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Dante's Thomistic Vision: The Commedia

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DANTE'S THOMISTIC VISION: THE *COMMEDIA*

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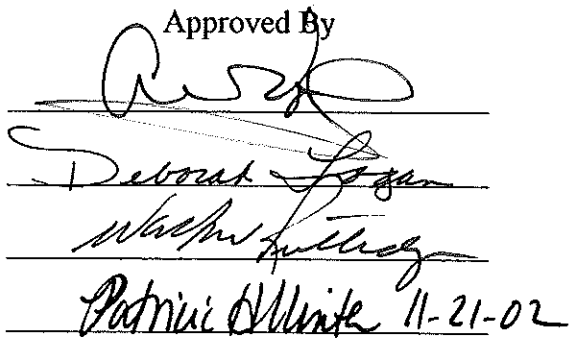

Abstract

Dante's *Commedia* derives its form and content from the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. It is a philosophical poem that allegorically examines medieval moral theory, articulated in Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, in order to morally instruct the medieval layperson. This paper focuses mostly around the capital sin of pride due to its important place throughout the work and its efficacy in illustrating the link between Aquinas and Alighieri. The discussion of the sin involves providing Thomas' definition of pride and its opposite virtue, humility, in comparison with Dante's artistic representations. The overall goal is to present Dante's *Commedia* as an intricately philosophical work of literature that adopts both the ideas and techniques of medieval syncretism as embodied by Thomas Aquinas.

Foreword

Dante's *Commedia*, completed in 1321, is the most widely read and recognized *Summa* written during the late medieval period. Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) is incontestably the consummate poet of the middle ages, and it is through his poetic synthesis of both ancient and contemporary philosophical systems into a coherent and functional whole that he becomes a philosophical poet. The *Commedia* serves, just as Homer's *Odyssey* acts for many of the pre-Socratic pagans or Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* for the Epicureans, to complete the philosophical ideas that it adopts and embodies. Dante's poem depicts the link between faith and reason that St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) establishes in his *Summa Theologiae*, as Dante the pilgrim is guided through the realms of the afterlife by both Virgil, the allegorical representation of human reason, and Beatrice, the allegorical figure symbolizing spiritual blessedness. The pilgrim's journey toward the Beatific Vision of Paradise is possible only through the combined effort of divinely appointed grace alongside the abilities of mundane and human intelligence.

In Dante's own words, the *Commedia* is the allegorical examination of "man, as by good or ill deserts, [when] in the exercise of the freedom of his choice, he becomes liable to rewarding or punishing justice" (*Epist.* X, 174-176). In this way, the pilgrim's journey represents the journey of the medieval Christian human being, as the pilgrim

maneuvers through a medieval intellectual world laden with Hebraic, early Christian, Classical, and Scholastic ideas combining to form a universe saturated with seemingly incompatible theories. Yet, Dante presents Aquinas' vision of a universe that is perfect and unwavering in a poem of almost divine symmetry and grace: it is the representation of a Divine and perfect Being's perfectly created universe. Dante's *Commedia* stands out not only for its poetic structure, but for its construction of a truly catholic Christian universe rising out of the diverse systems of thought suddenly becoming available to the medieval world.

Dante was born in 1265 into what has come to be known as the century of Thomas Aquinas, who, alongside Albert the Great, helped to make it the century in which Aristotle was introduced once and for all to the Christian world (Steenberghen 4). Around one hundred years earlier, there had been a great influx of ancient texts translated from Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic into Latin. This was partially due to the relaxation of the early medieval attempt to completely replace pagan philosophy with that of Christianity and to the subsequent allowance of only those elements of any pagan philosophy that could aid the successful study of sacred texts (Steenberghen 27). Prior to the flood of translations beginning in the mid-11th century, there were only fragmentary portions of the diverse range of organic philosophies devised by the ancients, such as Boethius' translation of Aristotle's logical treatises. However, this began to change as complete philosophical systems began to become available to medieval scholars. These complete systems of thought suddenly presented non-Christian worldviews that were perceived by many officials as threats to the hegemony of the Church.

By the middle of the twelfth century, nearly the entirety of Aristotle's

philosophical system had been translated piece by piece into Latin by various sources, the most influential work being done by the Arabic philosophers Avicenna and Averroes. There were four major centers of intellectual exchange in which Western philosophers discovered ancient texts: Antioch, Constantinople, Spain, and Sicily. The principality of Antioch, present-day Syria, was created in 1098 during the First Crusade and was bitterly fought over until its fall in 1268, a period of 170 years during which Western scholars, who had followed the soldiers into the Holy Land, were being exposed to Arabic and Islamic texts and translations. Constantinople was the center of the Eastern Empire and the center in which Greek thought was exchanged. Spain was a center of Arabic thought where the pivotal works of Avicenna and Averroes were discovered by Western translators. Sicily was the fourth major center of intellectual exchange, as it was located in a geographical position that was conducive to the convergence of Latin, Hebrew, Greek, and Arabic, while providing an intellectual environment that allowed for the free exchange of ideas. The linguistic advantages of Sicily's geographical position were shared by the south of Italy, and most importantly Naples, where Thomas Aquinas spent the early part of his academic career and was introduced to the thought of Aristotle (Knowles 186).

Among those theologians who had maintained free use of Aristotle throughout the turbulent 13th century, there arose a new sort of religious document that purported to be a comprehensive manual, or *Summa*, covering the entire body of theology and using philosophical methods to explain the conclusions reached. The *Summae* attempted to incorporate the amassed and ever-increasing stock of heterogeneous philosophical and theological ideas into a coherent whole by using the dialectical methods of Aristotle

(Knowles 229). This method was adopted by Scholastic philosophers, of which Thomas was later dubbed "Prince." Aquinas adopted and adapted Aristotelian methods of inquiry and reasoning in order to illustrate and resolve points of theological contention in his *Summa Theologiae*, which epitomized the Scholastic syncretism of philosophy and religion in the thirteenth century.

This is the century, a century of immense religious and philosophical upheaval, into which the poet and layman Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) was born. Dante is a philosophical poet not because the *Commedia* is philosophically constructive, but because the poem acts as a perfect representation of medieval Scholastic philosophy.[1] Poets cannot use poetic works to actively construct philosophical systems, although they may act as interpreters of philosophy and theology if they are to be considered philosophical in any sense. In philosophy, investigation and reasoning often act as the preparatory and servile means to a philosophical conclusion. Purely philosophical works are "leafless forests" through which the truth-seeker trudges with the aid of reason and data in order to obtain a philosophical vision which reveals a perceived order in the world that every poet tries to grasp (Santayana 10). Passages are poetical because they are pregnant with the suggestion of a few things upon which the poet focuses his or her attention, and these suggestions are brought forward when one gives some scope to this feeling. A poetic vision that has "more scope and depth, focus[ing] all experience within it, mak[ing] it a philosopher's vision of the world, will grow imaginative to a superlative

[1] The phrase "philosophically constructive" should be explained more in depth. Philosophers can be poets, and poets can be philosophers; however, the two fields are completely distinct. Poetry is essentially *descriptive* while philosophy is essentially *constructive*. Even when philosophers such as Plato delve into the world of poetic, or allegorical, writing, it is usually only in an effort to illustrate and elucidate one of their philosophical statements made at some point earlier. This is the case with Plato's famous "Allegory of the Cave," which is itself a model for the *Commedia*. The Pilgrim is compelled to move upward toward

degree, and be supremely poetical" (Santayana 13). Dante exhibits the philosophical tendencies of his time, which are those of St. Thomas Aquinas as well, not as his own reflection or comment, but in terms of something perceived, producing a "supremely poetical" work of the imagination.

A philosophical poem, a poem that adopts and presents a specific philosophical system, must be such "that the philosophy is essential to the structure and that the structure is essential to the poetic beauty of the parts" (Eliot 165). The *Commedia*'s structure is that of the individual's moral journey through life, as the pilgrim progresses from Hell and Purgatory, also called the City of Man, to Paradise, what Augustine calls the City of God. The poem is divided into three canticles—the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*—of 33 cantos each along with one canto introducing the entirety of the poem. It is written in *terza rima*, an interlocking rhyme scheme (aba, bcb, cdc, etc.) invented by Dante specifically for the *Commedia*, that has the effect of making the pilgrim's journey an inevitable and constant progression. For Dante, medieval human beings are compelled by nature to progress toward their goal, naturally desiring to fulfill their definition as intellectual beings through a union with God. The pilgrim advances along the path shown him by human reason and spiritual blessedness toward the beatific vision of Paradise (*Par.* 33), where he is completed and perfectly happy. Dante's *Commedia* is a sort of moral education that mirrors Thomas' theory of human, or moral, acts and their consequences in the overall structure of the poem and more specifically in the opening Canto and the Purgatory's Terrace of Pride.

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the Beatific Vision just as the cave-dweller is forced upward to view the actual forms, and both share the responsibility of relating their newfound knowledge to the rest of humankind.

DANTE'S THOMISTIC VISION: THE *COMMEDIA*

In Canto 26 of the *Inferno*, Dante the pilgrim encounters the classical hero Ulysses in the eighth level of Hell, the circle dealing with the sins of fraud, in the section reserved for fraudulent counselors. Ulysses' speech is one of the more famous passages in the *Commedia* for two primary reasons: first, it expounds upon the glory of the human race and second, because he calls, sinfully, for his "brothers" to follow him in his irrational desire for a final end that excludes any thought of God. Dante's Ulysses is a complex character constructed from a variety of ancient sources besides Homer, whose poems were not yet available during Dante's time. The most influential of these non-Homeric sources are Virgil and Cicero.

Virgil's *Aeneid*, the tale of the Trojan Aeneas' founding of Rome, presents Ulysses as a "deviser of crimes" (*Aeneid* 2.164), the inventor of the fraudulent Trojan "horse that made the doorway through which went forth / The Romans' noble seed" (*Inf.* 26.61-62), and the perpetrator of other crimes for which he is justly punished in Hell. Dante mixes this largely negative image of Ulysses with that of Cicero, who uses Ulysses as his model for the lover of wisdom (*De finibus* 5.18.49). Dante adopts and adapts these multifarious ancient images of Ulysses and creates a new story that incorporates the

Christian philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas by illustrating Ulysses' commission of the capital sin pride (Barolini 842-843).

Ulysses' tells the tale of how he abandoned his family and his dutiful and divinely appointed roles for maintaining the rational order of the world, and went out in search of "experience of the world" (*Inf.* 26.94), sailing past the pillars of Hercules "beyond which men were not to sail," and onto the "deep open seas" of the Atlantic Ocean in search of human knowledge. After an "insane flight" ("*folle volo*" *Inf.* 26.125) of several months southward, Ulysses and his crew see an unnaturally tall mountain—Mount Purgatory--that they attempt to reach, but are thwarted by a God-created storm that sinks their boat. Ulysses and his crew overstep their human bounds by attempting to reach Heaven, the perfect good, without the will and consent of God.

The most famous words of Ulysses' speech are those addressing the dignity of humanity, those for which he is most severely punished by God's divine justice, and those for which he is most admired:

> 'Consider well your seed:
> You were not born to live as a mere brute does,
> But for the pursuit of knowledge and the good.' (*Inf.* 26 113-115)

Here, Ulysses echoes the beginning of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which states that "All Men by nature desire to know" (*Metaphysics* 1.1, 980a21), an idea that is expounded upon in Dante's unfinished philosophical work, the *Convivio*:

> The reason for this can be and is that each thing,
> impelled by a force provided by its own nature,
> inclines towards its own perfection. Since knowledge
> is the ultimate perfection of our soul, in which resides
> our ultimate happiness, we are all therefore subject to
> a desire for it. (*Convivio* 1.1)

This passage seems to be analogous with Ulysses' "insane" or irrational desire for knowledge, for it envisions the primary end of humans to be the pursuit of natural knowledge and understanding, conspicuously omitting the supernatural element of God in this definition of "ultimate happiness."

The *Commedia* begins with the poet recounting the spiritual mid-life crisis undergone by the Pilgrim: "Midway on our life's journey, I found myself / In dark woods, the right road lost" (*Inf.* 1.1-2). These "dark woods," separated from and concealing the "right road" of Thomas' right reason, may be the allegorical representation of Dante's own philosophical inquiries, specifically those put forward in the *Convivio*. In this work, Dante discusses his love for another lady after the death of Beatrice, this other lady being the Lady of Philosophy, whom he names the *donna gentile* (Gilson 87). Dante absorbed himself in worldly philosophy during this period, abandoning Beatrice and theology for the sinfully mundane natural philosophers of antiquity. Dante did not finish the *Convivio* presumably because its composition precipitated the spiritual crisis that the *Commedia* proposes to resolve.

The Pilgrim, like Ulysses, seeks to achieve the primary end without the consent of God in the first canto. Yet, he does come to possess a knowledge of God through divine grace and the sacred texts, symbolized by the "bright planet that shows / the road to everyone, whatever our journey" (*Inf.* 1.14-15). It is after acquiring this theological guidance that Dante feels he has come "ashore from [the] dangerous seas" that swallowed Ulysses and yet, even with the combination of limited philosophical and theological understanding, Dante is prevented from ascending the Mountain of Purgatory because he is attempting to overstep his mortal bounds by trying to ascend to a final end reserved

only for those chosen souls that have passed into the supernatural realm. Both the unaided Pilgrim and Ulysses defy the will of God by attempting to ascend Mount Purgatory, thereby seeking that which is disproportionate to them and committing the capital sin of pride.

The "Queen of the Vices"

Sins, which are vicious human acts (see appendix 1, p. 51), are defined by Thomas as being of several different types, varying in their execution and punishments. The Deadly Sins, including pride, are typically considered to be deadly because they bring about the death of the soul, or damnation, if they are committed by a human being or, as in the case of Lucifer, by any intellectual being subservient to God. Thomas, however, makes it clear that the sins themselves, which he terms "capital," do not necessarily bring about the death of the soul, but *may* oftentimes lead to damnation. Thomas' definition of sins as capital does not carry with it the legal connotation of punishment by beheading, i.e. removing one's *caput*, but is a metaphor signifying the status of the sin as "principal or director" of others. A vice from which other vices arise is called a capital vice, as it functions as a final rather than efficient cause. Thomas defines the capital vices as final causes, in which the sinner, who is disposed to one end, proceeds from the capital sin to the others and by which the sinner moves from apparent good to apparent good (*1a2ae*, Q. 84, A. 4).

As mentioned above, one of Thomas' tasks in clarifying his definition of sin was to reconcile conflicting Biblical passages. Ecclesiasticus 10.15 states that "pride is the

beginning of all sin," while 1 Timothy 6.10 says that "the love of money is the root of all evils." (Bloomfield 88) Thomas addresses the conflict in Question 84 of the *Prima Secundae Partis* of the *Summa* by stating that both sins take a share in being the root of all evils, but that pride is specifically defined as the root of all sin. While avarice embodies the excessive desire for any sort of temporal good, which has been shown to be the generic element of all sin, pride embodies the turning away from God, that is, *recta ratio*, toward worldly things.

Aquinas interprets pride as having three major definitions: as the "beginning of all sin," as it is the intemperate desire for personal excellence, which is also termed as either *vana gloria* or *inanis gloria* throughout the *Summa*. Vainglory represents the actual sin, the vicious act, which is more broadly termed pride. Secondly, pride stands for an overt contempt of God in that the individual refuses to submit to the command of God. This is the over-arching sense of pride that Aquinas cites as the root of all sin, which is the conscious (willed) commission of acts that are contrary to the will of God. The third connotation is that of pride's inclination toward other sins as a result of this contempt, which affirms its nature as a final cause leading toward other sins (*1a2ae*, Q. 84). In this way, Thomas endorses the *Ecclesiasticus* passage in which pride is identified as the root of all evils, thus he names it as the root of all sin.

Aquinas identifies the capital sin pride as the vice contrary to the virtue of humility. Pride (*superbia* in Latin, *huperbios* in Greek) is defined generally as the sin that takes place when a person's will aims above what he or she really is. The proud person wills to overstep his or her bounds as a human being living in a world created and ruled over by an omnipotent God. This applies only to the subservient relationship of

man to God, though it is the only relationship that Aquinas explicitly discusses in his discussion of pride, but the interaction between leaders of the church and leaders of the state, the leaders of a society ordained and ordered by God. An individual who challenges the structure of this world directly challenges the authority of God, which is perfectly in accordance with right reason.

Right reason requires that individuals seek that which is proportionate to them, and any person who seeks to overstep these bounds is endangering the soul by sinning. Pride can be examined in two ways: as a specific sin in itself and more widely as the root of all other sins. The specific sin of pride, called vainglory, is the "inordinate desire for one's own superiority" (*1a2ae*, Q. 162 A. 2). The broader sense identifies the pervasiveness of pride as a final cause from which all sins may flow. The over-arching sense of pride can either directly or indirectly cause other sins. Pride can directly cause other sins as any inordinate desire, that is, sin, can "subserve" the desire for one's own superiority. Pride has the over-arching quality of removing the impediment to committing sinful acts by condemning the divine law which keeps a person from sinning, thereby causing other sins indirectly. In this way, pride has its own special moral category as the inordinate cherishing of one's own superiority, and is classified as both one of the seven capital sins as well as an over-arching cause of all sin (*1a2ae*, Q. 162, As. 1-2). This double meaning of pride, which covers both *vana gloria* and superbia, follows the order set forth by Gregory the Great, who placed *vana gloria* as first in order and *superbia* separate from the rest as "queen" and root of all the vices (Bloomfield 72).

Aquinas considers pride to be the most grievous of sins because it forces human beings away from both creaturely goods and the divine good. It is in the turning away

from God that pride acquires its grave status, for the proud person turns directly against God by not willing to be subject to divine authority. Along with being the greatest of all sins, Thomas also considers it to be the beginning of all sin (as mentioned above), as the turning away from God is dominant in all sinfulness. "When things are ranged into a common class, the top place is held by that which is directly and essentially of that nature," thus placing the turning away from God, the essence of sin, in the top place as the first of the capital sins (*1a2ae*, Q. 84, A. 4).

The virtues have never been the source of contention that the vices proved to be, for the seven virtues (four cardinal and three theological) had been accepted since the very beginnings of Christianity by St. Augustine and other early theologians. The seven contrary sins, however, were more difficult to pinpoint, for it was not clear what the opposites of several of the sins were. The conflicting passages within the Bible did not help matters, as the idea of a set of sins was a source of tension within the church. Thomas did not pay heed to this controversy concerning the order of the sins but merely sought to alleviate any disagreements using the tool of Aristotelian dialectical reasoning.

For Thomas, the human act is essentially the inter-relation of the human will and intellect, both of which are moved and moved by one another throughout the process. The human intellect, represented by Virgil in the *Commedia*, presents the object, the universal good, to the will. The natural tendency of human beings is that they are led toward the Creator, who is the perfect good, in a voluntary series of actions that must deal with particular goods in order to attain the end of a complete good. In this way, human beings deal not with undeniable Goods that compel one to move towards them, but mundane goods that do not compel certain movements, but allow for voluntary action.

Thus what Dante calls the "freedom of [a human being's] choice" arises, enabling the human act to be judged as good or evil, making it "liable to rewarding or punishing justice" (*Epist.* 10, 175-176).

Purgatory

Both the Pilgrim and Ulysses encounter the mountain of Purgatory in the first part of the *Commedia*, and both fail to ascend the mountain because their attempt is not sanctioned by God. The Pilgrim is able to ascend the mountain only because of the divine intervention of Beatrice and Virgil, made permissible by God. Virgil explains to the Pilgrim that the mountain of Purgatory was created from the impact of proud Lucifer falling to the earth:

> 'On this side he fell down from Heaven; the earth,
> Which till then stood out here. impelled by fear
>
> Veiled itself in the sea and issued forth
> In our own hemisphere (*Inf.* XXXIV, 122).'

The mountain itself serves as the means by which souls that have died in God's grace, but who have venial faults or have not justifiably paid for their transgressions in accordance with divine justice, may purge themselves of the effects of their sins. Purgatory comes from the Latin "*purgo, purgare,*" which means to make clean or to purify. The purpose of Purgatory is not punishment, though there are punishments involved in the purgation of sin, but to cleanse the soul in order to prepare it for Paradise. The mountain itself is divided into seven terraces, with the Antepurgatory and the Earthly Paradise of Eden

below and above the terraces, respectively. Souls must spend time in the Antepurgatory before they can ascend to Purgatory proper, where they must atone for each of the seven capital sins committed in the natural world.

Purgatory, for Dante and Aquinas, is the instrument of God's justice that purges human sin and prepares souls for admittance to Paradise. In order that the capital sins be purged, the soul must spend a certain amount of time on the seven terraces that comprise Purgatory proper. The punishments that are administered on each level are not the pure punishments of the *Inferno*, but are intended to instruct the sinner in the virtue opposite of that particular vice. For example, on the terrace of pride the sinners must carry stones on their backs that force their heads to be bent low to the ground in humility, albeit a forced humility. The punishments in Purgatory, unlike those in Hell and the rewards of Heaven, are remedial and temporal (See Appendix 2, p. 62).

Thomas states that there are two parts of sin: the guilty act itself and the consequent stain of guilt. The stain that remains, that which Dante represents with the seven P's traced onto the Pilgrim's forehead, must be purged through the remedial punishments of Purgatory.

> The stain of sin cannot be removed from man, unless his will accept the order of Divine justice, that is to say, unless either of his own accord he take upon himself the punishment of his past sin, or bear patiently the punishment which God inflicts on him; and in both ways punishment avails for satisfaction (*1a2ae* 87, 6).

Thus those souls in Dante's Purgatory must patiently bear the divinely administered punishments, which, though being against the will (otherwise it would not be considered punishment), act just as the "medical man prescribes bitter potions to his patients [so] that he may restore them to health" (*1a2ae* 87, 7). The punishments meted out in Purgatory

are positive in the sense that they are lesser evils, punishment being a species of evil, that bring about greater goods. Dante follows Thomas' definition of punishment in his poetic illustration of Purgatory very closely.

The overall purpose of Purgatory is the purging of sin so that the soul may shed the chains of original sin and actual sin and achieve a state of true freedom of the will (Musa xii). Virgil states that the pilgrim "goes in search of freedom" in the first canto of the *Purgatorio*, a freedom that can be achieved only through the purging of original sin in the form of the capital sins. Also, as the Pilgrim prepares to ascend to the Earthly Pradise (Eden), Virgil makes it explicit that the Pilgrim has prepared his soul for Paradise:

> 'Expect no longer words or signs from me.
> Now is your will upright, wholesome and free,
> and not to heed its pleasure would be wrong:
>
> I crown and miter you lord of yourself!' (*Purg* XXVII, 139-142).

Dante the Pilgrim has shed the worldly and natural "weight" of original sin, and he is therefore able to ascend toward supernatural Paradise without the aid of human reason to check and determine whether the urges that he feels are in line with *recta ratio.* The Pilgrim's urges are pure and "ordinate," which means that they are directed completely and unwaveringly toward a union with God: the Beatific Vision of Paradise.[2]

Prior to entering Purgatory proper through the gate of St. Peter, the Pilgrim asks the attendant angel "in all humility" to turn the key and open the gate. The angel responds by carving seven "*P*'s" into the Pilgrim's forehead with the sword used to defend the gate against trespassers. The angel then commands Dante that "Once entered here, / be sure you cleanse away these wounds" (*Purg* IX, 113). The seven capital sins or the seven deadly sins are represented as divinely inflicted wounds that must be purged

through penance. Throughout the seven terraces, these wounds are described as stains that carry with them the weight of worldly imperfections. Dante proceeds to use historical and contemporary examples to illustrate the sins, urging Christians to use cases from history and the contemporary world as moral lessons from which to learn how to act as human beings. Dante's portrayal of the sins is one of the richest in the long and muddled history of the seven capital sins.

[2] The perfect good, or *Eudaimonia*.

The Terrace of Pride

Dante adopts Thomas' Gregorian definition of pride as the first sin, as pride is the first of the sins to be overcome in order that one ascend toward Paradise. The terrace of pride is related in three cantos, the first of which describes the opposite virtue of humility, the second describes the remedial punishment of the proud, and the third illustrates the sin itself. The terrace of pride is arguably the most important terrace on the mountain of Purgatory because it is the first terrace that the Pilgrim encounters and also because it is an extremely self-reflexive section of the *Commedia* for Dante. Examining the terrace of pride allows one to examine the structure of each terrace throughout the *Purgatorio*, which are all symmetrically constructed.[3]

Upon entering Purgatory, upon walking through the gate that is "forever closed to souls whose loves are bad / and make the crooked road seem like the straight," the Pilgrim and Virgil encounter a "narrow cleft" that winds through the rock. This "narrow cleft" or "needle's eye" comes from the Matthew 7:14 passage that reads "How narrow the gate and close the way that leads to life! And few there are who find it." The

[3] There are slight deviations; the pattern is the same throughout, but never exactly the same. For example, when the Pilgrim and Virgil witness Statius's purgation of the sin of avarice, the mountain quakes in delight (*Purg.* XX, 127). The punishments and emphases differ, but the overall pattern remains roughly the same.

difficulty of beginning the journey toward God is evident here, as it takes every effort of both travelers (i.e., the will and the intellect) to ascend toward the ledge where they encounter the carvings of humility.

The carvings represent three images of humility, the virtue to which pride is opposed. On every level, the opposing virtue is illustrated in such a way so as to assist in the purging of the opposite sin. Thomas Aquinas defines humility as a self-inflicted "praiseworthy abasement" concerning humankind's subjection to the authority of God. Humility falls under the virtue of temperance for Aquinas, for it acts in two ways to temper the mind against sin. Humility tempers the mind "lest it press forward immoderately" to those things that are beyond its reasonable reach; however, it also tempers the spirit against hopelessness and heartens it in the pursuit of great things in accordance with right reason. Humility must be an inward process, for it has the potential to become sinful if it is affected outwardly only for show. Humility snubs the human desire to strain for things that are out of right reason (*2a2ae* Q161, A. 1).

The actual commission of humility is a part of choice within the human action, and so it belongs properly to appetition rather than cognition. Aristotle states that choice is "the desire of things in our power," and humility helps to maintain this proper relationship and curb the desire for that which is not "in our power" (*Ethic.* iii, 3). Choice is "substantially not an act of the reason but of the will: for choice is accomplished in a certain movement of the soul towards the good which is chosen. Consequently it is evidently an act of the appetitive power" (*1a2ae*, Q 13, A. 1). As humility belongs to human appetition, it must act to curb and modulate the motion of the appetite. Human beings have an innate appetitive motion toward the good, which, when

the human being's appetite is properly directed, is for Thomas, Dante, and Aristotle a happiness beyond which there is nothing else to be achieved. Now, in order for humility to function so as to curb those human appetites that are corrupted due to the fallen and imperfect state of humankind, human beings must in some sense know their place in the universe. The "knowledge of one's own deficiency is a condition of humility as a rule and criterion moderating one's appetite" for those things that are beyond one's capacity as a human being (*2a2ae*. 161, 2).

The human being, within the Thomistic model of the universe, is the lowest form of intellectual being. Above humans are the angels, which are purely intellectual beings, and finally God, who is the Supreme Being. It is this knowledge, the knowledge that human beings are "deficient" in comparison with the other intellective beings of the Christian universe, that serves to check a human being's attempt to move up the intellectual ladder to a higher level of consciousness or power. Augustine claims that once human beings know that their lowly place in the universe provides a reason for humility, these feelings of inferiority bring about the "gift of fear whereby we hold God in awe" (*2a2ae*, 161, 2). Therefore, though "humility essentially lies in the appetite, and restrains its inordinate urge for things which are above us, yet its rule lies in cognition, namely in a judgment not reckoning ourselves to be above what we are" (2a2ae, 161, 6).

While humility is necessary for living one's life in accordance with *recta ratio*, which is to say virtuously, it can also tend toward sinfulness. Just as in Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, it must be carried out correctly, for it is a choice and therefore an action . Excessive abasement of one's self can drift toward a sinful sham humility that is in fact a form of sin. Therefore, one must *choose* to what degree he or she should be

humble before his or her fellow human beings. Though humility, like its opposite sin pride, concerns most importantly the direct relationship between humankind and God, it also affects the way that individual human beings act toward one another. Aquinas states that there are two aspects of a human being, "that which is God's and that which is his [or hers]. All that is defect is of man, all that is health and perfection is of God" (*2a2ae*, 161, 3). As humility is most directly related to the relationship between humankind and God, each person should be humble before that which is "of God" in each of his or her fellow persons. Therefore, a certain respect is due to each and every human being because people have some part of themselves that is "of God."

Thomas then goes on to list St. Benedict's twelve degrees of humility, which dictate the correct behavior of the humble person.[4] Thomas defends the established authority of St. Benedict (d. 567) by defending his rules, which were accepted as received authority during Aquinas' day. Thomas states that properly directed humility, that which is directed inwardly, "issues out into outward signs in words, deeds, and gestures, which manifest what is hidden within." Thus Thomas defends Benedict's commandment that one should act so as "to be humble of heart and always to show it in body, with the eyes cast down to the ground," pointing out the complex visual aspects of humility. He defends this position, that the inward aspects of a human can be seen outwardly by

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[4] St. Benedict's twelve degrees of humility:
1.) To be humble of heart and always to show it in body, with the eyes cast down to the ground.
2.) To speak few and sensible words, and not in a loud voice.
3.) Not to be ready with or prompt to laughter.
4.) To maintain silence until asked to speak.
5.) To keep the common rule of the monastery.
6.) To believe and profess oneself lower than others.
7.) To believe and acknowledge oneself useless for anything.
8.) To confess one's sins.
9.) To embrace patience by obeying when it is hard and rough.
10.) To submit oneself by obedience to the superior.
11.) Not to delight in having things your own way.

others, with the *Ecclesiasticus* passage that states that "a man is known by his look, and a wise man, when you meet him, by his countenance" (*Ecclesiasticus* 19, 26). Dante was undoubtedly familiar with St. Benedict's twelve degrees of humility, as can be seen in his description of the carvings of humility.

This linking of visual representation with virtuous and vicious behavior may be the motivating factor in Dante's ledge of pride, which derives much of its meaning and impact from the poet's description of the images contained therein. The terrace of pride is extremely dependant upon the creative arts, for they dominate the level in representing both the virtue that must be cultivated and the vice that must be purged. Also, the main human example of pride is Oderisi, an illuminator of manuscripts, whose artistic pride has prevented his soul from ascending to Paradise. Thomas Aquinas believes that art moves human beings toward contemplation, an activity basic to the acquisition of wisdom, which in turn leads them toward God (Fiero 6).

The Medieval notion of art is such that all human creativity is derived from the idea that human beings are created in God's image, and that therefore human beings carry with them some "God-like" creative force within their persons. The Medieval artist merely initiates an act of the divine intellect when creating art and works from an inner notion of form imposed upon matter. Art is an exercise in that portion of the human being that Thomas calls "of God," and is concerned, like God's creativity, with establishing order on the earth. Human art, then, becomes the fundamental way in which human beings impose order on the world. The realms of Hell and Heaven are ruled either by chaos or pure spiritual mysticism; therefore, but in Purgatory, which mirrors the natural world in many ways, art exists (Fiero 6-7). The art throughout Purgatory and

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12.) To fear God and be mindful of his commandments.

especially on the terrace of pride is intended to instruct those "souls whose loves are bad" (*Purg* X, 2) in order to impose upon them the "correct love," to show them the *via diritta* or Thomas' *recta ratio.*

The carvings themselves represent three scenes in which the virtue of humility is depicted, presenting paradigms of humility that instruct the sinners about how they should have behaved while living. The scenes portray three stories from three different eras and traditions, showing the syncretic qualities of Dante's vision. The first scene shows the Annunciation, from the New Testament; the second is King David's dancing before the Ark, from the Old Testament; and the third scene is Trajan's humility before the widow, drawn from a Christianized legend of ancient Rome. The three scenes, created by the hand of God from three different periods, represent the *Commedia* as a form of a *Summa* that seeks to link past and present modes of thought into a coherent whole.

The first carving depicts the scene of the Annunciation, in which the angel Gabriel comes down to earth and announces to Mary that she will give birth to the Christ, thus allowing humankind to be saved and thereby bringing about the "peace longed for by weeping centuries" (*Purg.* X, 35). Throughout the Purgatory, Dante uses the Virgin Mary as the primary example of human virtue. Mary had been purged of sin in the womb, and thus she is presented as a human free of sin on every level of Purgatory (*3a*, 27, 1). The action of the scene, or the perceived action of the scene, is that of the angel announcing the task that lies ahead for the Virgin and Mary's assent in humility.

Dante claims that the carvings, including that of the Annunciation, would "surely put to shame not only Polyclete but Nature too" (*Purg* X, 33), for they are the divine

artistic product of "That One for Whom no new thing can exist" (*Purg* X, 94). Polycletus was a famous Greek sculptor who was highly praised by Aristotle, Cicero, and many others for his unsurpassed human carvings, which, although none presently exist, were claimed to have been perfect (Musa 114). This comparison is easy enough to understand, for mortal beings cannot compete with the Divine Being in regard to the plastic arts, but the claim of God's superiority over Nature is an even more explicit example of the supremacy of the supernatural in comparison to the mundane.[5]

The carvings of Mary and Gabriel, though etched into the non-living marble stone, are endowed with life by the Artist. Gabriel is a "shape alive, / carved in an attitude of marble grace" that seems to speak the word "Ave!" to Mary. Mary responds, or rather the

> outlines of her image carved the words
> *Ecce ancilla Dei*, as clearly cut
> as is the imprint of a seal of wax (*Purg*. X, 43-45).

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[5] The capitalization here is Musa's (and Mandelbaum's)—Dante does not capitalize *la natura* in the Italian.

> "*d'intagli si, che non pur Policleto,*
> *ma la natura li avrebbe scorno* » (*Purg* X 32-33).

By his use of the article "*la*," it is apparent that he is speaking of the demi-goddess, *Lady Natura*.

The representation of God as Nature and Nature as God has been accepted by modern audiences since the Romantic Period. The Medieval conception of Nature was quite different, having been derived from the pre-Socratics, who invented the goddess *Natura*. This nature goddess encompassed the great variety of phenomena around them and could be talked about as a single object. Aristotle's Nature covers only the sublunary, the orbit of the moon forming the clear boundary between the natural and supernatural in Aristotle's system. For Dante, personified Nature does not encompass everything, but she is created by and ruled over by a representatively male God. Natura is resigned to maintain her place beneath God, beneath the orbit of the moon, and is appointed by God to carry out duties as administrative deputy toward her subjects. Human beings, her lawful subjects, stimulated by rebel angels and their own fallen natures, may disobey her and therefore become 'unnatural;' they may contradict the rational doctrines of Thomas' *recta ratio* or stray from Dante's naturally "correct" *via diritta* (Lewis 36-39).

Lady Natura is held up for comparison with God in Purgatory because the Mountain is still within her realm. Nature has its place within the medieval model, and indeed in Dante's representation of that model in the *Commedia*, with supernatural Heaven and Hell above and below. Purgatory ends and Paradise begins at the orbit of the moon, so everything in between is somewhat within the province of Nature—the Pilgrim feels fatigue, time progresses, and natural phenomena exist. The fact that the divinely wrought carvings are made upon the natural marble face represents the subservient "surface" of nature upon which God has complete command.

The act of the Creator endowing the marble with life resonates with the Biblical passage in which human beings are first created from the natural earth. The Latin term for earth is *humus*, the word that Thomas believes is the source of the term *humilitas*. This again returns one to contemplate what Dante is saying about artistic creation. The power that he assigns to creative art, albeit a Divine Being's art, reflects his own ideas as to the power of human creative art and in particular his own creative art.

The second carving is that of King David dancing in front of the Ark of the Covenant in humility so that the holy object may enter his own kingdom. Dante describes the "cart and oxen with the holy Ark: / a warning not to exceed one's competence," and therefore not to exceed one's God-appointed limits (*Purg.* X, 56-57). Dante is here referring to the act of Uzzah, who reached out to the Ark to steady it from falling:

> Uzzah reached out toward the Ark of God and took hold of it,
> for the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the Lord burned
> against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence;
> and he died there by the Ark of God (II Sam. 6:6-7).[6]

In contrast, David is "far beyond the sacred Ark," distancing himself from the sacred object out of humility while, "with robes girt up, the humble Psalmist danced, / showing himself both more and less than king" (*Purg.* X, 66). Because David dances in humility before the Ark, making sacrifices and burning incense to honor God, he is thus allowed to bring the Ark into the royal city. The scene introduces more supernatural elements into this representation of art, for it is not only that the Pilgrim's eyes and ears are convinced that they hear and see supernatural things, but the Pilgrim's nose is conflicted as to what

[6] "In a letter to the Italian cardinals (*Epist.* XI, 9, 12) Dante denies a comparison made between himself and Uzzah for his allegedly unwarranted interference in church affairs: while Uzzah touched the sacred Ark, Dante says, he only wishes to guide the oxen who have strayed from the right path" (Musa 115).

it senses. "The smoke which censers poured / was traced so faithfully that eyes and nose / could not decide between a 'yes' or 'no'," presenting the basic confusion of the senses that the Pilgrim faces throughout the terrace of pride (*Purg.* X, 62).

The next carving portrays the "noble Trajan, Emperor," (53-117 C.E.) stopping the entirety of the Roman army to converse with a grieving widow (*Purg.* X, 76). The whole conversation between the widow and the Emperor is related in the "visible speech (*visibile parlare*)" present in the previous carvings, but it is more detailed and lengthy in this, the third carving (*Purg.* X, 95). Trajan humbly stops to hear the widow's complaint in order that he may distribute justice to his lowly subjects.

The Emperor Trajan is placed in Purgatory, and later in Paradise with the Just Rulers (*Par.* XX, 44-45), while Virgil, who never actively persecuted early Christians, is placed in Limbo. The explanation for this is the "excellence" that "moved Gregory to win his greatest fight," as Dante calls it, which involves Gregory raising Trajan from the dead in order to absolve him of sin and free him from Hell. The story comes from Paul and John the Deacon's ninth-century life of St. Gregory, which states that "Gregory, one day, was crossing the forum of Trajan, built as one knows, with a rare magnificence: he looked there at the signs of the emperor's mercy, and learned among others, of this memorable act," the memorable act being the justice shown to the widow (Vickers 75). The forum of Trajan is home to Trajan's column[7], the carvings on which might have initially led Gregory to begin contemplating the life and acts of Trajan when strolling through the forum that day.

The column of Trajan, and Roman columns in general, may have influenced Dante's construction of Purgatory, at least in respect to the carvings of humility. The

column of Trajan is structured on the textual model of Trajan's life and accomplishments, moving in an upward spiral to the right and ending in his death at the apex (Vickers 76). Dante's column of Purgatory spirals upwardly to the right, telling the story of a soul as it ascends toward Paradise, perhaps.

The carving of Trajan on the mountain of Purgatory unmistakably merits contemplation of the column, and what, exactly, it was that led Gregory to attempt and "win his greatest fight." It could very well have been that Gregory saw a carving on the column that inspired him to raise the spirit of Trajan and save the pagan's soul, and so he was inspired by art to act and intercede in God's divine justice.[8] The stories range from Gregory's going to St. Peter's to pray for the emperor to his actual raising of the dead body back to life on the spot, but whatever technique he used, the pagan's soul was given a new life. Dante, by incorporating Gregory's "fight," acknowledges the power of creative art in helping to achieve the impossible. This is a self-affirmative move that in turn acknowledges the power of his own poetic column inspired by his journey as a human Pilgrim, which in turn may bring about the saving of his fellow humans' souls (Vickers 80).

[7] Which is probably still standing only because of this story of the just Trajan.

Structure and Movement

The terrace of pride, while presenting the primacy of the capital sin pride and raising unique issues concerning artistic creation, acts as an introduction to the structure of each level of Purgatory. While each level contains unique punishments and lessons for the ascending sinners, the levels all maintain a structural similarity as evidenced by the first level of the Mountain. The pilgrim's viewing of the carvings illustrates the Pilgrim's movement through Purgatory, which carries with it a philosophical significance. The idea of constant movement toward the goal, toward that state of perfect happiness that exists in Paradise, is stressed throughout the terrace of pride and the rest of Purgatory to indicate the constant moral striving in which any Christian pilgrim must participate in order to reach Heaven.

Dante must move ever upward through Purgatory, not turning his back upon the goal, for "to look back means to go back out again" (*Purg* IX, 132). Virgil constantly reminds Dante that he must continue to move forward and should not linger when the goal is so apparently accessible. Dante's descriptions of the scenes illustrate the Pilgrim's actual physical movement up the Mountain as he "reads" each carving, like a text, from left to right. The Pilgrim describes the first carving of the Annunciation as Gabriel descending toward Mary on the left as he proceeds up the mountain from left to

[8] An act made permissible by God in exchange for his health in old age—Gregory was supposedly in ill health for the rest of his life after this act.

right. Immediately after viewing this first carving, Virgil directs the Pilgrim "to look at the other parts as well," whereupon the Pilgrim, standing on Virgil's left side ("the side that holds the heart"), turns his head to the right and looks "ahead past Mary's figure to that point where he / who prompted me now stood, and there I saw / another story cut into the stone" (*Purg* X, 49-52). "Crossing in front of Virgil," moving to the right, Dante then goes on to describe both carvings in the same way as he described the first: as if reading a text from left to right.

The significance of this movement toward the right and upward aligns with Vickers' belief that Dante partly adopted the structure of Purgatory from the form of the ancient Roman column, and that the proper allegorical movement of the soul is from left to right. As has been pointed out, the partial function of the *terza rima* that Dante employs throughout the *Commedia* is to elicit the sense of constant movement forward toward the goal of Paradise. Also striking about this movement from left to right are the two examples of failed attempts to ascend the mountain of Purgatory made by the Pilgrim in the *Inferno*.

In Canto I of the *Inferno*, when the Pilgrim perceives that there is a veritable good atop the mountain, he attempts to scale the mountain without the grace of God. By attempting to ascend the Mountain, he is attempting to supercede his earthly bounds and is thus operating against God's wishes and therefore against nature. The Pilgrim climbs the Mountain with his "left foot always lower on the hill," attempting to ascend Mount Purgatory in a leftward spiral (*Inf* I, 24). As he begins to enter the realm of Purgatory proper, the Pilgrim is forced to quit what Thomas would call his irrational search for happiness by the divinely sent leopard, she-wolf, and lion. The crude allegory is that

leftward movement, *sinister* movement, represents an attempt to reach heaven without the aid of either reason or God.

Another example of leftward movement symbolizing misdirected desires is that of Ulysses' "mad flight" past the pillars of Hercules in search of worldly knowledge. Ulysses and his crew set out "in an insane flight / always gaining on the left" in their "pursuit of knowledge and the good" (*Inf* XXVI, 120-121). Here, it would be well to examine the geography of Dante's earth. Dante's Purgatory is in the southern hemisphere of earth, directly opposite to Jerusalem in the northern hemisphere. Purgatory is an isolated island in the southern hemisphere, and so the only way to reach it is by way of an ocean voyage. The souls of the dead who hope to reach heaven gather at the mouth of the Tiber in Rome, "which is the meeting of place of all the dead" that are to be transported via supernatural vessel to the shores of Purgatory (*Purg* II, 104). The faithfully departed souls' journeys are sanctioned but Ulysses' is not: he is moving in the wrong direction to attain perfect happiness.

The Pilgrim, his journey authorized by God, moves to the right because he is spurred by Virgil, his capacity for reason, and the other external stimuli around him. On the terrace of pride, the Pilgrim is also moved forward by the art of the carvings, which have such an effect upon him that they force him to move forward, to the right, in order that he may be observe them in their entirety. The reliefs themselves are meant to aid in the purgative process by educating the shades as to the nature of virtue and thus moving them closer to the perfect freedom of the will that each soul seeks in order to ascend to Heaven. More literally, however, the reliefs propel the Pilgrim forward as he describes them step by step while he advances up the Mountain (Baldassaro 268).

The implications of this dynamic, that the art of this first terrace propels both the Pilgrim and the souls inhabiting this level, seem to align with Thomas' idea that art can provoke reflection, which can in turn promote wisdom and which can therefore aid in directing a human being toward its proper end. The immediate impetus behind the Pilgrim's motional observation of these carvings is their design; it is the immediate and tangible good that propels the Pilgrim forward. The carvings, and more broadly the plastic arts, are Thomistic secondary goods that advance human beings toward the Final Good. Dante here again affirms the potency of artistic achievement, as it can lead the soul toward the "right road" to salvation (Baldassaro 274).

Punishment

After the Pilgrim observes the final carving, that of Trajan consoling the widow, he is directed by Virgil to observe the "crowd of souls" slowly approaching (*Purg* X, 101). The proud souls are moving toward the two poets, moving toward the right like all the rest of the penitent souls on Purgatory, "slowly" because they are forced to carry huge stones upon their backs for penance. The severity of their punishment, which forces the proud to be bent low to the ground (Thomas' *humus*) in humility, makes them unrecognizable as shades to both Virgil and the Pilgrim. The sin of pride so afflicts these souls that they cannot be identified as such, noting the long journey of purgation that they have yet to endure in order to set their "will upright" (*Purg* XXVII, 140). The apparitions are an amalgam of parts that Virgil and Pilgrim must "disentangle" in order to recognize them, and thus they are far from achieving the state of full definition that defines Thomistic happiness.

The punishment of the sinners, the stones that force the souls to be weighed down toward the ground, is a remedial punishment in the sense that it forces the souls to participate in the virtue of humility. However, although this punishment forces the proud to participate in St. Benedict's first degree of humility, which states that one should "be humble of heart and always show it in body, with the eyes cast down to the ground," it also prevents the sinners from clearly observing the reliefs on the cliff face (*2a2ae* 161,

6). The sinner Omberto Aldobrandesco illustrates the punishment issued to the proud, by telling the Pilgrim,

> If I were not prevented by this stone
> That curbs the movement of my haughty neck,
> And makes me keep my face bent to the ground,
>
> I would look up (*Purg* XI, 52-55).

Each soul must strain even to catch a glimpse of the carvings, symbolizing the difficulty of maintaining the right road previously made explicit with the needle's eye.

The punishment of the proud, the heavy burden of stones, emphasizes the idea of sin as "weight." The penitent proud must shed their burden by "purging away the filth of worldliness" and rising, "weightless and pure, into the wheeling stars" (*Purg* XI, 36). Dante the poet identifies living beings as

> worms,
> each born to form the angelic butterfly,
> that flies defenseless to the Final Judge (*Purg* X, 124-126).

The imagery here lends itself to the purgatorial nature of the terrace, for human beings are depicted as lowly and humble worms that can potentially morph into weightless, and therefore sinless, butterflies toward God. However, the butterfly is defenseless, and though it does rise toward God, it is only because it is clearly allowed to do so. Dante, in accordance with Thomas, relates that human beings are "born to fly heavenward," but the slightest "breath of wind" can force them to fall back into the "dark forest" of the *Commedia*'s opening canto. The theme of weight is brought to the fore constantly throughout the *Commedia*, for everywhere the Pilgrim is identified as possessing the physical quality of weight as he weighs down boats and disturbs the stones in Hell. Virgil identifies this weight as the burden of "Adam's flesh," with which every human is

invested and which must be purged in order that the earthly paradise atop the mountain of Purgatory be accessed (*Purg* XI, 43).

The First Sin

Thomas, beyond listing pride as first amongst the capital sins, identifies pride as the source of original human sin. The sin committed by Adam and Eve in the Garden is that of pride, as they seek a perceived good above their measure as human beings. The Serpent promises Adam and Eve "that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil," convincing them to directly disobey God's commandment (Genesis 3.5). In this way, Adam and Eve perform the exterior and possibly the interior act of pride. The exterior act is the transgression of a precept, in this case God's order not to eat from the tree of knowledge, which is the basic element of all sin. The interior act of pride is the internal contempt for a divine precept, as Adam and Eve hold the instruction of God to be unimportant and attempt to disobey it secretly. The fact that the Serpent entices Adam and Eve makes the interior act of pride questionable, but the sin is performed in contempt of a direct commandment from God.

"Adam and Eve willed to rob divinity," attempting to "become like gods"; they wished to achieve not an equality with God, but godlike status merely imitating God. Aquinas states that created beings can share the divine likeness in *being*, as man and angels are made in God's image; in *knowing*, as angels know and humans have the potential to know; and in the power of *action*, which neither humans nor angels possess. Both angels and persons have to act and do something in order to achieve happiness,

while God simply exists in a perfect, fully defined, and happy state. Adam and Eve sin principally in seeking to know good and evil by attempting to exploit (in the true sense of the word) this capacity to know as human beings. They seek to possess the ability to determine for themselves by their own natural powers what was right or wrong for them to do (*1a2ae*, Q. 163, A. 1-2). In this way, they sin by desiring to achieve God's likeness, wherein they could achieve their own happiness through their own faculties (*1a2ae*, Q. 163, A. 2).

The sin committed by Adam and Eve is the gravest of all human sins because of the circumstances surrounding it. They are perfect beings living in a state of complete happiness, bestowed upon them by God, when they directly disobey his divine order. The sin committed by the first humans is the attempt to live life outside of God's world, which is impossible. They seek to become like God and to be able to function as human beings on their own independent of God's hegemony. Aquinas believed that this striving to live beyond the reach of God was the turning of the human back toward God. Thus, the Ecclesiasticus passage that defines pride as the "root of all evil" applies directly to the case of the first sin, which was the sin of pride.

The imagery of pride as the "root of all evil" obviously brings forth images of sin as a tree. The tree has links to that tree from which Adam and Eve plucked the fruit of knowledge, and therefore stained humankind with original sin, but Aquinas interprets it in terms of the nature of sin. Capital vices, the vices that compose the seven levels of Dante's Purgatory, are for Thomas "those which give rise to others, especially by way of final cause" (*1a2ae* 84, 4). The root of the tree of sin acts as the final cause to all sin, and pride is the source of all sin because it is the impetus behind the initial turning away from

God. Pride "denotes aversion from God simply through being unwilling to be subject to God and His rule" and causes "aversion" from the *via diritta* of *recta ratio* (*2a2ae* 162, 6). Sin is unnatural, for it defies the natural order set forth by God, and therefore pride acts as a root by being the final cause of sin from which all sin stems, and can therefore be called the "root of all sins."

The Sinners

The first identifiable proud sinner that introduces himself to Dante is Omberto Aldobrandesco. Throughout Purgatory (as in Hell and in Paradise), Dante uses his contemporaries as exemplars of virtuous and vicious behavior. Amidst his grand attempt to unite Classical, Hebraic, and Christian narratives into one graceful story, Dante concerns himself with his temporal worldly surroundings in order to describe eternal issues of God's justice. This use of historical examples, both past and contemporary, to represent the virtues and the vices was increasing after the twelfth century and, though present in all art forms, was commonly found on works of tapestry (Bloomfield 102). Dante's situating of Oderisi of Gubbio and Omberto Aldobrandesco alongside Nimrod or Arachne as examples of pride seems an effective way to unite his contemporary world with the past, to create an artistic *Summa* that links the past, present, and future in one eternal narrative.

Omberto Aldobrandesco is guilty of familial pride, as the achievements of his family had made him arrogant during his natural life. He adopted an air of "superb disdain" to all of his fellow human beings, and it is for his vainglory that he is subjected to the weight of the stones that force his "haughty neck" to be bent toward the ground:

> This weight which I refused while I still lived,
> I now am forced to bear among the dead,
> Until the day that God is satisfied (*Purg* XI, 70-72).

Omberto refused the "weight" of humility while living, and thus is forced to bear the excruciating weight of the stones. Omberto does seem to be making some progress toward relieving his burden and moving up the Mountain, for directly after mentioning his father's name he quickly adds, "Perhaps you never heard the name before," illustrating the progress that he has made thus far in Purgatory (Musa 124). However, he then shows himself to have retained some pride for his family's accomplishments, justifying his continuing punishment, by indicating his "ancient lineage" and "gallant deeds" that caused his inordinate pride (*Purg* XI, 61).

While speaking to Omberto, the Pilgrim has his "head bent low, to hear his words" and is thus participating to some degree in the punishment of pride. The Pilgrim confesses that pride is one of his besetting sins on the next level of Purgatory, that of the envious. He relates that he will not be punished for the sin of envy, which entails the sewing together of one's eyelids so that he or she may focus upon inward improvement, but will most likely be punished for his pride.

> 'My sight one day shall be sewn up,' I said,
> 'but not for long; my eyes have seldom sinned
> in casting envious looks on other folk.
>
> It is a greater fear that shakes my soul:
> That of the penance done below—already
> I feel on me the weight those souls must bear (*Purg* XIII, 133-138).'

Dante moves along with the sinners, keeping his "body bent" as he goes so that he may purge himself of his pride in order to ascend toward heaven.

Dante's second contemporary example is Oderisi of Gubbio, an illuminator of manuscripts. Dante's description of Oderisi in the terrace of pride again brings the focus back to the creative arts, as Oderisi is punished for his artistic pride. Oderisi, like

Omberto, shows the progress that he has made by immediately deferring to Franco Bolognese, another illuminator of manuscripts, as being a superior artist. Oderisi then talks about the ephemeral qualities of artistic fame, the "empty glory of all human power," dismissing the humanistic tendency to search for eternal life in artistic achievement rather than with God.

Oderisi goes on to point out that "earthly fame is like the green in the grass: / It comes and goes" as directed by God. He discusses poetic fame while speaking to the Pilgrim, for he is aware of his artistic endeavors, and he even mentions a poet, "already born," who will supercede all other poets in fame. This poet seems to indicate Dante, though that is uncertain, but if it is a self-reference to his own poetic skill, it is most certainly evidence of Dante's own excessive pride in his work. Oderisi further implicates poetry and the literary arts by asking the Pilgrim,

> 'Were you to reach the ripe old age of death,
> Instead of dying prattling in your crib,
> Would you have more fame in a thousand years (*Purg* XI, 103-105)?'

Oderisi's "words of truth" humble the Pilgrim's "swollen pride," which is his besetting sin, and allow for him to make progress toward the floor reliefs representing pride and eventually the primary good.

The Floor Carvings

Canto XIII begins with Dante's relating that he and Oderisi continue to move along the terrace of pride "like oxen keeping step beneath their yoke," with their heads bent in humility (*Purg* XIII, 1). Virgil commands the Pilgrim to leave his side, "for each one here must drive his boat ahead / with sail and oar, and all the might he has," again bringing forth the nautical imagery, the imagery of a voyage that is linked with Purgatory throughout the poem (*Purg* XII, 5-6). The Pilgrim observes the Mountain as one who has just escaped drowning. God wrecks Ulysses' ship on its shores before reaching it, but the Pilgrim and Virgil are transported to the island over the ocean by the bark of genius. Here, Virgil equates even the journey that is taking place on land with a sea voyage—perhaps invoking the Augustinian idea of the Christian pilgrim's journey as having a definite beginning and ending.

The Pilgrim "stands to walk the way man should," observing that he and Virgil have become noticeably "light of foot," representing the progress that they have made by participating in the punishment for pride. Again, Dante evokes the idea of a burden being relieved with the removal of sin, the removal of the weighty stain of worldliness. The Pilgrim is then advised to "look down" at the divinely wrought stone carvings similar to "tombs set in a church floor" (*Purg* XII, 16). The Pilgrim must bend his head low again in humility in order to observe the floor reliefs, and thus must still participate in the

remedial punishments of Purgatory. The sinners weighed down by the stones must observe the carvings depicting pride—they have no choice in the matter—and it is apparently only through coming to understand the vice that one can come to know the virtue. The proud souls must come to understand the sin of pride before the weight is relieved so that they are able to lift their heads enough to recognize humility.

The carvings themselves relate scenes of pride from both Biblical and Classical sources, and the first twelve (Italian) tercets begin with the letters *UUUU*, *OOOO*, *MMMM*, forming an acrostic that is made explicit in the thirteenth tercet (Musa 133).[9] The acrostic, which spells out *uom* or *uomo*, the Italian word for man, is an obvious comment on the fact that pride, the sin of Adam and Eve, is synonymous with humanity. Every human being, with the exception of the Virgin Mary, carries with him or her the "weight" of original sin. It is pride, the first sin, that is the root of all other sins by way of causing human beings to ignore and disobey God's law. Pride is the cause of all sin, and it is present in every sinful human being, which is to say that it is present in every human being.

The carvings illustrate examples of pride, beginning with the fall of Lucifer from Heaven and ending with the fallen city of Troy in ashes. The carvings, just as the carvings of humility before them, are the artistic creations of God that represent reality with such mimetic realism that the "dead seemed dead, the living seemed alive" (*Purg* XII, 67). The levels of relation here make both sets of carvings increasingly complex, for the images are described ecphrastically by the Poet.

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[9] Vedeva Troia in cenere e in caverne:
O Ilion, come te basso e vile
Mostrava il segno che li si discerne! (*Purg* 12, 61-63)

Ecphrasis in the literary tradition usually denotes descriptions of the visual arts by writers, typically poets describing paintings. Ecphrastic poems share the common task of representing in language that which is visually representing something else, therefore acting as a kind of mirror of a mirror (Hollander 4). Yet, as Plato points out in the *Phaedrus*, paintings "seem to talk to you as if they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you the same thing forever" (*Phaedrus* 275d). To use Plato's theory of the forms, ecphrasis itself represents a new level of artifice. Plato uses the example of an individual bed, which is itself a mere instance of the form Bed, and only shares somewhat in the true "bedness" of the perfect bed. Any view of a bed, from whatever perspective, represents another level of separation, while any picture representing this same view represents a third level of separation. If the picture is removed three times from actuality, then the ecphrastic description of such a scene is even further removed by several additional levels—poetic skill, language, alongside others. Art depends upon these levels of fictiveness in order to yield the true form of Bedness better than can the actual bed itself.

Dante's descriptions of the divinely wrought carvings are examples of notional ecphrasis, which is the depiction of purely fictional works of art brought to life through the poetic language itself (Hollander 7). Dante imagines what God would have probably carved upon the walls of Mount Purgatory, and describes it poetically in such a way that he brings the carvings to life so that the "dead seemed dead, the living seemed alive" (*Purg* XII, 67). If Dante the Pilgrim fears for the safety of his soul due to his pride, this artistic act in which he controls the artistic hand of God could most certainly be counted as Dante overstepping his human bounds—Thomas' definition of pride (*Ia2ae*, 162, 1).

On a larger scale, the *Commedia* could be taken as a proud, and perhaps Ulyssean, exercise in notional ecphrasis.

Among the floor reliefs depicting the proud, Dante places Arachne as derived from Ovid's Metamorphoses:

> O mad Arachne, I could see you there,
> Half-turned to spider, sad above the shreds
> Of your own work of art that sentenced you (*Purg* XII, 43-45).

Arachne's sin is her artistic pride, as she is renowned for her "consummate work," which inspires her to claim that she surpasses the goddess Minerva's skill in wool-working (*Metamorphoses* 177). Arachne challenges Minerva to a weaving competition, and Minerva comes down to earth in the form of an old woman that advises the girl to count it "enough to be supreme among all mortals when you weave / and work your wool, but never do compete / with an immortal goddess" (*Metamorphoses* 178) Arachne refuses the advice of the old woman and challenges Minerva again, whereby the goddess shows her true form and the two begin to create.

Minerva creates scenes depicting the glory of the gods and the consequences for those mortals who challenge this greatness. Arachne's weaving depicts the deceitful nature of the gods, as she portrays sequence after sequence of divine abuses against humanity. When Minerva cannot find any fault with the girl's work and so in a jealous rage tears the "pieces of that bright cloth / whose colors showed the crimes the gods had wrought," whereupon Arachne hangs herself. Minerva feels sorry for the girl and changes the rope into a spider's silken thread and morphs Arachne into a half-spider (*Metamorphoses* 182).

Dante's Arachne is obviously borrowed from Ovid but also manifests certain

Christianized elements. Arachne's sin was not amended by Minerva's act of imperfect justice, but in Purgatory, she is depicted as suffering sadly above her lost work of art. The fact that she mourns the loss of her weaving shows her to maintain the pride for which she was punished. Interestingly, the dual between Arachne and Minerva involves creation—the province of the gods. It is only when Arachne almost creates another reality, exemplified by the image of Europa being tricked by the bull that is artistically represented in such a way that one "would think that both the bull and waves were true", that she becomes an overly proud human being (*Metamorphoses* 181). Dante calls Arachne "mad (*folle*)," immediately identifying her with Ulysses, who participated in another proud and "*folle*" attempt to overstep his human bounds (Barolini 30). Dante's art, which attempts a form of verisimilitude in its ecphrastic description of God's own creative art, could be described as Arachnean, and therefore Ulyssean, in nature.

Another Ulyssean figure depicted on the floor reliefs is Nimrod, the builder of the Tower of Babel on the Plain of Shinar:

> I saw the mighty Nimrod by his tower,
> Standing there stunned and gazing at the men
> Who shared at Shinar his bold fantasy. (*Purg* XII, 129).

Nimrod is described in Genesis 10:10 as king over the land of Babel among others in a time when the "whole earth used the same language and the same words" (Gen 11:1). Because of this linguistic unity, the people were able to build a "tower whose top will reach into heaven," which provoked God to come down and separate these proud people, scattering them over the earth and confusing their language so that they could no longer communicate and build (Gen 11:4-8).

The link between Nimrod and Dante's task, that of building a tower that reaches

Heaven through the utility of words and language, acts for Dante as a sort of self-implication of his artistic pride. And so once again he cites himself for committing the sin of pride, and thus throughout the terrace he is humbly admitting his sin in order that it be purged. The self-reflexive nature of the terrace of pride, in which Dante examines his own artistic endeavors, illustrates the dramatic elements of the poem. He is a natural human specially chosen by God to explain a supernatural realm, a position which he undoubtedly recognized as being somewhat above humankind's measure—and it is on the terrace of pride that he attempts to come to terms and justify his proud endeavor.

After the Pilgrim progresses beyond the floor reliefs, the angel of humility comes and leads Dante and Virgil toward the steps to the second level of Purgatory. He brushes his wings against the Pilgrim's forehead, erasing the first *P* representing pride. As the two walk toward the steps, the angel sings the beatitude "*Beati pauperes spiritu!* (Blessed are the poor in spirit!)" in celebration of their ascendance toward the primary good. A beatitude such as this is sung before the Pilgrim and Virgil leave every level of Purgatory.

While climbing the steps toward the terrace of envy, the Pilgrim feels himself to be much lighter as he ascends. He inquires as to what weight has been lifted from him, to which Virgil responds:

> 'When the *P*'s that still remain
> (though they have almost faded) on your brow
> shall be erased completely like the first,
>
> then will your feet be light with good desire;
> they will no longer feel the heavy road
> but will rejoice as they are urged to climb' (*Purg* XII, 121-126).

Virgil therefore elucidates both the overall purpose of Purgatory, which is to shed the weight of original and actual sin in order to acquire true freedom of the will, and the

importance of pride as the first sin. When pride is removed, so is removed that superb audacity that causes humans to ignore God's law and sin, and so the other *P*'s nearly fade away once the capital sin pride has been purged.

Conclusion

Dante adopts the philosophical system of Thomas Aquinas in order to yield a poem that is, in many ways, a more perfect representation of this philosophic vision. Thomas' *Summa Theologiae* is among the greatest works of Scholastic philosophy; however, it is Dante's perception and presentation of Thomas' philosophical vision that acts as the most recognizable *Summa* of the medieval period. Dante's poem acts as the moral teacher of the medieval age, making the philosophical richness of the 13th and 14th centuries available to the common people. It is because of the philosophical weight that it carries that the *Commedia* becomes much more penetrating and powerful. Thomistic philosophy is essential to the structure of the *Commedia*, and this structure is essential to the poetic beauty of each of its parts. Any specific episode of the poem cannot be isolated from the overall structure, a Thomistic structure, without corrupting the meaning of both the part and the whole. The greatest achievement of Dante's *Commedia* is that it is an organic and nearly complete work, due mostly to Dante's adoption of Thomas Aquinas' organic and nearly complete philosophical vision.

APPENDICES

1

The Human Act

For Thomas, human beings act for an end, and it is in relation to this end that human acts are to be judged and defined. There is the primary end, which is single and supernatural, and there are secondary ends, which are multifarious and mundane. Humankind is both moved and moves toward the primary end, which is God, in accordance with nature as dictated by God. Though humans are directed towards the primary end of supreme goodness, they deal almost exclusively with the worldly goods represented by secondary ends. If human beings were faced with the primary end, which is God, they would not be able to act in any manner but in accordance with that supreme goodness. This goodness is supreme, which is to say that there is nothing beyond it that humans could desire. It is the perfect and undeniable goodness of God that human beings seek with every human act that they perform. Secondary ends do not compel the individual toward them, and it is in dealing with these imperfect ends that freedom of the will, an overarching principle of Thomas' theory of human acts, arises.

The end that human beings seek is happiness, which can be both perfect and imperfect. Perfect and primary happiness, or beatitude, is the supernatural state in which

the being becomes fully defined and lacks nothing, forming a complete self. Secondary happiness is natural, that is, worldly, and thus can never be perfected because of the fallen and imperfect state of humankind. Human acts are voluntary because they deal with secondary goods that do not compel but must be chosen by the will.

The human act begins with the interior act of the will, which stems from the intellect's formation of a conception of the primary end, which yields the intention of the act. The will moves all other powers of the soul, and the intention is the volition of the means to the end, which is the primary end, through the means of secondary objects. The will then engages in inquiry mounted by reason, called counsel, as to what end is to be chosen as the best means to the end. The will then consents, as directed by counsel, to apply an appetitive movement toward something that is to be done. Consent expresses the application of sense, gathered by the previous stages of the human act, to something by acquiring experience, cleaving to it, and finding satisfaction in it. The human being then chooses those acts that are in its power to perform or do as actions in order to achieve the end through the means. Upon choosing this action, the intellect commands the will to perform the act through intention, forming one sweeping movement of reason and will to form one external act. This external act applies something to the intention, which has been established by the intellect as the good. The act uses the means in order to attain the good, which is beatitude.

The human act, by virtue of its being voluntary and capable of erring, is worthy of praise or blame. As human beings are directed by God to move naturally toward that which is good, which is perfectly good and essentially God, those actions that are in accordance with this natural tendency are considered reasonable by virtue of their

naturalness. Aquinas' universe is an ordered and reasonable place ordered by and toward God. The human act in its fullest state, its perfect state, adheres to this natural tendency and is then considered rational and good. Those actions lacking in fullness are considered to be deficient in rationality and therefore evil.

As has been shown, morality is first in the interior act of the will, but there is also a degree of morality in external actions. The goodness or malice of external acts depends upon the act as it is in accord with due matter ('what is done?') and circumstances ('why?'), which depend on the human reason, and the act as it is in accord with the order of the end, which depends upon adherence to eternal law. The form of the external act is its willing, while the matter is the act itself which deserves merit or demerit as it is a human act. An act is considered sinful if it is evil, and considered evil if it is deficient and irrational. The human act, which can be either good or evil, can develop into habits that can also be good or evil.

Habits, Virtues, Vices

A human is in the privileged position of being the only creature in the created universe in whom the complex subjects of action, habits, and virtues are not only possible but are realized. This singularity stems from the will that, along with the intellect, principally guides human action toward good, its object. The human action is essentially the inter-relation of the human will and intellect, which both are moved and moved by one another in the process. The human intellect, whose objects are universal being and truth, presents the object, the good, to the will. The natural tendency of human beings is that they are led toward the Creator, who is the perfect good, in a voluntary series of actions that must deal with particular goods in order to attain the end of a complete good. In this way, human beings deal not with undeniable goods that compel one to move towards them, but rather with mundane goods that do not compel certain movements, yet allow for voluntary action.

Dante's claim that his poem is about a human being that "becomes liable to rewarding or punishing justice" indicates that the Pilgrim is participating in a human, or moral, act or series of actions. Throughout the *Commedia*, the Pilgrim illustrates Thomas' structure of a human act, which initiates the action of the poem. The human act

is essentially the interrelation of the will and the intellect, and Dante illustrates this interaction through the interaction between Virgil, representative of the human intellect, and the Pilgrim, representing the human will.

For Thomas, the human will is put into motion by the intellect, which gives the will its object, as the will itself wills external actions that seek to achieve this goal. Virgil thus presents the object of the journey to Dante: "the delightful mountain, source / and principle that causes every joy" (*Inf.* 59-60). Yet, the entire process is often begun with the willing of the intellect to conceive of an end, represented by the Pilgrim humbly asking Virgil for help. In this way, the will moves all human faculties toward the end, yielding an intention, the intention being repeated throughout by Virgil, that governs the willed act and makes it a single movement that is governed by the object, the imagining of the end blending with the willing of the means. This would be sufficient if the willing of the means dealt with purely abstract ends and means, but not everything is so certain.

As humans deal with particular goods rather than universal goods, they deal with inevitable uncertainties. In order to make reasonable judgments, people deliberate as to the means of obtaining the particular end. This deliberation takes place entirely in the intellect and must end in a judgment that merely lessens the amount of uncertainty and provides the will with an object or objects to which it either consents, in the case of only one method of obtaining the end being offered by the intellect, or elects to consent, in the case of multiple options for means. Virgil is unquestionably the "master" of the journey to whose commandments the Pilgrim unwaveringly consents.

The will elects to perform that act deemed to be the best means to the end proposed by the intellect. The process of election is based upon both the intellect and the

will, as the intellect proposes the judgments for the will to examine, thereby representing the matter of the act, and the will moves the soul toward the good it chooses through election, therefore representing the form of the act. Election is the movement of the soul toward the good it chooses to pursue, presumably leading to greater and more perfect goods, and is therefore largely an act of the human will.

The discussion of human acts becomes yet more complex when it is considered that they are *human* acts, which involve beings that, unlike the angels, are not purely intellectual beings of reason and will. Human beings are influenced by certain manners and ways of being that are different for each individual and by certain "permanent dispositions" called habits. Aquinas defines habits as "dispositions according to which a being is well or ill disposed," thereby identifying the fact that these dispositions can be both good and bad. Habits are dispositions added to humans, being external to their substance and modifying it. A being's habits are considered good or bad according to how they aid in realizing that being's own definition, which is to say its ideal. Good habits therefore draw a being toward this ideal while bad habits draw a being away from this ideal (*1a2ae*, Q. 1-21).

The human soul is the perfect place in which habits are to develop, for with its free will it possesses the potency and receptivity to change determinations. These habits develop within the human intellect, in which the various powers of the human reason allow for both the potency and receptivity needed to form habits. These intellectual powers are capable of being combined and organized according to widely differing arrangements, embodying the potentiality of the intellect to form habits. The human will

is the subject of the habits because it is a faculty of the rational soul and has the free indetermination necessary to be subject to the habits.

The habits introduce the idea that the human soul either progresses or regresses, for the development of habits is not only possible where conditions make it so, but also necessary. For example, if human being have all the instruments to attain their end, the good, they attain this end through the faculty of reason and must have a disposition that inclines it to will the process of the human act into motion. In this way, habits complete the nature of human beings. Habits establish a link between the intellect and its objects or possible operations, and therefore any intellect is inseparable from all habits enriching or degrading it.

There are two main types of habits to be distinguished: innate and cognitive habits. Innate habits, which include the inborn knowledge of first principles, are the natural dispositions to know from first sense experience that which is immediately knowable. Cognitive habits are those natural inclinations of the body that direct one toward knowledge. Human beings are born with the beginnings of cognitive habits in the form of sense organs, whose accuracy and keenness predisposes a particular being to know well or poorly.

Habits are derived less from these natural dispositions than from acts. A habit can be developed by a simple act, whereby a single act can completely convince the intellect by virtue of its certainty. However, habits are developed more often from repeated acts, by which the habit dominates the lower faculties of the soul and body through repetition. These habits develop the lower faculties to act as the intellect directs through constant tutelage and repetition.

As it has been stated, there are good habits and there are bad habits that can help or hinder the human soul's journey toward its final end. A good habit that disposes an individual in a lasting way to perform good actions is called a virtue, whereas bad habits that function in the opposite manner are called vices. Virtues are consistent with the model of human nature that has been proposed as they aid humankind's striving toward the good. This striving toward the good would be sufficient, as it has been said, if the entity who operates and acts were not human, but since Thomas is dealing with human beings, he must deal with imperfect beings. Humans therefore, being imperfect, bring with them a certain amount of good and evil in varying proportions to their acts.

Actions in human beings belong to the genus *action*, and the goodness of actions is measured by the perfection of the being that performs them, assigning an intrinsic value of excellence and goodness in the substance of the action itself. Actions are deemed good, *good* being the particular species of the action, if the object of the action is a suitable object, for example, the primary good or a good leading to the primary good. The circumstances surrounding a human action often determine the goodness or badness of those actions. The circumstances are a necessary part of human action, and it is only through their presence that the full perfection of a human being comes to pass. The goodness of an action is also derived from the end of the action. An action is deemed good if it has a proper end.

Yet, this is an incomplete conception of virtue, for if having a proper end were the sole criterion for possessing virtue, one would only have to think proper thoughts and never actually *do* anything. The human being is an active being, and two parts of any voluntary act are the interior act of the will that sets it into motion and the exterior act

itself. Each of these parts of the act has its own object, as the interior act of the will strives toward the end and the exterior act strives toward that which it is referred by the will. The will imposes its form, that of the end, on the exterior act, the matter of the act.

The end of the will that determines the form of the act also determines the species of the act, that is, whether it is a *good* or *bad* act. The aforementioned end of a human being is that human's being good, which is in accordance with reason. Therefore, the goodness or badness of an act depends upon whether its end is in accordance with "right reason" (recta ratio). Thomas then differentiates between immoral acts, which are contrary to reason, and amoral acts, which are considered to be "of a man" and should accordingly not be judged morally. In order for an act to be morally good, it must be orientated toward a legitimate and reasonable end; however, this does not mean that merely subordinating action toward rational ends guarantees the goodness of an act. A perfectly good moral act is one that satisfies the demands of reason in all parts and which is not merely the willing of a good, but the realization of it.

Human beings are influenced by certain manners and ways of being that are different for each individual and by certain "permanent dispositions" called habits and virtues. Aquinas uses Aristotle's definition (*Metaph.* v, text. 24,25) that a "'habit is a disposition': and disposition is 'the order of that which has parts either as to place, or as to potentiality, or as to species,'" thereby identifying the fact that these dispositions can be either of the good or bad species (*1a2ae*, Q.49, 4). Habits are dispositions added to humans, being external to their substance and modifying them. A being's habits are considered good or bad according to how they aid in realizing that being's own definition, which is to say its ideal. Good habits, which are called virtues, therefore move

through the realm quickly (a relatively new concept for the poet) so that he may return to his proper place in Limbo.

Dante deals with the problem of time in a very interesting manner, for the *Commedia*, through its attempt to unite classical and Christian thought, attempts to synthesize very different ideas about the nature of time. Christians conceptualize time as a linear model that begins with the creation and ends with an apocalyptic Judgment Day. The *Commedia* serves as sort of a bridge between the epic, the representative genre of the classical period, and the novel, the narrative form of the Christian era. The Pilgrim's journey has a linear beginning and ending, as the fearful Pilgrim progresses toward the goal of becoming the poised and confident Poet that is telling the story. Also, Dante employs some Christian corrective measures on some of the classical tales that he encounters, most notably that of Ulysses, making it a linear rather than circular tale. Dante corrects what he deemed to be mistakes of the ancients regarding the nature of time, making Ulysses' journey have a definite catastrophic ending in the form of a shipwreck. As Augustine states in the twelfth book of the *City of God*, the coming of Christ assures that "circles have been shattered," establishing a fixed point upon which to base a linear model of time (Frecerro 136).

Dante's Pilgrim operates within the Christian linear conception of time, but his journey also operates within the classical circular model. The poem has the cycle of the epic, as the Pilgrim sets out from the natural world to travel with Virgil and Beatrice through the Christian supernatural realms only to return back to the world of the living. His journey in this way is circular, but in the Christian linear sense his journey depicts the voyage from the initial lost and fearful soul to the confident and wise Poet. Also, though

the Pilgrim moves from a definite point A (the dark forest) to point B (the Beatific Vision in Paradise), he does so in a circular motion—he moves in a spiral of sorts downward through Hell and upward through Purgatory toward Heaven.

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