6-1965

The Social Implications of Dante’s Commedia

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THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS
OF DANTE'S COMMEDIA

by

Judson I. Mather, Jr.

A Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the School of Graduate
Studies in partial fulfillment
of the
Degree of Master of Arts

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
June 1965
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks go to Professor John McNally and Professor John Sommerfeldt of the Medieval Institute for their help and encouragement in the writing of this thesis.

I also wish to acknowledge a special debt to the writings of Charles Williams. His books have been immensely helpful in forming a point of view toward Dante. Several of the themes explored in the following pages, such as vocation, affirmation, and co-inherence, reflect Williams' insights.

Judson I. Mather, Jr.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I THE INFERNO</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II THE PURGATORIO</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III THE PARADISO</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV CONCLUSION</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study has derived, in part, from the experience of teaching a course in "The History of Social Thought" to undergraduate sociology majors. The more comprehensive texts in this field accord Dante some notice. But the treatment he receives as a social thinker is uniformly patronizing. One of the most substantial and adequate of these texts, for example—the three-volume study by Howard Becker and Harry Elmer Barnes—has this to say:

The key to Dante's character, and to his social theory as well, is to be found in the fact that "world peace was the target at which all his shafts were sped." It is interesting to note that the two other members of the trio who lent luster to the first quarter of the fourteenth century, Pierre DuBois and Marsiglio of Padua, also longed for an end of the strife that surrounded them. However much they may have differed in other respects, they were all greatly concerned with the problem of preserving peace in Christian Europe. With Dante, indeed, it was the dominating practical passion of his life, for it was not only the root of his political activity, the basis of his De monarchia and omnipresent in other prose works, but was also a leading thread in the Commedia. Indeed, not a few scholars look upon the Divine Comedy as fundamentally a Ghibelline political pamphlet designed to advance the prospects of Can Grande della Scala in the unification of Italy. Although this may be true, it would be unfair to Dante if we were ever to lose
sight of the fact that his aim was always peace, never mere partisan advantage.¹

There are, no doubt, several reasons for this treatment of Dante as a social thinker. In the first place, there is a well-established convention of drawing upon political philosophy in tracing pre-nineteenth century social thought. Thus a book of "readings," such as Robert Bierstedt's Making of Society, will include selections from Plato's Republic (rather than the Apology), Aristotle's Politics (rather than the Ethics), and Cicero's Laws (rather than On Friendship). Dante's political treatise, the De Monarchia, was ready at hand to be utilized within the framework of this convention. In the second place, there is the fact that the De Monarchia is a treatise and the Commedia is not. And it is certainly much easier to abstract clear assertions from a treatise than from a poem. Thirdly, there is the fact that the De Monarchia fits quite appropriately into the usual characterization of late medieval social thought. This characterization

would take note of the rise of secularism at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the disillusionment over ecclesiastical ideals and power. But at the same time it would hold that these 'new' thinkers--and Dante in particular--were unable to turn their eyes from the unitary ideal of the high middle ages to see the new social reality emerging in Europe. As a befuddled student is fabled to have written in a final examination: "Dante stood with one foot in the middle ages, and with the other saluted the rising dawn of the Renaissance."

Although this treatment of Dante as a social thinker is understandable, it is not ipso facto adequate. As Becker and Barnes themselves point out in another connection, "there has been a general failure, down to relatively recent times, to distinguish clearly between the state and society." Furthermore, there is an air of special pleading about this view of "the key to Dante's character, and to his social theory as well." One might well wonder, for example, about the adequacy of a reading of the Commedia which sees it as "fundamentally a Ghibelline political pamphlet designed to advance the prospects of Can Grande della Scala in the unification of Italy." For

2Becker and Barnes, I, 405.
as a historian of medieval political thought, John Morrall, remarks, "one wonders in reading these pages of the Monarchia how the pedantically jejune mind which seems to lie behind them could also have been the author of the poetry of the Comedy." Where such a contrast exists, one should be suspicious of the capacity of the lesser work to convey the author's deepest and fullest insights.

In the following pages I shall be trying to see whether the Commedia provides the basis for a more adequate "social theory" than the one conventionally attributed to Dante. The approach is necessarily an indirect one. It will involve a study of the structure, the dramatic action, the major figures, and the leading ideas of the Commedia. In a sense, it will be an effort to understand the world of the Commedia sociologically: to understand the function of the ideas, and the characteristic patterns of interaction and social organization in the three "societies" which Dante has created in the Inferno, the Purgatorio, and the Paradiso.

CHAPTER I: THE INFERNO

The Inferno provides an abundance of material on corrupted social relationships. This chapter will be a study of the structure of hell in the Inferno—its continuities and regressions—and the pattern of its dramatic action. The purpose of this chapter will be to see what such an approach will show about Dante's understanding of social disintegration.

I

In Canto xi of the Inferno, having made their way into the city of Dis with the aid of divine intervention, Dante and Virgil sit down behind one of the flaming tombs of the heretics in order to acclimate themselves to the stench before proceeding further. During the break, Virgil tells Dante something about the order of hell's punishments. The order, says Virgil, is explained by Aristotle.¹ The division is

¹In fact, the order is grounded on a slight misunderstanding of Aristotle which came into the medieval intellectual tradition through Cicero. Furthermore, Dante has made certain additions to the order, so that it will include 'Christian' sins such as heresy.
a threefold one, with the sins of incontinence being punished in the easier circles of hell. Then, within the city of Dis, the progressively more serious sins of violence and fraud are punished in the lower circles of the pit. Virgil also indicates a threefold division of the sins of violence: those directed against God, against self, and against one's neighbor.

The structure of the Inferno is obviously more complex and fully worked out than Virgil's explanation indicates. If the sins of incontinence, violence, and fraud are progressively more serious, it does not mean necessarily that the damned who committed these sins are progressively nastier. We can also note a certain parallelism in the structures of the circles of the incontinent on the one hand, and the combined circles of the violent and the fraudulent on the other. This can be seen in the parallel between those guilty of illicit sexuality (Canto v) and those guilty of perverted and fraudulent sexuality (Cantos xv-xvi, xviii). The avaricious (Canto vii) have much in common with the simonists and barrators (Cantos xix, xxi-xxii). And there is certainly a connection between those at the bottom of the circles of the incontinent, and the fraudulent at the bottom of hell. The former

2 See chapter I, section III, below.
are people underneath the water, who sob, and
make it bubble at the surface; as thy eye may
tell thee, whichever way it turns.

Fixed in the slime, they say: "Sullen were we
in the sweet air, that is gladdened by the Sun,
carrying lazy smoke within our hearts;

now lie we sullen here in the black mire."
This hymn they gurgle in their throats, for
they cannot speak it in full words. 3

The latter, traitors against lords and benefactors,
are entombed beneath a lake of ice:

I had come (and with fear I put it into verse)
where the souls were wholly covered, and shone
through like straws in glass.

Some are lying; some stand upright, this on its
head, and that upon its soles; another, like a
bow, bends face to feet. (Inferno xxxiv, 10-15)

Yet although these patterns are significant,
the general pattern of the Inferno is one of a steady
regression from beginning to end. Allegorically, this
regression is reflected in the things which happen to
the sinners: the principle, "let the punishment fit
the crime" is operative in hell.

Furthermore, a steady regression can be noted
in Dante's development of the inescapably social nat-

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3 Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, the Carlyle-Wicksteed translation (New York: The Modern Library, 1950) Inferno, Canto vii, lines 118-126. All subsequent quotations from the Commedia are from this edition. The references will be noted at the end of the quotation, rather than in a foot-
note, by the Canticle (Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso),
the Canto (in Roman numerals), and the line numbers
(in Arabic numerals).
ure of hell. Excepting the cases of the sullen and the worst traitors, the damned are damned to one another's company. The significance of this becomes increasingly horrifying. In the first circle of hell, the damned seem to have at least the comfort on one another's presence. Dante tells Virgil, "willingly would I speak with those two that go together, and seem so light upon the wind." Virgil replies:

Thou shalt see when they are nearer to us; and do thou entreat them by that love, which leads them; and they will come. (Inferno v, 73-78)

Thus he meets Paolo and his sister-in-law Francesca, who have been damned for their illicit love. Francesca tells Dante:

Love, which is quickly caught in the gentle heart, took him with the fair body of which I was bereft; and the manner still afflicts me.

Love, which to no loved one permits excuse for loving, took me so strongly with delight in him, that, as thou seest, even now it leaves me not. (Inferno v, 100-105)

But in hell, their love is cold comfort. "There is," says Francesca, "no greater pain than to recall a happy time in wretchedness." (Inferno v, 121-123)

The misery of social relationships in hell soon becomes more manifest. Although the gluttonous neither bother nor console one another (Canto vi), the avaricious keep rolling heavy weights into one another and shouting recriminations (Canto vii), and the
wrathful rend one another (Canto viii). Through the circles of the violent and the first circle of the fraudulent a new element is introduced. The tormentors of the damned are the creatures of hell—centaurs, harpies, and hell hounds. But the damned may still try to ignore one another. Thus in the circle of the heretics Dante speaks with Farinata:

Already I had fixed my look on his; and he rose upright with breast and countenance, as if he entertained great scorn of Hell....

When I was at the foot of his tomb, he looked at me a little; and then, almost contemptuously, he asked me: "Who were thy ancestors?"

(Inferno x, 34-36, 40-42)

Indeed, the disdain Farinata holds for hell and for Dante also extends to his fellow occupant in the fiery tomb, whom he pointedly ignores. But in the end, it is apparent that the scorn of Farinata reflects an intense class consciousness rather than an intense individualism:

And now my Master was recalling me: wherefore I, in more haste, besought the spirit to tell me who was with him.

He said to me: "With more than a thousand lie I here; the second Frederick is here within, and the Cardinal; and of the rest I speak not."

(Inferno x, 115-120)

As Dante proceeds deeper into hell, it becomes increasingly difficult for the damned to ignore one another, however. In Canto xix, Dante speaks with
Pope Nicholas III, who is thrust head downward into a hole in the rock, while flames lick around his protruding feet. Nicholas implies that there is only one hole for popes guilty of simony, and that with each new arrival the occupants are jammed down on top of each other in the hole. There is some real social interaction in Canto xxii, where the damned and the devils "get at" one another. Dorothy Sayers views this canto as a kind of comic relief to the deadly dreariness of hell. While it does serve this function, it is to be noted that the humor of this passage is the humor of sadism; indeed, the barrator caught by the fiends gets away by offering to betray his fellows into their clutches. Dramatically, Canto xxii furnishes comic relief; structurally, it shows the capacity to enjoy making someone else miserable as one more stage in the regression of social relationships in hell.

As Dante nears the bottom of hell, social interaction becomes a nightmare. In Canto xxiv, the damned thieves endlessly attack and fasten on one another, and in so doing they are endlessly transmuted into a variety of ghastly and unnatural creatures.

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Finally, in the lake of ice that forms the floor of hell, Dante comes upon Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri, both of Pisa. The two had been in collusion in committing treachery; then Ruggieri had betrayed Ugolino, locked him in a tower, and starved him to death. Now, forever, they were frozen together up to their necks in the ice, with Ugolino on top, in his famine gnawing on the brains of Ruggieri.

Recalling the principle of the punishment fitting the crime, a further instance of the antisocial progression in hell can be seen. As John Sinclair remarks, "for Dante, sins are base in the measure in which they are anti-social." And indeed, in the instances cited above, the antisocial behavior of the damned toward one another has a close connection with the antisocial character of the sins which they have committed.

II

The parallelism noted between the circles of incontinence on the one hand, and the circles of violence and fraud on the other, is further emphasized by the image of the city of Dis—a wall surrounding

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the circle of the heretics:

The kind master said: "Now, Son, the city that is named of Dis draws nigh, with its grave citizens, with its great company."

And I: "Master, already I discern its mosques, distinctly there within the valley, red as if they had come out of fire."

And he to me said: "The eternal fire, which causes them to glow within, shows them red, as thou seest, in this low Hell."

We now arrived in the deep fosses, which moat that joyless city; the walls seemed to me as if they were of iron. (Inferno viii, 67-78)

The demons who meet the two pilgrims at the gate refuse to admit them. And although there are many difficult transitions to negotiate in hell, it is only here that Virgil is forced to call upon angelic intervention to clear the way. While Dante and Virgil wait for this intervention, the harpies on the wall attempt to turn them into stone with the Gorgon's head.

Why is it that Dante places this special barrier in hell, and why does he place it at this particular point? It seems to me that the division here being made has to do with the intellectual dimension of sin. As they pass through the gate of hell at the beginning of the Inferno, Virgil tells Dante:

We are come to the place where I told thee thou shouldst see the wretched people, who have lost the good of the intellect. (Inferno iii, 16-18)

But there are degrees to which the good of the
intellect may be lost. For those sinners outside the
city of Dis, in the circles of incontinence, the
intellect has consented to sin more by default than by
deliberation. The deliberateness of their sin was in
the neglect of the intellect, the intentional follow­
ing of their passions rather than their mind. But
one must think his way into the city of Dis. The
imagery of the locked gates, the Gorgon's head, and
the angelic intervention indicate that, apart from
divine intervention, the gates open only to those who
choose this city deliberately and decisively.

Within the city of Dis, further distinctions
are made. It seems clear that the circles of violence
hold those who have done violence to the intellect.
Heretics, suicides, squanderers, blasphemers, and
perverts are not violent in the sense of the wrathful. Rather they have flaunted right reason, delib­
erately chosen what is monstrous.

The fraudulent have carried the process a
step further. Not only have they chosen what is false;
they also have used their gift of reason to pursue
falsehood and evil. 6 This is the characteristic

6 "To turn reason, the faculty that establishes
order, into a means of organizing disorder, is a per­
versity truly satanic." George Santayana, Three Philo­
osophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, Goethe (Garden City,
common to the mixed lot found in the circles of the fraudulent: panderers and sorcerers, simonists and hypocrites, thieves and traitors and the rest.

What can be seen, stage by stage through the Inferno, is a consistent regression from the truth. The devil, Jesus had said, "is a liar and the father of lies," and the descent through hell is a descent into an ever more deliberate lie. And Dante indicates that, in the end, the intention to use reason in the service of falsehood is destructive, not only of goodness, but also of coherence. The final image of the Inferno, the figure of Satan, is that of a towering, drooling idiot.

It would seem that a good deal is implied in the Inferno about the nature and significance of reason. Rationality is necessary; those who have neglected it are flung about by the gales of self-indulgence or sunk in the mud of self-absorption. But corruptio optimi pessima. In hell, rationality gone bad pursues both personal and social disintegration with a vengeance and effectiveness that is frightening.

III

As a medieval man, Dante would have been well aware of the definitions of man as both a rational and

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7John 8:44
a social animal. I think it can be seen from the foregoing analysis that Dante views these two definitions of human nature as interrelated but not identical. In hell, the degeneration of reason and the decay of social relationships follow independent, if often propinquent, courses. This accounts for the fact that there is both a more or less consistent regression through hell, and a certain parallelism between its two major divisions. Only as the depths of hell are reached do the two regressions draw together; treachery is the last stage of both.

There is, I think, one further regression to be found in the structure of the Inferno, based on Dante's concept of function, or vocation. Dante states the principle in the De Monarchia:

God and nature make nothing in vain, and . . . whatever is produced serves some function. For the intention of any act of creation, if it is really creative, is not merely to produce the existence of something but to produce the proper functioning of that existence. Hence a proper functioning does not exist for the sake of the being which functions, but rather the being exists for the sake of its function. This principle, I think, explains much about Dante's thought. His passionate denunciations of corrupt

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popes and corrupt Florentines are something more than reflections of his partisan loyalties and personal troubles. Corrupt popes and Florentine leaders were betrayers of great vocations. They had turned the proper order of things upside down. They treated their offices as if these offices had been created for them; in reality they had been created for the offices.

Yet to speak of offices is to impoverish this element of Dante's thought. For it seems to me that Dante's concept of social relationships is essentially qualitative and personal. It is not the status of an office, or the number of people affected by a relationship that matters most. Rather it is the depth and the reality of the relationship. The horror of a corrupt pope was not that a spiritual lord of so many would be evil, but that "the servant of the servants of God" should desecrate so fundamental a relationship. With biting irony, Dante uses this papal title in referring to Pope Boniface VIII.9

The theme of vocation is not prominent in the Inferno. For though man's function is inescapably social, his essence is rationality, and on that, primarily, he is judged. He is damned for what he has

9See Inferno xv, 112.
become, not for what he has done to others. Thus, for example, as Dante scans the crowd that moves about the vestibule outside of hell, the place of the futile, he says:

After I had recognized some amongst them, I saw and knew the shadow of him who from cowardice made the great refusal.

Forthwith I understood and felt assured, that this was the crew of caitiffs, hateful to God and to his enemies. (Inferno iii, 58-63)

The figure is not named, but most commentators identify him as Pope Celestine V, who resigned in favor of Boniface VIII. Yet whoever he was, and however disastrous and far-reaching the consequences of his great refusal, he is judged only as a coward. And cowardice is not significant enough to get him beyond the vestibule of hell. On the other hand, in Canto xvi, Dante comes upon a group of courteous and dignified men. They are Florentines; they have had careers of distinguished and honorable public service. But their deeds no longer mattered because of what they had become. They were in the circle of the violent because they had become sodomites.

The circles of fraud are the one place in the Inferno where Dante's principle of vocation may be relevant. I cannot pretend to explain the rather puzzling sequence of fraudulent vices in detail, but
it does seem to me that a certain pattern is discernable. In the first five circles are those guilty of pandering and seducing, flattering, simony, sorcery, and barratry. These, in a sense, are "cheap" sins; they can flourish only in an atmosphere of corruption and credulity. They who committed these sins did ill, and for that they are punished. But the vocation they had failed was tempered by the circumstances and atmosphere that surrounded it; fraud was made easy. The sins of the next two circles—hypocrisy and thievery—go deeper. They undermine the foundations of healthy human society: integrity of word and of things. Here the betrayal of vocation makes the good bad, rather than the bad worse. Finally, there are the sins of those to whom much was given and of whom much was required: counsellors of fraud, sowers of discord, falsifiers and traitors. Like all others, they had been created for a function. The "greatness" of their function did not consist in the extent of their influence, but in the depth and reality of the relationships in which they were involved. They were presented with some moment of responsibility or loyalty, and they deliberately—rationally—made the worst of it. Here, indeed, the best corrupted has become the worst.
I

Thus far some of the structural aspects of the Inferno have been noted. Let us now turn to a consideration of its drama.

Throughout the Inferno, two judgments are going on simultaneously. On the one hand there is the judgment implicit in the structure of the Inferno: the divine judgment as it is formulated by Dante the poet. On the other hand, there is the perceptive human judgment of Dante the pilgrim, reflecting back to the reader the impact of what he sees and hears. For the most part, Dante the pilgrim plays the involved yet objective observer. Examples of this could be chosen almost at random:

We had already come to where the narrow pathway crosses the second bank, and makes of it a buttress for another arch.

Here we heard people whining in the other chasm, and puffing with mouth and nostrils, and knocking on themselves with their palms.

10 "He writes in the first person; and yet the distinction between Dante speaking as the author, and Dante the Pilgrim, is fundamental to the whole structure. The author, when he reminds us of his existence, is outside the fictive world of the poem; the Pilgrim is the protagonist of the drama, the center of each scene. The author knows the whole story in advance, the Pilgrim meets everything freshly, for the first time." Francis Fergusson, Dante's Drama of the Mind: A Modern Reading of the Purgatorio (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1953) pp. 9-10.
The banks were crusted over with a mold from the vapour below, which concretes upon them, which did battle with the eyes and with the nose.

The bottom is so deep, that we could see it nowhere without mounting to the ridge of the arch, where the cliff stands highest.

We got upon it; and thence in the ditch beneath, I saw people dipped in excrement, that seemed as it had flowed from human privies.

And whilst I was searching with my eyes, down amongst it, I beheld one with a head so smeared in filth, that it did not appear whether he was layman or clerk.

He bawled to me: "Why are thou so eager in gazing at me more than the others in their nastiness?" And I to him, "Because, if I rightly recollect,

I have seen thee before with thy hair dry; and thou art Alessio Intermineli of Lucca: therefore do I eye thee more than all the rest."

And he then, beating his pate: "Down to this, the flatteries wherewith my tongue was never weary have sunk me!" (Inferno xviii, 100-126)

At times—as in the instance of the sorcerers—Dante the pilgrim is moved to pity:

Perhaps by force of palsy some have been thus quite distorted; but I have not seen, nor do believe it to be so.

Reader, so God grant thee to take profit of thy reading, now think for thyself how I could keep my visage dry,

when near at hand I saw our image so contorted, that the weeping of the eyes bathed the hinder parts at their division?

Certainly I wept, leaning on one of the rocks of the hard cliff, so that my Escort said to me: "Art thou, too, like the other fools?" (Inferno xx, 16-27)
At other times, Dante the pilgrim can be extremely callous. Crossing the lake of ice at the base of hell, whether it was will, or destiny or chance, I know not; but, walking amid the heads, I hit my foot violently against the face of one.

Weeping it cried out to me: "Why tramplest thou on me? If thou comest not to increase the vengeance for Montaperti, why dost thou molest me?"

And I: "My Master! now wait me here, that I may rid me of a doubt respecting him; then shalt thou, however much thou pleasest, make me haste . . . ."

Then I seized him by the after-scalp, and said: "It will be necessary that thou name thyself, or that not a hair remain upon thee here!"

Whence he to me: "Even if thou unhair me, I will not tell thee who I am; nor show it thee, though thou fall foul upon my head a thousand times."

I already had his hair coiled on my hand, and had plucked off more than one tuft of it, he barking and keeping down his eyes,

when another cried: "What ails thee, Bocca? is it not enough for thee to chatter with thy jaws, but thou must bark too? What devil is upon thee?"

"Now," said I, "accursed traitor! I do not want thee to speak; for to thy shame I will bear true tidings of thee." (Inferno xxxii, 76-84, 97-111)

Indeed, on at least one occasion, Dante the pilgrim enters into the divine judgment of hell with what is, to our ears, a rather unpleasant relish. As Dante and Virgil were being ferried across the marsh to the city of Dis,

whilst we were running through the dead channel, there rose before me one full of mud, and said: "Who art thou, that comest before thy time?"
And I to him: "If I come, I remain not; but thou, who art thou, that hast become so foul?" He answered: "Thou seest that I am one who weep."

And I to him: "With weeping, and with sorrow, accursed spirit, remain thou! for I know thee, all filthy as thou art . . . ."

A little after this, I saw the muddy people make such rending of him, that even now I praise and thank God for it.

All cried: "At Filippo Argenti!" The passionate Florentine spirit turned with his teeth upon himself. (Inferno viii, 31-39, 58-63)

But yet, when these and scores of similar passages are considered, the most striking passages of the Inferno remain those in which the judgment of Dante the poet and the judgment of Dante the pilgrim stand in opposition. There is the pitiable forlornness of Francesca (Canto v) and the courtesy and dignity of the Florentine counsellors (Canto xvi). Ulysses is the same old spellbinder he was in the Odyssey, as he tells the tale of his last great voyage (Canto xxvi).

But most of all, there is the impact of Dante's mentor and friend, Brunetto Latini, in Canto xv:

Thus eyed by that family, I was recognized by one who took me by the skirt, and said: "What a wonder!"

And I, when he stretched out his arm to me, fixed my eyes on his baked aspect, so that the scorching of his visage hindered not my mind from knowing him; and bending my face to his, I answered: "Are you here, Ser Brunetto?"
And he: "O my son! let it not displease thee, if Brunetto Latini turn back with thee a little, and let go his train."

I said: "With all my power I do beseech it of you; and if you wish me to sit down with you, I will do so . . . ."

"O my son," he said, "whoever of this flock stops one instant, lies a hundred years thereafter without fanning himself when the fire strikes him.

Therefore go on; I will follow at thy skirts; and then will I rejoin my band, that go lamenting their eternal losses." (Inferno xv, 22-35, 37-42)

As they walk together, Brunetto tells Dante:

If thou follow thy star, thou canst not fail of glorious haven, if I discerned rightly in the fair life;

and if I had not died so early, seeing Heaven so kind to thee, I would have cheered thee in the work. (Inferno xv, 55-60)

And Dante can reply to him:

Were my desire all fulfilled . . . you had not yet been banished from human nature:

for in my memory is fixed, and now goes to my heart, the dear and kind, paternal image of you, when in the world, hour by hour,

you taught me how man makes himself eternal; and whilst I live, beseems my tongue should show what gratitude I have for it. (Inferno xv, 79-87)

Finally Brunetto must tell Dante:

"I would say more, but my going and my speech must not be longer; for there I see new smoke arising from the great sand.

People are coming with whom I may not be; let my 'Treasure,' in which I still live, be commended to thee; and more I ask not."
Then he turned back, and seemed like one of those who run for the green cloth at Verona, through the open field; and of them seemed he who gains, not he who loses. *(Inferno* xv, 115-124)

What can we say about these things? It seems to me that Dante is drawing attention to the very real tension that exists between the sensibilities of our human judgment on the one hand, and our human understanding of the laws of divine justice on the other. Much of the *Inferno* can be read with a certain complacency; the pictures it paints are vivid, but they are still pictures. Its figures have little of the reality of the persons we call our friends. But then, suddenly, a segment of the picture comes alive, and a figure steps out from it. And it is rather shattering to see hell, not only with its "human interest," but with its human dignity and decency as well. Hell no longer seems quite so far away; there is a new aspect to the whole picture.

It is, after all, the aspect of the world that we know. The *Inferno* is never far from this world in its impact. I doubt that it is meant to be far. In a sense, the *Inferno* is a picture of the world without grace, a world without joy, hope, faith, and saints—a world debilitated by unreflective action and devastated by reasoned falsehood.
It may be that this terrible tension between divine and human judgment has a positive significance. A certain degree of autonomy between personal evil and social disorganization, the anti-rational and the anti-social, has already been noted. May not the tension between divine and human judgment point to the partial autonomy—and, therefore, reality and permanence—of the criteria of human judgment?

Dante's approach in the Inferno is that of a moralist and theologian. And the temptation of such an approach to personal and social evil is to dismiss, rationalize away, or ignore the good things of human values: to engage in what William Lynch calls "univocal thought." The Inferno does not do this. Because of the relative autonomy of the different elements which go to make up human personality and human society in the Inferno, evil—even in hell—does not utterly annihilate goodness. This will have an important bearing on Dante's understanding of purgatory and paradise, to the consideration of which we now turn.

CHAPTER II: THE PURGATORIO

The topographical differences between the world of the Inferno and the world of the Purgatorio are in a sense symbolic of the social differences between the two worlds. Hell is a funnel-shaped pit, with its nadir at the center of the earth; purgatory is a cone-shaped mountain thrust up into the light and clear air of the heavens. The previous chapter was a study of the disintegration of social relationships; the present chapter will examine the re-integration of these relationships.

I

There are a number of structural and thematic parallels between the Purgatorio and the Inferno. It can be noted, in the first place, that purgatory, like hell, has certain definite structural divisions. Particularly to be noted here is the division between ante-purgatory and purgatory proper, and the division between the cornices of purgatory (ledges of rock which circle the mountain at various levels) and the Garden of Eden, atop the mountain. Any attempt to make
a connection between these divisions and the divisions of hell, however, would be fraught with problems. Secondly, in purgatory, the penances are symbolically representative of the sins being purged, just as in hell the punishments have fitted the crimes. Thus (to cite three examples) those guilty of pride carry huge rocks on their backs in purgatory—the rocks both representing the weight of pride and forcing the penitents into a humble position. The slothful, on their cornice, are running at full speed at midnight. And the gluttonous are in an advanced state of famine. Thirdly, there is a direct parallel between the first three circles of hell and the last three cornices of purgatory. Here, in both cases, the sins of the flesh are punished: avarice, gluttony, and lust. Finally, the principle, "the being is created for its function, and not the function for the being," is operative in purgatory as it was in hell.¹

II

The contrasts between purgatory and hell are much more striking than the similarities. This can be seen particularly in the light of the major themes that

¹See chapter I, section III; chapter II, section IV.
have been traced through the Inferno in the previous chapter. The degeneration of social relationships apparent in hell is not paralleled with an upbuilding of social relationships in purgatory. In purgatory, social relationships are uniformly good, from its shore to its summit. Although there may be some difference in the enthusiasm with which Dante is greeted by friend and stranger among the penitents, there is no difference in the courtesy, interest, and respect which he consistently finds. Likewise, throughout the Purgatorio, the penitents provide mutual support and encouragement for one another. This is epitomized in an incident which occurs in Canto xx. As Dante and Virgil move along the cornice of the avaricious, there is a tremendous earthquake:

I felt the mountain quake, like a thing which is falling; whereupon a chill gripped me, as is wont to grip him who is going to death . . . .

Then began on all sides a shout, such that the Master drew toward me, saying: "Fear not while I do guide thee."

"Gloria in excelsis Deo," all were saying, by what I understood from those near by, whose cry could be heard. (Purgatorio xx, 127-129, 133-138)

In the following Canto, Statius explains that the earthquake had no physical cause; both it and the shout mark the end of purgation for a certain soul, his freedom to mount to paradise. In the Purgatorio,
the good fortune of one soul is a cause for the joy of all.

There are a number of reasons for the uniformity of social relationships in the *Purgatorio*. In the *Inferno*, the structural differences—the series of circles—marked permanent distinctions between the inhabitants. But the *Purgatorio* has no permanent distinctions because it has no permanent inhabitants. All—like Dante and Virgil—are pilgrims. As such, the focus of their ambition and longing is on their final goal rather than on their proximate status. This, too, is reflected in Dante's social relationships with the penitents. If these contacts are uniformly friendly, they are also uniformly brief. Almost as soon as they arrive at the mountain, Dante and Virgil pause while Cassella sings:

My Master and I and that people who were with him, seemed so glad as if to aught else the mind of no one of them gave heed.

We were all fixed and intent upon his notes; and lo the old man venerable, crying: "What is this, ye laggard spirits?

what negligence, what tarrying is this? Haste to the mount and strip you of the slough, that lets not God be manifest to you." (*Purgatorio* ii, 115-123)

From this point on, however, the penitents do not need

2 The "old man" is Cato of Utica, the warder of purgatory.
to be reminded of the significance of time. Pope Adrian V tells Dante at the end of their conversations:

Now get thee hence; I desire not that thou stay longer, for thy tarrying disturbs my weeping, whereby I mature that which thou didst say.\(^3\)

(Purgatorio xix, 139-141)

When Dante speaks to the souls in the cornice of the lustful, they are as careful not to step out of the purifying flame as Dante is not to step into it. And Dante's friend Forese, after he has talked with him briefly, tells him:

"Now remain thou behind, for time is precious in this realm, so that I lose too much coming with thee thus at equal pace."

As a horseman sometimes comes forth at a gallop from a troop that is riding, and goes to win the honour of the first encounter,

so parted he from us with greater strides.\(^4\)

The desire for haste on the part of the penitents indicates another aspect of social relationships in the Purgatorio not found in the Inferno. In hell, the damned are beyond help. But the penitents in purgatory can be helped by the prayers of the living—

\(^3\)"That which thou didst say" is the fruit of repentance.

\(^4\)A further example of the importance of time can be seen in Statius' remark that it would have been worth one whole extra year in purgatory to have lived in Virgil's time and to have met him. The "one year" must be seen in relation to the fact that Statius spent nine hundred years in purgatory! See Purgatorio xxi, 100-102.
and therefore by Dante:

When the game of dice breaks up, he who loses stays sorrowing, repeating the throws, and sadly learns:

with the other all the folk go away; one goes in front, another plucks him from behind, and another at his side recalls him to his mind.

He halts not and attends to this one and to that: those to whom he stretches forth his hand press no more; and so he saves him from the crowd.

Such was I in that dense throng, turning my face to them, now here, now there, and by promising freed me from them...

from all those shades whose one prayer was that others should pray, so that their way to blessedness be sped. (Purgatorio vi, 1-12, 25-27)

There is a mutuality in purgatory between Dante and the penitents. They can enlighten him; he can speed them on their way to heaven.

The egalitarianism of purgatory goes much deeper than mere utility, however. In the cornice of the avaricious, when Dante discovers that he is addressing Pope Adrian V, he says:

I had kneeled down, and was about to speak; but as I began, and he perceived my reverence merely by listening,

"What reason," he said, "thus bent thee down?"
And I to him: "Because of your dignity my conscience smote me for standing."

"Make straight thy legs, uplift thee, brother," he answered; "err not, a fellow-servant am I with thee and with the others unto one Power."
If ever thou didst understand that hallowed gospel sound which saith, Neque nubent, well can thou see why thus I speak." (Purgatorio xix, 127-138)

When a soul has arrived in purgatory, the time for status, office, and prestige has passed. Pope Adrian's attitude here can be contrasted with the deep sense of "class consciousness" reflected by such figures as Farinata in hell. It is indicative of a further contrast between the two Canticles: the contrast between darkened and enlightened reason.

III

It was noted in the previous chapter that the seriousness of sin in the Inferno is related to its irrationality. Neglecting the intellect, doing violence to the intellect, and deliberately corrupting the intellect were seen as three stages in a sequence of rational degeneration. Within the structure of the Purgatorio, there is a certain parallel to this: the "intellectual" sins of pride and envy are purged in the lowest cornices of the mountain, and the "passionate" sins of gluttony and lust are purged in the highest. Yet there is no progression or rational re-integration that I can trace in the Purgatorio. The penitents in ante-purgatory and in the lower cornices
are fully as rational as those in the final cornice.\(^5\)

It would seem that the change effected in the penitents in purgatory is essentially an interior one. It cannot be pictured in the action and the dialogue of the Purgatorio; rather it is developed in the discourses of the Canticle—particularly that of Virgil in Canto xvii:

He began: "Nor Creator, nor creature, my son, was ever without love, either natural or rational; and this thou knowest.

The natural is always without error; but the other may err through an evil object, or through too little or too much vigour.

While it is directed to the primal goods, and in the secondary, moderates itself, it cannot be the cause of sinful delight;

but when it is turned awry to evil, or speeds towards the good with more or less care than it ought, against the Creator his creature works.

Hence thou mayst understand that love must be the seed of every virtue in you, and of every deed that deserves punishment." (Purgatorio xvii, 91-105)

Thus viewed, the seven cornices of purgatory are seen not so much as representative of seven deadly sins to be purged, as indicative of seven different ways in which love must be purified and redirected, in order to be perfected. On the lowest three cornices are found the penitents whose love during their

\(^5\) For a further treatment of this point, see below, chapter II, section IV.
lifetime has been perverted—who "loved the ill that is another's woe." These are the sins of pride, envy, and anger. On the middle cornice are the penitents whose love is defective: the sin of sloth. Then, on the upper three cornices disordered love—avarice, greed, and lust—is reordered and made whole.

Thus live, or charity, plays a role in the Purgatorio not unlike that which rationality plays in the Inferno. This contrast would seem to indicate, for one thing, a shift from an universal order to a Christian order. As was noted in the preceding chapter, the structure of the Inferno is grounded on a pagan view of the moral order. As such, it was a moral order open to the light of reason, and therefore open to all. But the structure of the Purgatorio reflects the Christian scheme of the seven deadly sins. In this sense there is a narrowing of scope in the Purgatorio; a man must be a Christian before he can be a penitent.

But with the narrowing comes a deepening in the understanding of the nature and the potential of man. Medieval Christians were at one with the ancients in seeing rationality as the distinctively human characteristic, the quality separating man from the animals. But the medieval Christians did not, like the
ancients, see rationality as the fulfillment of human nature. To their mind, it was charity rather than rationality that completed human nature and brought it to perfection. As Virgil tells Dante:

That infinite and ineffable Good, that is on high, speedeth so to love as a ray of light comes to a bright body.

As much of ardour as it finds, so much of itself doth it give, so that how far soever love extends, eternal goodness giveth increase upon it;

and the more people on high who comprehend each other, the more there are to love well, and the more love is there, and like a mirror one giveth back to the other.

Charity, then, is the greatest of human qualities because it is the one through which God can most fully communicate himself to humans.

IV

The themes of social egalitarianism and growth in charity are related to a third major theme: that of vocation. As was noted in the previous chapter, Dante held that a person is created for his function, not the function for the person. A person is not judged on the basis of what he has achieved, or even the basis of the effects of what he has done. Fundamentally, a man's vocation is to be something before it is to do something.
In the Purgatorio, the common characteristic of all the pilgrims is that they have become penitents, this is the function which (at this stage of their existence) they have been created to fulfill. Here, I think, we have a further reason for social equality among the penitents in purgatory.

Penitence also would seem to shed further light on the other themes traced thus far in the Purgatorio. For penitence is not just the precondition for the restoration of right social relationships and right reason. It is the restoration, in substance if not in all its ramifications. For penitence is essentially the acceptance of God's forgiveness. And, as the Gospels abundantly make clear, the precondition of divine forgiveness is the forgiveness of others: "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." This would presuppose, in turn, that right-mindedness and charity toward others had been restored already.

6St. Thomas gives confirmation of this view along different lines: "Souls immediately after their separation from the body become unchangeable in will, with the result that the will of man cannot further be changed, neither from good to evil, nor from evil to good . . . . The souls which carry with them something subject to purging do not differ in end from the blessed souls, for they depart in charity by which we cleave to God as to an end. Those very souls, then, will have an unchangeable will." St. Thomas Aquinas, On the Truth of the Catholic Faith: Summa Contra Gentiles.
Closely connected to the "what" of vocation in the Purgatorio (i.e. to become penitents) is the "how" of vocation. Here it is helpful to examine the view of grace and free will developed in the Purgatorio. Dante adheres to the orthodox position that prevenient grace is the background and impulse of every good decision and every good act. Thus if it can be said that the person is created for his function, it also needs to be added that the ability to fulfill that function is offered with the demand.

By its nature, prevenient grace is more difficult to illustrate concretely than to state abstractly. Dante, however, does so illustrate it in the Purgatorio. There is, for example, the symbolism of the principle that no movement can take place in purgatory once the sun has set:

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St. Thomas also holds that a soul with an immutably good will "cannot be in ignorance at all." Ibid., chapter 92, section 6.

7Thus, for example the Council of Orange, held in the year 529, condemned the proposition "that in order that we may be purged from sin our will anticipates God; and that it is not through the infusion of the Holy Spirit and his operation in us that we wish to be purged." Cited in Henry Bettenson (ed.), Documents of the Christian Church (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 86.
And ere the horizon in all its stupendous range had become one hue, and night held all her dominion,
each of us made a bed of a step; for the law of the mount took from us the power, rather than the desire, to ascend.  
(Purgatorio xxvii, 70-76)

Again, in Canto vii, two angels drive off the snake which attempts to enter the "bower of the kings." And certainly one of the most striking images of the operation of grace is Dante's dream in Canto ix, as he is carried from ante-purgatory to Peter's Gate, the entrance to purgatory itself:

At the hour when the swallow begins her sad lays nigh unto the morn, perchance in memory of her former woes,

and when our mind, more of a wanderer from the flesh and less imprisoned by thoughts, in its visions is almost prophetic;

in a dream methought I saw an eagle poised in the sky, with plumes of gold, with wings outspread, and intent to swoop . . . .

Then me seemed that, having wheeled awhile, terrible as lightning, he descended and snatched me up far as the fiery sphere.

There it seemed that he and I did burn, and the visionary flame so scorched that need was my slumber broken.  (Purgatorio ix, 13-21, 28-33)

Virgil tells Dante that at dawn there came a lady and said: "I am Luch, let me take this man who sleepest, so will I prosper him on his way . . . ."

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See also Purgatorio vii, 43-60; xvii, 70-78. The one exception to this law is the cornice of the slothful.
She took thee, and as day was bright, came on upward, and I followed in her track.

Here she placed thee; and first her fair eyes did show me that open entrance; then she and sleep together went away.⁹ (Purgatorio ix, 53-57, 59-63)

Both positively and negatively, divine grace stands behind all movement in the Purgatorio.

At the same time, Dante makes it very clear that grace does not operate apart from free will:

The heavens set your impulses in motion; I say not all, but suppose I said it, a light is given you to know good and evil,

and Free Will, which, if it endure the strain in its first battlings with the heavens, at length gains the whole victory, if it be well nurtured.

Ye lie subject, in your freedom, to a greater power, and to a better nature; and that creates in you mind which the heavens have not in their charge.

Therefore, if the world today goeth astray, in you is the cause, in you be it sought. (Purgatorio xvi, 73-84)

Here Mark Lombardo is telling Dante that the stars--Fortune, Luck--may influence a person's life, but they do not determine it. Choice--choice of decision and

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⁹Lucy, it can be noted, has already appeared as an agent of divine grace in Canto ii of the Inferno. In using erotic imagery to describe the experience of divine grace, Dante stands in a long tradition of religious poetry: e.g. Francis Thompson, John Donne, St. John of the Cross, The Song of Songs. Although foolishness to the Freudians and a scandal to the prudes, such imagery does seem to be peculiarly appropriate to the experience of intimacy, prevenience, and transformative power which these poets are attempting to communicate.
choice of action—are always in fact made. The choice can be subtle, and even hidden from the eyes of the world. But it is nonetheless real. Dante develops this powerfully (to cite one instance) in the ironic contrast between Buonconte of Montefeltro and his father, Guido. Guido, after a successful career as a fighting man, turned to religion and became a Franciscan. But Dante meets him in hell. For after he became a friar, Pope Boniface VIII called upon him for advice in tricking his enemies, the Colonna family. Guido tells Dante:

I kept silent, for his words seemed drunken.

And then he said to me: "Let not thy heart misdoubt; even now do I absolve thee, and do thou teach me so to act, that I may cast Penestrino to the ground.

Heaven I can shut and open, as thou knowest; for two are the keys that my predecessor held not dear."

Then weighty arguments impelled me to think silence worst; and I said: "Father! since thou cleanest me from that guilt into which I now must fall, large promise, with small observance of it, will make thee triumph in thy High Seat."

Saint Francis afterwards, when I was dead, came for me; but one of the Black Cherubim said to him: "Do not take him; wrong me not.

He must come down amongst my menials; because he give [sic] the fraudulent counsel, since which I have kept fast by his hair;
for he who repents not, cannot be absolved; nor is it possible to repent and will a thing at the same time, the contradiction not permitting it."

O wretched me! how I started when he seized me, saying to me: "May be thou didst not think that I was a logician!" (Inferno xxvii, 99-123)

Guido's son, Buonconte, died in battle; he met the kind of sudden death that minimized the opportunity for preparation and repentance. He is in purgatory, however, and he tells Dante:

At Casentino's foot a stream crosses, which is named Archiano, and rises in the Apennines above the Hermitage.

There where its name is lost, did I arrive, pierced in the throat, flying on foot, and bloodying the plain.

There lost I vision, and ended my words upon the name of Mary; and there fell I, and my flesh alone was left.

I will speak sooth, and do thou respeak it among the living; the angel of God took me, and one from Hell cried: "O thou from Heaven, wherefore robbest thou me?

Thou bearest hence the eternal part of this man, for one little tear that snatches him from me." (Purgatorio v, 94-107)

--So fine is the line that separates the choice between heaven and hell.

Yet while the free choice of heaven or hell is in the first instance an either-or matter, Dante does not leave it at that level. Beyond the fundamental choice, the depth of the free commitment makes a difference. Negatively, this is clear in the structur-
ing of the *Inferno* (from bad to worse) traced in the previous chapter. In the *Purgatorio*, the depth of the choice affects the length of the penance to be endured. Thus in the cornice of the proud, a certain Sienese leader is pointed out to Dante:

"That," he answered, "is Provenzan Salvani; and he is here because in his presumption he thought to bring all Siena in his grasp.

Thus hath he gone and goes without rest since he died; such coin he pays back in satisfaction who yonder is too daring."

And I: "If that spirit who awaits the brink of life, ere he repents, abides there below, and mounts not hither,

unless holy prayers aid him, until so much time be passed as he hath lived, how has the coming here been vouchsafed to him?"

"When he lived in highest glory," said he, "in the market-place of Siena he stationed himself of his free will and put away all shame;

and there, to deliver his friend from the pains he was suffering in Charles's prison, he bought himself to tremble in every vein.

No more will I tell, and darkly I know that I speak, but short time will pass ere thy neighbours will act so, that thou shalt be able to interpret it. This deed released him from those confines."  

(Purgatorio xi, 121-142)

A proud and powerful man begging for money in the public square of his own city, and that on behalf of

10 "There below" means ante-purgatory.

11 The allusion in this stanza is to the fact that Dante too will have his pride humbled by begging during his exile from Florence.
a friend in need: this was an act of such humility that years were cut from his time in purgatory.

In his act of humility, Salvani was uniting his free will with grace, as was Buonconte in his act of commendation. Ultimately, one of the purposes of purgatory is to bring this union of grace and free will to perfection. This is brought out in the passage in which Statius tells how a soul comes to leave purgatory and mount to paradise:

Of the cleansing the will alone gives proof, which fills the soul, all free to change her cloister, and avails her to will.

She wills indeed before, but that desire permits it not which divine justice sets, counter to will, toward the penalty, even as it was toward the sin.

And I who have lain under this torment five hundred years and more, only now felt free will for a better threshold. (Purgatorio xxi, 61-69)

The souls in purgatory have made the basic choice for grace and for God's will. But they are still, in some fashion, at odds with themselves. Their case is analogous to that of the tragic figures of the Inferno such as Francesca and Brunetto: persons who are eternally "divided against themselves." The difference lies in the principle of vocation. Because the souls in purgatory have chosen to become penitents, they are on the way to becoming "whole" men. After they

\[12\] Thus the Second Great Commandment says; "Thou
have passed through the flame of the final cornice,

Virgil can tell Dante:

No more expect my word, nor my sign. Free,
upright, and whole, is thy will, and 'twere a
fault not to act according to its prompting;
wherefore I do crown and mitre thee over thy­
self. (Purgatorio xxvii, 139-142)

Here we can perhaps see why it was necessary—both
artistically and intellectually—for Dante to develop
the contradiction between divine judgment and human
values in the Inferno. It is because the human values
are eternally significant. In the Purgatorio, human
qualities are not eliminated or absorbed by divine
judgment, but perfected by it.

V

The contrast between divine judgment and human
values in the Inferno is essentially a contrast be­
tween a positive and a negative perspective. There is
a similar contrast in the Purgatorio. Here, however,
the contrast is between two ways of understanding the
relation of God to His creation, and thus two ways of
drawing near to Him.

shall love thy neighbor as thyself." Ultimately, per­
sonal and social integration cannot be separated. On a
the relation of "penance" to the process of this inte­
gration, St. Paul's profound observation might be cited:
"We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering
produces endurance, and endurance produces character,
and character produces hope, and hope does not dis­
appoint us, because God's love has been poured into
our hearts." (Romans 5:3-5)
In Canto xxvii Dante sets forth one of the characteristic approaches to these two ways. During his final night in purgatory, at the entrance to the Garden of Eden, he says:

Meseemed to behold in a dream, a lady, young and fair, going along a plain gathering flowers; and singing she said:

"Know, whoso asketh my name, that I am Leah, and go moving my fair hands around to make me a garland.

To please me at the glass here I deck me; but Rachel my sister ne'er stirs from her mirror, and sitteth all day.

She is fain to behold her fair eyes, as I to deck me with my hands: her, contemplation; me, action, doth satisfy." (Purgatorio xxvii, 97-108)

Traditionally, the two ways to God are called the contemplative and the active life—the way of negation and the way of affirmation. The contrast between these ways could be summed up in the aphorism, "this also is Thou; neither is this Thou." The way of negation stresses the truth that all that exists is both less than the Creator and of a different order than the Creator. There is a gulf fixed which no thing, no image, no analogy can bridge. It is to the high aim of union with this hidden God that the contemplative spirituality is addressed. The master of this way, St. John of the Cross, epitomized it thus:

The soul must proceed in its growing knowledge of God by learning that which He is not rather than
that which He is, in order to come to Him, it must proceed by renouncing and rejecting, to the very uttermost, everything in its apprehensions that it is possible to renounce, whether this be natural or supernatural.\textsuperscript{13}

The way of affirmation, on the other hand, stresses the truth that everything that is exists because God made it and sustains it. Every created thing is, therefore, in some measure a reflection of Him. Even St. John of the Cross can say of all things created:

Not only did He communicate to them their being and their natural graces when He beheld them . . . , but also in this image of His Son alone He left them clothed with beauty, communicating to them supernatural being. This was when He became man, and thus exalted man in the beauty of God, and consequently exalted all the creatures with Him, since in uniting Himself with man He united Himself with the nature of them all.\textsuperscript{14}

As this passage indicates, for Christians the bond between the creation and the Creator is given a new dimension by the coming and the saving work of Christ.

In reality, of course, the two ways are not completely separable. The most active Christian must have some modicum of discipline to order his life, and in all likelihood will have some burden of adversity.


to bear. At the same time, the most ascetic contemplative will have to eat and wear something, and thus share in the good things of God's creation and redeeming. Yet the distinction between the two ways is a real one. And as ways to union with God, certainly the way of negation has been most thoroughly studied and worked out. It is, traditionally, the "higher" way, and has drawn the attention of those most preoccupied with the goal of union with God.

The doctrine of purgatory has been formulated largely in the light of this ascetic tradition. St. Thomas writes, for example:

To be sure, the soul is purified from . . . uncleanness in this life by penance and the other sacraments . . . , but it does at times happen that such purification is not entirely perfected in this life; one remains a debtor for the punishment, whether by reason of some negligence, or business, or even because a man is overtaken by death . . . . They must, then, be purged after this life before they achieve the final reward. This purgation, of course, is made by punishments, just as in this life their purgation would have been completed by punishments which satisfy the debt; otherwise, the negligent would be better off than the solicitous, if the punishment which they do not complete for their sins here need not be undergone in the future. Therefore, if the souls of the good have something capable of purgation in this world, they are held back from the achievement of their reward while they undergo cleansing punishments. And this is the reason we hold that there is a purgatory.15

15 Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles IV, chapter 91, section 6.
The *Purgatorio* shows many elements of this viewpoint. Certainly Dante never minimizes the purgations which the penitents undergo. The penances of purgatory are fierce, and they are increasingly fierce as the sins being purged become less serious. The excommunicate and the late-repentant have only to sit and wait in ante-purgatory, under rather pleasant circumstances. The envious sit about in groups, their eyes sewn closed with wires. The slothful must keep on the run, day and night. But the gluttonous walk around in a state of advanced famine in a cornice graced with lush fruit-bearing trees. And the lustful move about in a cornice that is wholly enveloped in flame. From the standpoint of human justice, this is rather inexplicable. But it is sound doctrine: "to whom much is given, of him shall much be required." The closer one is to God, the more fully one is in grace. And the more fully in grace, the more he is able to bear, and is called upon to bear, for the sake of love.

Thus even in the purgations there is a positive element. In the cornice of the gluttonous Dante meets his old friend Forese; he is so emaciated that Dante recognizes him from his voice rather than his appearance. He tells Dante:
All this people, who weeping sing, sanctify themselves again in hunger and thirst, for having followed appetite to excess.

The scent which issues from the fruit, and from the spray that is diffused over the green, kindles within us a desire to eat and to drink.

And not once only, while circling this road, is our pain renewed, I say pain and ought to say solace;

for that desire leads us to the tree, which led glad Christ to say: "Eli" when he made us free with his blood. (Purgatorio xxiii, 64-75)

Forese's comment is of a piece with Virgil's explanation of the order of purgatory in Canto xvii. However stringent the purgations, the fundamental orientation of the Purgatorio is positive. Purgatory is not understandable apart from love, and love is not comprehensible apart from the sacrifice of Christ. Dante, it would seem, moves beyond the juridical and individualistic emphasis reflected in the passage cited above from St. Thomas.

A further positive emphasis in the purgations of the Purgatorio can be noted. The penances are educative as well as penal. The penitents practice and learn the virtue they have neglected during their lifetime: the slothful running, the gluttonous fasting, the lustful burning and yet remaining steadfast.

Thus even the most negative aspect of the Purgatorio--its penances--are grounded in the way of
affirmation, an active rather than a contemplative approach to God. The many non-penitential elements of the Purgatorio further develop the implications of a way of affirmation. Purgatory is not "all business." Loath as the penitents are to leave their purgations, they nonetheless do stop to talk with Dante. And when they do, it is likely to be art, literature, politics, and philosophy that they discuss.

In particular, the number of artists and poets whom Dante meets can be noted. Cassella sings one of Dante's songs at the foot of the mountain (Canto ii). In Canto xi, Odoresi the illuminator talks with Dante about the vanity of fame. In Canto xxiv, talking with Bonagiunta, Dante sets forth the excellences of the "sweet new style" of poetry. "But tell me," says Bonagiunta,

"if I see here him who invented the new rhymes beginning: 'Ladies that have intelligence of Love.'"

And I to him: "I am one who, when Love inspires me take note, and go setting it forth after the fashion which he dictates within me."

"O brother," said he, "now I see the knot which kept back the Notary and Guittone, and me, short of the sweet new style that I hear.

Truly I see how your pens follow close after him who dictates, which certainly befell not with ours."

And he who sets himself to search farther, has lost all sense of difference between the one style and the other"; and, as if satisfied, he was silent. (Purgatorio xxiv, 49-63)
Yet if the "new school" went beyond the old in its fidelity to inspiration and to fact, it nonetheless was built on the foundation of the old. This debt is acknowledged by Dante in Canto xxvi, when he speaks with Guido Guinicelli and Arnault Daniel.

Most important among the poets whom Dante and Virgil meet in the Purgatorio, however, is Statius. Accompanying them during the final one-third of their journey, Statius fills the role of a Christian guide in the higher reaches of purgatory. It is Statius rather than Virgil that gives the discourse on the nature of the soul in Canto xxv.

Yet Dante also gives Virgil a role to play in relation to Statius. Historically speaking, there is no reason to think that Statius was a Christian. So Virgil asks him, what "set thy sails to follow the fisherman?"

And he to him: "Thou first didst send me towards Parnassus to drink in its caves, and then didst light me on to God.

Thou didst like one who goes by night, and carries the light behind him, and profits not himself, but maketh persons wise that follow him,

when thou saidst: 'The world is renewed, justice returns and the first age of man, and a new progeny descends from heaven.' 16

Through thee I was a poet, through thee a Christian." (Purgatorio xxii, 63-73)

16 The reference here is to Virgil's famous
The role which Virgil filled for Statius on earth is indicative of the role of the arts in the Purgatorio. For even more than a place of the artists, the Purgatorio is a place of the arts. On the first cornice there are amazing sculptures on both the pavement and the walls of the mountain. On most of the other cornices voices (usually those of the penitents themselves) call out classical and biblical allusions. In every case the pictures and the words are educative; they aim at recollecting the penitents to the beauty of the virtue they have missed or the ugliness of the vice they have indulged.

What we have here, I think, is a didactic aesthetic not unlike that implicit in the medieval cathedrals. The arts are meant to be educative, not only intellectually but volitionally as well. They aim at the lifting up of the whole man. This is not anti-intellectual; penitents would have to be very well-educated to appreciate the arts of the Purgatorio. Nor is this anti-rational; Statius' discourse on the rational soul in Canto xxv gives ample evidence of this. But it is a poet who here expounds philosophy. It would seem that in the Purgatorio the arts are

Fourth Eclogue, which was widely held to be a messianic prophecy.
portrayed as the most useful and comprehensive of all ways of knowing. The penitent in Dante's Purgatorio does not draw near to God "by renouncing and rejecting, to the very uttermost, everything in its apprehensions that it is possible to renounce, whether this be natural or supernatural." He comes to God by affirming and embracing all that is truly good, both human and divine. Dante's Purgatorio, I think, sets forth a view of the religious significance of the active life with a coherence and penetration that is rare in serious Christian literature.

VI

The Purgatorio, like the Inferno, is not far from this world in its impact. In both Canticles, it is Dante's "human" orientation that makes the most vivid impression. But the significance of human values and the human reality is strikingly different in the two Canticles. In hell, there is a picture of the world without grace—a world in which the human dignity of a figure such as Brunetto stands out from its background in lacerating contradiction. But the Purgatorio is a picture of the world in grace, the world in the process of being transformed. The human element is fulfilled rather than contradicted by the divine.
Dante's purgatory is not a perfect world, but a world on the right track. Yet this is not necessarily apparent on the surface. Viewed from the outside, purgatory is a world of suffering and pain. It is a world in which the inhabitants seem to go about in circles, without point or purpose. But as Dante penetrates into the rationale of purgatory, and the mind of the inhabitants, a very different picture emerges. Forese's phrase, "I say pain, and ought to say solace," epitomizes the experience of purgatory from within.

In relating the _Purgatorio_ to this world, three points might be especially noted. The first is the context within which Dante places suffering. It would seem that, in his view, suffering is ultimately peripheral. It is not necessarily destructive either of happiness or of good social relationships—as, inexorably, thoughtlessness and malice are. Secondly,

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17Simone Weil has expressed this insight in a striking metaphor: "Whoever has finished his apprenticeship recognizes things and events, everywhere and always, as vibrations of the same divine and infinitely sweet word. This does not mean that he will not suffer. Pain is the color of certain events. When a man who can and a man who cannot read look at a sentence written in red ink, they both see the same red color, but this color is not so important for the one as for the other." Simone Weil, _Waiting for God_, translated by Emma Craufurd (New York: Capricorn Books, 1959) p. 131.
it would seem to be Dante's view that in an imperfect world populated with imperfect people, the framework of good social relationships is one of penitence and its antecedent, forgiveness. Thirdly, when Dante deals with penitence, forgiveness, and charity in the Purgatorio, he does so in a concrete way. The "spirit" of these things is not enough; they need to be manifest in action. Penitence is articulated in penance; charity in the treatment accorded to others. There is an insight, I think, in the Purgatorio that is akin to the understanding of modern social psychology. Dante has a grasp of the extent to which an individual is shaped by his social world: by interpersonal relationships, by the social groups which structure these relationships, and by the culture which these groups both inherit and create.

"The discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth. The fact that he made this discovery in a religious context and articulated it in religious language is no reason to take it any less seriously in a strictly secular sense. It has been in the nature of our tradition of political thought (and for reasons we cannot explore here) to be highly selective and to exclude from articulate conceptualization a great variety of authentic political experiences, among which we need not be surprised to find some of an even elementary nature." Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959) pp. 214-5.
CHAPTER III: THE PARADISO

Dante's heaven—like hell but unlike purgatory—is characterized as a permanent state. In the Paradiso, the good social relationships of the Purgatorio are given a permanent order and structure. This chapter, then, will attempt to deliniate Dante's view of perfected social relationships, both on a universal and a personal level.

I

There is an "otherness" about the Paradiso not found in the Inferno and the Purgatorio. For although the setting of the whole Commedia is a world beyond mortality, only the Paradiso is beyond terra firma.

Dante makes this otherness clear through a number of devices. In the sphere of the moon, the first of the heavenly spheres to which he rises, he thinks at first that he is seeing the reflection of the blessed, rather than the souls themselves:

In such guise as, from glasses transparent and polished, or from waters clear and tranquil, not so deep that the bottom is darkened,

come back the notes of our faces, so faint that a pearl on a white brow cometh not slower upon our pupils;
so did I behold many a countenance, eager to speak. (Paradiso iii, 10-16)

In the succeeding spheres, his sight of the blessed is even more abstracted from the natural; more often than not, they will appear to him as sparks or flames and will form themselves into symbolic patterns: circles, a cross, an eagle.

The overarching image of otherness in the Paradiso, however, is Dante's double vision of paradise. For in the Paradiso, Dante is describing two heavens—or rather one heaven twice. First, in Cantos i to xxix, heaven is revealed to him successively and figuratively. He describes this in relation to nine heavenly spheres: those of the seven planets plus those of the fixed stars and the primum mobile. Through these heavens Dante rises with Beatrice as his guide. In each sphere, hosts of the redeemed come sweeping down to greet him and enlighten him. Beyond the last sphere, Dante comes to the Empyrean. He sees heaven as it is, and, in an amazing poetic achievement, translates the ineffable vision into verse (Cantos xxx to xxxiii).

Oh but how scant the utterance, and how faint, to my conceit! and it, to what I saw, is such that it sufficeth not to call it little. (Paradiso xxxiii, 124-126)
Yet, within the otherness of the Paradiso, the earth is not forgotten. If heaven is apart from this world, it makes possible a view of this world from a new and more comprehensive perspective. The things born of civilization, the good creations of human effort and cooperation, are given extensive treatment in Justinian's discourse on the Roman Empire, and Cacciaguida's story of Florence during an earlier age. In heaven, too, St. Thomas Aquinas praises St. Francis, and St. Bonaventure praises St. Dominic, for the mark they have made on the world.

In these passages, Dante gives recognition to "the essence fulfilling the function" on both a personal and a corporate level. At the same time, there is in these instances, and in many more, an explicit contrast between the former achievement and the contemporary degeneracy. Justinian denounces partisan strife (Canto vi); Folco, the Church's worldliness (Canto ix); St. Thomas, the Dominicans and St. Bonaventure, the Franciscans (Cantos xi and xii); Cacciaguida, modern Florence (Cantos xv to xvii); the heavenly Eagle, the kings of Europe (Canto xix); St. Peter Damian, the higher clergy (Canto xxi); St. Benedict, the monks (Canto xxii); and St. Peter, the papacy (Canto xxvii). Indifference is not one of the
elements of heaven's otherness; heaven is beyond the tribulations of this world, but not beyond concern over them.

II

The Paradiso is related to this world in a further way. If the Inferno delineates this world's potential for evil, and the Purgatorio pictures the way of a pilgrim through this world, the Paradiso would seem to picture this world as it would be if its relationships truly were right. I do not think that the Paradiso is a tract for social reform; it does not have a "program," as did the De Monarchia. Nevertheless, the social structure which Dante the poet imposes upon the Paradiso is not without its significance for his view of a right social structure upon earth.

Here Dante's ordering of the seven spheres of the planets in his first vision of heaven is very much to the point. Each of these spheres reveals a different class of the blessed. Omitting for the moment the fourth sphere, we find some extremely interesting parallels between the first three spheres and the last three. In the lowest sphere, Dante meets the souls of those who have been inconstant in their vows; they

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1See below, chapter III, section IV.
have been deficient in the virtue of fortitude. In the fifth sphere are the holy warriors and martyrs—those who have been triumphant in fortitude. The second sphere is that of the good but too worldly rulers; the sixth sphere is that of the just rulers. The contrast here is in the virtue of justice. The third sphere is that of the souls who were ardent and generous in their temperament, but misdirected in their aim—the intemperate lovers. And the seventh and highest sphere reveals those whose lives were tempered to the highest aim; it is the sphere of the contemplatives.

The fourth sphere, that of the planet sun, differs from the others in that it has no parallel. Here Dante meets several of the great figures of the middle ages, and of ancient times as well. St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas are two of the chief spokesmen in this sphere; among those who accompany them are Nathan the prophet and King Solomon, Dionysius the Areopagite and Boethius, the Venerable Bede and St. John Chrysostom, Gratian and Richard of St. Victor, Sigier of Brabant and Joachim of Flora.

The image of the sun is a fitting one in this sphere, for these are the intellectual saints, who through their prudence have given light to the earth.
At the same time, it can be noted that while Dante ranks a defective life of action below the intellectual life, among the adequate fulfillments of vocation the order is (1) contemplatives, (2) leaders, (3) doers and sufferers, and (4) intellectuals.²

Something of a reversal of a long intellectual tradition is reflected in this ordering. From the time of Plato's Republic onward, the intellectual life and the contemplative life tended to be coupled. Dante agrees with this tradition in seeing the contemplative life as the highest. But he seems to couple the intellectual life with the active life. And within the active life, the rules of the active life are operative. The intellectual occupies the lowest place because his activity is furthest removed from action in this world. The doers and sufferers are in the midst of this action. And the leaders are not only in the midst of it, but are responsible for it as well.

Thus it would seem that the hierarchical ordering of heaven can be related to Dante's principle of

²Even this order would have to be qualified to place a greater emphasis on the active life. Further on, Dante makes it clear that he ranks the Apostles and other New Testament figures above the contemplatives. Furthermore, he assigns the highest rank among the contemplatives to those who have had a profound impact on the world, such as St. Francis, St. Benedict, and St. Augustine.
vocation, discussed in the previous chapters. As has been indicated, Dante evidently keeps in mind two dimensions of vocation. On the one hand, there is the question of the fidelity with which a vocation is fulfilled. In heaven, the eternal significance of this is imaged in the contrast between the spheres of defective fortitude, justice, and temperance, and the spheres of the triumphant fulfillment of these virtues. On the other hand, there is the significance of the vocation itself, imaged in the hierarchical ordering of the virtues: "to whom much is given, of him shall much be required." The hierarchical structure of heaven, in this sense, is a reflection of the order of merit of the blessed.

III

The "order of merit" in heaven would seem to be confirmed by the only explicit epistemological statement I can find in the Commedia. In Canto xxviii of the Paradiso, Beatrice tells Dante, with regard to the angels:

Hence may be seen how the being blessed is founded on the act that seeth, not that which loveth, which after followeth.

And the measure of sight is the merit which grace begetteth and the righteous will; and thus from rank to rank the progress goeth. (Paradiso xxviii, 109-114)
The importance of "the act that seeth" has been noted in the previous Canticles. Thus, in the Purgatorio, the arts serve as the means of increasing sight, which overflows into a love expressed through penitence. And in the Inferno, in a terrible inversion of this epistemology, the more clearly rational a sin is--the clearer the sight of it--the further removed it is from love.

In the Paradiso, the imagery of light is everywhere (as is the imagery of dance and song). It is the sight of the deepening beauty of Beatrice that is the sign to Dante of his movement upward through the spheres; it is the sight of Beatrice, in other words, that increases Dante's love. When Dante comes to the Empyrean, he first sees the "real" heaven as a river of light. His eyes drink of this river, and this strengthens his sight and transforms the vision into the final image of heaven as a vast white rose.

It seems clear that "seeing," to Dante, means not only sense perception, but also thinking on the basis of sense perception—that is, rationality. St. Thomas tells Dante:

That insight without peer whereon the arrow of my intention smiteth, is regal prudence . . . .

And let this ever be lead to thy feet, to make thee move slow, like a weary man; both to the yea and nay thou seest not;
for he is right low down amongst the fools who maketh affirmation or negation without distinction between case and case;

wherefore it chanceth many times swift-formed opinion leaneth the wrong way, and then conceit blindeth the intellect.

Far worse than vainly doth he leave the shore, since he returneth not as he puts forth, who fisheth for the truth and hath not the art. (Paradiso xiii, 104-105, 112-123)

To act (or will, or love) without first seeing clearly is to miss the right path. This is why seeing comes first; its position is one of priority rather than preeminence.

Only rarely in the Paradiso does Dante separate the act of seeing and the act of loving, but he does consistently maintain the distinction between them. In Canto v, Beatrice says to Dante:

If I flame on thee in the warmth of love, beyond the measure witnessed upon earth, and so vanquish the power of thine eyes,

marvel not; for this proceedeth from perfect vision, which, as it apprehendeth, so doth advance its foot in the apprehended good.

Well do I note how in thine intellect already doth reglow the eternal light, which only seen doth ever kindle love. (Paradiso v, 1-9)

And in Canto ix, Dante says to Folco:

"God seeth all, and into him thy seeing sinketh," said I, "blessed spirit, so that no wish may steal itself from thee.

Then wherefore doth thy voice, which gladdeneth Heaven ceaselessly,—together with the singing of those flames devout, which maketh themselves a cowl with the six wings,—
not satisfy my longings? Not till now had I awaited thy demand, were I in thee even as thou art in me." (Paradiso ix, 73-81)

The final line here is even more intensive than the translation indicates: "s' io m' intuassi, come tu t' inmii." If Dante's understanding of "sight" encompasses reason, it also can go far beyond the usual understanding of reason to indicate one person's total involvement in, and response to, another.

Like "choice" in the Purgatorio, "seeing" in the Paradiso is, in the first instance, an either-or matter. The redeemed see God; the damned do not. But like choice, seeing admits of degrees. The redeemed all see God with all the fulness of which they are capable. But their capabilities differ. Those in the first three spheres of heaven are defective in sight. In the four higher spheres, there is a difference of the degree of involvement in, and response to, what the blessed have seen in their mortal life. If the martyrs, kings, and contemplatives have responded to God more fully than the intellectuals, it is because they have first seen God in His creation more deeply and more comprehensively.

IV

Does the heirarchical ordering of heaven relate to the stratification of earthly society, and if so,
how? It might be said that the heirarchy is a reflection of Dante's political vision as it is developed in the *De Monarchia*. Here Dante exalts the position of secular political authority, and in particular, that of the Holy Roman Empire. In direct contrast to the position of his contemporary, Pope Boniface VIII, Dante held that the authority of the Emperor derived directly from God, and not through the Church.³

There is a certain affinity between the *De Monarchia* and the *Paradiso* here. But to press the connection too hard, and to read the *Commedia* only in the light of the earlier political treatise, is unsatisfactory. For it reduces the *Commedia*—and in particular, the *Paradiso*—to the level of a rather contrived political tract.

The *Paradiso*, I think, goes deeper than this. Like the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*, the *Paradiso* is related to this world. But all three Canticles are

³See Pope Boniface VIII's Bull, "Unum Sanctum": "Truly he who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter, misunderstands the words of the Lord, 'Put up thy sword into the sheath.' Both are in the power of the Church, the spiritual sword and the material. But the latter is to be used for the Church, the former by her; the former by the priest, the latter by kings and captains but at the will and by the permission of the priest. The one sword, then, should be under the other, and temporal authority subject to spiritual." Quoted in Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, p. 162.
pictures of the world's potentialities, in distinction from (and often in explicit contrast with) the world's actualities: the world without grace, the world in grace, the world made perfect.

It might be said that in the **Commedia** Dante is speaking as an idealist, that the **Paradiso** is a picture of what the world **ought** to be. Or it could be urged that Dante speaks as a social reformer, that he speaks of what ought to be and can be. Certainly there are grounds for both these interpretations of the perspective of the **Commedia**. But it seems to me that in the **Commedia** Dante's basic perspective is that of a prophet. He speaks not only of what ought to be and can be, but also—and most of all—of what **will** be. His view, in other words, is eschatological.

John Sinclair speaks of the insistent and significant recurrence of an idea in Dante's scheme, the idea . . . that the truth of God is not truth only, but also fact, in its defeat, or its struggle, or its victory,—that the divine purpose for men is not an ideal and aspiration only, but also effectual motive and attainment,—and that human life, for all its shames and through all its strivings, is directed to an actual fulfilment greater than men's thoughts and dreams. It was, indeed, a chief function of Dante, by his very grasp and **exposition** of scholastic thinking and by the energy and concreteness of his mind, to rescue it—rescuing himself, too—from its abstractness and to bring it to the test and proof of life, to relate it in all its meaning to that which God and man are to do. In this spiritual and moral realism which
marks The Divine Comedy from beginning to end Dante was a true follower of the saint whom he held, among all the saints, in a peculiar reverence and affection, Francis of Assisi, and still more of the Master of them both.

It seems to me that Dante's "spiritual and moral realism" sees beyond any easy connection between the heirarchy of heaven and stratification on earth. Certainly Dante held that the heirarchy of power in fourteenth-century Italy was disasterously disordered. But he also saw that the root of social disorganization lay at a deeper level than that of the social structure. In a vehement passage, Beatrice tells Dante:

O greed, who so dost abase mortals below thee, that not one hath power to draw his eyes forth from thy waves!

'Tis true the will in men hath vigour yet; but the continuous drench turneth true plum fruits into cankered tubers.

Faith and innocence are found only in little children; then each of them fleeth away before the cheeks are covered . . . .

And thou, lest thou make marvel at it, reflect that there is none to govern upon earth, wherefore the human household so strayeth from the path. (Paradiso xxvii, 121-129, 139-141)

There is a tragic ambivalence about stratification in human society. Without one to govern (and therefore, inevitably, a heirarchy) the "human household" goes astray. But the necessity of stratification is in-

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exorably bound to the ubiquity of greed; stratification bears the seeds of its own corruption. For those who possess high status there is ever the temptation to abuse its responsibilities for selfish ends. And for those who lack high status, there is always the temptation to envy. Dante brings out this latter point subtly but beautifully in his conversation with Piccarda Donati, the "least in the kingdom of heaven" whom he meets. Dante says:

"But tell me, ye whose blessedness is here, do you desire a more lofty place, to see more, or to make yourselves more dear?"

With those other shades first she smiled a little, then answered me so joyous that she seemed to burn in love's first flame:

"Brother, the quality of love stilleth our will, and maketh us long only for what we have, and giveth us no other thirst.

Did we desire to be more aloft, our longings were discordant from his will who here assorteth us, and for that, thou wilt see, there is no room within these circles, if of necessity we have our being here in love, and if thou think again what is love's nature.

Nay, 'tis the essence of this blessed being to hold ourselves within the divine will, whereby our own wills are themselves made one."

(Paradiso iii, 64-81)

In heaven, the being exists for the function; anything else would be unthinkable. But the naturalness—almost the inevitability—with which Dante puts his question to Piccarda indicates one of the difficulties
of all social stratification in this world, be it "right" or "wrong."

There are, then, many lines of connection between the Paradiso and this world, for the perspective of heaven provides a kind of panoramic view of human society. But at the same time, the "otherness" of heaven is ultimately irreducible. Dante's vision of heavenly society and insight into human society are both too clear for it to be otherwise. There is a solution to this world's problems, but it is an eschatological one.

V

If the Paradiso is the Canticle of the Commedia in which social relationships are viewed in their widest and most universal perspective, it is also the place where they are approached from the most personal standpoint. For it is in heaven that the figure of Beatrice appears.\(^5\)

The deliniation of personal relationships is not, of course, absent from the Inferno and the Purgatorio. Of greatest significance is the sustained relationship between Dante and Virgil in these Canticles,

\(^5\)That is, if the Garden of Eden can be included in "heaven," as would seem to be permissible in this connection.
Virgil would seem to have a kind of double role in the Commedia. On the one hand, the figure of Virgil is invested with a great deal of symbolic significance. He is the greatest of the pagan poets, the poet of empire, and the prophet of a new society.

Dante can say to him, as he meets him in the Inferno:

"Art thou then that Virgil, and that fountain which pours abroad so rich a stream of speech?"
I answered him, with bashful front.

"O glory, and light of other poets! May the long zeal avail me, and the great love, that made me search thy volume.

Thou art my master and my author; thou alone art he from whom I took the good style that hath done me honour." (Inferno i, 79-87)

Furthermore, a host of medieval legends clustered around the figure of Virgil. He was the wisest of the ancients and the greatest of teachers; indeed he was something of a mystic. He is all these things in the Commedia; he represents, in other words, "natural" knowledge at its fullest and best.

Yet though Virgil's role is symbolic, it is also vividly personal. In the figure of Virgil, the fullest and best of natural knowledge is embodied in a person and communicated through a personal relationship. He emerges from the pages of the Commedia not

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6See, for example, the story of Virgil and Lucinius in the Dolopathos sive de rege et septum
just as a figure but as a character: an austere and
reserved man, who yet has an immense sensitivity to
others. He seldom smiles, and is only once flustered.
In the Inferno he can be imposing and preemptory. But
he is not condescending. It is Virgil's knowledge
that makes hell and purgatory comprehensible for Dante.
But it is Virgil's presence that makes them bearable.

Beatrice, I think, has the same twofold role
in the Paradiso that Virgil does in the Inferno and
the Purgatorio. But Beatrice's symbolic significance
and her personal bond with Dante are woven together more
closely than is the case with Virgil. For unlike the
figure of Virgil, the figure of Beatrice is a personal
one: nothing certain is known of her outside of Dante's
writings. Because of this, and because the background
of the Paradiso gives less scope for characterization
than the background of hell and purgatory, the question
of what Beatrice "stands for" looms especially large.
And this question is involved with the question of
allegory in the Commedia. All commentators, I think,
agree that Beatrice has an allegorical significance—

sapientibus of Joannes of Alta Silva, dating from about
a century before the time of Dante. The story can be
found in Charles H. Beeson (ed.), A Primer of Medieval
Latin: an Anthology of Prose and Poetry (Chicago:
or even several of them.⁷ They do not agree on just what her significance is. This is inherent in the nature of allegory; it is open to diverse interpretations. In the Commedia, the problem is compounded by the fact that many interpreters are looking for autobiography in the allegory; they are trying to discover what Dante the man and poet really thought. I propose to undertake a somewhat simpler question here: namely, the significance of Beatrice for Dante the pilgrim. I plan to ask two questions about Beatrice, questions which are based on Dante’s principle of vocation: what isBeatrice’s “essence” --who is she? And what is her function in relation to Dante the pilgrim?

For the story of who Beatrice is, Dante’s Vita Nuova, as well as the Commedia, must be considered.

⁷There is good reason for this. Dante himself wrote, in the Epistle to Can Grande: “For the elucidation, therefore, of what we have to say, it must be understood that the meaning of this work [i.e. the Commedia] is not of one kind only; rather the work may be described as ‘polysemous’, that is, having several meanings; for the first meaning is that which is conveyed by the letter, and the next is that which is conveyed by what the letter signifies; the former of which is called literal, while the latter is called allegorical or moral or analogical.” Quoted in Dante Alighieri, The Comedy of Dante Alighieri; the Florentine: Cantica III; Paradise, translated by Dorothy L. Sayers and Barbara Reynolds (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1962) p. 45.
The story is quite straightforward. She is a Florentine girl whom Dante passed on the street one day. Dante was only nine years old at the time, but he immediately fell in love with her. As they grew into young adulthood, Dante's love for her continued. He was fairly certain that she was aware of his love, although he articulated it so indirectly in his verses she evidently (and quite reasonably) had some doubts. Beatrice married, and while still a young woman, died. This is the story of Beatrice in the Vita Nuova.

As the Commedia opens, several years have passed. Dante is approaching middle age, and he has lost his way, intellectually and morally. At the behest of Mary, Beatrice descends from heaven, and goes through hell to limbo to ask Virgil to take Dante in hand. Virgil leads Dante to the Garden of Eden, where Beatrice meets him. She guides him up through the spheres of heaven until finally, in the Empyrean, she gives him over to the guidance of St. Bernard, and returns to her place among the redeemed.

Throughout the Vita Nuova, Beatrice has a moral and spiritual impact on Dante. "She went along crowned and clothed with humility, showing no whit of pride in all that she heard and saw," he writes. And:

8Dante Alighieri, La Vita Nuova, xxvi. This
Merely the sight of her makes all things bow.
Not she herself alone is holier
Than all; but hers, through her, are raised above.

From all her acts such lovely graces flow
That truly one may never think of her
Without a passion of exceeding love.9

Indeed, Dante can say,

... any who endures to gaze on her
Must either be made noble, or else die. 10

Nor is the intellectual dimension left out:

Albeit her image, that was with me always, was
an exultation of love to subdue me, it was yet
of so perfect a quality that it never allowed me
to be overruled by Love without the faithful
counsel of reason, whencsoever such counsel was
useful to be heard.11

In the Inferno and the Purgatorio, Virgil uses
Beatrice's name to stiffen Dante's will to go on in
the face of the dangers they must meet. But when
Dante finally meets Beatrice in the Garden of Eden,
it is no lover's greeting that he receives. Rather
Beatrice confronts him with the disparity between the
high claims of the Vita Nuova and the quality of his
actual life:

and all subsequent quotations from the Vita Nuova are
taken from the D. G. Rossetti translation in Paolo
Milano (ed.), The Portable Dante (New York; The Viking

9Ibid., xxvii
10Ibid., xix.
11Ibid., ii.
This man was such in his new life potentially, that every good talent would have made wondrous increase in him.

But so much more rank and wild the ground becomes with evil seed and untilled, the more it hath of good strength of soil.

Some time I sustained him with my countenance; showing my youthful eyes to him I led him with me turned to the right goal.

So soon as I was on the threshold of my second age, and I changed life, he forsook me, and gave him to others.

When I was risen from flesh to spirit, and beauty and virtue were increased within me, I was less precious and less pleasing to him;

and he did turn his steps by a way not true, pursuing false visions of good, that pay back no promise entire.

Nor did it avail me to gain inspirations, with which in dream and otherwise, I called him back; so little recked he of them.

So low sank he, that all means for his salvation were already short, save showing him the lost people. (Purgatorio xxx, 115-138)

"Hence may be seen how the being blessed is founded on the act that seeth, not that which loveth, which after followeth." The vision of goodness that Dante had seen in Beatrice was to be the foundation of a "new life," morally and spiritually, for him. Beatrice was, for him, the true vision; in turning from this vision the "act that seeth" was perverted, and he began "pursuing false visions of good."
What Beatrice imaged for Dante (goodness, truth) is important; even more important is who she imaged. Certainly the most striking of all Beatrice's functions in relation to Dante is one that best can be described as Christological. At the opening of the Vita Nuova, Dante remarks on the significance of her name: she who confers blessing. "In her salutation alone," he says, "was there any beatitude for me." 12 Later in the Vita Nuova, Dante relates a vision he had of Beatrice preceded by another woman. Speaking of the latter, he says:

If thou go about to consider her right name, it is . . . as one should say, "She shall come first"; inasmuch as her name, Joan, is taken from that John who went before the True Light, saying: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare ye the way of the Lord." 13

Or again, in the same passage, "an appearance of Love" says to Dante:

He who should inquire delicately touching this matter, could not but call Beatrice by mine own name, which is to say, Love; beholding her so like unto me. 14

Indeed, the Christological implications of these and other passages in the Vita Nuova have received some

12 Dante, Vita Nuova, xi.
13 Ibid., xxiv.
14 Ibid.
When the *New Life* was at last printed—in 1576—the ecclesiastical authorities censored it. They cut all references to Beatrice as "beatitudo" and substituted "felicita"; they cut "salute" and substituted "quiete" or "dolcezza"; they cut the "Osanna" with which the angels received the soul of Beatrice; they cut the profound allusion to the girl Giovanna going before Beatrice, as John the Baptist went before the True Light.\(^\text{15}\)

In the *Commedia*, the elaborate epiphany of Beatrice in Cantos xxix and xxx of the *Purgatorio* can be noted in particular for its Christological implications. In the Garden of Eden a triumphant procession approaches Dante. The allegory of the procession seems clear. First come seven lights, which allude to the vision of Christ shown to St. John in the Apocalypse. Then follow figures representing the books of the Old Testament and the four Gospels. All these precede a gryphon which draws a triumphal car by means of a pole. Here the gryphon represents Christ; the pole; the cross; and the car, the Church. At the wheels of the car dance the four cardinal and three theological virtues, and following it are figures representing the books of the New Testament. The procession draws abreast of Dante and halts. And then, as the angels sing "*Benedictus qui venis,"

the triumphal car, at the center of focus of the whole procession.

It can be noted that "benedictus qui venit" was sung as Christ entered into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and is sung at the Mass at the beginning of the Canon. I think Dorothy Sayers is correct in seeing a relationship between this pageant and a Corpus Christi procession. Miss Sayers says that she calls this passage the pageant of the Sacrament because this description agrees best with its formal presentation, but what it shows is something still greater; the whole revelation of the indwelling of Christ in His creation through the union of His two natures . . . . Of this union, the Sacrament of the Altar is at once the divinely ordained symbol, and the means by which Christians participate in that union; and in the Masque, Beatrice--Dante's own particular "God-bearing Image"--plays the part of the Sacrament. It is at this point that masque and reality become inextricably welded into a single dominating Image; for the historical Beatrice is, for Dante, what she represents, just as, after a higher and more universal fashion, the Sacrament is what it represents, and--after a manner more absolute still--Christ is what He represents.16

The point which Miss Sayers is making here--the importance of seeing and maintaining distinctions within identities--could be expressed in terms of the aphorism quoted in the previous chapter: "this also is Thou;

neither is this Thou." For the Christian, the highest manifestation of this distinction within an identity is the Person of Christ: "two natures in one Person, inseparable and unconfused," as the Council of Chalcedon defined Him. And for Christianity, this understanding of the Person of Christ points to a unique but not an isolated reality. The union of the natural and the supernatural in Christ is seen to be of tremendous significance for the natural order. The passage cited earlier from St. John of the Cross can be called to mind:

Not only did He communicate to them their being and their natural graces when he beheld them . . . , but also in this image of His Son alone He left them clothed with beauty, communicating to them supernatural being. This was when He became man, and thus exalted man in the beauty of God, and consequently exalted all the creatures in him, since in uniting Himself with man He united Himself with the nature of them all.\footnote{St. John of the Cross, \textit{Spiritual Canticle}, stanza V, section 4.}

Here St. John emphasizes the universal significance of Christ's coming. But there is another, equally important, dimension. "Everything in general" easily can mean "nothing in particular." If the nexus between the supernatural and the natural in Christ is universal in its implications, it is concrete and personal in its actualization. St. Paul epitomized
this in a phrase in the Epistle to the Galatians: "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

Dante's insight, I think, is related to St. Paul's, but is not identical with it. For in the figure of Beatrice, Dante explicates this concrete, personal relationship to Christ with reference to another, not himself. It is Beatrice who lives; yet not Beatrice, but Christ who lives in her. It is Beatrice he loves; yet not Beatrice, but Christ who loves in her.

The implications of this understanding are far-reaching. The gulf that can exist between "human" and "divine" love is closed; the connection between the love of God and the love of neighbor (or wife or enemy) is made manifest. Only in hell are the claims of human relationships at cross purposes with divine reality. In purgatory, in heaven, and on earth as in heaven, human relationships become the "openings" to the deepest and fullest relationship with God.

O Lady, in whom my hope hath vigour, and who for my salvation didst endure to leave in Hell thy footprints;

of all the things which I have seen I recognize the grace and might, by thy power and in thine excellence.

Thou hast drawn me from a slave to liberty by all those paths, by all those methods by which thou hadst the power so to do.
Preserve thy munificence in me, so that my soul which thou hast made sound, may unloose it from the body, pleasing unto thee. (Paradiso xxxi, 79-90)

These are the final words of Dante the pilgrim to Beatrice in the Paradiso. In Beatrice, time and space have been transcended, guilt and failure have been transformed. Behind all that he has seen, grasped, and conveyed in the Commedia stands the creative power of this personal, human relationship.
CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

To the high fantasy here power failed; but already my desire and will were rolled—even as a wheel that moveth equally—by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars. (Paradiso xxxiii, 142-145)

With these words Dante brings his *Commedia* to its close. And it is, I think, the Love that moves both "the sun and the other stars" and Dante's own "desire and will" that best serves to draw together the social implications of the *Commedia*. It seems to me, further, that the magnificence and penetration of Dante's deliniation of social relationships grows out of the realism, the concreteness, and the coherence of his development of this theme of Love.

I

Let us first take note of the realism of Dante's development of this theme. It is by no means apparent that Love will serve as an adequate theme for the realistic analysis of the human condition. Two centuries before Dante's time, Bernard of Cluny could write, in his *De Contemptu Mundi*:
Hora movissima, tempora pessima sunt, vigilemus. Ecce minaciter imminet arbiter ille supremus.¹

And two centuries after Dante's day, another famous Florentine would say:

Since it is my object to write what shall be useful to whosoever understands it, it seems to me better to follow the real truth of things than an imaginary view of them . . . . It is essential, therefore, for a Prince who would maintain his position, to have learned how to be other than good, and to use or not to use his goodness as necessity requires.²

Dante's purview of man in society stands in contrast both to the religious pessimism of Bernard of Cluny, and the secular pessimism of Machiavelli. And the contrast is all the more striking because Dante comes to grips with the temporal realities on which their pessimism is grounded.

The world about Dante confronted him with a muddle of conflicts. There was the conflict of Empire and Papacy, of his patriotism toward Florence and his exile from it. And beneath the conflicts between institutions and persons were the conflicts within persons: the enigma of a corrupt pope such as Boniface,

¹Cited in Beeson (ed.), Primer of Medieval Latin, p. 351.

of lusting lovers such as Paolo and Francesca, of a gracious pervert such as Brunetto Latini.

Nor was Dante himself exempt from these conflicts. He was confronted with the enigma of his own loneliness. In the Paradiso, his ancestor Cacciaguida prophecies:

Thou shalt abandon everything beloved most dearly; this is the arrow which the bow of exile shall first shoot.

Thou shalt make trial of how salt doth taste another's bread, and how hard the path to descend and mount upon another's stair.

And that which most shall weigh thy shoulders down, shall be the vicious and ill company with which thou shalt fall down into this vale,

for all ungrateful, all mad and impious shall they become against thee; but, soon after, their temples and not thine shall redden for it.

Of their brutishness their progress shall make proof, so that it shall be for thy fair fame to have made a party for thyself. (Paradiso xvii, 55-69)

Not only was Dante estranged from the city that he loved, but also from his fellow Florentine exiles. And even before his exile, he had lost the vision of loveliness and goodness that he had seen actualized in the person of Beatrice. At the heart of the matter was the fact that Dante was estranged within himself:

In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost.
Ah! how hard a thing it is to tell what a wild, and rough, and stubborn wood this was, which in my thought renews the fear! (Inferno i, 1-7)

Yet it is only here, in the opening lines of the Commedia, that Dante is completely alone, and only here that he is lost. There was to be no finding of himself apart from his relationship with others. His estrangement gave witness to a deeper reality: the coinherence of his life in the lives of others and in the structures of society. The cross of his estrangement made the world of men and of human relationships not less real, but more.

It is on this deep level that Dante develops the theme of Love in the Commedia. While there is a basic choice between coinherence and estrangement developed there, the choice is not a simple one. In choosing coinherence, one also chooses all the elements of estrangement that are bound up with it. The agony of Dante's meeting with Brunetto Latini in hell gives ample witness of this. At the same time, the choice of estrangement carries with it all the terrors of an inescapable coinherence: Ugolino everlastinglly gnaws the brains of Ruggieri.

In a later generation, Francis Bacon would praise "Machiavelli and . . . writers of his kind who openly and without dissimulation show what men are and
not what they ought to be.\textsuperscript{3} Dante saw more deeply. He showed what men are, but he also saw that this offered no escape from what they ought to be. To choose to be "other than good" (in Machiavelli's phrase) was to turn love upside down rather than to eliminate its inconvenience. It was to choose co-inherence-within-estrangement rather than estrangement-within-coinherence.

II

The contrast between Dante and Machiavelli goes beyond the simple contrast between a moralist and an ethically neutral empiricist. For in addition to being a moralist, Dante was a romantic and a mystic.

It would seem that the link between Dante's realism on the one hand, and his romanticism and mysticism on the other, is the concrete, personal character of his thought and expression.

For Love, to Dante, though it could be abstracted and analyzed, meant ultimately a concrete, personal relationship. For Dante the pilgrim, the decisive event in his life was the romantic vision of a young boy who met a little girl in the streets of Florence.
Nine times already since my birth had the heaven
of light returned to the selfsame point almost,
as concerns its own revolution, when first the
glorious Lady of my mind was made manifest to
mine eyes; even she who was called Beatrice by
many who knew not wherefore . . . . Her dress,
on that day, was of a most noble colour, a
subdued and goodly crimson, girded and adorned
in such sort as best suited with her very tender
age. At that moment, I say most truly that the
spirit of life, which hath its dwelling in the
secretest chamber of the heart, began to tremble
so violently that the least pulses of my body
shook therewith; and in trembling it said these
words: "Here is a deity stronger than I; who,
coming, shall rule over me." At that moment
the animate spirit, which dwelleth in the lofty
chamber whither all the senses carry their per­
ceptions, was filled with wonder, and speaking
more especially unto the spirits of the eyes,
said these words: "Your beatitude hath now been
made manifest unto you." At that moment the
natural spirit, which dwelleth there where our
nourishment is administered, began to weep, and
in weeping said these words: "Alas! how often
shall I be disturbed from this time forth."
I say that, from that time forward, Love quite
governed my soul; which was immediately espoused
to him, and with so safe and undisputed a lord­
ship (by virtue of strong imagination) that I
had nothing left for it but to do all his bidding
continually. 4

Even in his final description of Beatrice in the
Paradiso, Dante alludes back to this first meeting:

If that which up till here is said of her were
all compressed into one act of praise 'twould
be too slight to serve this present turn.

The beauty I beheld transcendeth measure, not
only past our reach, but surely I believe that
only he who made it enjoyeth it complete.

4 Dante, Vita Nuova, ii.
At this pass I yield me vanquished more than
e' er yet was overborne by his theme's thrust
comic or tragic poet.

For as the Sun in sight that most trembleth, so
the remembrance of the sweet smile sheareth my
memory of its very self.

From the first day when in this life I saw her
face, until this sight, my song hath ne'er been
cut off from the track;

but now needs must my tracking cease from
following her beauty further forth in poesy, as
at his utmost reach must every artist.

(Paradiso xxx, 16-33)

The fact that Dante casts his great poem in
the form of a supermundane experience raises the
question of whether Dante was a mystic. At least one
scholar, Paolo Milano, asserts that "Dante is any­
thing but a mystic." He goes on to brief his case
by pointing to the concrete, this-worldly character­
istics found so consistently throughout the Commedia:
"The Commedia is not a vision by a mind in absolute
contemplation; it is rooted in the immediate Christian
world of the year 1300, as seen by a Tuscan exile."

The chief difficulty of this view is that
Dante himself seems to contradict it. In his Letter
to Can Grande Dante wrote:

And should the cavillers not be satisfied, let
them read Richard of St. Victor in his book On
Contemplation; let them read Bernard in his book
On Consideration; let them read Augustine in his

5Milano (ed.), The Portable Dante, p. xxiii.
book On the Capacity of the Soul; and they will cease from cavilling. But if on account of the sinfulness of the speaker they should cry out against his claim to have reached such a height of exaltation let them read Daniel, where they will find that even Nebuchadnezzar by divine permission beheld certain things as a warning to sinners, and straightway forgot them. For He "who maketh his sun to shine on the good and on the evil, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust", sometimes in compassion for their conversion, sometimes in wrath for their chastisement, in greater or lesser measure, according as He wills, manifests His glory to evil-doers, be they never so evil. 6

In light of this passage, it would seem to be best to say that Dante is indeed a mystic, but a most unusual one. "A vision by a mind in absolute contemplation" would more or less characterize the usual view of mystical experience. It turns from images and sense experience to follow the shortest, most direct route to the presence of God.

Dante's mysticism is the precise opposite of this. Dante's route to the highest heaven is the longest possible one: through the limbo of the great pagans, through the depths of hell, circling the mountain of purgatory again and again. And as the routes differ, so do the rules of travel. The traditional mystic moves by mortification of the senses; Dante the pilgrim moves by looking intently at all

6Quoted in Sayers and Reynolds (trans.), The Comedy of Dante: III: Paradise, p. 43.
that he comes upon. He is to look upon all to see it as God sees it—for with increase of vision comes increase of love. So to look, and see, is possible for Dante only because he has seen, and will see, Beatrice as God sees her: transfigured, and fully herself.

"Romanticism" and "mysticism" are apt to have pejorative connotations in the twentieth century. But the fact remains that the romantics and the mystics may have insights into the dimensions of Love which the realists will overlook. One of the indices of Dante's greatness is that he is able, in the Commedia, to come to grips with the insights of all three perspectives.

III

It is, I think, the intellectual acuteness of the Commedia that gives the theme of Love its coherence. The various themes which have been traced in the preceding chapters of this study can all be seen as "levels" upon which the overarching theme of Love is explored. At the basis lies the theme of rationality: the interior self-honesty that is the sine qua non of a right relationship with God and with one's fellow man. But this rationality does not exist in a vacuum. It is related to the world outside of self by the theme of
vision; how a man sees is of decisive importance to how he thinks. Furthermore, how a man sees and thinks cannot be separated from how he lives in relation to others; this has been traced under the theme of vocation.

Thus Dante approaches the theme of Love indirectly, and step by step. "Hence may be seen how the being blessed is founded on the act that seeth, not that which loveth, which after followeth." Dante the pilgrim travels the whole length of hell, and half that of purgatory, before the theme of Love is explored analytically in Virgil's great discourse:

Nor Creator, nor creature, my son, was ever without love, either natural or rational; and this thou knowest.

The natural is always without error; but the other may err through an evil object, or through too little or too much vigour.

While it is directed to the primal goods, and in the secondary, moderates itself, it cannot be the cause of sinful delight;

but when it is turned awry to evil, or speeds toward the good with more or less care than it ought, against the Creator his creature works.

Hence thou mayst understand that love must be the seed of every virtue in you, and of every deed that deserves punishment.

Now inasmuch as love can never turn its face from the weal of its subject, all things are safe from self-hatred;

and because no being can be conceived as existing alone in isolation from the Prime Being, every affection is cut off from hate of him.
It follows, if I judge well in my division, that the evil we love is our neighbours', and this love arises in three ways in your clay.

There is he who through his neighbour's abasement hopes to excel, and solely for this desires that he be cast down from his greatness;

there is he who fears to lose power, favour, honour and fame because another is exalted, wherefore he groweth sad so that he loves the contrary;

and there is he who seems to be so shamed through being wronged, that he becomes greedy of vengeance, and such must needs seek another's hurt.

This threefold love down below is mourned for; now I desire that thou understand of the other, which hastes toward good in faulty degree.

Each one apprehends vaguely a good wherein the mind may find rest, and desires it; wherefore each one strives to attain thereto.

If lukewarm love draws you towards the vision of it or the gaining of it, this cornice, after due penitence, torments you for it.

Another good there is, which maketh not men happy; 'tis not happiness, 'tis not the good essence, the fruit and root of all good.

The love that abandons itself too much to this, is mourned for above us in three circles.
(Purgatorio xvii, 91-137)

The concept of Love explicated here is relevant to the categories of coinherence and estrangement discussed in the first section of this chapter. It does not eliminate the tension between coinherence and estrangement, but it does go a long way toward explaining it.

In the light of this explication, for example, the antagonisms of hell can be seen as the perversion of
love. Thus (to take one illustration) the transmuted thieves, attacking and fastening upon one another, epitomize the love of self reaching out to consume all that is within its grasp—and in the process consuming itself. Hatred is cancerous love, malignant coinherence. At the same time, the estrangements of hell, purgatory, and earth here can be seen in their true significance. They are not ultimate, but they do have their root in the Ultimate Reality. The distinctions of the hierarchy of heaven are necessary not only for the sake of justice, but also for the sake of Love. If heaven were a kind of Hindu Atman—a world soul within which all distinctions would be absorbed—there would be no Love.

This is to say that the distinctions within the hierarchy of heaven are in some sense analogues of the Trinity. The mystery of distinction within unity, manifested in the dogma of the Trinity, penetrates into the whole of creation, and not least into the human social reality. For the distinctions within the Godhead are inextricably bound up with the nature of Love. The Holy Spirit, according to the traditional doctrinal formulations, is not "begotten" but "generated" by the love which proceeds from the Father to the Son, and returns from the Son to the Father.
Thus, ultimately, Love is not a concept but a Person: God is Love. Here, I think, the full significance of John Sinclair's observation, cited in the previous chapter, comes to light:

It was, indeed, a chief function of Dante, by his very grasp and exposition of scholastic thinking and by the energy and concreteness of his mind, to rescue it--rescuing himself, too--from its abstractness and bring it to the test and proof of life, to relate it in all its meaning to that which God and men are to do.7

What I would wish to emphasize here is that the concreteness and the personalism of the Commedia are not something imposed by Dante on the scholastic synthesis, and external to it. Rather this concreteness and personalism are a penetration into its deepest significance, its full relevance for the world of human relationships and the structure of human society.

Throughout this study, Dante's own title for his magnum opus--the Commedia--has been used. A later generation added the adjective, Divina, as an honorific. No doubt the honor was deserved. But it has been my intention here to show that the Commedia, if divine, is so because it is so deeply, so fully; and so lucidly human.

7Sinclair (trans.), Dante's Paradiso, p. 342.
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