dispassionate reason so that

⁶⁰Sayers, op.cit., p.114.

⁶¹ There is possibly a conflation among the sullen between the characteristics of the "Bitter-tempered" and the "insensible". Of the latter, Aristotle states at Ethics III,xi,1119a: "Men erring on the side of deficiency as regard pleasures, and taking less than a proper amount of enjoyment in them, scarcely occur". They are like the "sullen", "*trist*" of Inferno VII,121.

The finality of the state of sullenness is brought into focus by St. Thomas (S.T. I,IIae,25,1): "and it is thus clear that every irascible passion ends in a concupiscible passion pertaining to rest; either to joy, that is to say, or to sadness [*ad tristitiam*]."

repentance remains a possibility.⁶²

(V) On the verge of Nether Hell

Throughout the descent thus far, Dante has followed Aristotle's Ethics very carefully. Like Aristotle, he has moved from the realm of bodily existence to the realm of the more social and rational. Aristotle had considered courage at Ethics III,vi,ff.; temperance at Ethics III,x,ff.; liberality at IV,1,ff., and anger at IV,v. Dante treats of courage down to the first circle, temperance in circles two and three, liberality in the fourth circle and anger in the fifth.

In the Comedy he has reached the point at which reason risks being engulfed by passion unless it is consciously exercised. This is the state of affairs at the time of the incident with Filippo Argenti.

This "furious"⁶³ soul tries to capsize the boat in which Dante and Virgil are being ferried across the Styx by Phlegyas (himself a symbol of irrational rage). Virgil thrusts him off and Dante curses him. Argenti is last seen not only being attacked by other irascible spirits but actually turning "on himself with his

⁶²The next logical step is stated by Aristotle at Ethics III,v,1114a: "The unjust and the profligate might have avoided becoming so, and therefore they are so voluntarily, although when they have become unjust and profligate it is no longer open to them not to be so".

⁶³Inferno VIII,48: "*furiosa*".

teeth".⁶⁴

Conversely, Dante's anger is governed by reason, as is shown by Virgil's enthusiastic approval.⁶⁵ This anger serves to protect Dante against the dangers of complete irrationality.⁶⁶

In short, when they approach the walls of Dis, reason and appetite are shown to be in a state of complete contradiction in the sinners of the marsh. Moreover, a community of such sinners would be a logical impossibility. Due to their rage, they cannot even preserve their own persons intact, let alone a city.

⁶⁴Inferno VIII,63: "*in sé medesimo si volvea co' denti*".

⁶⁵Cf: Inferno VIII,43-57.

⁶⁶On the quality of such anger, see Ethics IV,v,1126a: "when a man retaliates there is an end of the matter: the pain of resentment is replaced by the pleasure of obtaining redress, and so his anger ceases".

Chapter Five: Reason contrary to the Good

(I) The City of Dis

In the poem, when the sense of principle has been destroyed, one has reached the City of Dis. What this means is explained clearly by Aristotle: "The first principles of actions are the end to which our acts are means: but a man corrupted by love of pleasure or fear of pain, entirely fails to discern any first principle...".¹ He doesn't perceive that he should measure his actions by that standard, "for vice tends to destroy the sense of principle".²

The City of Dis is a fortress with walls of iron.³ Behind the walls there are mosques, it seems, rather than churches, and they are seen by the light of "the eternal fire that blazes there within".⁴ Upon the battlements Dante sees "more than a thousand of those rained down from Heaven",⁵ and these refuse entrance

¹Ethics, VI,v,1140b.

²ibid.

³Cf: Inferno VIII,68-69,76-78.

⁴Inferno VIII,73-74: "*Il foco eterno / ch'entro l'affoca.*" The mosques are really the tombs of the heretics. They are here to stand for a counter-church, just as the City of Dis stands for an inverted City of God.

⁵Inferno VIII,82-83: "*... più di mille ... / da ciel piovuti ...*".

entrance to Virgil and Dante.

Virgil, who has power over the passions, has no power over these fallen angels, who, as spiritual beings, are, rather, perverted rational wills.⁶ Alongside them, the three Furies, embodiments of vengeance, rise up and threaten to turn Dante to stone⁷ by having Medusa come with the Gorgon's head. In the narrative, this betokens a state of complete immobility, which not even the sullen have attained⁸ - the paralysis of reason, or principle.

The arrival of a "messenger from Heaven"⁹ finally breaches the defences. The wicked angels disperse, since they - and their city - have no power independent of God. Dante and Virgil go through the gate and turn right¹⁰ in order

⁶To Virgil, the City of Dis would be the equivalent of Tartarus. (See Singleton, *op.cit.*, note 78 on Canto VIII, p.129). In the *Aeneid* Aeneas never visits Tartarus. Here Virgil says that he has gone all the way to the bottom of the Inferno once, at the behest of the evil sorceress Erichtho.

⁷Cf: *Inferno* IX,52ff.

⁸Cf: Sayers, *op.cit.*, p.127. "In the allegory, [Medusa] is the image of despair which so hardens the heart that it becomes powerless to repent".

⁹*Inferno* IX,85: "*da ciel messo*".

¹⁰Cf: *Inferno* IX,132. Cf: John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), p.87. "Heresy, unlike all other sins in hell, attacks the true, and not the Good; which is to say, in the words of St. Thomas, that its *subjectum* is not *voluntas* but rather *intellectus* It is for this reason that the

to make their way among the glowing tombs of "the heresiarchs with their followers".¹¹

The heretics have always seemed an anomaly to interpreters of Dante. Edward Moore wrote that "with the exception of Pope Anastasius, there are no 'heretics', properly so called, mentioned here at all".¹² Mark Musa takes the sixth circle to be about "a clearly willed sin based on intellectual pride, and because it denies the Christian concept of reality, it is punished outside the area allocated to the Christian categories of sin".¹³

Once it is realized that Dante is still following Aristotle's Ethics quite closely, the anomaly vanishes. Here is Busnelli on the position of heresy in the Comedy:

In incontinence practical reason does not lose its rectitude with respect to its judgment of the end, but in malice reason is perverted and judges it good to pursue that evil which the will then freely "*ex electione*" intends and seeks. And heresy belongs to the genus of malice as a species not necessarily connected with injustice against

pilgrim must perform his retrograde movement to the right, in order to deal with an aberration of the intellect in the realm of perverted will."

¹¹Inferno IX,127-128: "... *li eresiarche / con lor seguaci ...*".

¹²Edward Moore, Studies in Dante, Second Series, (New York, 1968),p.177.

¹³Mark Musa, Dante, The Divine Comedy, Vol I: Inferno (New York,1984),p.157.

one's neighbour, and distinct from "every malice of which injustice is the end" [which will be the subject of the Inferno from the seventh circle on].¹⁴

Malicious injury presupposes perverted reason. Dante therefore places the sin of heresy before the sins of injustice, and after the sins of incontinence. In this he follows Aristotle's precedent in dividing incontinence from vice "proper", since this latter involves "choice", defined as "voluntary action preceded by deliberation, since choice involves reasoning and some process of thought."¹⁵ What is most remarkable about this is simply the etymology. The Greek word for "choice" is *prohairesis*, in short, *heresy*.¹⁶

In Aristotle, this word is distinguished from *boulesis*, which means "wish" or "will". "We wish rather for ends than for means, but choose the means to our end."¹⁷ The end, which the natural light of reason discerns as the Good, is obscured by incontinent habits, so that men are led to seek false goods and to deliberate how to procure them.

¹⁴Busnelli,op.cit.,p.94.

¹⁵Ethics III,ii,1112a.

¹⁶Ibid. Cf: Busnelli,op.cit.,note 1,p.94.

¹⁷Ethics III,ii,1111b.

Aristotle argues in this manner. "That eye of the soul of which we spoke cannot acquire the quality of Prudence without possessing Virtue."¹⁸ (Prudence means deliberative wisdom). "For deductive inferences about matters of conduct always have a major premise of the form 'Since the end or supreme Good is so and so ... but the Supreme Good only appears good to the good man: vice perverts the mind and causes it to hold false views about the first principles of conduct' ".¹⁹

Perverted reason, or heresy, lies at the very junction of vice with reason. Its presence indicates that, after courage and temperance, the third cardinal virtue of wisdom disappears here as well.²⁰

(II) Heresy

The tombs of the heretics are open and glowing hot. They are grouped according to the specific heresy, as Virgil implies when he tells Dante where "Epicurus with all his followers, who make the soul die with the body, have

¹⁸Ethics VI,xii,1144a.

¹⁹Ibid. Cf: Ibid. "Also Prudence as well as Moral Virtue determines the complete performance of man's proper function: Virtue ensures the rightness of the means we adopt to gain that end" - and Ethics VI,xiii,1145a.

²⁰Reason will now come to be directed against the objective good.

their dwelling place."²¹

For Dante, as for Aristotle, the human body is given unity and form by the rational soul.²² Epicurus's denial of this is tantamount to the considered belief that it is corporeal desire rather than reason which should guide deliberation. This is the general principle which distinguishes heresy from incontinence, where the standard of reason is still perceived.

The first "Epicurean" they meet is Farinata, who quarrels with Dante because the latter's family are Guelfs. This partisanship involves making the whole of the city dependent on a part - a family or political party. It thereby inverts the proper relationship and is analogous to the error of making the rational soul dependent upon the body.²³

²¹Inferno X,14-15: "... *con Epicuro tutti suoi seguaci /che l'anima col corpo morta fanno*".

²²For a more extended discussion about the relationship between the rational soul and the body, see Purgatorio XXV,37-84.

²³Cavalcanti, the other soul introduced here, is a Guelf partisan. He is distraught because his son is not with Dante. The latter tells Cavalcanti that Virgil, "whom perhaps your Guido had in disdain" (Inferno X,63), has led him here. Guido is an Averroist, and would not have followed Virgil, since he would not have believed that reason could have any definitive power over the passions. See

The souls in this sixth circle are able to predict the distant future, but know nothing about the present.²⁴ The heretics are unable to link what they sense to their reason.²⁵ They are unable consequently to act rationally - to relate their intellects to their wills. Their intellects become abstract, like those of separated spirits. At the Last Judgment they will be reunited to their bodies, but their tombs will be closed shut. The heat will become more intolerable, and the bodies which they valued so highly will become means of torture.²⁶

At the beginning of the next canto, Dante introduces his readers to another heresy, when he and Virgil come upon the tomb of Pope Anastasius. Dante believed this pope to have been a disciple of Photinus, who had dissociated God the Son from Christ - who was supposed only to have been human. This division between divine and human is analogous to that between soul and body in the

above, pp.30-36.

²⁴Cf: Inferno X,100-108.

²⁵Ciacco can still relate the two. Among the incontinent, reason itself is still intact. He can use it to judge the present and to tell Dante about Florence. See above, p.58.

²⁶Cf: St. Augustine, Confessions VI,26: "I held that Epicurus had in my mind won the palm, had I not believed, that after death there remained a life for the soul, and places of requital according to men's deserts, which Epicurus would not believe". Perhaps Dante thought of this passage when he wrote of the life of the soul after death, and the dependence of the body on the soul.

minds of Latin Averroists.²⁷

The sins of the sixth circle are all closely related. In the structure of the Comedy they are not anomalous.

(III) The Organization of the Inferno.

While they rest at the tomb, Virgil explains to Dante the organization of the Inferno. This is the last suitable time for such a reasoned discourse. In the circle of heresy reason is turning upon itself. Further below, there is even less rationality.

Virgil begins by explaining the three lower circles to which they are proceeding. These are for sinners with malice who committed injustice "by force or by fraud."²⁸ Dante probably takes this distinction from Ethics V,ii,1131a, where it is stated that "[of] voluntary transactions some are furtive, for instance, theft, adultery, poisoning, procuring, enticement of slaves, assassination, false witness; others are violent, for instance, assault, imprisonment, murder, robbery with

²⁷There may be some irony intended here too about the relation of the body to the soul. The pope's name derives from *anastasis*, which can mean resurrection in Greek.

²⁸Inferno XI,24: "*o con forza o con frode*".

violence, maiming, abusive language, contumelious treatment." While it is sometimes presumed that Dante's source is Cicero's De Officiis I,13,41,²⁹ it is more likely that he simply follows Aristotle, whom he has been following all along.³⁰

Virgil goes on to say that the circle of violence is located above the circles of fraud,³¹ for, "because fraud is an evil peculiar to man, / it more displeases God."³² W.H.V. Reade argued that this assertion "has no warrant in the systems of Aristotle, Cicero or St. Thomas, and no support in Dante's own doctrine of *voluntas*".³³ Against this one could reply that since wisdom or contemplation is for Aristotle the highest human end the self-inflicted corruption of reason in fraud

²⁹See, for example, Musa, op.cit., p.173, or Edward Moore, Studies of Dante, First Series, (New York, 1968), p. 259, who wrote that the distinction between the sins of violence and the sins of fraud "is certainly derived from the De Officiis of Cicero...".

³⁰Dante gives a list of furtive sins at Inferno XI,58-60, which is quite similar in form to the list quoted from the Ethics: "wherefore in the second circle hypocrisy, flatteries, sorcerers, falsity, theft, simony, panders, barratry, and like filth have their nest"; "*onde nel cerchio secondo s'annida / ipocresia, lusinghe e chi affattura, / falsità, ladroneccio e simonia, / ruffian, baratti e simile lordura*". For a list of violent sins, see Inferno XI,34-39.

³¹Dante divides the seventh circle into sins of violence against (i) neighbour, (ii) self and (iii) God. Below, the eighth circle concerns sins of fraud which destroy the natural trust of men in one another, and the ninth circle sins of fraud against those to whom one owes a special trust.

³²Inferno XI,25-26: "... *perché frode è de l'uom proprio male, / più spiace a Dio*".

³³W.H.V. Reade, The Moral System of Dante's Inferno, (Oxford,1909),p.421.

should constitute the greatest human sin. Certainly it is peculiar to man, as Joan Ferrante makes perfectly evident. She writes that "animals cannot conceive it, since they communicate by instinctive action; angels cannot practice it, since they communicate by direct intuition. Only men can deceive each other."³⁴

Hence, just as incontinence leads to the subjection of reason by concupiscible appetite, and violence leads to the subjection of reason by irascible appetite, fraud leads to the self-destruction of reason.

Virgil himself relates the sins of incontinence to the sins of injustice by introducing from the Ethics "the three dispositions which Heaven wills not: incontinence, malice and mad bestiality."³⁵ If these are to correspond to the three main divisions of hell, there is a difficulty. Malice has already been identified with the sins of injustice which include both force and fraud. Thus there is no obvious place left for "mad bestiality." Musa argues that this category is superfluous.³⁶

³⁴Ferrante, op.cit.,p.153.

³⁵Inferno XI,81-83: "*le tre disposizion che'l ciel non vole, / incontinenza, malizia e la matta / bestialitade*". These distinctions come from Ethics VII,i,1145a.

³⁶Musa, op.cit., writes, on page 174: "Virgil's mention of the three sins treated by Aristotle is merely a device to introduce the work of the Greek philosopher and to indicate the exact book from which he will quote his distinction between Incontinence and Malice, for the threefold reference is found in the first sentence

Reade takes it to signify force - thus confining malice to fraud.³⁷ It may also be taken to refer specifically to Dis, or Satan, since it is a third term in descending order after incontinence and malice. As Aristotle points out, "we sometimes also use 'bestial' as a term of opprobrium for a surpassing degree of human vice."³⁸ - Finally, Payton may well be correct in interpreting "mad bestiality" to refer to the bestiality of hell as a whole, prominent in such figures as Minos, Cerberus and Plutus.³⁹ In this case, a reference of bestiality to Dis as the culminating instance would not be inappropriate.

The last question of the canto is how the sin of usury "offends / the divine Goodness."⁴⁰ Once more, Virgil refers Dante to the works of Aristotle, this time to the Physics. There it is taught that human art imposes form on natural

of Book VII of the Nichomachean Ethics".

³⁷Reade, loc.cit., argues that the claim that fraud most displeases God is "an effective device (a) for getting *bestialitas* into the circle of *forza*, (b) for thrusting *frode* down into the lowest circles of all".

³⁸Ethics VII,i,1145a. Aristotle elaborates: "Hence, if, as men say, surpassing virtue changes men in to gods, the disposition opposed to Bestiality will clearly be some quality more than human; for there is no such thing as Virtue in the case of a god, any more than there is Vice or Virtue in the case of a beast: divine goodness is something more exalted than Virtue, and bestial badness is different in kind from Vice".

³⁹Cf: Payton, op.cit.,p.84.

⁴⁰Inferno XI,95-96: "... *offende / la divina bontade ...*".

objects, thereby imitating the forms placed in nature by the divine intellect. By refusing to be productive, as Adam and his descendants were enjoined to do in Genesis, usurers refuse to participate in this divine scheme of things.⁴¹

Thereafter, Dante and Virgil begin their descent of the cliff.

⁴¹Cf: Inferno XI,97-111.

Chapter Six: The Conscious Destruction of Natural Order

(I) The Seventh Circle

With the seventh circle, Dante is no longer able to follow Aristotle's Ethics so closely. He does, of course, show the readers what life is like with the elimination of the fourth and final cardinal virtue of justice.¹ But Aristotle writes relatively little about evil per se. Apart from the list of violent and furtive sins quoted above, there is an even shorter mention of vicious acts and emotions in Book II: "malice, shamelessness, envy, and, of actions, adultery, theft, murder".² There is nowhere a systematic treatment, for Aristotle almost always writes about ethical life by moving from the imperfect towards the perfect.

Dante structures the circle, instead, on the model of the inversion of the two great commandments, to love God, and one's neighbour as oneself. First,

¹The inhabitants of the bottom three circles will be "the worst", who practise "the whole of vice". (Ethics V,1,1130a). Aristotle discusses courage, temperance, justice and wisdom in that order. He deals with justice primarily as a specific virtue pertinent to external social relations before going on to treat of the internal virtue of wisdom in the soul. Dante considers wisdom before justice probably because he wants to deal with justice as a general virtue. Cf: Ethics V,i,1129b. "Justice ... in this sense is perfect virtue, though with a qualification, namely that it is displayed towards others. This is why Justice is often thought to be the chief of the virtues And justice is the perfect virtue because it is the practice of perfect virtue; and perfect in a special degree, because its possessor can practise his virtue towards others and not merely by himself."

²Ethics II,vi,1107a.

violence is committed against one's neighbour and his property. Then, quite possibly since such acts have their source, in Aristotle's view, in evil habits contracted by the self, there is violence against the self and its means of sustenance. Finally, since such evil habits presuppose a blindness to the Good (as among the heretics), there is violence against God, against God's "property", i.e. - nature, and against the measure of human action and art implicit in that nature, (and hence against the whole notion of an *imitatio Dei*). The result is an obliteration of all external models of order that could represent opposition to unbridled appetite.

(II) Violence to Neighbour

In Canto XII, the descent becomes abruptly steeper as Virgil and Dante encounter the Minotaur at the top of an "alpine"³ slope leading down to the seventh circle. Just as Minos guarded the entrance to the circles of incontinence, the Minotaur, hybrid symbol of "bestial wrath",⁴ guards the entrance to the rings of violence. The transition is made from the sins of the leopard to the sins of the lion.

³Inferno XII,2, "*alpestro*".

⁴Inferno XII,33, "*ira bestial*".

The steepness of the path probably alludes to both the increasing speed with which sinners can make their way downward and to the far lower depths they can reach now that the impediment of objective reason has been overcome. Human community wavered upon the brink of destruction amidst the wrathful and sullen in the marsh of Styx. Now, with justice consciously spurned, Dante and Virgil arrive at a "river of blood..." in which boils everyone / who by violence injures others".⁵ Those immersed most deeply in the blood are tyrants.⁶ They have enlisted reason in service of the irascible element in their souls and have created a society steeped in blood. Accompanying them are those who have plundered the possessions of others. The body politic has become the image of what Farinata thought it should be. The whole is violently subordinated to the part and can be held there only by continued violence. The suggestion of civil war pervades the atmosphere of this first ring of the violent, and it remains present down to the bottom of the circle.⁷

(III) Injury to Self

Injury to neighbour is consequent upon evil habits cultivated by the

⁵Inferno XII,47-48, "... *riviera del sangue in la qual bolle / qual che per violenza in altrui nocchia*".

⁶Cf: Ethics V,vi,1134a-1134b: "this is why we do not permit a man to rule, but the law, because a man rules in his own interest, and becomes a tyrant ...".

⁷This results mostly from the prominence of partisans, either Guelf or Ghibelline, throughout the circle.

self. When Dante and Virgil descend into the second ring they discover those who had done injury to themselves either by suicide or by squandering consciously their means of livelihood.⁸ The suicides have become disfigured trees in a ghastly wood: "No green leaves, but of dusky hue; / no smooth boughs, but gnarled and warped ; / no fruits were there, but thorns with poison".⁹

The suicides have been cast like seed into the dead forest and have grown at random. Their only "outlet" is through the wounds inflicted upon their branches by Harpies. They will recover their bodies at the Last Judgment, but to no avail, since these bodies will be hung on their branches. They had not valued the order and productivity of the world and had deprived themselves of the very means of worldly activity. It is now a stunted world in which they live, without both order and productivity. They share it with the wastrels.

The two travellers meet Pier delle Vigne here. He had been the first minister of Frederick II and had held "both the keys of Frederick's heart"¹⁰ - presumably the keys of justice and mercy. He used them not to render the ruler

⁸Cf: Ethics IV,i,1120a, where Aristotle likens profligacy to self-destruction. It is "to ruin oneself, inasmuch as wealth is the means of life".

⁹Inferno XIII,4-6: "*Non fronda verde, ma di color fosco; / non rami schietti, ma nodosi e 'nvolti; / non pomi v'eran, ma stecchi con tòsco*".

¹⁰Inferno XIII,58-59: "... *ambo le chiavi / del cor di Federigo*...".

accessible to his subjects but rather to keep Frederick's secrets.¹¹ This naturally aroused envy, and this issued into false accusations which led to Pier's disgrace, imprisonment and suicide.

At the end of the canto, they meet another suicide, who "made [himself] a gibbet of [his] own house"¹² - in Florence, a city in a chronic state of civil war.¹³ As with the imagery of the wood and with the government of Pier delle Vigne, there is also here an inversion, a turning inwards to the exclusion of reality.

The intention of the kind of suicide referred to in the above instances is self-contradictory. The aim is to harm the self through harming the body, but the act is undertaken to achieve an apparent good - to the self. The outcome is bound to be paradoxical. When Pier confesses, for example, that his act "made me unjust against my just self",¹⁴ he is asserting that the clear outcome was harm to spirit as well as body, due to the exercise of evil will. The correct course of action, had this been possible, would have been to retaliate.¹⁵

¹¹Cf: Inferno XIII,61.

¹²Cf: Inferno XIII,151: "*lo fei gibetto a me de le mie case*".

¹³Cf: Inferno XIII,143-145.

¹⁴Inferno XIII,72 "*ingiusto fece me contra me giusto*".

¹⁵ Aristotle believed that it was impossible to commit an injustice against the self, so that suicide had to be considered as a crime "against the state". (Ethics V, xi, 1138a). One reason may be that in an act like Pier's, the injustice committed

(IVa) Attempted Injury to God: Blasphemy

The last of the three rings is located on a stretch of burning sand upon which flakes of fire fall without pause. Here there are three groups of souls. "Some were lying supine on the ground, some sitting all crouched up, and others were going about incessantly".¹⁶ The differences in gravity of their respective sins seem not as prominent as the similarities.

The first soul here is Capaneus, the Blasphemer, who had defied Jove while scaling the walls of Thebes, and does so now while lying supine on the fiery sand. He recalls Farinata in his defiance. The difference lies in the active violence of Capaneus. Virgil comments upon his punishment: "no torment save your own raging would be pain to match your fury".¹⁷

Capaneus desires, of course, to punish his Creator, not himself, but such a desire is self-contradictory. For without his Creator his self would not exist.

against him remains unpunished, to the detriment of the justice that should reign in the state. Cf: also, Ethics V,xi,1138b, and for Dante's opinion that it is impossible to will harm to the self, Purgatorio, XVII, 105-108.

¹⁶Inferno XIV,22-24. "*Supin giacea in terra alcuna gente, / alcuna si sedea tutta raccolta / e altra andava continüamente*".

¹⁷Inferno XIV,65-66: "*nullo martiro, fuor che la tua rabbia, / sarebbe al tuo furor dolor compito*".

Capaneus's act flies in the face of reality, and is an act of "pride",¹⁸ like the acts of Dis. In Aristotelian language, it amounts to a denial of God who is "pure activity", and without whom there are no potential existents.¹⁹ As such, it represents a kind of conclusion to the seventh circle, as is shown by Capaneus's punishment, marginally the worst of the third ring. It is also shown by the episode which follows.

Virgil and Dante come across a bloody rivulet, and Virgil then explains the relationships between the rivers of hell. They are the tears of the Old Man of Crete, and they originate in a cleft beneath his golden head. As the story goes, the old man stands within Mount Ida in his island in the middle of the sea, looking upon Rome "as his mirror",²⁰ and with his back to the Holy Land. His body is made of increasingly baser metal the lower it goes, and he rests mostly on his right foot, which is made of baked clay. The mountain, once fertile, is now the deserted centre of a wasted land.²¹

¹⁸Inferno XIV, 64: "*superbia*".

¹⁹Dante argues that injury to the Creator is unthinkable. (Purgatorio XVII,109-111). See St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae,I,44-49, for the relation of the Creator to creatures.

²⁰Inferno XIV, 105: "*come sūo specchio*".

²¹Cf: Inferno XIV, 94-120. To Virgil, the whole story is tantamount to a description of man's decline, from the time of the Golden Age. Just as in the descent of the Inferno, the "journey" downward takes place because the right foot, which presumably represents the intellect, is made of clay. Its "vision" is weak. (Cf:above,note 31, Chapter 1,p.28).

Crete is the converse of Mount Purgatory, which is also situated on

The figure is a recapitulation of the journey thus far. It directs the reader downwards, to Cocytus at the bottom of the Inferno.

(IVb) Attempted Injury to God: Sodomy

The second group on the burning sand is that of the Sodomites. Theirs is the lightest of the three punishments, since they are always in motion. Among them is Brunetto Latini, who has taught Dante "how man makes himself eternal".²² Here he continues to advise Dante to purge himself of those Florentine customs that they inherited from the bestial Fiesolans,²³ and to keep pure his (Florentine) Roman heritage.

The scorn of nature characteristic of sodomy²⁴ seems to surface again in the vain glory of Latini and in his praise of the refinement of literature,

an island in the centre of the sea. Eden is located on its peak, and Virgil on the ascent up the mountain will look to the restoration of the Golden Age. Dante will face to the east when he arrives there, the direction from which comes the procession of the revealed truth. This is contrary to the Old Man, who looks west.

It should be added that Virgil would have approved the looking to the west, to the Eternal City, except that the vision is now of the city in a state of disintegration.

²²Inferno XV,85: "*come l'uom s'eterna*".

²³Cf: Inferno XV,73: "*le bestie fiesolane*"; "the Fiesolan beasts". Aristotle, at Ethics VII,v,11486, treats sodomy as an instance of bestiality.

²⁴See above, p.77.

removed from the mundane activities of ordinary life.²⁵ Richard Lansing indicates briefly why this withdrawal from the common lot is reprehensible. "As God created man in his own image, so must man, in discharging God's will, recreate himself in his own image. The Homosexuals repudiate that mandate ...".²⁶ Sodomy is effectively a sin against procreative power.²⁷ It does not so much destroy this as attempt to substitute an artificial world in its place.

(IVc) Attempted Injury to God: Usury

The third group on the burning sand, the Usurers, do not appear until well after Virgil has begun to arrange passage to the eighth circle.²⁸ This clearly associates usury with fraud. Usury, the attempt to make money, the common

²⁵Latini's speech emphasizes worldly fame and "fortune". Dante's conversation with three other Florentine Sodomites in Canto XVI, 28-90, will do much the same. This serves to recall to the reader what had been said about worldliness in the fourth circle. See above, pp.57-59.

²⁶Richard Lansing, "Dante's Concept of Violence and the Chain of Being", in Dante Studies XCIX, (Albany, 1981),p.81.

²⁷Lansing, loc.cit., calls attention to the primacy of the generative power with respect to the nutritive and augmentative powers, in Aristotle's works. He also quotes St. Thomas: "*Est enim rei jam perfectae FACERE ALTERAM QUALIS IPSE EST*" (S.T.I,78,2); " For it is a property of a perfect entity to produce another like itself".

²⁸ At the bottom of the circles of incontinence, Dante introduced the "sullen", who occupied the lowest position, before he wrote about Filippo Argenti, who was one of the "wrathful". Here, in a similar manner, he has presented the reader with Capaneus before introducing the Usurers. Yet Capaneus's punishment is worse than that of the Sodomites and even that of the Usurers, whose punishment is second in rank. Is this because there is little to choose between them, in either instance, or is it also to show more easily the continuity between the respective circles and those which follow?

measure of social value, itself productive for the benefit of individual families, easily becomes a furtive activity.²⁹ Usurers, in their perversely artificial attempt to replace nature by substituting an abstract process, are as unproductive as the Sodomites.

(V) The Destruction of Nature

The seventh circle as a whole is strikingly different from the circles above. To begin with, it is more complex, and this may indicate that, as evil deepens, it becomes less and less simple. No longer, moreover, does Dante make his way downward in a semi-conscious (or unconscious) state. The conscious effort is greater, since he is in a region where the descent from one sin to another is consciously willed. The more basic difference lies in the fact that one recognizes "Incontinence as the sinful excess of natural and therefore good passions and violence as the yielding to unnatural and therefore inherently bad passions. It is unnatural to want to harm another, oneself, or the Deity".³⁰

²⁹Singleton notes, op.cit.,note 67-73,pp.302-303, that here, for the first time, "a soul maliciously names other sinners ... in the hope that the wayfarer will report their shameful deeds to the world of the living". Usurers are furtive in that they wish to avoid worldly fame. Aristotle compares petty-usurers to brothel-keepers at Ethics IV,i,1121b-1122a. Both practise a degrading trade, (which provides them with a motive to remain unknown). Aristotle elsewhere calls the life of money-making "a constrained kind of life". (Ethics I,v,1096a).

³⁰Lansing, op.cit.,p.72.

It is also a delusion to believe that, while progressively defying the two great commandments, one is acting more and more realistically. By substituting one's will for law, one is progressively destroying any vestige of ordered reality.

The imagery says it all. One moves from a river of blood through a lifeless forest to a desert of fiery sand. In Lansing's interpretation the centaurs of the first ring mark a degeneration from rational to animal activity, the suicides signify a movement from that to plant life, and the third ring shows the destruction of life altogether.³¹

John Freccero makes the following observation about usury, the last sin dealt with in the circle. "This is the only sin in Dante's Inferno which the poet specifically tells us is against human industry. For it is the only sin which methodically and systematically reproduces the materials it began with in a parody of productivity which is in fact sterile".³² In usury, the human intellect proceeds

³¹Cf:ibid.,p.75. Lansing takes violence, characteristic of the whole circle, to mean "physical assault on the life force of the individual or human race", (p.80), - whence one can understand why Dante includes Sodomy and Usury as violent sins.

³²Quoted in Singleton, op.cit.,note 33,p.299. Freccero identifies usury as a sin of the lower activity of the human intellect, heresy being a sin of its highest, speculative activity. This suggests the downward movement through Cantos six and seven. (The quotation is taken from Freccero, "Dante's Pilgrim in a Gyre", in Dante, the Poetics of Conversion, Cambridge, 1986, p.89.)

with what it has begun in sodomy, substituting its own order for the natural order. In terms of the continued descent, the opposition of nature to the human will has been obliterated. What remains is the direct opposition of the rational soul, which is able to be the recipient of divine grace. This will be the subject of the circles of fraud, which will be the actuality of complete injustice, which is able to operate without opposition.³³

³³ The location and structure of the seventh circle invite comparison with the location and structure of "Purgatory proper" in the Purgatorio. The respective positions of each are in the middle of the two poems. Each contains seven sections, with the seventh circle dealing with neighbour, neighbour's property, self, self's property, God, God's nature, and the art which imitates it.

More important, the purpose of "Purgatory proper", inverse to that of the seventh circle, is to conform the passions to the rule of reason. The landscape there is also bleak, but it finally issues into a beautiful garden rather than a barren desert. The golden age is there restored.

Chapter Seven: The Conscious Destruction of Human Order

(I) The Inner City of Dis

The inner city of Dis is a pit surrounded by ten circular ditches joined by bridges. The approach to it recalls the approach to the outer city. "There is a place in Hell called Malebolge, all of stone which is the color of iron like the wall that goes around it. Right in the middle of this malign field yawns a pit very wide and deep ...".¹

Dante follows Aristotle in that he structures the life of this inner city according to Aristotle's theory of friendship. It is, however, a negative city which Dante constructs. Aristotle had not known a doctrine of Original Sin, and consequently had no compelling interest in the degeneration of the will left to its own resources; as was noted above, p.76, the Ethics always moves upwards, to the divine and not away from it. To Dante, on the other hand, the articulation of a realm of evil becomes a complementary undertaking to that of articulating the

¹Inferno XVIII,1-5 *un Luogo è in inferno detto Malebolge,
tutto di pietra di color ferrigno,
come la cerchia che dintorno il volge.
Nel dritto mezzo del campo maligno
vaneggia pozzo assai largo e profondo.*

Civitas Dei, the Paradiso - the realm where Original Sin has been overcome.²

The Malebolge, with its central pit, is transfigured into the perverse and unavailing imitation of Paradise.

(II) Geryon

To the soul who has eliminated the "life forces" of the eternal world which oppose the individual will, the only remaining means of descent are internal ones. To go to the eighth circle, Virgil and Dante descend "on the right hand side and [take] ten steps upon the verge",³ in order to summon Geryon, the "foul image of fraud".⁴ On his back they will travel below; the approach to the realms of fraud is through fraud itself.⁵

Geryon comes because Dante takes off his cord and flings it into the deep ravine. This act suggests the surrender of a defence. There are no material obstacles which are proof against this beast with the face of a just man, the body of a beast and a hidden but treacherous tail. If one divests oneself of spiritual defences as well, one is helpless, as perhaps Adam and Eve were in the

²See above, pp.8-12, on Augustine and the two cities.

³Inferno XVII,31-32: "... *scendemmo a la destra mammella, / e diece passi femmo in su lo stremo*".

⁴Inferno XVII,7: "*sozza imagine di froda*".

⁵The ten steps to the right may signify the necessity of denying the ten commandments in order to enter the realms of fraud.

garden when they were tempted by the serpent. The image of Geryon represents what was the true nature of the serpent. "Behold the beast with the pointed tail, that passes mountains and breaks walls and weapons! Behold him that infects all the world".⁶ The surrender to temptation leads ultimately to the rapid descent into fraud.⁷ The speed is dizzying, since there is nothing external which can prevent the fall through a very great distance (represented in the poem by means of a waterfall).

(III) The Malebolge

Because the Malebolge is so complex it is useful first to present it in one comprehensive view. This may be done by reproducing Joan Ferrante's summary exposition and her brief but convincing explanation of its significance.

⁶Inferno XVII,1-3: *Ecco la fiera con la coda aguzza,
che passa i monti e rompe i muri e l'armi!
Ecco colei che tutto 'l mondo appuzza.*

⁷See above,pp.25-29. The unexpected nature of the beast which is caught with the belt is magnified by the presence of spots on its trunk (reminiscent of the leopard) and paws, "hairy to the armpits", "*pilose insin l'ascelle*", Inferno XVII,13, (reminiscent of the lion and the wolf). In this light Geryon is a composite beast who recapitulates all of the sins in his person.

It is interesting that the first sinner we meet in the Malebolge is the furtive (Cf: Inferno XVIII. 46-47) Caccianemico, whose name suggests that the *nemico* or enemy has been hunted (from *cacciare*, to hunt) - and caught. The prominence of the motif of avarice suggests that we are now in the realms of the wolf. So does line 99, which says that the first bolgia has sinners "in its fangs"; "...*n sé 'assanna*".

He arranges the ten sections so that they seem to be distortions or intensifications of the large categories of Hell's nine circles or the manipulation of the impulse to those sins in others, the organizing of sin for profit:

	FRAUD, EIGHTH CIRCLE	CIRCLES OF HELL
sec.	1. panderers, seducers	2. lust
	2. flatterers	3. gluttony
	3. simoniacs	4. avarice
	4. false prophets	prodigality
	5. barrators	5. wrath
	6. hypocrites	6. heresy
	7. thieves	7. violence
	8. counsellors of fraud	8. fraud
	9. disseminators of scandal, schism	9. treachery, betrayal
	10. falsifiers (of elements, persons, coins, words)	Satan.

Seducers and panderers turn the lust of others to their gain; flatterers indulge the gluttonous appetite of others for praise; simoniacs feed their own greed for money on others' greed for position; false prophets squander their gifts of divining to feed others' reckless desire to know the future. Barrators attack the structure of the state, ultimately a self-destructive act, since the state is an extension of the self, just as the wrathful vent their passions on themselves when there is no other object to hand.

Hypocrites deceive others with a false appearance of piety, while heretics, who search for truth, accept false beliefs; thieves take by stealth, the violent by force, both interfering with the providential order; counselors of fraud advise others to use fraud; disseminators of scandal and schism advise others to treachery, the one case in which the act itself is worse than the inducement to it. The last section has no counterpart among the sins: if the falsifiers, who abuse all the essentials of human existence making both civilized life and salvation impossible, have any counterpart, it can only be Satan, the perverse reflection of the creator of those elements.⁸

Like the figure of Geryon, the eighth circle gathers together the sins

⁸Ferrante, *op.cit.*, pp.167-168.

of incontinence and violence, transfigures them and incorporates them into a new and wider framework.

The transition from upper Hell into the City of Dis is clearly echoed in the new structure. The juncture of the fifth and sixth bolge, (barratry and hypocrisy), is the site of a broken bridge. Virgil is deceived at this point by demons, just as he had been halted by the fallen angels at the gate of the City. The progress downwards here becomes more difficult, just as it had ceased to be almost unconscious at the entrance to the City. Finally, as will become clear during the following discussion of the Malebolge, the character of the punishments changes in the lower five bolge.

(IV) The first five bolge

In the first five bolge, the fraudulent manipulate the established order of the community for the purpose of illicit gain. This is what Aristotle had called injustice "in the particular sense".⁹ It leads to the destruction of the community, for "money ... serves as a measure which makes things commensurable and so reduces them to equality. If there were no exchange there would be no association, and there can be no exchange without equality,

⁹Ethics V,ii,1130b. See above,note 1,Chapter 6,p.76, for injustice in the general sense, which applies to all the sins of *malizia*, including those of the seventh circle.

and no equality without commensurability".¹⁰ More succinctly: "The very existence of the state depends on proportional reciprocity".¹¹

Here, the bonds of social reciprocity are progressively broken, from the more particular to the more general; sexuality, language, sacrament, prophetic knowledge and finally law itself. The fraudulent themselves have long since ceased to acknowledge the law, except as something to be used. Now they break down trust in all social institutions, and they cause other people to offend social norms as well.

The first two bolge are taken up in Canto XVIII. This gives the reader the impression of rapid movement downwards, just as in the circles of incontinence. It serves equally to remind the reader that lust and gluttony had been closely associated above. The lustful there were goaded to movement by the winds, while the panderers and seducers here are goaded to movements by the whips of demons.¹² The gluttonous there squatted in the mud. The flatterers here squat in human waste.

¹⁰Ethics V,v,1133b.

¹¹Ethics V,v,1132b.

¹²Cf: Ethics V,ii,113a for the difference between the two. "Again, suppose two men to commit adultery, one for profit, and gaining by the act, the other from desire, and having to pay, and so losing by it: then the latter would be deemed to be a profligate ... while the former would be deemed unjust".

The next sin, simony, is connected to the first two by the continued use of sexual imagery. With flattery, a prostitute had falsely praised her paramour,¹³ whereas here it is "the things of God"¹⁴ which are prostituted. For punishment, the simoniacs are buried upside down in tombs that are similar to baptismal fonts. This punishment has little in common with that of the avaricious and prodigal, who must push their rocks endlessly around the same semicircles. The identification of simony with avarice is nevertheless quite clear. The scene in which Dante berates Pope Nicholas III¹⁵ expresses the poet's utter abhorrence of avarice.¹⁶

The fourth bolgia contains the false prophets who "twisted divine truth"¹⁷ and proceed backwards in return, with their heads twisted to face their backs. Ferrante likens them to the profligate in that they squander their gifts,

¹³For a definition of flattery, see Ethics IV,vi,1127a: "If [a man] sets out to be pleasant for no ulterior motive, [he] is Obsequious; if he does so for the sake of getting something by it in the shape of money or money's worth, he is a Flatterer".

¹⁴Inferno XIX,2: "*le cose di Dio*".

¹⁵Cf: Inferno XIX,88-123.

¹⁶Aristotle shared this strong opinion, calling avarice (unlike prodigality) "incurable". Ethics IV,i,1121a.

¹⁷Ferrante, op.cit.,p.169. Aristotle comments on the furtive nature of those who lie and "pretend to accomplishments that are useful to their fellows and also can be counterfeited without detection; for instance, proficiency in prophecy ..." (Ethics IV,vii,1127b). The deception lies in the pretence that they can alter the future.

although it is equally possible to argue that they are like the sullen. Wallace Fowlie comments that "[if] a man know his future, his actions in the present will be impeded. His knowledge may paralyze his body".¹⁸ He probably has Amphiaraus in mind, who foretold his own death at Thebes and tried to flee, without success. The sorcerers make their appearance "silent and weeping".¹⁹ perhaps like the sad sullen. (In addition, many sorcerers, just like the wrathful and the sullen, are associated with war and civil war.)²⁰

In the fifth bolgia, the barrators are submerged in pitch. The punishment is much like that of the wrathful and the sullen. The violence of the devils is much like the rage of the angry spirits of the marsh.

The imagery used here, with its elements of buffoonery, mendacity, vulgarity and general impropriety, suggests that the idea of a city or community based upon barratry is ludicrous.²¹ Sayers wrote, about the lack of solidarity,

¹⁸Wallace Fowlie, A Reading of Dante's Inferno, (Chicago, 1981), p.131.

¹⁹Inferno XX,8: "*tacendo e lagrimando*".

²⁰The canto actually begins by stating that it will have to do with the "submerged". Cf: Inferno XX,2-3 "...to the twentieth canto of the first canzone, which is of the submerged". "*...al ventesimo canto / de la prima canzon, ch'è d'i sommersi*". If the last words refer to the Inferno as a whole, one might still ask why they are used just here.

²¹Much of the imagery may be taken from Ethics IV, viii,1128a, which deals, *inter alia*, with obscenity, boastfulness, buffoonery and boorishness.

that "Satan's kingdom is divided against itself and cannot stand, for it has no true order, and fear is its only discipline. Moreover, in the long run, the devil is a fool: trickery preys on trickery and cruelty on cruelty".²²

When depravity reaches this level even the appearance of community is deceptive. What had been a potential enmity between members of the city in the upper bolge is here realized and actual.

(V) The last five bolge

Below the broken bridge, the established order of the community is attacked more directly, and its objective status starts to disintegrate, first with the hypocrites, with whom nothing is as it seems. They are broken in body as their outwardly beautiful leaden mantles weigh them down.

The Jovial Friars, chosen to rule Florence impartially, sacrificed one party to the other. Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin agreed to a judicial murder so that the rest of the nation would survive. As in the circle of heresy, the whole is made dependent upon a part, or party, and thus becomes self-contradictory. The difference is that among the hypocrites the partisanship is deceptively hidden.

²²Sayers, op.cit.,p.211.

In the seventh bolgia, the external basis of community disappears. "The Thieves", writes Sayers, "who made no distinction between *meum* and *tuum* - between the 'mine' and the 'thine' - cannot call their forms or their personalities their own".²³ Property is no longer plundered or squandered, as in the seventh circle, but procured by stealth. And those who steal become bestial (literally changing into snakes and back into humans). Figures such as Cacus and Vanni Fucci, who had been violent, are here because they had also been furtive.

The conscious neglect of established order continues to be stressed in the following bolgia. Ulysses is here, whose mad desire for "experience of the world"²⁴ led him to set aside his duties to his family in order to explore "the world that has no people".²⁵ Here also is Guido da Montefeltro, who disregarded his obligations as a friar - casting off his belt, as it were - to indulge in fraudulent counsel at the behest of the pope. Both Ulysses and Guido have become "tongues of flame",²⁶ burning, perhaps, with worldly desire, and enjoining others to do the same. Their sin, the giving of counsel of a furtive

²³Sayers, *op.cit.*,p.231.

²⁴Cf: *Inferno* XXVI,97-99.

²⁵*Inferno* XXVI,117: "*mondo senza gente*".

²⁶Ferrante, *op.cit.*,p.169.

nature, is the quintessential sin of the eighth circle. Its presence to a greater or lesser degree transfigures the sins of the first seven bolge so that the latter do not remain sins of incontinence and violence, but become sins of a deeper nature.

In the ninth bolgia, the communities that bind humanity together explicitly disappear. Mohammed, regarded in the Comedy as a schismatic, splits apart the highest aspirations of men and rends religious unity asunder. Curio divides the empire, the institution which ensures the peace which enables the spiritual quest to proceed undisturbed. Pier da Medicina, presumably, sets the component cities of the empire in enmity. Mosca destroys the internal unity of the city. Bertran de Born breaks apart the family, the final unity which serves as the basis for all the rest. It is fitting that their own bodies should be "continually severed",²⁷ since they have created a society in which nothing but disunity is conceivable.

The tenth bolgia contains falsifiers "who corrupted the elements of human life".²⁸ Here are alchemists, who alter the order of the natural world; impersonators, who destabilize human relations; counterfeiters, who destroy the

²⁷ibid.

²⁸ibid.p.170.

objective basis of exchange, and false accusers, whose sin involves false counsel and borders upon treachery to Church and to Empire, (much as the sin of the usurers bordered upon fraud). Ferrante compares the falsifications with those of Satan himself. The punishments are analogous. The bodies and minds of the falsifiers are wasted away internally. Satan has become utterly bestial. In either case, it is the self, over and above the objective social order, which disintegrates.

The punishments of the last five bolge indicate this quite clearly. In the previous five, the body had remained intact while being punished. Now, it is crushed under leaden weight, changed into serpentine form, enclosed within a fire, cloven apart, and finally eaten away.²⁹ The fraudulent here still manipulate the established order of the community for their private purposes, but they, themselves, come to embody the actuality of complete vice, the opposite of justice as the perfect virtue.

The disjunction between appearance, or the apparent good, and reality, or the real Good, has become complete.³⁰

²⁹ At Ethics, VII,viii,1150b, Aristotle distinguishes between vice and unrestraint, the first being like a chronic and the second like an intermittent evil. He uses diseases such as dropsy and consumption, also found in the tenth bolgia, to illustrate vice.

³⁰ I owe to Andy O'Neill, a student at the University of King's College, the

(VI) The Malebolge as a Counter-Paradise: Themes

In the eighth circle, Dante is once more able to incorporate Aristotelian principles, here especially the theory of friendship, into his poetic structure. In this light, the eighth circle is inversely comparable to Paradise.

In the latter, the City of God, there is complete justice and total harmony, because there is a concord of wills, and no envy estranges the citizens of the celestial city.³¹ This concord of wills is friendship of the highest sort, which constitutes the bond of the city, since "if men are friends there is no need of justice between them; whereas merely to be just is not enough - a feeling of friendship is also necessary".³² Justice is the potentiality of friendship and unity. "It is natural that the claims of justice also should increase with the nearness of the friendship, since friendship and justice exist between the same persons and are co-extensive in range".³³ In Paradiso it is the light of friendship or charity which joins men and angels. The men only appear in separate heavens so that Dante, with the limitations of his human intellect, may make his way through

perception that, in the last five bolge, there is an increasing divorce between appearance and any semblance of objectivity.

³¹ Cf: Paradiso III,64-87.

³² Ethics VIII,i,1155a.

³³ Ethics VIII,ix,1160a.

finite distinctions to final unity - when he sees everyone in Paradise in the Celestial Rose, and then partakes of the Beatific Vision.³⁴ It is the principle of friendship, as Bourbeau cogently argues, which "serves as the foundation to the entire construction of Paradise".³⁵

The Malebolge is constructed on the inverse principle of fraud, "the most social and most socially destructive sin of all".³⁶ All common interests are denied, and by the fifth bolgia, the state, "which aims not at a temporary advantage but at one covering the whole of life",³⁷ is destroyed by barratry.³⁸ Injustice estranges the sinners, who are separated by ditches and confined to their respective bolge. Finally, even the friendship which a man might feel "for himself"³⁹ begins to vanish. Those who act unjustly and intemperately, and take

³⁴Cf: Paradiso IV,28-48.

³⁵Bourbeau, op.cit.,p.3.

³⁶Ferrante, op.cit.,p.167.

³⁷Ethics VIII,ix,1160a.

³⁸The barrators, like all of the sinners in the Malebolge, are willing to commit acts of injustice for the sake of money or honour. They act contrary to the way that friends act. A virtuous man will "forgo money if by that means his friends may gain more money ... and he behaves in the same manner as regards honours and office also: all these things he will relinquish to his friend, for this is noble and praiseworthy for himself". (Ethics IX,viii,1169a).

³⁹Ethics IX,iv,1166a-1166b, where Aristotle writes that a man may "feel friendship for himself ... in so far as he is a dual or composite being, and because very intense friendship resembles self-regard".

for themselves the things that are most ignoble and most truly bad are haters of themselves in an exceptional degree.⁴⁰ It is they who populate the lower bolge. In short, just as conscious acts of justice are done in Paradise, without any concerted opposition felt in the soul, conscious acts of injustice are committed in the Malebolge in a thoroughly cold-blooded manner.

(VII) The Malebolge as a Counter-Paradise: Structure

There are similarities in structure between Paradise and the Malebolge, as well as similarities in theme. The most important is that there are ten heavens and ten bolge. The ten heavens follow a seven-tiered purgatory and precede the divine point which is the centre of Paradise. The ten bolge follow a seven-part circle of violence (with two sins against neighbour, two against self, and three against God) and precede the lowest circle with Satan as its centre.

There may also be a correspondence between the individual bolge and the individual heavens. Bourbeau argues very convincingly that Paradiso is structured according to the theological virtues. The Moon is about Faith, Mercury about Hope and Venus about Charity. The sun is about Faith, Mars

⁴⁰This conclusion follows from Ethics IX,viii,1168b: "[If] a man were always bent on outdoing everybody else in acting justly or temperately ... as a matter of fact such a man might be held to be a lover of self in exceptional degree. At all events he takes for himself the things that are noblest and most truly good".

about Hope and Jupiter about Charity. (For our present purposes we extrapolate and argue, further, that Saturn may be about Faith, the Heaven of the Fixed Stars - with its crucial examination in the theological virtues - about Hope, and the Primum Mobile - the domain of the faithful angels - about Charity).

In the Malebolge, one might argue that the first, fourth and seventh bolgia (on seduction and pandering, sorcery and theft) are about trust and knowledge - faith; the second, fifth and eighth (flattery, barratry and false counsel) about hope, and the third, sixth and ninth (simony, hypocrisy and schism) about charity, these last three indeed having a pronounced ecclesiastical cast.

Whatever the case, one is encouraged to attempt some such comparison through the explicit correspondence of bolgia eight and the eighth heaven, both governed by the Cherubim (albeit the eighth bolgia by the "black Cherubim".)⁴¹ It would surely not be discordant with Dante's "Gothic" practice of presenting material in an intricate pattern of logical steps to find a detailed analogy between the Malebolge and Paradise.⁴²

⁴¹Cf: Inferno XXVII,113: "*di neri cherubin*".

⁴²See above, pp.13-15.

Chapter Eight: The Conscious Destruction of the Self

(I) The giants

Although Dante cannot follow Aristotle at every point by inverting the order of the Ethics, he does follow that inverted order by concluding the Inferno with the consideration of the progressive destruction of friendship to the point where the very self becomes divided against itself. It becomes thus divided by committing acts of injustice against those to whom one owes a "special trust",¹ with whom the self is in fact identified.

Dante hears the loud blast of a horn as he begins the final descent, and is reminded of Roland's horn, which warned Charlemagne of treachery.² When he looks in the direction of the sound, he seems to see "many lofty towers".³ It becomes clear only later that these towers are in fact giants, whose characteristics are the perversions of that trinitarian image which the rational self embodies. Dante warns that "where the instrument of the mind is added to an evil

¹Inferno XI,63: "*fede spezial*".

²Cf: Inferno XXXI,16-18.

³Inferno XXI,20: "*parve veder molte alte torr*".

will and to great power, men can make no defense against it".⁴ The power of the giants has to be held in check, and their intellect, as with Nimrod for example, reduced to a state of abject stupidity. Virgil and Dante enlist the service of one of them, Antaeus, for the unnatural descent to the immobile centre of the inverted city.

(II) Treason

Antaeus carries them down to Cocytus, to the ice which holds traitors immobile, immersed according to the depth of their treachery. Treason to kin is marginally less evil than treason to party or country. This is marginally less evil than treason to guests or friends, and the worst of all is treason against "Lords". The differentiation takes place according to the degree that the friendship involved in each relationship is freely willed. That between kin is given almost biologically, and is perhaps most like potential friendship, or "Goodwill", defined by Aristotle as "inoperative friendship, which when it continues and reaches the point of intimacy may become friendship proper".⁵ Friendship based upon party or country is more freely chosen and approximates relationships between citizens based upon justice in the Ethics. Friendship between guest and host is, in these terms, rather like the true friendship which renders external law or justice superfluous. Finally,

⁴Inferno XXXI,55-57: "*dove l'argomento de la mente / s'aggiugne al mal volere e a la possa, / nessun riparo vi può far la gente*".

⁵Ethics IX,v,1167a.

friendship to "Lords" involves liege loyalty, which in mediaeval society necessitated an explicit vow.

These acts of treason are all committed against those who have some claim to be an "*alter ego*" or "second self".⁶ The worst is done against those to whom one owes the most. The sense of this is brought out in Ethics VIII where Aristotle writes: "It is more shocking to defraud a comrade of money than a fellow-citizen; or to strike one's father than to strike anybody else".⁷ It is no accident that, to Dante, the ultimate traitor is Satan, who rebelled against God the Father.

(III) Evil destroys itself

The final canto of the Inferno opens with the words "*Vexilla Regis prodeunt inferni*"; "Abroad the regal banners of the infernal regions fly".⁸ This is a parody of the processional hymn sung from Vespers of the Saturday before Passion Sunday until Maundy Thursday",⁹ looking toward the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. Unlike the procession at the end of the Purgatorio, or the glory of the Church Triumphant at the end of the Paradiso, the central figure of the procession of this canticle is not Christ but Satan.

⁶Ethics IX,v,1167a. This is Aristotle's definition of a true friend.

⁷Ethics VIII,ix,1160a.

⁸My translation. Singleton does not render the Latin into English.

⁹Singleton, op.cit.,p.626.

This is exactly appropriate in this context. The Comedy is set in the Jubilee Year of 1300, with its focus upon sin and its forgiveness. Dante is at the age of Christ when the latter was crucified, and his conversion from the life of sin in the dark wood, through the nether regions and up Mount Purgatory, to lead a life in imitation of Christ, is set in Holy Week of the Jubilee Year. He begins his journey proper on Good Friday, and reaches the bottom of the Inferno just before Easter Sunday. It is at this point, then, that he will learn definitively how the life of sin will logically conclude, (after traversing all of the steps downward in the manner of the logical development of a Bernardian treatise on humility).

The conclusion was latent or implicit in the beginning. Celestine V's abdication of the papal throne amounted to a betrayal of a sacred trust, and Paolo's liaison with Francesca contained more than an element of treachery.¹⁰ Thereafter, in proportion as the inverted cone of hell becomes narrower, the nature of sin as such becomes more explicit. Since it is entirely negative, and constricting, it can only issue into "the point to which all weights are drawn from every part",¹¹ and the complete lack of freedom there is made even more manifest

¹⁰ One might argue that even Aristotle's conviction that friendship between God and man is impossible, (Cf: Ethics VIII,vii,1159a), is looked upon by Dante as a kind of betrayal of the divine covenant.

¹¹ Inferno XXXIV,110-111: " *l punto /al qual si traggon d'ogne parte i pesi*".

by the figure of "the emperor of the woeful realm"¹², encased there in ice.¹³

Treachery has turned Satan or Lucifer, "the creature who was once so fair"¹⁴ into a beast. He has been transformed into a grotesque parody of the Trinity.¹⁵ He bites and claws three sinners with six ugly winged arms and with his three mouths, weeping all the while. In the two outer mouths, Brutus and Cassius hang with their faces down. In the inner mouth, Judas has his head mangled.

Satan's inane gnawing upon the traitors to the authority of Church and State is indicative of his total bestiality.¹⁶ His is the surpassing vice, the superhuman wickedness that changes its possessors into beasts.¹⁷ He is similar to "the worst man ... who practises vice towards his friends as well as in regard to

¹²Inferno XXXIV,28: "*Lo 'mperador del doloroso regno*".

¹³As Ferrante indicated in the diagram reproduced above, p.91, only Satan can correspond to the falsifiers, since there is no tenth circle. A tenth circle, like a tenth heaven, would signify perfection. The intention here is precisely the opposite.

¹⁴Inferno XXXIV,18: "*la creatura ch'ebbe il bel sembiante*".

¹⁵See above,p.9,for more about the trinitarian attributes which constitute man as an *imago Dei*. The attributes of memory, intelligence and will are also essential to the angelic soul, and, as created, positive in nature. Thus, all that Satan has been able to achieve is their perversion - their inactivity, as it were. The flapping of his wings is the source of the ice.

¹⁶Cf: Ethics VII,v,1149b For an illustration of devouring one's offspring as an image of bestiality. The traitors are Satan's offspring. In Aristotelian terms, they pervert the active life of the state, and the life of contemplation, which is divine.

¹⁷Cf: Ethics VII,i,1145a.

himself".¹⁸ In him, the intellect, the dominant part of his personality, is inoperative.¹⁹ He is the tyrant with whom friendship is impossible, "for where there is nothing in common between ruler and ruled, there can be no friendship between them either, any more than there can be justice".²⁰ In sum, Satan is the embodiment of that extreme degree of excess which Aristotle thought "impossible, since evil destroys even itself, and when present in its entirety becomes unbearable".²¹

With this, Dante has reached the very bottom of his journey.²²

¹⁸Ethics V,i,1130a.

¹⁹Ethics IX,viii,1169a.

²⁰Ethics VIII,xi,1161a.

²¹Ethics IV,v,1126a.

²²The whole canto, of course, is meant to be contrasted with the last canto of the Paradiso.

PART 3 : THE PURGATORIO

Chapter 9: Faith Regained

(I) The conversion of direction

When Virgil takes Dante down the body of Satan to the centre of the earth, Virgil and Dante then turn upside down and continue to climb upwards.¹ Dante looks back and sees the legs of Satan protruding upwards from the central point. This is the true position of Satan, head downwards, with his intellect buried.

From Dante's new vantage point, the Inferno appears as what it really is, as the true world turned upside down. His voyage through hell has purified his vision, so that he sees the consequences of the divorce of the will from the good of the intellect. He and Virgil climb along what must be the lower reaches of the river Lethe to the surface of the earth at the foot of Mount Purgatory. There, they emerge to see the stars.²

The stars are both a source of light, and a means of navigation

¹Cf: Inferno XXXIV,75-81.

²Cf: Inferno XXXIV,139, the last line of the Inferno, which, like the last lines in the other two canticles, ends with the word stars, "*stelle*".

during the night. Allegorically, their rise in the heavens is equivalent to the resurrection of reason, after Dante has come forth "from the deep night that ever makes the infernal valley black ...".³

It is almost sunrise on Easter Sunday morning. Venus, "the fair planet that prompts to love"⁴ is still discernible in the sky. To the south four other stars are visible, "never seen before save by the first people".⁵ Their presence here, then, signifies another resurrection, that of the four cardinal virtues (which had disappeared, one after another, in the Inferno).⁶ Dante sees the stars, of course, since he is on Mount Purgatory in the southern hemisphere, where "the first people" had been placed by God. What the presence of these stars ultimately implies, therefore, is the restoration of Eden, the loss of which "means, for one thing, the loss of four stars, if Adam and Eve are placed opposite Eden when they are driven therefrom".⁷

³Purgatorio I,44-45: "... *de la profonda notte / che sempre nera fa la valle inferna* ...".

⁴Purgatorio I,19: "*Lo bel pianeta che d'amar conforta*".

⁵Purgatorio I,24 "*non viste mai fuor ch'a la prima gente*".

⁶For the identification of the four stars as the four cardinal virtues, see Purgatorio XXIX,121-132, and Purgatorio XXXI,106-111.

⁷C.S. Singleton, Journey to Beatrice,(Cambridge,1958),p.177.

The reader may infer that a central concern of the Purgatorio will be the gradual restitution of the cardinal virtues. This accounts for the importance of Virgil in a canticle with so many Christian overtones. It also places in context the appearance here of Cato, on whose face the four stars shine "as if the sun were before him".⁸

(II) Cato

Cato is here as one "who for liberty gives up life",⁹ thereby embodying the cardinal virtue of courage.¹⁰ In point of fact, he had been willing to endure death, "the most terrible thing of all",¹¹ in order to uphold the law of the Roman Republic, his conduct "guided by the interests of his friends and of his country ... [laying] down his life in their behalf".¹² His devotion to law, Robert Hollander argues, brings Moses to the reader's mind. "This shade - the benign but stern lawgiver of Purgatory (his function parallels that of Charon in Hell), who

⁸Purgatorio I,39: "*come 'l sol fosse davante*".

⁹Cf: Purgatorio I,71-72: "He goes seeking freedom, which is so precious, as he knows who renounces life for it"; "*libertà va cercando ch'è sì cara, / come sa chi per lei vita rifiuta*". (the first "He" refers to Dante).

¹⁰See above, pp.30-31. The great refusal, or *gran rifiuto*, of Celestine V, connotes the opposite vice of cowardice.

¹¹Ethics III,vi,1115a.

¹²Ethics IX,viii,1169a. This is how Aristotle says that a virtuous man acts.

stands outside the Promised Land but may not enter (at least until the Day of Judgment),¹³ and who stands beneath a mountain, his face ablaze with light, as Moses stood at the foot of his mount, his face so bright he had subsequently to veil it from the sight of man (Exodus 34:29f) - this shade must first be conceived as figured in Moses".¹⁴

The fulfillment of the law is a condition of freedom. "For any Christian the phrase, 'he who for liberty gives up life', can point only to Christ's sacrifice. This is the true *gran rifiuto*, and it was prefigured in a sort of pre-imitation of Christ by the suicide of Cato, which is why Dante can say in *Convivio*, '*E quale uomo terreno più degno fu di significare Iddio, che Catone? Certo nullo*'. ('And what earthly man was more worthy of signifying God than Cato. Surely no one').¹⁵

In this one man, Dante has depicted the Aristotelian virtue of courage, the absolute surrender to the law, and, by a kind of transfiguration, the

¹³Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's Commedia*, (Princeton,1969),p.123, writes that Cato's "stoic rigidity ... certainly reminds us of Hell the mark of his worldly error is still to be seen in his office, for he must work as God's customs officer and may not complete his purgation and ascend to heaven".

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp.124-125. Since the harrowing of Hell, Moses has been in Paradise. (Otherwise, he might well have been placed here). Cato himself was placed here on the same occasion. (Cf: *Purgatorio* I,88-90).

¹⁵*Ibid.*,pp.126-127. The quotation is taken from *Convivio* IV,xxviii,15. Dante's veneration of Cato is also found in *Convivio* IV,v,6 and *Convivio* IV,xxvii,4.

sacrifice of Christ.¹⁶ This conflation of classical, Hebraic and Christian imagery will become more pronounced in Purgatory proper.

(III) The rush of humility

At the end of Canto I, Cato sends Virgil to prepare Dante for the ascent of Mount Purgatory. "Go, then, and see that you gird him with a smooth rush, and that you bathe his face so that you remove all defilement from it".¹⁷ This "humble plant"¹⁸ is the only plant that can bear the buffeting of the waves and still live. If it is plucked, it grows again at once. It is an apt representation of the patient endurance which the ascent of Mount Purgatory requires. Hollander calls it a "sure symbol of the Resurrection"¹⁹ and contrasts it with the "broken twig from the ruined tree that is the soul of Pier della Vigna"²⁰ - which cannot grow back.

¹⁶Hollander (op.cit.,p.123) notes that it would not have been surprising to find Cato in any part of Hell. He was a virtuous pagan, who committed suicide, gave his wife to another man, and opposed Caesar. He might have been in Limbo, among the Violent, the Fraudulent and the Treasonous, (although he had never sworn allegiance to Caesar). Hollander is probably correct in believing that all of these things, taken together, make Cato an unlikely figure for Purgatory. Yet, as he says, "Grace ... is always a surprise". (ibid.) This assertion could well be taken as the theme of the first cantos of the Purgatorio.

¹⁷Purgatorio I,94-96: "*Va dunque, e fa che tu costui ricinghe / d'un giunco schietto e che li lavi 'l viso, / sì ch'ogne sucidume quindi stinghe*".

¹⁸Purgatorio I,135: "*umile pianta*".

¹⁹Hollander, op.cit.,p.127.

²⁰ibid., p.129.

The rush of humility with which Dante girds himself here replaces the cord that he had taken off in order to attract Geryon. It is the sign of "goodwill" (*eunoia*) in Aristotelian terms, "the beginning of friendship, just as the pleasure of the eye is the beginning of love".²¹ It betokens the beginning of a very different kind of journey to the summit of the mountain from the unsuccessful attempt of Inferno I, and a less terrifying one than that which had had to begin by going through the Gate of Hell.²²

(IV) Casella

In Canto II, a troop of souls arrives singing in unison "*IN EXITU ISRAEL DE AEGYPTO*"²³ in thanks for their liberation from bondage.²⁴ One of them is Casella, who has only been allowed to reach the shores of Purgatory so soon because of the extraordinary mercy extended to souls during the Jubilee Year of

²¹Ethics IX,v,1167a. The cord, both here and in the Inferno, may also represent justice and faith. Singleton, in his Commentary on the Purgatorio, (Princeton, 1973), in note 114,pp.153-154, on the meaning of the "cord of every worth"; "*d'ogne valor ... corda*" (Purgatorio VII,114) quotes Isaiah 11:5:"And justice shall be the girdle of his loins, and faith the girdle of his reins".

²²At Purgatorio I,119, the journey is compared to a return "*a la perduta strada*", - to the road that had been lost at Inferno I,3: "*la diritta via*"; "the straight way".

²³Purgatorio II,4-6.

²⁴They are thus quite unlike the souls in the Inferno who blaspheme as they crossed Acheron, ferried by Charon. Here they are like the Hebrews led by Moses out of Egypt. Hollander's comparison of Moses with Cato proves apt.

1300.²⁵

Dante requests him to sing, and he complies with one of Dante's own works, "*Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona*"; "Love that discourses in my mind".²⁶ All of the souls, Virgil included, are completely enthralled, and have to be interrupted abruptly by Cato to get on with their ascent of the mountain.

Virgil is mortified by his own negligence,²⁷ and is highly aware of his unfamiliarity with Purgatory.²⁸ He reflects that it had been because of such human failings that the Incarnation had been necessary - that without it, even such men as Aristotle and Plato were in a perpetual state of desire without fulfilment.²⁹

It needs to be stressed that while Virgil is quite at home in the territory of the four cardinal virtues under Cato's governance,³⁰ there is always

²⁵Casella has been refused passage many times before. (Cf: Purgatorio II,96).

²⁶Purgatorio II,112.

²⁷Cf: Purgatorio III,7-9.

²⁸Cf: Purgatorio II,61-63. He had been familiar with all of the Inferno. This makes his lack of knowledge here the more striking.

²⁹Cf: Purgatorio III,34-43.

³⁰See Purgatorio VII,34-36, where Virgil states that he is in Limbo only because he lacked the three theological virtues. The other virtues he knew and followed

here - with the stars in the southern sky, with Cato's self-sacrifice and with the rush of humility - an aspect which escapes his grasp. This is the relationship to divine revelation, as he admits. St. Thomas taught that this revelation was accessible to all and necessary for human salvation "even in religious matters the human reason is able to investigate. For the rational truth about God would have appeared only to few, and even so after a long time and mixed with many mistakes; whereas on knowing this depends our whole welfare, which is in God".³¹ Virgil, not realizing this, is naturally astonished at the rather indecorous behavior, or at least at the spontaneous joy, of Casella, with its union of emotion and reason.

The Purgatorio is the direct way up the mountain of Inferno I, under the auspices of revelation.

"*tutte quante*" (36); "all of them".

³¹S.T. I,1,Resp.

Chapter 10 Continnence: The Subjection of Desire to Reason

(I) Incontinence in Purgatory

There is another very important aspect of Dante's encounter with Casella. This is the contrast between their absorption in immediate pleasure and the arduous labour which is their destiny on Mount Purgatory. The souls here are not yet prudent enough to defer their pleasure. They are like baptized infants whose conduct is to be guided carefully by their parents until they come of age. Here, unlike in the Inferno, they are educated to be continent. Cato admonishes them and they go about their proper task at once. They go up the mountain, always to the right (in the contrary direction to the path down the Inferno).¹

Dante emphasizes again the ease with which good souls fall into acts of incontinence both at the beginning of Canto IV, when he is so enrapt in Manfred's story that he loses track of time,² and at the beginning of Canto V,

¹Aristotle states the difference between self-restraint, (i.e. - continence), and full temperance at Ethics VII,ii,1146a: "if Self-Restraint implies having strong and evil desires, the temperate man cannot be self-restrained, nor the self-restrained man temperate; for the temperate man does not have excessive or evil desires".

The souls in Purgatorio are like infants, in that they need to learn how to be continent and then virtuous. Repentant and forgiven, they may make a new beginning. - They are different in that they have to get rid of the bad habits they accumulated in their lives full of vice.

²Cf: Purgatorio IV,1-18.

when he is distracted by Belacqua's companions.³ Self-possession will come only after a protracted period of time.⁴

(II) The excommunicate

The first souls Dante and Virgil meet on the bottom terrace of the Antepurgatory are the excommunicate. These act like sheep, obedient here the way they never were throughout most of their lives. Manfred tells the travellers that the excommunicate have to remain in exile here thirty times as long as they had lived in obdurate exile from the church during their lives, unless good souls pray for them.⁵

³Cf: Purgatorio V,1-21.

⁴See Singleton, op.cit., note 130, p.173, where he quotes Convivio I,xi,7: "*L'abito di vertude, si morale come intellettuale, subitamente avere non si puo, ma conviene che per usanza s'acquisti*". ("The habit of a virtue, whether moral or intellectual, may not be had of a sudden, but must needs be acquired by practice".) The note refers to the rectitude of Currado Malaspina's house. (Cf: Purgatorio VIII,128-132). This rectitude is perfectly in place at the very end of the Antepurgatory.

⁵Cf: Purgatorio III,136-140. Since good-will, friendship and love in some way constitute the goal to be achieved by the penitent as well as ways to that goal, their effects in prayer may be immediate, substituting as another means for arduous labour.

At Purgatorio VI,37-39, Virgil comments about prayer that "the summit of justice is not lowered because the fire of love fulfil in a moment that which he must satisfy who sojourns here"; "*cima di giudicio non s'avvala / perché foco d'amor compia in un punto / ciò che de' sodisfar chi qui s'astalla*". Mercy does not destroy justice, but rather fulfils it.

Moreover, as Ferrante observes, op.cit.,p.202: "Dante is making not only a theological, but a psychological point: the love of one's fellows, relatives, or friends, can help one to withstand the temptations of the wrong desires and strengthen the desire for the right".

It is mercy, such as that which is implied by these prayers, which is the main theme of Canto III. Manfred's sins were "horrible",⁶ but he surrendered himself while mortally wounded "to him who pardons willingly".⁷ It is this repentance, possible "so long as hope keeps aught of green"⁸ which allows even the most hardened sinners to achieve happiness. Manfred will obviously have a long way to go before he breaks the power that evil habits have over his will. The scars which he shows Dante are probably marks of the horrible life which he led,⁹ and like the other people here in Antepurgatory, he will need time to refine his character. On the other hand, the power to do just that has been given to him.

This is one of scenes in which the difference between Aristotle's doctrine and Christian teaching is clearest. In Aristotle, certainly, souls may

⁶Purgatorio III,121: "*orribil*".

⁷Purgatorio III,120: "*a quel che volontier perdona*".

⁸Purgatorio III,135: "*mentre che la speranza ha fior del verde*". Cf: Inferno IV,40.

The Purgatorio, which emphasizes that acquisition of the virtues of the active life, is pre-eminently the canticle of Hope, "a sure expectation of future glory, which divine grace produces, and preceding merit"; "... *uno attendere certo / de la gloria futura, il qual produce / grazia divina e precedente merito*". (Paradiso XXV,67-69) Action under the auspices of Hope follows upon the vision or knowledge which Dante acquired in the Inferno.

⁹As distinguished from the seven Ps which will later be inscribed on Dante's forehead, Manfred's scars were received most unwillingly.

repent. The whole point of the Ethics is to improve human life. The repentance, however, never amounts to an explicit act of complete faith, as it does even in the case of a "horrible" sinner like Manfred. The emphasis in the Ethics is not placed upon the power of grace to effect a complete and immediate "conversion". Aristotle's teaching is here transfigured by the recognition that it is the presence of faith, hope and charity which provides the requisite motivation for the reformation of character.¹⁰

(III) Habituation to virtue

When Dante and Virgil proceed, with great difficulty, up to the next terrace, they meet the indolent Belacqua, who has to wait there another lifetime, for just as long as he had deferred his repentance - unless of course, a soul in grace prays on his behalf. Then, as they proceed further, they come upon souls who repented at the final moment when they were dying from violence. "Since circumstances are partly responsible for their death, they occupy a slightly higher position than the Indolent, and have a prayer of their own; but they are still surrounded by the atmosphere of haste and agitation which attended their last

¹⁰It is sometimes asked whether souls are in the Inferno because they in fact committed sins and in the Purgatorio because they need to erase their habitual tendency to commit sins. This is almost certainly a false antinomy. Everyone in Purgatory is there because of deeds committed, even those which are venial consequences of original sin. These deeds have been committed out of habit, for the most part. The problem is to make sure that the habit does not begin, as with Paolo and Francesca. The emphasis in the Purgatorio is therefore upon education in continence. Had the souls in the Inferno been continent, they would not have fallen. Grace enables exactly this.

moments".¹¹

They are more active people than Belacqua, and the final group of late repentants in the Valley of the Kings will be even more active. The increase in activity is paralleled by the increase in the pace of ascent up the mountain.¹²

The reason is the increasing ability of the souls to control their desires.¹³ As Virgil explains to Dante in a key passage:

This mountain is such that ever at the beginning below it is toilsome, but the higher one goes the less it wearies. Therefore, when it shall seem to you that the going up is as easy for you as going downstream in a boat, then will you be at the end of your path.¹⁴

¹¹Sayers, The Divine Comedy 2:Purgatory,(London,1988),p.107. The groups of the late repentant are higher or lower according to the quality of the impediments which caused their negligence.

¹²Compare Purgatorio IV,19-54 with Purgatorio V,10-21.

¹³The difficulty at the beginning is explained in Ethics III,xii,1119b: "Children, like profligates, live at the prompting of desire; and the appetite for pleasure is strongest in childhood, so that if it be not disciplined and made obedient to authority, it will make great headway. In an irrational being the appetite for pleasure is insatiable and indiscriminating, and the innate tendency is fostered by active gratification". One thinks of Casella.

¹⁴Purgatorio IV,88-94:

*... Questa montagna è tale,
che sempre al cominciar di sotto è grave;
e quant'om più va sù, e men fa male.
Però, quand' ella ti parrà soave
tanto, che sù andar ti fia leggero
com'a seconda giù andar per nave,
allor sarai al fin d'esto sentiero;*

The fact that the higher you go the easier it gets is contrary to natural

This is Aristotelian doctrine translated into a poetic image. "Moral or ethical virtue is the product of habit".¹⁵ We acquire such virtues "by first having actually practised them just as we do the arts".¹⁶ "We become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts".¹⁷ "In a word, our moral dispositions are formed as a result of the corresponding activities".¹⁸ The activities, of course, gradually become easier. "We become temperate by abstaining from pleasures, and at the same time we are best able to abstain from pleasures when we have become temperate".¹⁹ And finally: "A man is temperate if he abstains from bodily pleasures and finds this abstinence itself enjoyable, profligate if he feels it irksome".²⁰

In Antepurgatory the time which must be spent in order to learn how to control one's desires is experienced as a punishment. On the second

expectation. Perhaps this is meant to suggest the action of grace here in Purgatory, over and above the action of nature. Another similar phenomenon already encountered is the fact of a rush which grows again when plucked.

¹⁵Ethics II,i,1103a.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ethics II,i,1103b.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ethics II,ii,1104a-1104b.

²⁰Ethics II,iii,1104b.

terrace, it lasts a lifetime,²¹ but there is a lessening of the depth of the bad habits of the three successive groups. By the time that Dante and Virgil come to the end of Antepurgatory, the neglect of reason due to passion is minimal. Currado Malaspina, the last soul they meet in the Valley of the Kings, can state that "to my own I bore the love that is refined here".²² His passion needs but refinement for him to become a temperate man. The reader is at liberty to infer that his time in Antepurgatory will be short.

(IV) The Valley of the Kings: Friendship

Sordello, the troubadour who criticized the failings of the courts of Europe, leads Dante and Virgil into the Valley of the Kings just before nightfall, heralding the completion of the journey through Antepurgatory. In the valley, they find the whole political order of the Empire mirrored. The emperor is seated above the kings, and a representative of the high nobility is seated below them. There is still an air of negligence about them, as befits those who are erasing the final traces of it, but the overall ambience is one of harmony. Those who had been archenemies in life have here become friends.

This friendship may be seen as the culmination of the relationships

²¹Cf: Purgatorio XI,127-132.

²²Purgatorio VIII,120: "*a' miei portai l'amor che qui raffina*".

that the reader has seen in Purgatory under the auspices of "the fire of love".²³ In the Ethics, this friendship has its roots in good will, "the beginning of friendship, just as the pleasure of the eye is the beginning of love".²⁴ This may issue into concord, wherein "the citizens agree as to their interests, adopt the same policy and carry their common resolves into execution".²⁵ In turn, this may lead to active beneficence, where "a benefactor feels friendship and affection for the recipient of his bounty even though he is not getting anything out of him and it never likely to do so".²⁶ It is not difficult to associate Casella with goodwill, the kings with concord, and all of those in Purgatory with beneficence. Even at its lower reaches, Mount Purgatory is all about the development of friendship.

(V) The Valley of the Kings: The theological virtues

The Valley of the Kings is the most sensuously beautiful of all of the areas in the Comedy. It is reminiscent of the Elysian Fields in the Aeneid, Book Six. It resembles Limbo, with the latter's grassy meadow and its hierarchy of philosophers, rulers and poets. Its own hierarchy reminds the reader of the order of Empire in Dante's De Monarchia.

²³Purgatorio VI,38: "*foco d'amor*".

²⁴Ethics IX,v,1167a.

²⁵Ethics IX,vi,1167a.

²⁶Ethics IX,vii,1167b.

What distinguishes it from these most of all is its setting in the context of the fall of man. Each night, angels with blunted swords and green vesture are stationed at the entrance to the garden. A serpent, "perhaps such as gave to Eve the bitter food",²⁷ makes its way into the garden but is repulsed by the angels. Sayers comments: "The green robes of the angels are the colour of Hope - specifically the hope of salvation. Their fiery swords remind us of the flaming sword of Gen.iii.24, set at the gate of Eden after the expulsion of Adam and Eve; but these are blunted at the point: 'salvation, in these souls, is now working out the reversal of the fall'. (J.D. Sinclair)".²⁸

The souls are proof against the lure of sensual beauty. They sing the *Salve, Regina*, (in which they implore Mary to help them in their exile "in this valley of tears"; "*in hac lacrimarum valle*"). When night is just about to fall, one of them begins the *Te lucis ante*, uttered as if he were saying to God: "for naught else do I care".²⁹ He and those who join him in chorus have their attention fixed upon the virtue of temperance.

While these events are going on, Dante catches sight of three stars which have just risen in the southern sky. They replace the four stars which

²⁷Purgatorio VIII,99: "*forse qual diede ad Eva il cibo amaro*".

²⁸Sayers, op.cit., p.130.

²⁹Purgatorio VIII,12: "... *'D'altro non calme*".

represent the four cardinal virtues. They therefore must stand for the three theological virtues, "the specifically Christian virtues of the life of contemplation".³⁰ These appear at night, when the nocturnal darkness "hampers the will with impotence",³¹ so that the souls can no longer ascend. Virgil, who represents the natural reason of the active life, is surprised that further movement is impossible at night.³² Without the rest, however, and the illumination of the mind which takes place under the three stars which now shine in the sky, the stability of the secular Empire and of the "Elysian Fields" of the Valley of the Kings would be precarious.

Virgil,³³ and Aristotle himself, lacked the three virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. They therefore lacked a clear understanding of the conditions under which the purification and illumination of the will takes place.

³⁰John D. Sinclair, Dante: The Divine Comedy: 2: Purgatorio, (New York, 1961), p.116.

³¹Purgatorio VII,57: "... *col nonpoder la voglia intriga*".

³²Cf: Purgatorio VII,49-63. Virgil would probably think that reason should be free at night when it is unencumbered by the body, (just as in the Elysian Fields), and should be able to act as it wishes.

The sudden notice that the ascent of the mountain by day will be interrupted by "enforced" contemplation at night is somewhat startling. Poetically it is brilliant. Here in the middle canticle, between the eternal night of the Inferno and the blazing light of the Paradiso there is both light and dark - the latter not yet overcome without trace.

³³Cf: Purgatorio VII,34-36.

(VI) Contenance

In the Inferno, among the wrathful and the sullen, reason is all but overwhelmed by passion. Incontinence is virtually complete, and it requires little to convert 'reason' to the service of deliberate evil. Here in the Valley of the Kings - the comparable location in the Purgatorio - passion is all but under the control of reason. Contenance is all but complete, and little is necessary to render the domination of passion by reason a conscious and concentrated goal.³⁴

³⁴The reader is just before the Gate of Purgatory, as previously before the Gate of the City of Dis. John D. Sinclair, op.cit.,p.115, notes that it is immediately after the singing of the Salve Regina that "Dante appeals to his reader to penetrate to the truth under the veil of his lines, and there is recalled to our mind the quite similar appeal in the ninth canto of the Inferno at the gate of Dis". Our senses are sharpened for what will happen next.

Chapter 11: Reason under the Aegis of the Good

(I) Illumination: Dante's first dream

Dante's miraculous arrival at the gate of Purgatory involves a kind of transformation in the attitude of the poet. He becomes similar to the man in the Valley of the Kings who lifted his arms towards the east and stated his complete absorption in God. Like him, Dante will set his mind against the temptations of the world. He will no longer be distracted as he was periodically in Antepurgatory. Indeed he will undergo an examination of his sins at Purgatory's gate, and participate actively in the activities of the ascent, as befits a traveller in this middle canticle of the active life of Hope.

This means that he is acquiring the virtue of prudence. Aristotle writes that "our choice of actions will not be right without Prudence any more than without Moral Virtue, since, while Moral Virtue enables us to achieve the end, Prudence makes us adopt the right means to the end".¹ From now on,

¹Ethics VI,xiii,1145a. Strictly speaking, Dante will not be temperate until he reaches the summit of the mountain. Nonetheless, Antepurgatory, like Upper Hell, is concerned with the control of desire by reason, or the opposite. Its range of concern is the same which is relevant to the cultivation of temperance.

Dante will consistently adopt "the right means", even if the stains of moral vice remain to be obliterated.

The point reached here at the gate of Purgatory corresponds exactly to the point reached in the Inferno at the gate of the City of Dis. There, with the heretics, the mind takes the deliberate decision to perform vicious actions; here it resolves to perform virtuous ones.

The power to effect these virtuous actions is represented as being beyond the power of unaided reason. Since it is impossible to climb the mountain at night, Dante sleeps. Just before morning, "when our mind, more a pilgrim from the flesh and less captive to thoughts, is in its visions almost divine",² he has a dream. He has been rapt upwards by a golden eagle and turned with it together in a fire.³ When he awakes, Virgil informs him that, in reality, Lucy had come and had taken Dante, followed by Virgil,⁴ up to the gate

²Purgatorio IX,16-18: "*che la mente nostra, peregrina / più de la carne e men da' pensier prisa, / a le sue vision quasi è divina*".

³In his dream he conjectures that the eagle "is wont to strike just here"; "*fiede / pur qui per uso*", (Purgatorio IX,25-26). It strikes, presumably, just when souls are prepared to receive it. The knot of their sins, (Cf: Purgatorio IX,124-126), is ready to be disentangled.

Dante compares himself to Ganymede, who had been rapt by Jupiter from his natural surroundings and translated to heaven. The divine initiative is stressed.

⁴This emphasizes, once again, Virgil's lack of independence in Purgatory.

of Purgatory. Clearly, this is an allegory of the perfection of nature by grace, with Lucy illuminating Dante's mind.⁵

(II) Peter's gate

Dante and Virgil approach the three steps leading up to the gate of Purgatory. "These three steps are generally taken to represent the three stages of repentance; the first step, which is white and mirrorlike, stands for self-examination; the second, black, rough step stands for sorrow for sin, or contrition; the third, flaming-red step signifies satisfaction of the sinner's debt, or penance".⁶ The angel of the gate, with sword refulgent in the sun, opens the gate, and, after Dante begs for mercy, traces seven Ps on Dante's forehead with the sword. He opens the gate with two keys, one gold and one silver. The gold key signifies the power to absolve and the silver the judgment exercised as to the worthiness of the sinner to be absolved.⁷

The Ps on Dante's forehead represent the stains of sin. Of this,

⁵The sense of the illumination here may become clearer by using traditional and Neo-platonic terms. In Antepurgatory, Dante's mind is purified (from worldly blemish). Here it is illuminated. In the Earthly Paradise it will be perfected.

⁶Musa, The Divine Comedy: Purgatory, (New York, 1981), p.105.

⁷The repentance shown by Dante is necessary for his readmission to Eden, as he continues to work out "the reversal of the Fall". (See note 28 in the previous chapter). The sword of the angel signifies the authority to prevent humans from tasting of the Tree of Life.

St. Thomas writes:

But if we speak of the removal of sin as to the stain, it is evident that the stain of sin cannot be removed from the soul without the soul being united to God, since it was through being separated from Him that it suffered the loss of its splendour, in which the stain consists ... Now man is united to God by his will. Therefore the stain of sin cannot be removed from man unless his will accepts the order of divine justice; that is to say, unless either of his own accord he take upon himself the punishment of his past sin, or bear patiently the punishment which God inflicts upon him; and in both ways punishment has the character of satisfaction.⁸

Dante, acting accordingly, takes adult responsibility for his fate, somewhat as if he were being confirmed in his faith. Once more, what is happening here is the converse to what happened in the Inferno. There, after the loss of prudence among the heretics, the poet dealt with the destruction of justice in the bottom three circles. Here, once prudence is reestablished to some degree, the sinner performs acts of penance, showing his or her acceptance of "the order of divine justice". What is aimed at is a steadfast will, with all of the stains removed.

The sinner must destroy all the affinity of the will with each of the deadly sins. When the angel takes his leave, he tells Dante "that he who looks back returns outside again".⁹ To look back would be to take one's eyes off of one's goal, and this would mean to be distracted, precisely as in

⁸S.T. Ia,IIae,87,a7.

⁹Purgatorio IX,132: "*che di fuor toma chi'n dietro si guata*".

Antepurgatory.¹⁰ Instead, Dante must turn his attention to the hymn he hears ahead, the *Te Deum*, with its total concentration and focus upon God.

¹⁰Dante is given a similar "choice" before the walls of Dis. Virgil will be allowed on, but Dante will have to find his own way back through the circles of incontinence.

Chapter 12: The Conscious Restoration of Human Nature

(I) Education on Mount Purgatory

When one descends through the seventh circle in the Inferno, one sees the souls destroy progressively the awareness of the standard according to which they should measure their willed acts, and replace that standard by their own particular desires. When one ascends through "Purgatory proper", one sees the souls conduct themselves increasingly according to that prudence against which their desires can be measured. The result is the gradual reconstitution of the ability to do acts of justice without feeling concerted opposition in one's soul.

The landscape of the mountain here inside the gate provides a stark contrast to the sensuous valley immediately beneath.¹ It is bleak and forbidding, like the seventh circle. Generally speaking it is a matter of

¹Cf: Singleton, op.cit., note 14, p.224. The figure of a desert "applies to both Antepurgatory and to Purgatory proper, in respect to the time which the souls have to spend here in waiting and in purgation, even as the Israelites had to wander for forty years in the desert". Liberation begins, so to speak, with Casella, but the Promised Land is reached only at the summit of the mountain. Cf: also note 50 in chapter 2 above.

indifference anyway, since the souls here are devoted entirely to purging the stains of their sins, and are oblivious to external beauty.

Purgatory is divided into seven cornices, one for each of the seven deadly sins. On almost every cornice, Virgil and Dante perceive examples of the virtue to be cultivated, and then meet the souls doing penance.² The souls sing appropriate prayers in order to concentrate their attention upon their tasks.³ After Virgil and Dante speak to them and prepare to go on, they perceive other examples of the vice to be avoided. Finally, the angel of the cornice erases one of the Ps from Dante's forehead, and they hear a beatitude which signifies the acquisition of the virtue.⁴

In the beginning there is no theoretical instruction. Aristotle

²The order on the cornices of avarice and lust differs slightly.

On each cornice, the prime example of the virtue to be learned is taken from the life of Mary, whose preparation for divine grace is exemplary, and in whom all of the virtues are united. Of two other examples, one is always taken from the Hebrews, and one from the Graeco-Romans, paralleling perhaps the institutions of synagogue and state, the precursors of Church and Empire.

Given the readiness to join biblical and classical motifs, as in the person of Cato and in these examples, it is not surprising to find the philosophy of Aristotle prominent in even the most "Christian" parts of the Comedy.

³Only on the cornice of sloth do they have no prayer. Sayers notes, op.cit.,p. 203: "Their labour is their prayer".

⁴Dante will participate in the penance, usually in a symbolic manner. He will bow down on the cornice of pride, shed tears on the cornice of envy, be blinded on the cornice of wrath, and discourse into the night on the cornice of sloth.

explained the reason for this in the Ethics in an important passage.

Theory and teaching are not, I fear equally efficacious in all cases: the soil must have been previously tilled if it is to foster the seed, the mind of the pupil must have been prepared by the cultivation of habits, so as to like and dislike aright. For he that lives at the dictates of passion will not hear nor understand the reasoning of one who tries to dissuade him; but if so, how can you change his mind by argument?⁵

Education begins instead with concern over matters of pleasure and pain, since "moral virtue is the quality of acting in the best way in relation to pleasures and pains, and ... vice is the opposite".⁶ The object is to habituate souls to following a mean, especially by avoiding "that extreme which is the more opposed to the mean ... we must drag ourselves away in the opposite direction [from those errors to which we are most prone]".⁷ "Thirdly, we must in everything be most of all on guard against what is pleasant ...".⁸

The ascent through Purgatory proper takes place in accordance with these Aristotelian principles. The sinners undertake unpleasant - painful - labours in order to purge the stains of their sin. These labours may take the form of the opposite extreme to the sin they are trying to purge, where this extreme

⁵Ethics X,ix,1179b.

⁶Ethics II,iii,1104b. Cf: also Ethics II,iii,1105a.

⁷Ethics II,ix,1109a-1109b.

⁸Ethics II,ix,1109b.

virtually coincides with the mean. The proud bow themselves down under the weight of large boulders, the envious endure the loss of their sight, the slothful run, the gluttonous abstain. The labours may also take the form of suffering the sin to be purged, just as in the Inferno the punishment was the sin. The wrathful have to endure the black and pungent smoke of wrath, while the avaricious must give their whole attention to worldly matters by facing downwards, prostrate. (The lustful have to burn. The fire no doubt signifies the fire of lust. It also signifies, however, the fire of purification.)

The reason why there is more latitude in the nature of the punishment to be suffered in Purgatory than there is in this respect in the Inferno is that the education of the souls here takes place precisely in conforming their will to a rational standard. This may be done by practising the virtue or by suffering the vice. In the Inferno the rational standard is absent, and only indirectly felt in the frustration experienced by the sinners trying to guide their acts to some sort of real fulfilment. All that is really present explicitly is the sin.

(II) Habit , a second nature

As the sinners become habituated to virtue, they experience fewer obstacles preventing the rational control of their desires. Thus, their ascent up Mount Purgatory becomes easier, in accordance with the Aristotelian principle already stated by Virgil at Purgatory IV,88-94.

As Virgil and Dante climb from the cornice of pride to the cornice of envy, Dante notices that the cliff is now less steep. "This is because when Pride, the root of all sin, is overcome, the conquest of the rest is easier. For the same reason [the poet] emphasizes the freedom and lightness which the pilgrim feels when the P of Pride has been erased".⁹

Then, as they pass from the cornice of envy to the cornice of wrath, Virgil encourages Dante, who has been blinded by the resplendence of the angel. "Soon will it be that the seeing of these will not be hard for you, but as great a delight as nature has fitted you to feel".¹⁰ By now the climb has become less arduous and they are able to carry on a conversation about the nature of envy. On the cornice of wrath, there is yet another and more complex conversation with Marco Lombardo.

In short, as the inculcation of good habits grows, so do the abilities, understanding, pleasure and social aptitudes of the soul. By the time that the travellers leave the cornice of wrath, their full vision, or reason, will be restored. On the lower cornices of pride, envy and wrath, like the circles of violence, fraud

⁹Sayers, *op.cit.*, p.162.

¹⁰*Purgatorio* XV,31-33: "*Tosto sarà ch'a veder queste cose / non ti fia grave, ma fieti diletto / quanto natura a sentir ti dispuose*".

simple and fraud complex in the Inferno, this power of reason to direct one's actions has not been explicitly present.

(III) The structure of the Purgatorio

Virgil explains the structure of Purgatory to Dante just as they arrive at the cornice of sloth. In the Inferno he had explained the structure of Hell just before reason was placed at the service of the irascible powers of the soul. Now he takes up the subject of structure just after the travellers have freed themselves from the power of wrath. Dante is hence prepared to follow a discourse on love as the foundation of Purgatory, (and a theoretical one, because his intellect is now free from contending emotions such as wrath).¹¹

The lowest cornice is that of pride, the desire "to excel by the abasement of one's neighbour".¹² Next is the cornice of envy, "[the fear] to lose power, favor, honor, and fame, because another is exalted".¹³ Then, on the cornice of wrath is found "he who seems so outraged by injury that he becomes

¹¹When it is in the power of pride, envy or wrath, the intellect loses its natural freedom. Cf: Singleton, op.cit. note 100,p.396: "When elective love turns to an evil object, it operates unnaturally ...".

¹²Purgatorio XVII,115-116: "*per esser suo vicin soppresso, / spera eccellenza*".

¹³Purgatorio XVII,118-119: "*podere, grazia, onore e fama / teme di perder perch' altri sormont'*".

greedy of vengeance".¹⁴

The cornice of sloth holds those who pursue the good with "too little vigor".¹⁵ The three upper cornices, of avarice (and prodigality), gluttony, and lust, are for those who pursue created or secondary goods without due measure.

It is clear that there is meant to be a general correspondence between the order of the sins in the Purgatorio and in the Inferno. Lust, gluttony and avarice / prodigality correspond directly. Sullenness, wrath and heresy are certainly not equivalent to sloth, but there are family resemblances between sullenness and sloth, and just as heresy marks the point at which the freedom of the intellect is totally lost, the cornice of sloth is the place in Purgatory when it is regained.

Wrath in Purgatory is comparable to violence in the Inferno which in turn prolongs the motif of wrath from the last circle of upper hell. Envy is not easily assimilable to "fraud simple", but pride, the root of all sin, is also Satan's sin at the bottom of the circle of "fraud complex".

¹⁴Purgatorio XVII,121-122: "*chi per ingiuria par ch'aonti, / sì che si fa de la vendetta ghiotto*".

¹⁵Purgatorio XVII,96: "*poco di vigore*".

The general correspondence is to be expected. If there is a sin in the Inferno, there must be some place in the Purgatorio where that sin may be purged. If the structure of the Inferno is modelled on Aristotelian thought, the structure of the Purgatorio has to be as well.

(IV) The beginning of theoretical discourse

The theoretical discourse of Virgil on the cornice of sloth is evidence that Dante has reached that level in his education when "theory and teaching" will be of some use. This aspect of his instruction had begun while Virgil and Dante were making their way from the cornice of envy to the cornice of wrath. On that occasion, the lesson was quite simple. Love of worldly things leads to envy, greed and the desire to monopolize worldly goods which are always limited in number. In contrast, "the love of the highest sphere",¹⁶ (i.e. - spiritual love) increases the amount of good that each possesses - in a manner contrary to merely natural expectation.

On the cornice of wrath, the root of evil is firmly fixed in the human will. Marco Lombardo tells Dante that if the heavens did cause evil, "free will would be destroyed in you, and there would be no justice in happiness for good

¹⁶Purgatorio XV,52: "*l'amor de la spera suprema*".

or grief for evil".¹⁷ To avoid its tendency to cause evil, it needs to be checked by the good kind of anger which is embodied in the law.¹⁸

In this context, Virgil's speech on love in Canto XVIII analyzes the ways in which the will can err, and since these are determined by its love, Dante wishes then to know exactly why the will is not simply "internally" forced to act as it does. Virgil does admit that the final objects of desire are simply given. "Whence comes the intelligence of the first cognitions man does not know, nor whence the affection for the first objects of desire, which exist in you even as zeal in the bee for making honey; and this primal will admits no deserving of praise or blame".¹⁹

The problem is that every other act of will should be conformed to

¹⁷Purgatorio XVI,70-72: "... *in voi fora distrutto / libero arbitrio, e non fora giustizia / per ben letizia, e per male aver lutto*".

¹⁸Compare the good anger felt by Dante against Filippo Argenti in the fifth circle of the Inferno. Here, too, it is rational anger which is in question. Francis Fergusson writes, in Dante's Drama of the Mind, (Princeton, 1953),p.77: "The Pilgrim (whose consciousness is our guide) is in close darkness, but trying to release himself from it by means of the one faculty he can use, the discursive reason".

¹⁹Purgatorio XVIII,55-60:

*... là onde vegna lo 'ntelletto
de le prime notizie, omo non sape,
e de' primi appetibili l'affetto,
che sono in voi sì come studio in ape
di far lo mele; e questa prima voglia*

"this primal will".²⁰ To this end, humans have a "faculty that counsels and that ought to hold the threshold of assent".²¹ This faculty may clearly merit praise or blame. It is its "innate liberty"²² which those men studied who "bequeathed ethics to the world".²³ Virgil adds that Beatrice calls it "the free will",²⁴ and suggests thereby that she can elucidate on his own explanation, - perhaps about what power enables it to conform to that "primal will" mentioned above.

(V) Dante's second dream

After Virgil's speech, night falls and Dante sleeps for a second time on the slopes of Mount Purgatory. He dreams of an ugly woman, whom he binds to himself through the semi-conscious love which his will bestows upon her. She becomes the beautiful Siren who led Ulysses astray. A holy lady, a surrogate of Lucy perhaps, has to appear and to summon Virgil to reveal the true nature of

merto di lode o di biasmo non cape.

²⁰Purgatorio XVIII,59: "*questa prima voglia*".

²¹Purgatorio XVIII,62-63: "*la virtù che consiglia, / e de l'assenso de' tener la soglia*".

²²Purgatorio XVIII,67: "*innata libertate*".

²³Purgatorio XVIII,69: "*moralità lasciaro al mondo*". Aristotle is the chief of the moral philosophers referred to here. He had taken great pains to specify voluntary actions as those done neither "(a) under compulsion or (b) through ignorance" (Ethics III,i,1109b-1110a), and chosen actions as voluntary actions "preceded by deliberation" (Ethics III,ii,1112a). Only voluntary actions are subject to praise or blame. The "first objects of desire" are simply given, as in Virgil's speech.

²⁴Purgatorio XVIII,74: "*lo libero arbitrio*".

the Siren.²⁵ Only then is Dante freed from her thrall.

His will had been bound "internally" by love in his dream. Since the dream is prophetic, like the dream about the eagle, it also indicates the kind of sins which cause the sinners in the three cornices of avarice, gluttony and lust, above, to swerve away from the good of the "primal will".

(VI) Statius and Virgil

As Virgil and Dante are leaving the cornice of avarice, the whole mountain shakes and they hear the strains of *Gloria in excelsis*. The reason is that someone has been released from Purgatory. He subsequently appears to them just as the resurrected Christ appeared to the two travellers on the road to Emmaeus. He explains that such earthquakes take place here in Purgatory proper, which is free from atmospheric fluctuations, only when "some soul feels itself pure so that it may rise or set out for the ascent".²⁶

The liberated soul is Statius, who credits Virgil both with his poetic

²⁵Singleton, op.cit., note 26, p.452, writes that: "[the] holy lady who now comes is the personification of [the] light of discernment" about which Marco Lombardo talked, a light which enables us "to distinguish between good and bad ...". (ibid.,pp.451-452).

²⁶Purgatorio XXI,58-60: "... *alcuna anima monda / sentesi, sì che surga o che si mova / per salir sù ...*". Once more, the stress is placed upon the free will as the source of both punishment and freedom therefrom.

inspiration and with his Christian conversion:

You were like one who goes by night and carries the light behind him and profits not himself, but makes those wise who follow him, when you said, 'The Ages are renewed; Justice returns and the first age of man, and a new progeny descends from heaven'. Through you I was a poet, through you a Christian.²⁷

Virgil had prophesied the return of the Golden Age, the age that had been signified in the Inferno by the uncracked golden head of the Old Man of Crete. This had led Statius (according to Dante) to consort with Christians, who believed that this prophecy had come true, and to receive baptism.

Statius was saved by his faith in the actuality of the new life. This was what Virgil lacked. He, like classical philosophers in general, knew the goal, but not the way.

(VII) The sweet new style

The imagery of the upper reaches of Purgatory strongly features

²⁷Purgatorio XXII,67-72:

*Facesti come quel che va di notte,
che porta il lume dietro e sé non giova,
ma dopo sé fa le persone dotte,
quando dicesti: 'Secol si rinnova;
torna giustizia e primo tempo umano,
e progenie scende da ciel nova.'
Per te poeta fui, per te cristiano.*

upwards movement, as with the sudden release "upwards" of Statius.²⁸ The punishments for avarice and gluttony both require that one resist the impulse to rise, and the fire that purifies lust enables one to do exactly that. The discussion about poetry which Dante has with Bonagiunta of Lucca on the cornice of gluttony is essentially about the same thing. It is about the power of the free will over the temptations of the lower, sensual part of the soul.

Bonagiunta recognizes Dante as a poet of "the sweet new style"²⁹ and author of "*Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore*";³⁰ "Ladies that have understanding of love" - a poem in "the Vita Nuova, a *canzone* which represents a new beginning and a new style in Dante's poem to and about Beatrice".³¹ The novelty of the style, Dante tells Bonagiunta, lies in its inspiration from above. "I am one who, when love inspires me, takes note, and goes setting it forth after the fashion which he dictates within me".³²

²⁸In the upper reaches of Hell, the imagery had to do with the contrary motion of falling, like the leaves in autumn, for example, in Inferno III, 112-120.

²⁹Purgatorio XXIV, 57: "*dolce stil nuovo*".

³⁰Purgatorio XXIV, 51. In Purgatorio I, Dante exhorts that "dead poetry rise again"; "*la morta poesi resurga*" (line 7), and we soon hear his own poem "*Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona*"; "Love that discourses in my mind" (Inferno II, 112) sung by Casella. This poem is very much like the poem in question here. The suggestion is that the whole Purgatorio is like a *canzone* in the new style.

³¹Singleton, op.cit., p.569.

³²Purgatorio XXIV, 52-54: "*I'mi son un che, quando / Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo / ch'e' ditta dentro vo significando*".

Dante will go on to meet Guido Guinizelli, the father of the sweet new style, and Arnaut Daniel, praised by Guinizelli as his better - poets who had purified their poetry from the worldliness that was still a prime concern in the work of Bonagiunta, the Notary and Guittone.³³

(VIII) The soul as the form of the body

The ontological basis for the confidence that the rational soul can control the emotional drives common to all is given in a speech by Statius as the travellers make their way up to the final cornice. Statius explains that as soon as the sensitive powers of the human are complete, "the First Mover turns to it with joy over such art of nature, and breathes into it a new spirit replete with virtue, which absorbs that which is active there into its own substance, and makes one single soul which lives and feels and circles on itself".³⁴ Upon the death of the body, the sensitive powers remain dormant, "but memory, intellect, and will [are]

³³Cf: Purgatorio XXIV,55-57.

³⁴Cf: Purgatorio XXV,70-75.

*lo motor primo a lui si volge lieto
sopra tant' arte di natura, e spira
spirito novo, di virtù repleto,
che ciò che trova attivo quivi, tira
in sua sustanzia, e fassi un' alma sola,
che vive e sente e sé in sé rigira.*

far more acute in action than before".³⁵

This account links the higher and lower powers of the soul more intimately than does the doctrine of Averroës, who "separated the possible intellect from the soul because he saw no organ assumed by it".³⁶ In the latter case, when the body dies, the sensitive soul dissolves with it, just as Farinata and others in the circle of the heretics had claimed. Moreover, since the intellectual soul cannot be the form of the body, the rational will cannot exercise its freedom over the desires of the individual, just as Francesca had implied. In Statius' doctrine, the 'trinitarian' upper powers are to such an extent the form of the lower powers that the resurrection is expected almost as a matter of course, so that the sensitive powers may again be exercised.

In essence, the whole of Statius' speech is Aristotelian, as the mention of the "First Mover" as the creator of the rational soul indicates. Singleton judiciously remarks: "How the embryo acquires a rational soul is the point where Statius' knowledge exceeds Virgil's ken - i.e., the light of natural reason - and partakes of the 'eternal view', of a revealed supernatural order of

³⁵Purgatorio XXV,83-84: "*memoria, intelligenza e volontade / in atto molto più che prima agute*". See above, pp.8-12, for the powers of the soul in St. Augustine.

³⁶Purgatorio XXV,64-66: "... *fé disgiunto / da l'anima il possibile intelletto, / perché da lui non vide organo assunto*".

knowledge. Aristotle, to be sure, also held that the rational soul comes from without, but he left the mystery at that. Statius, the Christian, knows more, at least as much as is revealed to us in the Bible".³⁷

(IX) Through the purifying fire

The final ordeal which will definitively bring the sensitive powers under the control of the rational soul is the endurance of a red-hot fire which will purify the soul from lust. The angel of the cornice makes it clear that all souls have to undergo the action of the cleansing flame.³⁸ This includes Dante, who is mortally afraid, as he was when he refused at first to follow Virgil into Hell. Once again it is only when Virgil reminds him that Beatrice is on the other side of the fire that Dante regains courage. He enters the fire.

The reason why Dante must participate totally in this act of penance must be that it signifies his reemergence from the area where the stains of irrational concupiscence are in evidence. The effect, indeed, is almost as if he had stepped back out of the gate of Hell. He has assimilated all that Virgil has had to teach him, and, as Virgil tells him, he may now take his pleasure as his

³⁷Singleton, op.cit., p.607.

³⁸Cf: Purgatorio XXVII,10-11. The flame may remind us of the flaming sword of the angel of the gate, used to incise the seven Ps. Like the flaming sword, it guards the entrance to Eden.

guide.³⁹ "Free, upright, and whole is your will, and it would be wrong not to act according to its pleasure; wherefore I crown and miter you over yourself".⁴⁰

Singleton comments that "the crown and miter (implied in the corresponding verbs) [must be] the crown and miter which were used in the crowning of an emperor, and it should not be construed as pointing to two powers, empire and church respectively."⁴¹ Certainly, the coronation implies that Dante has finally acquired the last cardinal virtue of justice, since he is now at last a completely prudent individual. In Virgil's mind, he has achieved happiness in the Aristotelian sense, "the active exercise of his soul's faculties in conformity with excellence or virtue."⁴² He is thus capable of both the practical life and the theoretical life signified by the miter. (The crown and the miter may nonetheless still point to the empire and the church in the mind of the reader, since Dante is about to deal precisely with the relationship between them).

It also follows, since Dante's will is once more whole, just as Adam's was before the fall, that Dante can follow the lead of his pleasure.

³⁹Cf: Purgatorio XXVII,131.

⁴⁰Purgatorio XXVII,140-142: "*libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio, / e fallo fora non fare a suo senno: / per ch'io te sovra te corono e mitrio*".

⁴¹Singleton, op.cit.,p.665.

⁴²Ethics I,vii,1098a.

Aristotle gives the reason: "Pleasures correspond to the activities to which they belong; it is therefore that pleasure, or those pleasures, by which the activity, or the activities, of the perfect and supremely happy man are perfected, that must be pronounced human in the fullest sense".⁴³ Dante's pleasures are no longer negative obstacles; rather, his pleasure is now "a supervening perfection, like the bloom of health in the young and vigorous".⁴⁴

⁴³Ethics X,v,1176a.

⁴⁴Ethics X,iv,1174b.

Chapter 13: In The Mountain Garden

(I) Dante's third dream

Dante has a third dream just before he reaches the summit of the mountain. He sees Leah, singing and picking flowers to make a garland in order to adorn herself to look into the mirror. She tells Dante that this activity pleases her, just as the act of seeing herself in the mirror pleases her sister Rachel, who does nothing else all day.¹ In the Biblical story Jacob had to marry Leah before Rachel; this was taken to mean that the active life had to be perfected before the contemplative life was attained. Singleton comments:

There is, in this way, a striking agreement to be noted between Aristotle and Christian doctrine as to the life that is proper to man and man's highest goal in this life. That goal is a summit of perfection in both the active and the contemplative orders of life, the contemplative being the higher of the two and the 'final' good. There, at the summit, is true happiness to be found: The summit has two peaks, and one peak is higher, the contemplative. First we reach the lower peak of the active life that we may move from it to the higher one. We must first come to justice, the perfection of the active life.²

¹Cf: Purgatorio XXVII,94-108.

²Singleton, Journey to Beatrice, (Harvard,1958),p.115.

Dante has no help this time in interpreting this dream, except it be implicitly present in Virgil's advice for him either to sit or to go about the garden,³ which presumably means to act either like Rachel or like Leah, to contemplate or to be active. He sets off, ostensibly alone,⁴ to explore the summit of the mountain. Almost at once he finds himself again in a dark wood, and goes into it so far that he cannot see where he had entered it. Soon his progress is halted by a pure stream which "flows quite dark under the perpetual shade, which never lets sun or moon beam enter there".⁵

This enchanted forest would appear to be the counterpart of the dark wood of Inferno I.⁶ Its features are similar: the darkness; the solitude; the difficulty in seeing the entrance; the water which isolates it. The atmosphere, however, is

³Cf: Purgatorio XXVII,138. Virgil's interpretation of the dream may be the cause of his coronation of Dante (mentioned above).

⁴We are only told of the presence of Virgil and Statius later, at Purgatorio XXVIII,76. The reason, perhaps, is to have the reader recall the dark wood.

⁵Purgatorio XXVIII,31-33: "*si mova bruna bruna / sotto l'ombra perpetua, che mai / raggia non lascia sole ivi né luna*".

⁶The location here is perfectly appropriate for this allusion. In the Inferno, Dante's indecision and lack of hope in the dark wood correspond to the hardened indecision of the Vestibule and the decisive hopelessness of Limbo. In terms of the similarity of the organization of the Purgatorio with that of the Inferno, we are now exactly where Limbo is in the first canticle, just beyond the reach of concupiscence.

very different. It is verdant and fragrant, and the birds sing, while the water is pure, and Dante's vision is led across it to a land where the sun is shining.

There he sees a lady singing and picking flowers, warming herself "at love's beams".⁷ She reminds him of Proserpine "at the time her mother lost her, and she the spring".⁸ She smiles at his perplexity: "... why I am smiling in this place chosen for the nest of the human race some doubt holds you wondering".⁹ She explains that what she is singing is the psalm *Delectasti*, which is about delight in the works of God's hands.

Clearly she is somehow the Leah of the dream, and this is Eden, once given to man "as an earnest of eternal peace".¹⁰ The sad associations of the place come only from the sin of the man who "exchanged honest joy and sweet sport for tears and toil".¹¹ Dante, enamored of the lady, would himself like to cross

⁷Purgatorio XXVIII,43: "*a raggi d'amore*".

⁸Purgatorio XXVIII,50-51: "*nel tempo che perdette / la madre lei, ed ella primavera*".

⁹Purgatorio XXVIII,76-79: "*... perch'io rido, ... in questo luogo eletto / a l'umana natura per suo nido, / maravigliando tienvi alcun sospetto*".

¹⁰Purgatorio XXVIII,93: "*arr'... d'eterna pace*".

¹¹Purgatorio XXVIII,95-96: "*... in pianto e in affanno / cambiò onesto riso e dolce gioco*".

into "Eden proper", but the river keeps them "three paces apart".¹² We are told that the river "takes from one the memory of sin".¹³ Hence it is clear that Dante's purgation is not yet as complete as Virgil's words may have led us to believe.

The lady, in fact, is not only like Leah; she is also another Eve, restored to Eden. Her very name is evidence of this. The name Matelda may well be an anagram of the names *Adam* and *Lete*, - albeit with one less *e*. *Lete* (forgetfulness) in this context might suggest forgetfulness of Adam, and it is precisely when the souls drink of Lethe that they forget original sin. We are told the name Matelda just when Dante is about to drink from the water of Lethe's twin river, Eunoe, which will restore his memory of good.¹⁴ It is befitting that Matelda should be on the far side of the river, where the ancient poets imagined "the Age of Gold and its happy state"¹⁵ to be located.

¹²Purgatorio XXVIII,70: "*tre passi ... lontani*". The reader is reminded of the three steps at the gate of Purgatory, and of the three theological virtues. Dante is like a dweller in Limbo. He lives in longing to cross the river, but has no power to do so.

¹³Purgatorio XXVIII,128: "... *toglie altrui memoria del peccato*".

¹⁴Cf: Purgatorio XXVIII,130-132. Both rivers need to be tasted for the transformation from memory of evil to memory of good to take place. Together they are like the Jordan, the river at the end of the wilderness, and the entry to the Promised Land.

¹⁵Purgatorio XXVIII,140: "*l'età de l'oro e suo stato felice*". Singleton, op.cit., pp.184-203, argues convincingly that Matelda is also meant to bring to mind the Virgin, Virgo, of Virgil's Fourth Eclogue, who "returns" and heralds the coming

Dante, as well, thinks of Eve during this scene, but only of her daring, when as "a woman, alone"¹⁶ she disobeyed God and incurred the punishment of all the human race. He appears to believe that Matelda, who is also "a lady all alone",¹⁷ is like her. She cannot remain in Eden, but like Persephone, must return to the underworld for half the time each year.

If this is his belief, he has good grounds for it in that he is a student of Virgil. In the Aeneid, the souls in the Elysian Fields have to drink of Lethe and return to the tears and toil of the world. Lethe signifies the forgetfulness of Paradise rather than the forgetfulness of sin. Thus, in order to understand Matelda's pure joy in these "Elysian Fields" of Eden, Dante would have to turn Virgil's view on its head.

Another aspect of the Elysian Fields is that they have no permanent residents. Nor has the Biblical Eden. Nor has the beautiful mountain garden. There is no one at all on one side of the river except the wayfarers, and on the

again of the Golden Age. See especially pp.194-195.

¹⁶Purgatorio XXIX,26: "*femmina sola*".

¹⁷Purgatorio XXVIII,40: "*una donna soletta*".

other side there is only Matelda, who is the guardian of the garden just as Cato is the guardian of the mountain slopes. Keeping in mind that Dante's true destination is the *Civitas Dei* of the Paradiso, if he were to stop here, he would be a man without a city. And in Aristotle's words, "a solitary man has a hard life, for it is not easy to keep up continuous activity by oneself; it is easier to do so with the aid of and in relation to other people".¹⁸

The most tragic side of the Virgilian vision of life is brought out at Purgatorio XXX, 21, when the very words used to announce the advent of Beatrice are the ones used by Virgil at Aeneid VI, 883, to lament the death of the young Marcellus, who had been expected to fulfil Rome's mission to unify mankind under one empire. Virgil is indeed a guide "who could discern at least the tower of the true city".¹⁹ But he was barred from entry.

To Virgil, the summit of the mountain is virtually the same as Limbo, and shares in the half-light of that area of Hell. He is bewildered by the Pageant of Revelation that the wayfarers see next, because it is beyond his ken. Singleton

¹⁸Ethics IX,ix,1170a. Cf:also Ethics IX,ix,1170b: "Therefore to be happy a man needs virtuous friends", and Ethics IX,xi,1171b-1172a.

¹⁹Purgatorio XVI,95-96: "*che discernesse / de la vera cittade almen la torre*". For more on the Aeneid, see above, p.6.

assesses his mission in the Comedy, now fulfilled, in this way, that "it was the Roman people who brought the world to justice, even as Virgil brings Dante to justice; and this justice to which Rome led proved to be the very preparation for Christ's coming to all men ... [In the line of historical allegory] Dante is mankind, Beatrice is Christ and Virgil is Rome leading to that justice which came finally under Augustus Caesar and which was the preparation".²⁰

(II) Contemplation beyond man's natural power

The distance traversed by the ancient philosophers towards the perfection of the contemplative life had been considerable. Aristotle, for example, had written of contemplation and the science of wisdom, that God shared this science with human beings. "Its acquisition might justly be supposed to be beyond human power, since in many respects human nature is servile", but poets are wrong in believing that God punishes those who "excel in knowledge," for "it is impossible for the Deity to be jealous".²¹

Because of God's grace, then, the activity of contemplation was open to human nature, the activity praised by Aristotle as the activity of the highest

²⁰Singleton, op.cit., p.89.

²¹Metaphysics I,ii,982b-983a.

part of man, the most continuous, the most self-sufficient, the most leisured, the most pleasant, and the only activity which is an end in itself.²²

The difficulty was that human nature in itself is "servile". As Aristotle wrote at Ethics V,viii,1177b, contemplation is somehow "above" human nature, which is "composite". A true Incarnation would thus be an impossibility, and once Eden were attained, it would have to be surrendered - just as Virgil thought.²³

Aristotle therefore relinquished the attempt to elevate humans to the state wherein the life of wisdom would be a permanent possession. To conclude his Ethics he returned to "the life of moral virtue ... [which] is happy only in a secondary degree. For the moral activities are purely human ... and all of [them] seem to be purely human affairs".²⁴

When all of this is translated into the terms of the narrative of the Comedy, it becomes clear that the restoration of human nature to Eden cannot simply be a matter of philosophy. It is, rather, a matter of grace. As St. Thomas

²²Cf: Ethics X,vii,1177a-1177b.

²³For Virgil's belief that the body clogged the activity of the spirit, and served as a dungeon for it, see Aeneid VI,724-751.

²⁴Ethics X,viii,1178a.

argued, "... in the state of corrupt nature, man falls short of what he could do by his nature, so that he is unable to fulfil it by his own natural powers ...".²⁵ He needs grace not only "to do and wish supernatural good,"²⁶ involving the works carried out in accordance with the theological virtues, but also in order that the state of corrupt nature "be healed".²⁷

(IIIa) The Procession of Grace

What overcomes the impasse in the narrative at this point is the sudden appearance of a procession coming from the east. As what seemed first to be lightning gradually takes form as golden candlesticks with bands of colour streaming like banners behind them, it becomes evident that what we are witnessing is a pageant of the militia of heaven, just as we once witnessed the banners of Hell in Canto XXIV of the Inferno.

Following the candlesticks come the Old Testament elders crowned in white. Then comes a triumphal chariot drawn by a Gryphon and surrounded by the four evangelists crowned in green.²⁸ Three ladies, white, green and red

²⁵S.T.Ia,IIae,109,2 Resp.

²⁶ibid.

²⁷ibid.

²⁸The Gryphon is part golden eagle, and part white-and-red lion. This signifies

respectively, dance by the right wheel.²⁹ By the left dance four others clad in purple. Finally come the remaining authors of the New Testament crowned in red.

The predominant colours indicate that the pageant is held under the auspices of the three theological virtues. White is the colour of Faith, "the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen".³⁰ The Old Testament authors had this virtue. Green is the colour of Hope, "a sure expectation of future glory, which divine grace produces and preceding merit."³¹ The four evangelists had this virtue. Red, finally, is the colour of Charity, complete union with God. The authors of the New Testament who wrote after the crucifixion had this virtue - as did all the others mentioned, at least after the harrowing of Hell. They are all part of the same procession, which is shaped like a cross (as may be inferred by the above description).

the union of the two natures in Christ. The divine is the gold; the human the red (blood) and white (body).

²⁹It is inevitable to think of the two wheels as the church (on the right) and the state (on the left), because the theological virtues and the cardinal virtues are in these respective places. This is inevitable despite the fact that the chariot will later come to signify the church. (Cf: Purgatorio XXXII,109ff.).

³⁰Paradiso XXIV,64-65: "*sustanza di cose sperate / e argomento de le non parventi*".

³¹Paradiso XXV,67-69: "*uno attender certo / de la gloria futura, il qual produce / grazia divina e precedente merto*".

The purple colour of the four ladies who represent the cardinal virtues is no doubt related to the red of Charity. Both colours are reminiscent of Christ's blood. It is through the charity of the blood of Christ that the cardinal virtues are perfected. (This is the reason, after all, why they are on the far side of the river Lethe from Virgil).

(IIIb) The theological virtues

The dominance of the theological virtues is a sign that Dante is not destined simply to return to Eden, for by them he is able "to do and wish supernatural good". Their presence therefore lends a new dimension to the Purgatorio.

The dance of the "three ladies" is sometimes led by Faith and sometimes by Charity, whose song governs their movement.³² Charity, of course is the "final cause" of the virtues, and hence superior and "guiding". Yet Faith is the virtue upon which Hope and Charity rest, as Solomon says of the souls in Paradise, whose radiance depends upon their ardour and that upon their vision.³³

³²Cf: Purgatorio XXIX, 127-129.

³³Cf: Paradiso XIV, 40-42. See above, pp. 19-21.

The Purgatorio as a whole may be seen to illustrate this conception. The Antepurgatory is most of all a realm of Faith, without the movement willed according to a strict discipline. The angel which introduces the souls to the area is dazzlingly white.³⁴ Purgatory proper is most of all an active realm of Hope. The angels whose presence heralds its coming are blindingly green.³⁵ Lastly, the Earthly Paradise is to be the realm of Charity or union. The angel who stands just before the fire of the cornice of Lust (which is itself the gate to the Earthly Paradise), is "glowing and red".³⁶ According to this order, Faith leads to Hope and Charity. On the other hand, Charity is presupposed, with Christ's blood, as the very condition of a soul's entrance onto the mountain shore. In this sense, it is Charity which both leads and guides the general movement.

It should also be remarked that this is the first time we have seen the three theological virtues together with the four cardinal virtues. Previously they have risen, as stars, only when the stars signifying the cardinal virtues have set. Now a much closer relationship has been established, which will remain in the Paradiso.

³⁴Cf: Purgatorio II,22-26.

³⁵Cf: Purgatorio VIII,22-36.

³⁶Purgatorio XXIV,138: "*lucenti e rossi*".

(IV) The coming of Beatrice

The striking feature of the triumphal chariot flanked by the seven ladies is that it is unoccupied. The chariot itself, of course, is taken up from Roman history, and its presence should herald a fulfilment of that history as it had been envisaged by Virgil. This fulfilment is about to come, but Virgil will not see it, just as he did not see the coming of Christ which followed upon the triumphs of Augustus. He has returned to Limbo, just before the advent of Beatrice.

Virgil's return to Limbo signifies the identity between Limbo and the Earthly Paradise without the advent of Christ. In effect, the only difference between them is that the Earthly Paradise is a joyous step on the journey upwards to the *Civitas Dei*, whereas Limbo was a final, sad resting place for the virtuous pagans. Virgil, however, cannot see the Earthly Paradise as a stage in the ascent, as Nature restored by Grace, because he did not have that faith in the coming of Christ which would restore it. To Virgil, the Earthly Paradise is forever Limbo. It is fitting, then, in terms of the allegory that he should leave the scene just before the actual coming of Beatrice.

Beatrice has been preceded by Matelda, as Rachel had been preceded by Leah, and just as Beatrice had been preceded in the Vita Nuova

XXIV by Joan who was called *Primavera* - and just as Jesus was preceded by John the Baptist.³⁷ She appears "within a cloud of flowers",³⁸ just as she had risen to heaven in a cloud in the Vita Nuova (XXIII), and just as Christ had risen in a cloud at his ascension.

Dante describes her sudden presence: "olive-crowned over a white veil a lady appeared to me, clad, under a green mantle, with hue of living flame",³⁹

The olive crown of Minerva identifies her as Wisdom, which is why she had been taken by Virgil as Lady Philosophy. The colours of her clothes, the colours of the theological virtues, identify her with Theology.⁴⁰

³⁷In Vita Nuova (XXIV) Dante derives the name of Joan, Beatrice's "handmaid", from John the Baptist. Matelda is identified with perpetual spring, *primavera* - quite unlike Persephone. As we shall soon see, she has the duty of baptizing the souls of the saved. She is nature, as it were, transformed by grace.

³⁸Purgatorio XXX,28: "*dentro una nuvola di fior*".

³⁹Purgatorio XXX,31-33: "*sovra candido vel cinta d'uliva / donna m'apparve, sotto verde manto / vestita di color di fiamma viva*". Singleton, Commentary, p.738, notes: "it should be recalled that in the Vita Nuova Beatrice is, in her first appearance, dressed in crimson - see Vita Nuova II,3". The mention of the "hue of living flame" in line 33 recalls as well that Beatrice is described in the Vita Nuova (XXIX) as "a nine, or a miracle, whose root, namely that of the miracle, is the miraculous Trinity itself".

⁴⁰In addition, as Sayers writes, "the whole symbolism of the Masque, and particularly the chanting of the *Benedictus*, would lead us to expect the appearance upon the car of the Holy Host Itself". (op.cit.,p.311). In this light, "Beatrice [is] ... the particular type and figure of that whole sacramental principle of which the Host Itself is the greater Image". (Ibid.).

Sayers' understanding of Beatrice according to the four levels of literal,

Here, as in the Vita Nuova, she is the incarnation of love. As her name suggests, she is the one who makes persons blessed, and she acts as a kind of "created grace". In her, the lady of secular Romance - in which guise she also appeared to Virgil in the Inferno - is transfigured into the lady of sacred Romance.⁴¹

She is in effect the same lady about whom Dante wrote in the Vita Nuova. She appears here as in a sequel to that work.

(V) Beatrice's rebuke

The first word she addresses to Dante is his name. She upbraids him for weeping at Virgil's disappearance, and says that he must weep "for another

moral, historical and mystical interpretation makes it comprehensible that she can be at the same time "the Florentine woman whom Dante loved" (Ibid.); "the 'God-bearing image'" present to the individual soul (Ibid.); "the Sacrament ... [and thus] Christ's true Body the Church"; and "the whole principle of Affirmation, whereby [the union of the soul with God] is effected in and through all the images".

⁴¹ Andrea Pulega, in Amore Cortese E Modelli Teologici, (Milano,1995), p.72, writes of the theological pattern which governs medieval Christian Romance, of "the total submission, expressed as obedience to midons, of the lover, whose devotion appears totally similar to that rendered to God by the believer...". In this instance, the two virtually coincide.

sword",⁴² which is presumably the "sword of the spirit, which is the word of God",⁴³ as against the sword of nature or empire.

She then asks him how he deigned to climb the mountain, to achieve happiness. This draws the reader's attention back to the Inferno (I,77-78) where Virgil asked a similar question, and to the fact that it was only by her intervention that the ascent had been possible.

Since the purpose of showing Dante Hell and Purgatory was moral reform, his arrival at the summit of the mountain and his situation as a type of Adam restored should prepare him for the revelation (since it has never become explicitly clear until this point) that it is grace, and grace alone which has restored human nature. He has to acknowledge this as a "total submission" in order to avoid making the kind of "great refusal" that Celestine V had made.

(VI) The beginning of absolution

Reproached by Beatrice, Dante looks at his image in the waters of Lethe, just as he had once seen it on the lowest of the three steps leading into

⁴²Purgatorio XXX,57: "*per altra spada*".

⁴³Eph.6:17: "*gladium spiritus, quod est verbum Dei*".

Purgatory. He is filled with shame and looks away, and finally bursts into tears.

Beatrice does not relent. Instead, she tells of his treason to her. He had been supremely favoured by nature and by grace, and by her youthful presence. When she died, ascending "from flesh to spirit",⁴⁴ he fell by the wayside, "following false promises of good",⁴⁵ so that he could finally only be saved by showing him "the lost people".⁴⁶

The correct course of action would have been to follow her, divesting himself of the love of sensuality, just as he has now finally done in the Comedy by suffering the purifying fire - and continuing the action of the Vita Nuova, so to speak, without an hiatus.

Dante must confess this to be true, showing his contrition as he once had on the middle of the three steps leading to Purgatory. Accordingly he says: "The present things, with their false pleasures, turned my steps aside, as soon as

⁴⁴Purgatorio XXX,127: "*di came a spirto*".

⁴⁵Purgatorio XXX,131: "*imagina di ben seguendo false*".

⁴⁶Purgatorio XXX,138: "*le perdute genti*". She will go on, at Purgatorio XXXIII,85-87, to reproach him for having followed an inferior school (that of the classical philosophers). In sum, her reproach is total, which is why he has to see all of the Inferno. In other words, he has also to see and to understand why men

your countenance was hidden".⁴⁷

Finally, in order to show Dante the glory to which he had been blind by following false promises instead, Beatrice turns towards the Gryphon and is transfigured. Dante feels such remorse that "that which had most turned me to love of it became most hateful to me".⁴⁸ With this, he is at long last ready to follow Beatrice.

The sustained effort has been so much that he falls into a faint. The reader is reminded of his swoon in Inferno V,139-142, when he is overwhelmed by pity at the love and fate of Paolo and Francesca, because of his sympathy with "the present things". The reader is also reminded that Dante faints in Inferno III,133-136, just after he leaves the "Vestibule" and arrives at the river Acheron. In effect, he has now with his confession made the kind of decision of which Celestine V had proven incapable.

This is the point of absolution, akin to the position of the third of the

like Virgil and Aristotle are there, as well as the incontinent and the malicious.

⁴⁷Purgatorio XXXI,34-36: "*Le presenti cose / col falso lor piacer volser miei passi, / tosto che 'l vostro viso si nascose*".

⁴⁸Purgatorio XXXI,86-87: "... *qual mi torse / più nel suo amor, più mi si fé*

steps which led up to Purgatory. Dante has been convicted of treason, with ice "bound tight around [his] heart"⁴⁹ - an image which naturally evokes the ice of Cocytus - and he has been forgiven. When he awakens, he finds himself being immersed by Matelda in the waters of Lethe, and he is then led to the four maidens who represent the four infused cardinal virtues. They join their arms, perhaps like a crown, over his head. His nature has been restored.

The baptism, over and above the absolution for his personal sins, may well symbolically refer to the absolution of Dante from the guilt of original sin,⁵⁰ especially considering that, like Adam, he has been forgiven for treason to a Lord (or here, of course, a Lady).

(VII) Absolution completed

The four ladies bring Dante before the emerald eyes of Beatrice, as she continues to look upon the Gryphon. Dante, whose nature is being perfected by grace,⁵¹ is able to see the substance of the Gryphon remain the same, while its

nemica".

⁴⁹Cf: Purgatorio XXX,97: "*lo gel che m'era intorno al cor ristretto*".

⁵⁰Singleton, op.cit. note 98, p.770, remarks that this is "a kind of baptism (but not an actual baptism, for the sacrament of baptism is not to be repeated)".

⁵¹Cf: S.T.,I,1,a.8. Beatrice is here the intermediary par excellence, and she will continue to be so in the Paradiso, as "a light between the truth and the intellect";

manifestations changed, just as with the Host, where the body and blood are the bread and wine.

At this point, the three ladies come forth and request that Beatrice unveil herself to Dante, so that he can see her mouth, her "second beauty",⁵² just as her eyes were the first. Until Dante has actually somehow seen the Incarnation through her eyes he could not fully acquire the three virtues that would persuade her to turn from the Gryphon and grant to him the unveiling of her mouth.

This moment is the romantic climax of the Commedia. The Lady for whom the lover has undergone all manner of trials finally bestows upon him her smile, the sign of her favour. Dante is overwhelmed.

(VIII) After the absolution

When the action resumes, the procession wheels around and quickly

"*lume ... tra 'l vero e lo 'ntelletto*". (Purgatorio VI,45). She is the means of Revelation. - For a discussion of "Beatrice in her role as the middle light [i.e. - of grace]" see Singleton, Journey to Beatrice, pp.23-31. The quotation is from p.24.

⁵²Purgatorio XXXI,138: "*seconda bellezza*". If the first moment of Dante's romantic request was his recognition of his unworthiness in the Inferno, and the second moment his ordeals in the Purgatorio, the third and culminating moment is Beatrice's gracious bestowal of her smile upon him.

approaches "a tree stripped of its flowers and of its foliage in every bough".⁵³ The cry "Adam" is raised, after which the Gryphon rebinds the chariot to this tree from which it had been taken, stating tersely that "so is preserved the seed of all righteousness".⁵⁴ The tree breaks into flower, all purple - and Dante sleeps.

The symbolism of the Crucifixion is transparent. The historical movement of the procession has reached the point where Christ's fulfillment of the Law makes possible the salvation of mankind. Dante's sleep is probably a restoration of his powers.

He is reawakened when "a splendor rent the veil of [his] sleep",⁵⁵ and a voice cries "Arise, what are you doing?"⁵⁶ Once more, this echoes Inferno III, where it had been "a wind that flashed a crimson light"⁵⁷ that overcame his senses and caused him to sleep. Here, if his sleep is indeed a restoration of his powers, his awakening must be something akin to his coming to his senses on the

⁵³Purgatorio XXXII,38-39: "*una pianta dispogliata / di foglie e d'altra fronda in ciascun ramo*".

⁵⁴Purgatorio XXXII,48: "*Sì si conserva il seme d'ogne giusto*".

⁵⁵Cf: Purgatorio XXXII,71-72: "... *un splendor mi squarciò 'l velo / del sonno* ...".

⁵⁶Purgatorio XXXII,72: "*Surgi: che fai ?*".

⁵⁷Inferno III,133-134: "... *vento, che balenò una luce vermiglia*".

other side of the gate of Hell. The Gryphon and most of his entourage are ascending on high, leaving behind Matelda, the seven ladies and Beatrice, who is seated at the junction of the chariot and the revived tree.

Singleton argues that "Beatrice now appears as *Sapientia creata*, as *Sapientia* exists on earth among men after Christ has risen to Heaven, where He abides as *Sapientia increata*".⁵⁸ This involves "a subtle symbolic change: the place there, literally, the Garden of Eden, becomes in some sense the earthly city of the saints or the justified (for Dante the wayfarer is justified now), and the canto enters into the duality made famous by Augustine in his De civitate Dei ...".⁵⁹

Thus, when Beatrice tells Dante that he will be for a short while a "forester",⁶⁰ and then "forever a citizen of that Rome whereof Christ is Roman",⁶¹ she is saying that Dante will return to the dark wood of Inferno I, but now as one of "the justified". In preparation for this, Beatrice shows him the transformations which the chariot will suffer, so that he may write about them "for profit of the world that

⁵⁸Singleton, op.cit.,note 82-90,p.794.

⁵⁹Ibid. Cf:above,pp.8-12, for Augustine's conception of his two cities.

⁶⁰Purgatorio XXXII,100: "*silvano*".

⁶¹Purgatorio XXXII,101-102: "*sanza fine cive / di quella Roma onde Cristo è romano*".

lives ill".⁶² - For, as Singleton writes, "he is living in the midst of that world, as all the righteous and the justified must do who make up the good earthly city which must exist with the bad earthly city".⁶³

(IX) The allegory of Past, Present and Future

Of the meeting between Beatrice and Dante, beginning with her dramatic address to him by the use of his name, Francis Fergusson wrote that "Dante the Pilgrim and Dante the author are [finally] revealed as one".⁶⁴ Consequently, Beatrice will speak to him in plain language, so that he "may no more speak like one who is dreaming".⁶⁵ All that remains necessary for him to know, since he is indeed still in the world, is the present situation of that world, as a precondition for the attainment of that "ideal society",⁶⁶ the principles of which he must come to know in the Paradiso.

⁶²Purgatorio XXXII,103: "... *in pro del mondo che mal vive*".

⁶³Singleton, op.cit., note 100-102,p.796.

⁶⁴Fergusson, op.cit.,p.143.

⁶⁵Cf: Purgatorio XXXIII,33: "*si che non parli più com' om che sogna*". See also Purgatorio XXXIII,100-102.

⁶⁶This is the title Joan Ferrante gives to her discussion of the Paradiso in The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy. Since the Paradiso is the *Civitas Dei*, this title could not be more appropriate.

He is therefore shown what has happened in the period between the Ascension and the present. In the allegory, the chariot, representing the Church, suffers a series of disasters. It is transformed into a vehicle which is like an "inverted" church,⁶⁷ seated upon which is a harlot (representing the Papacy), who is kissed by a violent giant (representing the French monarchy). In the end, the giant draws the chariot into the wood, where it disappears from view.

This last movement suggests that the scene should return to the dark wood of Inferno I, and the momentum with which the chariot moves also suggests perhaps that it will be plunged headlong down the whole length of the Inferno, to the area at the bottom which is "guarded" by the giants. Beatrice speaks to Dante of the conclusion: "Know that the vessel which the serpent broke was, and is not."⁶⁸ Singleton, tracing the source of her words to Apocalypse 17:7-9, interprets them to mean "that the material Church has ceased to exist by becoming thus corrupt and by being dragged out of sight."⁶⁹ At the same time, she

⁶⁷ Singleton, op.cit., note 142-147,p.804, cites Moore to the effect that the ten heads that the chariot puts forth are the seven vices (with pride, envy and wrath having two heads apiece). This would render the harlot surrounded by the seven vices as the exact antithesis of Beatrice surrounded by the seven virtues. When the harlot turns her "lustful and wandering"; "*cupido e vagante*", eye on Dante, (Purgatorio XXXII,154), she is acting just as the Siren did in his second dream.

⁶⁸ Purgatorio XXXIII,34-35: "*Sappi che 'l vaso che 'l serpente ruppe, / fu e non è*".

⁶⁹ Singleton, op.cit.,note 35,p.812.

prophesies the renewal of the church.⁷⁰ This will come about through the appearance of an imperial figure who will take vengeance on the "giant and the harlot" who have despoiled the tree for the second time.⁷¹

The prophecy at the very end of the Purgatory echoes the prophecy made by Virgil at the very beginning of the Inferno, that a greyhound would come to kill the infernal wolf, thrusting her back into Hell.⁷² The poem has come full circle.

(X) Eunoe: good will

In the last scene, Dante approaches the source of the two rivers which Matelda had told him about in Canto XXVIII.⁷³ Lethe has already taken from

⁷⁰Cf: Purgatorio XXXIII,7-12.

⁷¹Cf: Purgatorio XXXIII,34-78. Is the implication that the restoration which will ensue, so that the tree will bloom again for the third time, will be the last - at the second coming? Whatever the case, it is fitting that it is an imperial figure which will prepare the way for the restoration. The empire, as in history, always comes "before" the church.

⁷²Cf: Inferno I,100-111. The wolf "lets no man pass her way, but so besets him that she slays him"; "*non lascia altrui passar per la sua via, / ma tanto lo 'mpedisce che l'uccide*" (95-96), and "many are the beasts with which she mates"; "*Molti son li animali a cui s'ammoglia*" (100). She is like the Siren and the harlot.

⁷³If Matelda's name is indeed an anagram of Adam and Lethe, it is most suitable that it be revealed to the reader just here, where Adam's sin will be forgotten definitively.

him the memory of sin. Now he comes to the second river, Eunoe, which "restores the memory of every good deed".⁷⁴ Dante comes forth from its waves, renewed, "pure and ready to rise to the stars".⁷⁵

The two rivers, like the two keys to Purgatory, only operate in concert. The first refers to the nature of man, which needs be prepared and purified for the reception of grace, which in fact purifies it, in the manner of the second key. "Grace does not remove nature, but perfects it, [and] natural reason serves faith, just as the natural inclination of the will is obedient to charity."⁷⁶ This paradigm of nature and grace has governed the Purgatorio throughout, with its dualities of the four virtues and the three, the active and the contemplative, philosophy and sacred doctrine, empire and church, and ultimately the vision of the two natures conjoined in the Gryphon. Dante's own nature is perfected in the waters of Eunoe, at the entrance to the *Civitas Dei*.

Bourbeau observes, at the same time, that "the etymology leads us

⁷⁴Purgatorio XXVIII,129: "[*la memoria*] *d'ogne ben fatto ... rende*". The sense of this will become clear in the Paradiso, as for example with Cunizza in Paradiso IX,34-36, who is not grieved by the sin which caused her to occupy a "low" place in Paradise.

⁷⁵Purgatorio XXXIII,145: "*puro e disposto a salire a le stelle*".

⁷⁶S.T.I,1,a.8.

to discover in the name of this river the Greek word eunoia, the term used by Aristotle to designate good-will."⁷⁷ Since Aristotle takes this to be the principle or beginning of friendship, it is evident that "the structural principle of the celestial city is none other than the very principle of Aristotle; that is to say, friendship."⁷⁸

This is an extremely important point. It indicates that the philosophy of Aristotle will no more be discarded in Paradise than nature will be discarded at the advent of grace. Moreover, if the argument in this thesis is correct, that the Malebolge is an inverted Paradise, one will expect to see in the final canticle the conscious restoration of human order, or friendship, in the light of grace.

With respect to the Purgatorio, the principle of good-will has been present from the first. It is virtually the equivalent of humility, signified by the reed with which Dante girds himself in Antepurgatory. After he is purified there from sensual distraction, he exemplifies the same principle in the confession of his sins at the gate of Purgatory. Once his understanding and his will are illuminated on the cornices of Purgatory, they are then perfected in the waters of Lethe and Eunoe.

⁷⁷Bourbeau, op.cit.,p.16. My translation.

⁷⁸ Ibid. My translation.

In the meantime, for this to be possible, the content of "good-will" has to suffer a transfiguration. According to Aristotle, it is impossible for there to be the kind of friendship between God and man which is manifest in the Incarnation, and which through grace forms the principle of human salvation. There is, to him, too great a disparity between the two. "This is most manifest", indeed, "in the case of the gods, whose superiority in every good attribute is pre-eminent. when one [friend] becomes very remote from the other, as God is remote from man, [the friendship] can continue no longer".⁷⁹

With Dante, as with St. Thomas, the faith in, and hope of, such friendship is the foundation of both action and contemplation. St. Thomas writes this of it in the Summa Theologica, I-II,65,a.5 Resp:

Just as someone cannot have a friendship with another person if he does not believe or expect that he can have any social union or intimate converse with him; thus no one is able to have a friendship with God, - which is Charity, unless he has Faith through which he believes in social union of this kind and converse of man and God, and hopes that he will come to such union.

Bourbeau comments on this. "If charity is not able to exist without divine good-will, it is not able to exist without faith and hope. In consequence, the

⁷⁹ Ethics VIII,vii, 1158b-1159a.

structure of Paradiso based ... in a general way on the principle of friendship, is more precisely determined by the three theological virtues".⁸⁰ It is with these that Dante is infused in the waters of Eunoe.

⁸⁰Op.cit.,p.25. My translation.

PART FOUR

CONCLUSION

Chapter 14

The Divine Comedy began in a dark valley, where Dante had all but lost the three theological virtues. It was the three blessed ladies who took pity on the poet and sent Virgil there to help him. Virgil's first task was to show Dante how human nature itself could degenerate, once faith in the friendship of God and man was absent. After the abdication of this faith by those in the Vestibule, Dante was shown the frustration of the virtuous ancients in Limbo, who knew that the *Civitas Dei* the city of men and angels united in the loving contemplation of God, was somehow the goal of human life, but deemed that the attainment of this goal was impossible. Aristotle himself, "the master of those who know",¹ has thus condemned himself to a life which is eternally tragic. In his own terms, perhaps one could say that he lacked sufficient courage to believe in a real incarnation of the prime mover.

¹Inferno IV,131: "*I maestro di color che sanno*".

Certainly, with the disappearance of courage, it is not long before reason is subjected to desire in the circles of incontinence, and temperance vanishes as well. These circles of incontinence are the area where the least reprehensible sinners are punished, in accordance with the Aristotelian doctrine expounded by Dante in Canto XI.

Then, in the circle of heresy, reason is turned against the objective Good, and wisdom is subverted. Finally, through violence and through fraud, justice, which is obviously the very foundation of any city, is changed into its opposite. With this, all semblance of rationality is gone, and the creature is no longer able to preserve intact the integrity of the self. When Dante depicts Satan as a perverted image of the Trinity, he can think of no better way to illustrate this than to show a spiritual being totally deprived of reason.

The Purgatorio shows the reconstitution of the cardinal virtues under the auspices of grace. The confidence of a Casella or a Manfred in the forgiveness of sin constitutes an act of courage which is the polar opposite to the cowardice of a Celestine V. In Antepurgatory, desire is gradually subjected to reason, and temperance is restored. In his elevation to the Gate of Purgatory and his subsequent confession, Dante's reason is illuminated, and placed under

the conscious discernment of an objective Good. His ascent of Mount Purgatory represents the first stage in the reconstitution of the just city. It is organized according to Aristotelian principles of habituation to good actions.

Throughout the whole ascent Virgil is present to guide him. Nonetheless, it is clear from the very beginning that there is a whole dimension to the journey which Virgil does not understand. This becomes explicit when they reach the Earthly Paradise. Virgil's hold upon his longed for destination is tenuous. He is amazed by the appearance of the procession of Revelation out of the east. Just at the very moment that Beatrice appears, who has effected Dante's salvation, Virgil has vanished - and it can be to nowhere else than to his eternal home in Limbo, where he dwells with Aristotle, in terms of whose philosophy the ascent has taken place.

What has become explicit here is the fact that the successful ascent of Mount Purgatory has only been possible under the aegis of grace. In retrospect, the imagery of the Purgatorio has been permeated from beginning to end with the interpenetration of nature and grace. Four days alternate with three nights; four stars with three stars. The silver key to Purgatory only operates in tandem with the golden key; Lethe only produces its effects in conjunction with Eunoe. Grace does not destroy nature. It perfects it.

Dante has assimilated the conception of human nature formulated by Aristotle in the Ethics, and organized the Inferno and the Purgatorio according to it. It is "Aristotelian" nature which is transfigured by grace in the Purgatorio.

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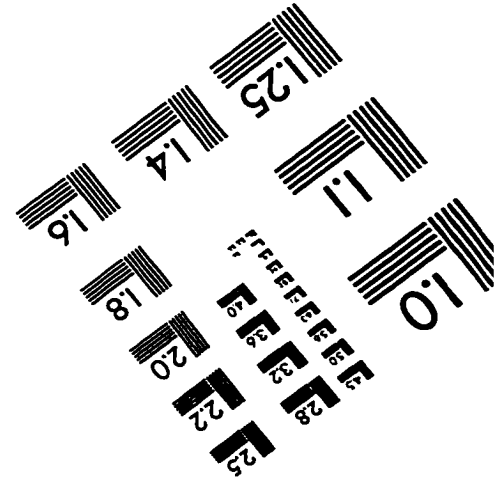
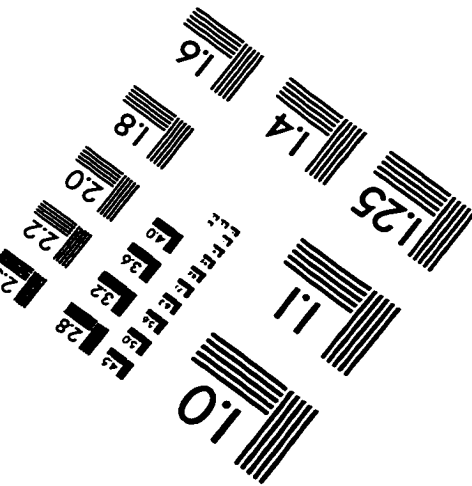
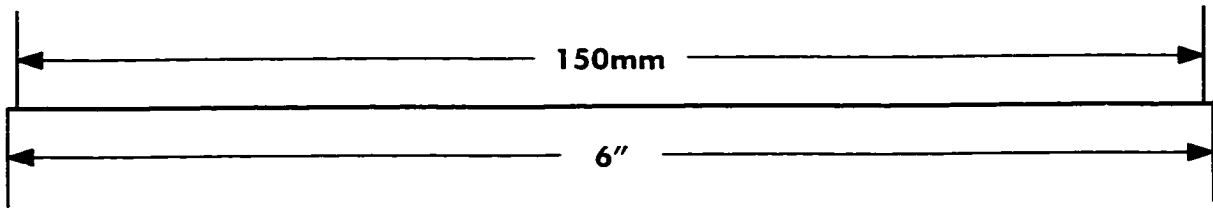
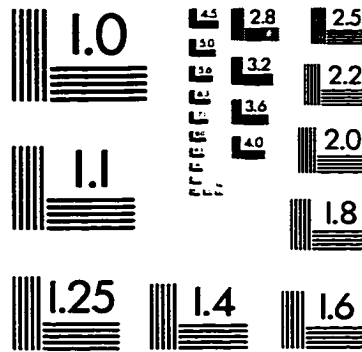
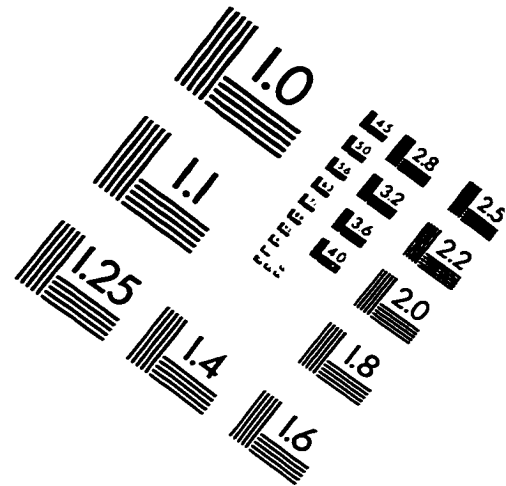
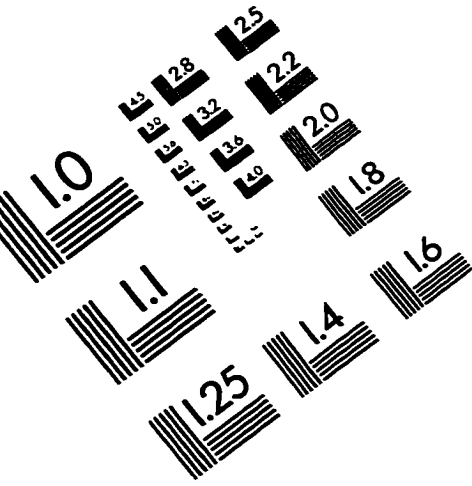
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