

MEDIEVAL MULTICULTURALISM AND DANTE'S THEOLOGY OF HELL

TEODOLINDA BAROLINI
Columbia University

Turning to the article "Inferno" in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, we discover in microcosm one of the chief characteristics of the field we call "Dante studies": its immunity to the world outside the *Commedia*, in other words, its immunity to history. After a brief summary of the usage of the term *inferno* in Dante's works, the entry turns to "L'Inferno nella *Commedia*," a rubric from which it thenceforth does not stray. Adhering to the topic Dante scholars have traditionally labeled "la struttura morale dell'inferno," the author treats Dante's hell as though it were a totally self-contained and self-generated Platonic idea, uncontaminated by history.¹ Thus, there is no discussion of the development of the idea of hell over time: of the permutations and vicissitudes that the concept of hell underwent as it passed from the Old to the New Testament, and thence from Origen, who affirmed the medicinal and corrective value of a noneternal system of punishment which would eventually restore all souls to God, to Augustine, who vigorously and successfully defended the eternity of hell, using Matthew 25 and arguing that "the sentence of the Lord could not be evacuated of meaning or deprived of its force; the sentence, I mean, that he, on his own prediction, was to pronounce in these words: 'Out of my sight, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the Devil and his angels.'"² Likewise, there is no reference to the body of texts we can roughly group together as "visions of hell and heaven."³ Of course, as I hope to have demonstrated in *The Undivine "Comedy*," Dante created the conditions that determined this critical reaction, presenting himself, so to speak, as the ultimate essentialist, when he was in fact the ultimate constructivist (in Isaiah Berlin's terms, as a hedgehog, when he was in fact a fox).⁴

¹See *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, 6 vols. (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970–1978) 3: 432–435; the author of the entry is Marcello Aurigemma.

²Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1972) 21–23. For Origen and Augustine on hell, see Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993) 306–33.

³These texts are conveniently accessed through the translation of Eileen Gardiner, *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante* (New York: Italica, 1989).

⁴See Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine "Comedy": Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992) 173: "I prefer to think in terms of paradox and tension deriving from Dante's double allegiance: his desire to synthesize Aristotelian sympa-

For, if we were pressed to characterize Dante's principles of infernal construction with a single formula, we would have to put forward his extraordinary and purposeful eclecticism, the voracious syncretism with which he embraces and makes his own a veritable cornucopia of cultural traditions.

While Dante's conceptualizing of sin, and thus ultimately of hell, is firmly embedded within orthodox theological tradition, his representation of hell — and thus implicitly his theology of hell — is frequently idiosyncratic to the point of being heterodox. For instance, there is no theological precedent for creating a vestibule of hell that houses neutral angels and cowardly souls "who lived without infamy and without praise" (*Inf.* 3.36), just as there is no theological justification for putting great pagans into Limbo alongside the unbaptized children or for claiming that certain traitors are damned before death, their souls sent to hell while devils inhabit their bodies on earth (*Inf.* 33). This last example, that of souls condemned to hell while still alive, furnishes an excellent case of a category that is not acceptable theologically, but that does find precedent in the popular culture of the visions.⁵ Therefore, although Dante reflects the most informed theological thought on hell, he is certainly not constrained by it. Moving from the theological template, he widens the range of cultural resources available to him in two fundamental ways: one, he utilizes pagan sources as well as Christian ones; two, he does not limit his Christian sources to the high culture of theology. Thus, he explicitly borrows from such (high culture) pagan sources as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which he credits as a source for the structure of his hell, or Vergil's underworld in *Aeneid* 6, various of whose characters and features he appropriates and transforms. But Dante's hell also demonstrates clear links to the established popular iconography of hell and to popular cultural forms like sermons, visions, and the didactic poetry of vernacular predecessors such as Bonvesin da la Riva and Giacomino da Verona. As Alison Morgan correctly notes, Dante "is the first Christian writer to combine the popular material with the theological and philosophical systems of his day."⁶

thy for difference with the Neoplatonic One. Or, in the terms of Isaiah Berlin's essay *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, I am suggesting that Dante is less an archetypal hedgehog — less a monist — than is commonly assumed."

⁵See Alison Morgan, *Dante and the Medieval Other World* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 55: "A number of the earlier visionaries came across individuals in the other world who were still alive."

⁶*Ivi* 8. Morgan, however, does not deal with Bonvesino, for whom see Manuele Gragnolati, "Identity, Pain, and Resurrection: Body and Soul in Bonvesin da la Riva's *Book of the Three Scriptures* and Dante's *Commedia*," Columbia University dissertation, 1999.

Dante's representation of hell is unique in its rich and uninhibited blending of these remarkably heterogeneous constituents into a personal — multicultural — vision: while, for instance, scholastic philosophy was rooted in Aristotle, so that Aquinas cites the *Nicomachean Ethics* in his discussion of sin, and the vision authors knew the Bible, Dante alone brings all these traditions together, knitting strands as disparate as the *Aeneid* on the one hand and the *Vision of Tundale* on the other. Moreover, while Dante's borrowings from classical authors tend to be overt and intellectualized, his connections to popular culture, although less emphatic, provide much of the poem's fundamental eschatological structure. For instance, the deployment of what Dante calls the "contrapasso" (*Inf.* 28.142), the principle of justice that governs the punishments, can be traced back to vision literature. Rudimentary forms of the *contrapasso* are in evidence as far back as the mid-second century *Apocalypse of Peter*: "In the *Apocalypse of Peter*, although the locations are distributed no more systematically [than in Plutarch's *On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance*], the punishments, in most cases, are very clearly linked to the sins."⁷

In a move that allows his syncretic penchant greater latitude, Dante resists providing a uniform template for sin; by offering one taxonomy for hell and another for purgatory he is able to widen the cultural resources available to the *Commedia*. The account of the organization of hell entrusted to Vergil in *Inferno* 11 explicitly makes use of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* to set up a fundamental distinction between sins of incontinence and malice. The sins of incontinence (circles two through five) are sins of impulse, brought about by immoderate passion uncontrolled by reason; they are lust, gluttony, avarice/prodigality (we shall return to the significance of this unique duo), and anger. The sins of malice cause injustice and harm to others, proceeding either by force or by fraud (this is a distinction that Dante finds, as Edward Moore points out, in Cicero's *De Officiis* 1.13).⁸ Injurious acts achieved by fraud are more sinful, since fraud requires the misuse of reason, man's peculiar gift. The seventh circle, then, houses the violent, while the eighth and the ninth circles contain the fraudulent. Vergil's account makes no mention of the first circle (Limbo) or the sixth (heresy).

Purgatory, on the other hand, is imagined by Dante as a mountain whose seven terraces of purging souls correspond to the seven capital sins (better called vices, since purgatory deals with the inclination to sin, rather than the sinful action itself). Of the seven capital vices, four — lust, glut-

⁷Bernstein 284.

⁸See Edward Moore, "The Classification of Sins in the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*," *Studies in Dante: Second Series* 1899 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1968) 158.

tony, avarice, and anger — appear in hell under the rubric of sins of incontinence. In other words, the organization of hell is revealed in retrospect as a hybrid concoction, whose “Aristotelian” sins of incontinence are also well housed under the more popular roof of the seven capital vices. (In fact, one suspects that most readers of the *Inferno*, in Dante’s time as now, are led by the early cantos to a complacent expectation that hell will be structured on a much more familiar and popular template than the one Dante borrows from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. From this perspective, *Inferno* 11, usually classified as “boring,” is a canto that should be read with a certain amount of amazement.) The overlap between the Aristotelian scheme adopted for hell and the theological scheme adopted for purgatory displays a uniquely Dantesque contamination: first, of Christian and classical paradigms (analogously, with respect to the inhabitants of otherworlds, Morgan points to Dante’s complete originality in including classical figures, “who are totally unrepresented in the earlier medieval texts”⁹); and, second, of popular with high culture, for Dante is conflating popular religious currents with a hyperliterate textual tradition.

In the essay “The Classification of Sins in the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*,” Moore writes that “the Church has by a sort of general consent accepted the doctrine of seven capital, principal, or (according to the more recent phrase) ‘deadly’ sins, but that it has not made (as far as I can ascertain) any authoritative declaration which would limit the discretion of individual writers in respect of the relative gravity of these sins, or their mutual interconnexion.”¹⁰ Thus, though widely known, the scheme of the seven capital vices is not official Church doctrine. Picking up where Moore left off, Morgan turns to popular culture and points to the importance of the seven vices for confession manuals of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: “The scheme of the seven capital vices is widely used in the confession manuals, particularly in the thirteenth century but also to some extent in the twelfth.” Making the connection to Dante, Morgan further notes that “The manuals classify sins according to the seven capital vices or the ten commandments, and include almost all those punished in Dante’s Hell.”¹¹

With respect to the taxonomy of Dante’s hell we could therefore sum up as follows: an arrangement that at first seems to be loosely based on the seven capital vices is then grafted onto Aristotle, whose distinction between

⁹Morgan 57.

¹⁰Moore 203. With his customary thoroughness, Moore also offers a compendium of views on the capital sins from Cassian in the fifth century to Chaucer and Gower in the fourteenth, a compendium that would eventually be greatly expanded by Morton Bloomfield in *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Michigan: Michigan State UP, 1952).

¹¹Morgan 122, 131.

sins of incontinence and sins of malice provides the overarching order. However, while this system of classification is overtly labeled Aristotelian, the material remains fundamentally Christian, given that, as Morgan says, “the thirty-seven sins punished in the *Inferno* are essentially the same sins as those traditionally represented in the popular visions of the other world and listed in the confession manuals of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.”¹² Thus, we find ourselves facing a remarkable bid on Dante’s part to bring classical authority into contact with that most irreducibly Christian genre, the vision of the Christian afterlife — a bid whose success can be judged, as so often with Dante, by the fact that it has been absorbed with surprisingly little critical fuss. By this I mean that, while much attention has been given to the question of how exactly to make Aristotle’s categories fit, there has been correspondingly little attention to the question of what Aristotle is doing here at all.

With respect to Dante’s purgatory, where the seven capital vices provide the order, the classical/Christian contamination that is Dante’s hallmark as a vision author seems to have disappeared, but it has not. It can still be glimpsed in the theologically unorthodox coupling of avarice with its Aristotelian counterpart, prodigality. This coupling is an anomalous feature of Dante’s eschatological scheme that reflects his commitment to contaminating theological culture with classical culture; as such it deserves greater critical interest. Dante is so wedded to his Aristotelian vision of virtue as the mean between two vices that he incorporates it into his treatment of avarice in hell and — even more remarkably, given the absence of any Aristotelian justification — in purgatory: both the fourth circle of hell and the fifth terrace of purgatory are devoted to avarice *and* prodigality, despite there being no official or for that matter unofficial Church doctrine in support of such an idea. And Dante goes further, having the character Statius proclaim, counter to the witness provided by his own text, the validity of Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean for *all* of purgatory: “E sappie che la colpa che rimbecca/per dritta opposizione alcun peccato,/con esso insieme qui suo verde secca” (“And know that the fault that counters any sin as its opposite with it here finds its sap dried out” [*Purg.* 22.49-51]).¹³ In other words, Statius says that on each terrace one will find punished not only the sin, but its op-

¹²*Ivi* 131.

¹³Chiavacci Leonardi’s commentary is typically uninterested in what is at stake in Dante’s apparently absurd declaration: “Se *qui* vale per tutto il purgatorio, e si tratta dunque di una norma generale, come appare probabile, essa resta poi astratta e non applicata se non in questo luogo, perché mai altrove si parla di vizi opposti a quello capitale, a cui son sempre riferiti esempi e beatitudini,” *Commedia*, vol. 2, *Purgatorio* (Milan: Mondadori, 1994) 647.

posite. We will return later to the question of what is at stake for Dante here, what could compel him to make so apparently gratuitous and absurd a claim.

Dante’s infernal system of classification is not without its puzzles and inconsistencies. However, when one compares the *Inferno* to the previous accounts of hell found in vision literature, one is struck not by its inconsistencies but by the opposite: Dante’s *Inferno* stunningly conveys the appearance of a totally inclusive penal system from which no sin is omitted and no sinner can escape. Key to creating such an illusion is the deployment of a system of classification that seems so logical, so precise, so rigorous in its definitions and distinctions, and that invokes the immense authority of Aristotle. Visions of hell before the *Inferno* suffer from lack of difference: all the sinners seem the same, all the punishments merge into one sadistic blur. Where parataxis reigned, both stylistically and structurally, Dante — with passages like *Inferno* 11 — imposes hypotaxis. In comparison to the confused and unsystematic quality of earlier visions — where sins and sinners are frequently piled one upon the other with minimal differentiation, so that the reader has no way of distinguishing the first from the second, third, or fourth, and consequently little incentive to see who comes next — in the *Inferno* we know the order in which sins will be encountered, and the moral value that has been assigned to each. Nor does Dante make the opposite mistake of relaying such information too soon. He waits until he has taken us through all the circles apparently based on the seven capital vices, whose logic seems easy enough to follow, and only then — when it is clear that we will require assistance — does he intrude. As a result of the discourse on the structure of hell, the reader can anticipate the narrative and is thereby induced to proceed, propelled by the subliminal desire to see how cogently the author’s rendering will conform to his earlier declarations, as well as by the urge to participate in a possible world that seems to make sense, or that can be challenged if it does not, because its structuring principles have been made known to us.

Also key to constructing a persuasive representation of hell is the use of the *contrapasso*, the principle whereby the punishment fits the crime. For Dante, the *contrapasso* frequently takes the form of literalizing a metaphor: thus, the souls of the lustful are tossed by a hellish storm as in life they were buffeted by their passions, while the schismatics, who in life rent the body politic, now find their own bodies torn and rent. Dante’s *contrapassi*, which enact the sin for which the soul is damned, display a remarkable inventiveness and draw from a broad spectrum of sources, ranging from traditional motifs like the graduated immersion of a sinner in a river or a lake (already

present in the fourth century *Apocalypse of Paul*) to the metamorphosis of man into tree as in *Aeneid* 3.¹⁴ Again, if we look at previous visions where the principle of the *contrapasso* is less systematically deployed, we see how important it is, not just theologically, but as a narrative anchoring of the text. The comparative effectiveness of *Tundale's Vision* (1149), for example, derives in no small measure from its rudimentary deployment of the notion that certain punishments befit certain sinners: "Which souls in particular might this punishment be for?" asks Tundale of his angel guide, thus acknowledging a curiosity that is grounded in an ideology of moral decorum, an ideology that the guide's reply, "This punishment is especially *fitting* for you and those like you," makes explicit.¹⁵ This vision also displays an understanding of the need for narrative subordination in order to create differentiation (Tundale is frequently told that the newest punishment will be greater than any he has seen before); moreover, the concern to differentiate has reached the point where the author imagines categories of souls called the "Not-Very-Bad" and the "Not-Very-Good." These procedures, for all their crudity, anticipate the narrative techniques we find in the *Inferno*; they are, in effect, the narratological analogues of the ideological innovations that allow Morgan to comment that the "*Vision of Tundale* shows the most complex approach to the classification of sin among the twelfth-century texts."¹⁶

We do well to remember that representers of the Christian afterworld display increasing sophistication, both narratologically and theologically, and that the *contrapasso* is a device that functions in both domains. Overall, Dante effectively uses the *contrapasso* to deflect any sense of randomness or arbitrariness and to suffuse his text with a sense of God's order and justice. The reception of the *Commedia* offers us an excellent index of Dante's effectiveness in this regard. We frequently find scholars searching for explanations for the more opaque *contrapassi*, operating on the assumption, as always in the study of Dante, that the answer will be there if we search long and hard enough, in other words, on the assumption that there is nothing arbitrary in the possible world Dante has created. The *contrapasso* is a crucial tool in Dante's attempt to represent hell in a way that bears out the declaration on its gate — "Giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore" ("Justice moved my high maker" [*Inf.* 3.4]) — and in a way that reflects its true

¹⁴"The immersion motif occurs in most versions of the *Vision of Paul* and in seven of the popular visions from the sixth to the thirteenth centuries" (Morgan 31). For other examples of earlier motifs picked up by Dante, see her first chapter, "Topographical Motifs of the Other World."

¹⁵Gardiner 162.

¹⁶Morgan 110.

theological nature: since hell is deserved separation from God, punishment is not something inflicted by God but the consequence, indeed the enactment, of the sin itself. Here too, while some of Dante's *contrapassi* may seem more fitting than others, and more transparently suggest the sin being punished, a comparison of Dante's hell to those of his precursors reveals that he is the only author to deploy an ideology of moral decorum not sporadically but as a systematic feature of his otherworld.

Study of Dante's visionary precursors enables us to see how much he goes beyond them, but also to grasp that his text belongs to a long visionary tradition.¹⁷ I fully endorse Morgan's claim that "Dante's classification of sin is in some sense the result of a marriage between a large mass of traditional material and the Aristotelian categories." She cites the following grounds for comparison between the classification of sin in the *Vision of Tundale* and the *Inferno*:

the explicit separation of one class of sinner from another; the gradual increase in gravity of sin and corresponding torment as we travel deeper into the pit of Hell; the distinction between sins deserving of punishment in upper Hell and those deserving of punishment in lower Hell, with the offering of a principle according to which the two types are differentiated; the assignment of monsters or guardians to the various classes of sinner, and finally the change in mood as the area of the purgation of minor sins is reached.¹⁸

Most significant is Morgan's conclusion that the correspondences suggest that Dante was "not thinking solely of Aristotle when composing his system of classification."¹⁹ There is no doubt that Dante was not thinking *solely* of Aristotle, or of Aquinas, or of any single authority.²⁰ Dante's uniquely rich

¹⁷In *The Undivine "Comedy"* I argue for factoring the visionary tradition into our reading of Dante; see, for instance, 143–44.

¹⁸Morgan 110, 112.

¹⁹*Ivi* 112.

²⁰Recently, Marc Cogan has proposed aligning the three zones of Dante's hell with the three appetites that Aquinas based on Aristotle (the concupiscible, the irascible, the will) and further suggests that "the *gironi* of Purgatory share a common substrate with the circles of Hell: dispositions in one, actions in the other are distinguished and organized by their relation to the same three appetites" (*The Design in the Wax: The Structure of the Divine Comedy and Its Meaning* [Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1999] 99). While there is much that is useful in Cogan's discussion of Aristotle and especially Aquinas, his argument's credibility is weakened by its exclusive focus on one cultural strand. The tidy order that he imposes on Dante's much more chaotic structure is ultimately reductive and raises as many questions as it answers — precisely because Dante's structure is not based on any single model.

and complex system is as indebted to popular culture as it is to high culture, given that “all the sins represented in the *Inferno*, with the single exception of suicide, are also found in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century representations of the other world and in the confession manuals.”²¹ But at the same time Dante is the only representer of the Christian afterworld to really understand and embody in his narrative choices the philosophy and beliefs of high culture, not only pagan but Christian. We previously noted that Dante uses the *contrapasso* to reflect hell’s true theological nature, which is utter separation from God. The precision and understanding with which Dante gives flesh to the doctrines of the greatest theologians, especially Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, are unprecedented.

Laying the eschatological foundations of the later Middle Ages, Augustine writes in the *Enchiridion* not only of fixed and eternal lots for the bad and the good, but also of degrees of happiness and misery:

After the resurrection, however, when the final, universal judgment has been completed, two groups of citizens, one Christ’s, the other the devil’s, shall have fixed lots; one consisting of the good, the other of the bad — both, however, consisting of angels and men. The former shall have no will, the latter no power, to sin, and neither shall have any power to choose death; but the former shall live truly and happily in eternal life, the latter shall drag a miserable existence in eternal death without the power of dying; for both shall be without end. But among the former there shall be degrees of happiness, one being more preeminently happy than another; and among the latter there shall be degrees of misery, one being more enduringly miserable than another.²²

Both these concepts — fixed, eternal lots and degrees of misery for the wicked proportionate to their sins — are key to Dante’s hell, whose sinners are distributed through nine circles according to the gravity of their sins. The eternity of hell is solemnly proclaimed by the gate of hell itself: “Per me si va ne l’eterno dolore [. . .] Dinanzi a me non fuor cose create / se non etterne, e io eterno duro” (“Through me the way into eternal sorrow . . . Before me were no things created / except eternal ones, and I endure eternal” [*Inf.* 3.2, 7-8]).

On the question of the eternity of hell, it is worth underscoring that Dante is much more theologically rigorous than is generally understood. The words “e io eterno duro” on the gate of hell point specifically,

Dante is deeply indebted to Aristotle and to Aquinas for his eschatological structure, but by no means exclusively.

²¹Morgan 131.

²²Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love* trans. J. F. Shaw (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 1961) ch. 111.

through the verb *durare*, to eternity as duration. When commentators and teachers of the *Commedia* repeat the wellworn maxim of Dante scholarship that holds that hell and heaven are eternal, while purgatory is temporal, we are in fact blurring the distinction that Dante is careful to make: the distinction between eternity as endlessness (hell) and eternity as simultaneous presence (heaven). True eternity, Dante knows, following Boethius, is not the same as endlessness, for eternity requires simultaneity: “Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis vitae *tota simul* et perfecta possessio” (“Eternity therefore is the perfect possession *altogether and at the same time* of an endless life.”²³ Over and over, Boethius stresses that what is not “*simul*” is not eternal: endless life is one thing, and God’s ability to embrace the whole presence of an endless life together and at the same time is another. Endlessness should be called “perpetual” (“perpetuum”), while only the plenitude of presence in a never fading instant may be called “eternal” (“aeternum”).

I would argue that Dante has conceptualized his hell and heaven according to Boethius’s distinction between perpetual endlessness and eternal timelessness: the air of hell is “without time” — “*sanza tempo*” (*Inf.* 3.29) — because it is starless and therefore endless, deprived of the measured time produced by the motion of the spheres, not because it is truly timeless and eternal, altogether outside of time, in the way that the divine mind exists “*in sua eternità di tempo fore*” (“in its eternity outside of time” [*Par.* 29.16]). In other words, with respect to the question of eternity, Dante’s treatment of hell and heaven is not simply symmetrical, with hell the *in malo* version of heaven and heaven the *in bono* version of hell, as scholars have implied; rather he treats the two realms in an asymmetrical fashion that is theologically precise. What eternity signifies in the context of hell is duration, as Aquinas notes: “The fire of hell is called eternal only because it is unending.”²⁴ And this is the eternity Dante renders. Thus, in his representation of hell Dante never problematizes the concepts of space and time as he does in his representation of paradise, where he has Beatrice explain that all the souls are really in the Empyrean and only appear in different heavens as an accommodation for the pilgrim’s limited understanding; he never says (the very ludicrousness of the proposition is telling) that all the souls are

²³Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* 5.6.9-11. The Latin text is cited in the Loeb Classical Library edition, eds. H. F. Stewart and E. K. Rand (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1936). The following discussion is based on Book 5, Prose 6 and my *Undivine Comedy* 167-71.

²⁴*Summa Theologiae* 1a.10.3. The *Summa Theologiae* is cited in the Blackfriars edition, 61 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964-1981); this citation is from volume 2: 143. All volume and page numbers in subsequent citations from the *Summa* are from this edition and will be indicated by *ST*.

really with Lucifer in Cocytus and only appear in various circles for the benefit of the pilgrim. Spatially, hell is treated as tangible and concrete, while temporally, the fact that it is eternal means specifically and only what is captured by “*ed io eterno duro*”: that it will last forever, that its torments are perpetual.

Augustine conceives the wages of sin in terms of loss and alienation: it is “to be lost out of the kingdom of God, to be an exile from the city of God, to be alienated from the life of God, to have no share in that great goodness which God hath laid up for them that fear Him, and hath wrought out for them that trust in Him.”²⁵ Although there will be degrees of happiness and of misery, the essential conditions after death are eternal life in God or eternal death apart from God. When all is said and done, hell is essentially a condition of perpetual death, of perpetual alienation from the life of God, as he explains in *Enchiridion* 113:

This perpetual death of the wicked, then, that is, their alienation from the life of God, shall abide for ever, and shall be common to them all, whatever men, prompted by their human affections, may conjecture as to a variety of punishments, or as to a mitigation or intermission of their woes; just as the eternal life of the saints shall abide for ever, and shall be common to them all, whatever grades of rank and honor there may be among those who shine with an harmonious effulgence.

If hell, theologically, is the perpetual alienation from God as a result of our sin, then sin is the turning from God whose reification is hell. As defined by Thomas Aquinas, sin consists of two elements: 1) “aversion, the turning away from the changeless good” (“*aversio ab incommutabili bono*”); 2) “conversion, the disordered turning towards a changeable good” (“*inordinata conversio ad commutabile bono*.”²⁶ *Quaestio* 87 of *Summa Theologiae* 1a2ae, under the heading “*de reatu poenae*” (“on the guilt of punishment”), teaches that aversion from God results in the *poena damni* or “pain of loss,” which corresponds to the loss of the beatific vision (in the context of purgatory, as Thomas explains elsewhere, this amounts to delay in attaining the beatific vision), while disordered conversion results in the *poena sensus*, or “pain of sense,” which corresponds to the torments of hell-fire (or punishment by fire in the case of purgatory). As T.C. O’Brien glosses Aquinas on sin and punishment: “The theological significance of sin, the *actus debito ordine privatus* [“an act lacking the order that it should have”], is that it is a turning to the creature at the expense of union with God, it is *aversio a Deo* . . . God is not the afflictive avenger; punishment for

²⁵Augustine, *Enchiridion* cit. 112.

²⁶*ST* 1a2ae.87.4; Blackfriars 1974, 27: 24–25.

mortal sin is the state of separation and estrangement, of loss.”²⁷ At heart, then, Thomas’s *aversio* expresses an idea of sin as separation that is profoundly Augustinian, for, as O’Brien explains in the notes to *Quaestio* 87, Thomas views mortal sin as that which “breaks the revealed, personal union of man with God through charity” and holds that the “punishment of mortal sin is precisely its mortality; it is the separation, alienation from the life-source, from God as Father and friend, which the sinful act brought about.”²⁸

Both Augustinian alienation and Thomistic aversion are concepts fundamental to Dante, who holds that sin disenfranchises us and separates us from God: “sin alone is that which unfrees” us and renders us “dissimilar from the highest good” (“Solo il peccato è quel che la disfranca/e falla dissimile al sommo bene” [*Par.* 7.79-80]). However, while Dante’s deep metaphoric structures are profoundly congruent with Augustinian exile, dissimilitude, and alienation, the Florentine poet shares with Thomas an interest in making distinctions within the metaphoric structures. Thomas, after all, is capable of elaborating on sin as follows:

Clearly in certain sins, while there is some disorder, it is not one conflicting with the ultimate end, but rather regards some subordinate ends, which a person wills in a manner beyond or short of what is right, while yet maintaining his relationship to the ultimate end. For example: a person, while being too attached to some temporal object, still would not for its sake will to offend God by doing anything contrary to the commandments. Therefore what is due as punishment for such sins is not perpetual but temporary.²⁹

O’Brien’s gloss to the above passage, which makes use of a metaphor he finds in Thomas, according to which life is a voyage on which humans sometimes “dally,” is remarkably suggestive with respect to Dante:

There is a dalliance, as it were, with the proper desirability of some subordinate end and a failure to attend to its true relationship to the ultimate end. In II *Sent.* 42, I, 3 ad 5 St. Thomas makes this comparison: the one sinning mortally is like a man who turns off the road to his destination; the one sinning venially, like a man who delays too long on the road (*recedens a via; nimis moratur in via*).³⁰

²⁷Blackfriars 1974, 27: 105–06.

²⁸*Ivi* 20–21.

²⁹*ST* 1a2ae.87.5; Blackfriars 1974, 27: 29.

³⁰Blackfriars 1974, 27: 28.

Thomas's metaphors for rendering the distinction between mortal and venial sin — “the one sinning mortally is like a man who turns off the road to his destination; the one sinning venially, like a man who delays too long on the road” — are stunningly apt for describing the *Commedia*: the sinners of hell are those who have definitively lost the path to their destination, *che la diritta via hanno smarrita*, whose ships have actually capsized; the souls in purgatory are guilty of having delayed, like Dante and the others whom Cato rebukes as “spiriti lenti,” asking “qual negligenza, quale stare è questo?” (“What negligence, what lingering is this?” [*Purg.* 2.120-121]). Like Thomas, Dante brings nuance and distinction to Augustine's concepts of death and exile; even more systematically than Thomas, given his central structural metaphor of human life as a path on which soul journeys, Dante finds voyage imagery a powerful tool for adding such distinctions.

The *Commedia*'s opening metaphor of life as path embodies Aquinas's ideas of *aversio* and *conversio*: at the beginning of the *Commedia* the pilgrim has lost the right path and figures the state of *aversio*, of the sinful soul that has turned away from God, in his case temporarily, but with respect to the sinners of hell permanently. The second element of sin, *conversio*, the turning toward the changeable goods of the world, seems to have particularly engaged Dante's interest, judging from the degree to which it permeates his thought. What is key for Dante is how clearly Thomas's category of *conversio* to sin, with its implied opposite of *conversio* to God, like Augustine's idea of *malus amor* versus *bonus* or *rectus amor*, brings sin — and therefore its ultimate consequence, hell — into contact with human desiring.

In *Convivio* 4.12 Dante spells out with limpid clarity his vision of human life as a voyage propelled by desire, in his parable of the pilgrim soul who moves along the road of life from one object of desire to the next as it seeks the inn of repose. In this story, the existential motion of soul comes into vivid focus, as it voyages on a path on which it has never been, on a path which is by definition always new and unknown — in other words, on the path of life, the path of becoming, the path we are all always on: “[i]l nuovo e mai non fatto cammino di questa vita” (“the new and never before traveled path of this life” [*Con.* 4.12.15]). As it voyages, soul may err, for it can erroneously believe that a lesser good it encounters along the path is the highest good — “qualunque cosa vede che paia in sé avere alcuno bene, crede che sia esso” (“whatever thing it sees that seems to have some good in it, soul believes that it is that highest good” [*Con.* 4.12.15]) — thus exchanging what should be a way-station for the goal or end-point of the journey. The suggestion is that soul could fail to correct its mistake and could therefore fail to keep moving forward: if soul believes that some lesser good is the end-point of its journey, soul will prematurely cease its motion, will attempt to dwell in the lesser good, and will lose itself.

This is not to overstate the case; the loss that is latent in the above comparison will become overt in the parable’s conclusion, where Dante writes that “Veramente così questo cammino si perde per errore come le strade de la terra” (“Truly this path is thus lost through error like the roads of the earth” [*Con.* 4.12.18]). There is no doubt that Dante’s is a mind that encompasses the possibility of perdition. But the fact of perdition, of total loss — Aquinas’s *aversio* — is not sufficient to Dante’s analysis, which dwells with remarkable lucidity and penetration on the graduated process of *conversio*. (Here Dante treats soul’s *conversio* to what is not God, while in *Paradiso* he treats with equal lucidity and precision the graduated process of soul’s conversion to God.) Before reaching his stark conclusion, Dante offers a nuanced discussion of the ways by which desire leads to loss, in a lovely *gradatio* detailing the kinds of objects that threaten sequentially to seduce us as we pursue the “nuovo e mai non fatto cammino di questa vita.” Our ignorance and naiveté render us susceptible at first to small goods, but as we mature and our appetites increase — and our ability to achieve satiety simultaneously decreases — we proceed to larger and larger objects of desire:

E perché la sua conoscenza prima è imperfetta, per non essere esperta nè dottrinata, piccioli beni le paiono grandi, e però da quelli comincia prima a desiderare. Onde vedemo li parvuli desiderare massimamente un pomo; e poi, più procedendo, desiderare uno augellino; e poi, più oltre, desiderare bel vestimento; e poi lo cavallo; e poi una donna; e poi ricchezza non grande, e poi grande, e poi più. E questo incontra perché, in nulla di queste cose truova quella che va cercando, e credela trovare più oltre. (*Con.* 4.12.16)

[And because soul’s knowledge is at first imperfect, because it is neither expert nor learned, small goods seem to it to be big goods, and so from these it begins at first to desire. So we see children desire above all an apple; and then, proceeding further, a little bird; and then, further still, beautiful clothing; and then a horse; and then a lady; and then not great riches, and then great riches, and then more. And this happens because in none of these things does soul find what it is looking for, and it believes that it will find it further on.]

Had Aquinas been given the opportunity to read this passage, he would have recognized, it seems to me, an extraordinary dramatization of what he calls *inordinata conversio ad commutabile bono*, the disordered turning towards a changeable good, rendered with a precision that conserves the Latin *bonum* in the Italian *bene*. Dante takes Aquinas’s abstract idea and recasts it as embodied narrative; he dramatizes *inordinata conversio* through time, showing soul as it moves progressively from one *bonum* to the next, figur-

ing human desire as successiveness, as successively we are seduced — “converted” in Aquinas’s language — by the various objects of desire along the path. Our progress on the path of life is figured linguistically as successiveness: we desire something, “e poi, più procedendo,” we desire something new, “e poi, più oltre,” something new again, and so on as by virtue of a succession of *e pois* our desires grow ever greater, and we create what Dante will shortly describe as a pyramid of objects of desire.

At first, as children, we desire an apple, “un pomo,” a source of nourishment but also — due to its sweetness — of pleasure; this first object of desire satisfies needs both pragmatic and affective. We then desire a little bird, “uno augellino,” a source of amusement and delight, a repository for our youthful affections, a friend. Thence we move to beautiful clothing, “bel vestimento,” an object of desire that suggests the burgeoning need for social integration and position: not just any clothing is desired, not just sufficient protection from the elements, but beautiful clothing, clothing for display. All these components are fused in the desire for a horse, “lo cavallo,” a signifier of the social status that “knighthood” — being a *cavaliere* — still holds for bourgeois Florence. The desire for “una donna” combines all the above and raises the stakes: more delight, more affect, more potential social prestige. The last is key, for in this meditation on human desiring Dante implies that desire for social advancement underpins all our individual desires, and suggests that it ultimately commodifies them; the objects of desire he lists here are commodities precisely in that their attainment serves to measure our position on the social scale. Dante’s analysis of commodification in this passage includes women, whom he situates in such a way as to suggest that a woman satisfies man’s desire more than a horse but less than wealth (it is worth noting that Dante as social analyst is capable of seeing women as his society sees them). Passing beyond “una donna,” Dante’s ladder of desire ends with wealth, an item whose ability to generate unending desire is rendered in the cadence and rhythm of “ricchezza non grande, e poi grande, e poi più.” The eternal craving of the *Commedia*’s she-wolf, laden with all desire (“di tutte brame” [*Inf.* 1.49]), resonates from the insatiable openedness of the last three words: “e poi più.”

Dante’s list begins by alternating between living and nonliving objects of desire: the first, “un pomo,” is not alive; the second, “uno augellino,” is; the third, “bel vestimento,” is not; the fourth, “lo cavallo,” is, as is the fifth, “una donna.” The transition from *cavallo* to *donna* offers two items of increasing value on the living side of the equation; they will be followed by three items of increasing value on the “dead” side, namely *ricchezza non grande*, *ricchezza grande*, *più ricchezza*. We could tabulate these objects of desire as follows:

NONLIVING

1) *un pomo*

3) *bel vestimento*

6) *ricchezza non grande*

7) *ricchezza grande*

8) *più ricchezza*

LIVING

2) *uno angellino*

4) *lo cavallo*

5) *una donna*

The latter half of the pyramid moves from a concentration of objects that are affectively as well as biologically alive, objects that can in different measures reward affection by showing love — or, if we approach the matter more in the spirit of the *Vita Nuova*, objects that can redeem affection by teaching us that love is its own reward — to a concentration of objects toward which any affective inclination is entirely misplaced, because they are truly “dead.” The balance is tipped toward death (there are three items in the living column and five in the nonliving) by the importance assigned to *ricchezza*, the only item for which the use of qualifying adjectives (“non grande,” “grande,” “più”) secures a triple presence.

The list of *Convivio* 4.12 tells us, in essence, that desire can lead to death-in-life. It figures the series of transitions that lead from the innocent desires of childhood (innocent, but already shadowed by the ominous *pomo*, a choice of fruits that is of course symbolically weighted, inscribing the nexus of loss/limits/trespass into this analysis of human desire from its very outset) to desires that, if not innocent, are still fully comprehensible in the light of basic human needs — for spiritual nourishment, for warmth, for love — and finally to the desire for something cold, inert, dead. By degrees we reach a stage where what we desire is no longer commensurate with our fundamental human needs; while the desire to possess a woman can still be glossed as an extended version of those needs, the desire for greater and greater wealth cannot. (Moreover, the sense Dante conveys of the gradual commodification of the living objects adds to the nuanced nature of his analysis, since commodification is precisely the process whereby the living becomes dead.) Something has happened, the mechanism has changed; one could say that our minds, in diseased form, have intervened, for desire propelled by need has been replaced by an intellectual construct: desire propelled by desire.

Albeit narrativized, and related in the form of a parable, the analysis offered by *Convivio* 4.12 bears striking resemblance to Thomas’s analysis of sensory desire, “de concupiscentia,”³¹ which is found in his treatise on the

³¹ST 1a.2ae.30.

passions.³² Asking, in article 4 of “de concupiscentia,” whether desire is infinite, Thomas, having already distinguished between natural and non-natural desire, argues that: “Non-natural desire, on the other hand, certainly is infinite. For as we have seen, it follows the reason; and it is in the nature of the reason to proceed *ad infinitum*.” As clincher to his argument, and as example of how reason can intervene negatively in the process of desiring, he offers precisely the example of desire for wealth: “Thus when a man desires riches he may desire, not riches up to a certain limit, but simply to be as rich as he possibly can.”³³ Dante’s version of “quantumcumque potest” is “e poi più” in the *Convivio*, and ultimately the figure of the *lupa* in the *Commedia*. Aquinas elaborates on concupiscence in a later passage in which he distinguishes between concupiscence of the flesh, which includes desires that “are natural in the sense that they relate to things which maintain one’s physical nature, whether it be food, drink and the like which support individual life; or sex, which provides for the preservation of the species,” and what he calls concupiscence of the eyes. In this latter category, Aquinas puts desire for things that “delight not because they are felt but because they are thought about, e.g. money, fine clothes and the like.”³⁴

The parable of the pilgrim in *Convivio* 4.12 was clearly dear to Dante’s heart, for he inscribes it into the center of the *Commedia*, in *Purgatorio* 16’s depiction of the newborn soul as a female child who, set forth by a happy maker on the path of life, willingly turns toward all that brings delight, only to find itself deceived and seduced by earthly goods: “Di picciol bene in pria sente sapore; / quivi s’inganna, e dietro ad esso corre, / se guida o fren non torce suo amore” (“First it tastes the savor of a trifling good: there it is beguiled and runs after it, if guide or curb bend not its love” [*Purg.* 16.91-93]). And sin as *conversio* is the centerpiece of the rebuke that Beatrice issues to the pilgrim when they meet at the top of Mount Purgatory, where she compels him to acknowledge that after her death he was “converted” by, and became excessively attached to, temporal objects: “Le presenti cose/col falso lor piacer volser miei passi” (“Present things, with their false pleasure, turned my steps aside” [*Purg.* 31.34-35]). Moreover, Aquinas’s model of sin as not just *aversio* from God but also *conversio* toward the secondary objects to which we become excessively and inappropriately attached resonates in *Purgatorio* 17’s discussion of the moral structure of purgatory, where we learn that *all* human actions, whether good or evil, spring from love. Vergil explains to the pilgrim that love is the seed of all human activity, of every virtue and of every act that

³²*De passionibus animae in generali*, found in Blackfriars 1967, vol. 19.

³³*ST* 1a.2ae.30; Blackfriars 1967, 19: 135.

³⁴*ST* 1a2ae.77.5; Blackfriars 1969, 25: 175.

deserves punishment: “amor sementa in voi d’ogne virtute / e d’ogne operatione che merta pene” (“love is the seed in you of every virtue and of every act that merits suffering” [*Purg.* 17.104-5]). This principle — which implies that love is the foundation for hell as well as purgatory — is restated at the outset of *Purgatorio* 18: “amore, a cui reduci / ogne buono operare e ’l suo contraro” (“love, to which you reduce all good action and its contrary” [*Purg.* 18.14-15]).

This foundational principle takes us back to Aquinas’s treatise on the passions, since it is the text which contains the dictum that is routinely cited by commentaries on *Purgatorio* 17: “Unde manifestum est quod omne agens, quodcumque sit, agit quamcumque actionem ex aliquo amore” (“every agent whatsoever, therefore, performs every action out of love of some kind”).³⁵ Thomas in turn relies on Augustine’s formulation of *bonus amor* and *malus amor*. All through “De passionibus” he cites Book 14 of *City of God*, and in particular chapter 7, in which Augustine explains that “amor” (as compared to “dilectio” or “caritas”) is not just bad, as many believe, but can be taken in a bad sense (“in malo”) or in a good sense (“in bono”). Aquinas cites *City of God* 14.7 repeatedly: “Augustine says of the emotions: ‘They are evil if our love is evil; good, if our love is good’”; “Augustine says that all the other emotions are caused by love”; “Augustine says that all the other feelings of the soul are caused by love”; “Augustine says that love is the cause of all our other feelings”; and “Love seems to be identical with every emotion; for Augustine says, ‘Love longing for the thing it loves is desire; love possessing and enjoying it is pleasure; love shrinking from what endangers it is fear; love experiencing that befall is sadness.’”³⁶ Another citation is provided by *City of God* 14.9: “Augustine says that when a man loves aright, all his emotions are healthy”: “Augustinus dicit quod *rectus amor omnes istas affectiones rectas habet.*”³⁷

“A right will is good love and a wrong will is bad love” — “*recta itaque voluntas est bonus amor et voluntas perversa malus amor*” — writes Augustine, providing a template for the treatment of love in the *Commedia*.³⁸ Augustinian *bonus amor* versus *malus amor* underwrites Dante’s

³⁵ST 1a2ae.28.6; Blackfriars 1967, 19: 106-107; see also Chiavacci Leonardi 506.

³⁶*De passionibus* 33, 49, 85, 111, 63.

³⁷*Ivi* 34-35; emphasis mine.

³⁸*City of God* 14.7. The Latin and the English translation are from the Loeb edition, trans. Philip Levine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1966) 4: 291. On the Augustinian basis of Dante’s understanding of desire, as it permeates his *Purgatorio*, see *The Undivine “Comedy,”* especially ch. 5; as it permeates his lyrics and *Inferno* 5, see Teodolinda Barolini, “Dante and Cavalcanti (On Making Distinctions in Matters of Love): *Inferno* 5 in its Lyric Context,” *Dante Studies* 116 (1998 [but 2000]): 31-63.

characterization of the entrance to purgatory as “la porta / che ’l mal amor de l’anime disusa” (*Purg.* 10.2): the gate of purgatory dishabituates souls from the practice of evil love — “mal amor.” And Dante comes very close to paraphrasing Augustine in the opening to *Paradiso* 15, where he aligns a right will (“benigna volontade”) with properly directed love (“l’amor che drittamente spira”) and a wrong will (“la iniqua [volontade]) with improperly directed love, i.e. cupidity (“cupidità”): “Benigna volontade in che si liqua/sempr l’amor che drittamente spira, / come cupidità fa ne la iniqua” (“Well directed will, in which is manifest always the love that breathes straight, as cupidity is manifest in evil will” [*Par.* 15.1-3]).

As noted above, commentaries of *Purgatorio* 17 routinely refer to the dictum from the *Summa* that is, as I have shown, rooted in an Augustinian analysis of love. But the critical tradition shows little inclination to carry through on the citation, and to deal with its implications: if love is, for Dante, the basis of all human behavior, if it is indeed that “to which you reduce all good action and its contrary,” then the traces of love must be visible in hell as well as in purgatory. Let us consider the case of *Inferno* 10, where Dante treats the heretics, and in particular the Epicureans, construing followers of Epicurus as atheists, deniers of God and the immortality of the soul, “who hold that the soul dies with the body” (*Inf.* 10.15). This being said, the density and difficulty of canto 10 derives from the oblique representational tack that Dante adopts: he does not represent the Epicurean heresy in a straightforward way, as denial of God, but rather as excessive attachment to what is not God. Farinata’s excessive attachment is to Florence: his closure toward God is viewed through the lens of political closure, the civic heresy whereby fraternal bonds between fellow Florentines become divisive walls of hurt and betrayal. Cavalcante’s excessive devotion is to his son: his closure toward God is reflected in the poetic closure of his son Guido, whose poetry denied the possibility that women could be beatifiers and lead to salvation. The decision to treat denial of God as an embrace of something else thus allows Dante to weave a fabric of great complexity whose threads include both contemporary politics and contemporary poetic debates. But what gives *Inferno* 10 its particular pathos and power is the love expressed by its sinners, the urgent and living love that we feel in Cavalcante’s anguished “mio figlio ov’è? e perché non è teco?” (“where is my son? and why is he not with you?” [*Inf.* 10.60]) or in Farinata’s claim that he alone among the Ghibellines preserved Florence from destruction.

The mystery at the heart of *Inferno* 10, the mystery that generates its enormous poetic power, is the connection of love to sin. In the palpable love of the sinners of *Inferno* 10 Dante dramatizes the law he sets forth in *Purgatorio* 17, the law that holds that all human action, whether good or evil, has its origin in love. What gives *Inferno* 10 its special grip on the

reader is that the love of Cavalcante and Farinata is still recognizable as love; while the original love of most sinners in hell is perverted and distorted beyond recognition, in Dante’s treatment of the heretics we can still individuate the *conversio* toward a secondary good that Aquinas delineates as sin. And when that secondary good is a beloved child, whose wellbeing the father still craves, the impact on us as human beings is very great, since the canto forces us to consider how emotions in which we all share can ultimately become reified and sinful.

I would like to conclude this essay by returning to the disconcerting statement, entrusted to Statius, that not only each of the seven capital vices, but also its opposite, is punished on the seven terraces of purgatory. What compels Dante to make this claim? The answer has to do, I believe, with the complex contamination of Christian and classical that is Dante’s single most radical and original contribution to the Christian visionary tradition. My suggestion takes us back to Aquinas’s “De passionibus,” whose great debt to Augustine, and in particular to the discussion of right and wrong love in *City of God* 14, we have already discussed. At the same time, of course, Aquinas’s treatment of human emotion is profoundly and avowedly Aristotelian. It is interesting, in this context, to witness Aquinas distinguish the Stoic position, in which all emotions are diseases of the soul, and hence unhealthy, from the Peripatetic view, in which emotions are good when under rational control, and evil when they are not:

The Stoics made no distinction between sense and intellect, and hence between the sensory appetite and the intellectual. Accordingly they made no distinction between the emotions and movements of the will, since the emotions belong to the sensory appetite and simple movements of the will to the intellectual appetite. They applied the term *will* to every appetitive movement that was under rational control, and the term *emotion* to every one that was not. Cicero followed their opinion, calling the emotions diseases of the soul . . . The Peripatetics, however, applied the term *emotion* to every movement of the sensory appetite. Accordingly they judged emotions to be good when they are under rational control, and evil when they are not; and from this they inferred, as a corollary, the doctrine of the ‘golden mean’ for the emotions.³⁹

Particularly suggestive is the conclusion to this passage, where Aquinas states that the doctrine of the golden mean was inferred as a corollary from the Peripatetic view that emotions are good when under rational control, evil when they are not. Aquinas thus links the Aristotelian doctrine of the golden mean to a view of human emotion — that it is good when under

³⁹ST 1a2ae.24.3; Blackfriars 1967, 19: 37. I have altered the translation by using “appetite” for Aquinas’s “appetitus” (instead of “orexis”).

rational control, evil when it is not — that is strikingly consonant with Augustine's view as expressed in *City of God* 14.7: "Recta itaque voluntas est bonus amor et voluntas perversa malus amor." Perhaps, in other words, the doctrine of the golden mean is captivating to Dante because it signifies for him the ethical ground where Aristotle and Augustine meet, where he can conflate these diverse ethical frameworks into his treatment of human desire. Of course, the same argument could be made with regard to Aquinas's "De passionibus" itself, in which Aristotle and Augustine had already met, and whose dictum "omne agens, quodcumque sit, agit quamcumque actionem ex aliquo amore" Dante prominently displays at the core of his *Purgatorio*. At the foundation of Dante's theology of hell is a theory of human desire that is laid out by Aristotle, parsed by Aquinas, but arguably for Dante most spiritually attuned to Augustine: "Benigna voluntade in che si liqua/semprè l'amor che drittamente spira,/come cupidità fa ne la in=i-qua" (*Par.* 15.1-3).