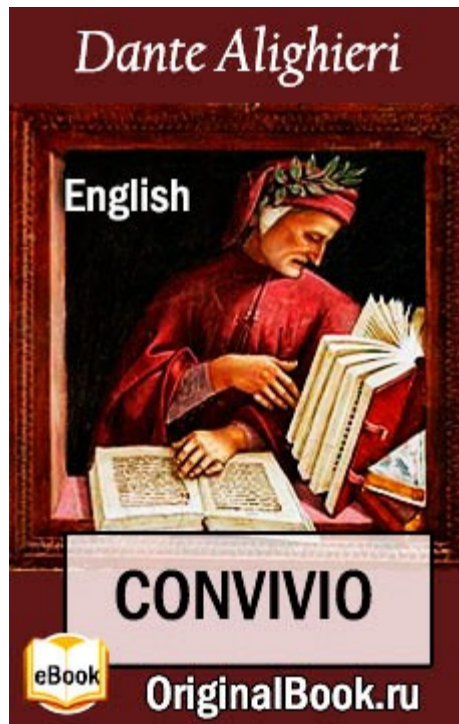


Convivio. Dante Alighieri

Original:

[Il Convivio](#)



1304

Translated by Richard Lansing

Convivio is a work written by [Dante Alighieri](#) roughly between 1304 and 1307. This unfinished work of Dante consists of four trattati, or "books": a prefatory one, plus three books that each include a canzone (long lyrical poem) and a prose allegorical interpretation or commentary of the poem that goes off in multiple thematic directions.

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The Convivio by Dante Alighieri

Book 01

Chapter 1

As the Philosopher says at the beginning of the *First Philosophy*, all men by nature desire to know.¹ 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 by nature subject to a desire for it. Many are, however, deprived of this most noble perfection by various causes within and outside of man which remove him from the habit of knowledge. Within man there exist two kinds of defects which impede him, one pertaining to the body, the other to the soul. That pertaining to the body occurs when its parts are not properly disposed, so that it can receive nothing, as is the case with the deaf, the dumb, and the like. That pertaining to the soul occurs when malice overcomes it, so that it becomes the follower of vicious pleasures, by which it is so deceived that because of them it degrades the worth of all things. Likewise outside of man two causes may be discerned, one of which subjects him to necessity, the other to indolence. The first consists of domestic and civic responsibilities, which properly engage the greater number of men, so that they are permitted no time for contemplation. The other is the handicap that derives from the place where a person is born and bred, which at times will not only lack a university but be far removed from the company of educated persons.

Two of these causes, namely the first from within and the first from outside, are not to be blamed but excused and are deserving of pardon; the other two, although one more than the other, deserve our censure and scorn. Anyone therefore can plainly see upon careful reflection that there remain few who are capable of achieving the habit of knowledge desired by all, and that the handicapped who live forever starved of this food are almost too numerous to count. Blessed are the few who sit at the table where the bread of the angels is eaten, and most unfortunate those who share the food of sheep!²

But since man is by nature a friend of all men, and every friend is grieved by defects found in the one he loves, they who are fed at so lofty a table are not without compassion toward those whom they see grazing about on grass and acorns in animal pastures. And since compassion is the mother of generosity, they who possess knowledge always give liberally of their great riches to the

¹ *The Philosopher* Aristotle, whom Dante characteristically refers to by antonomasia, following the traditional practice of his age. The First Philosophy is his Metaphysics, and the citation is to the opening line of Book I, Ch. 1.

² *the bread of the angels* A metaphor signifying wisdom.

truly poor and are like a living fountain by whose waters the natural thirst referred to above is quenched.³ Therefore I (who do not sit at the blessed table, but, having fled the pasture of the common herd, gather up a part of what falls to the feet of those who do sit there, and who know the unfortunate life of those I have left behind, for the sweetness that I taste in what I gather up piece by piece, and moved by compassion, though not forgetting myself) have set aside for those who are unfortunate something that I placed before their eyes some time ago, by which I have increased their desire.⁴

Wishing now to set their table, I intend to present to all men a banquet of what I have shown them and of the bread which must necessarily accompany such meat, without which it could not be consumed by them. This banquet, being worthy of such bread, offers meat which I intend should not be served in vain. Therefore I would not have anyone be seated there whose organs are ill-disposed because he lacks teeth, tongue, or palate, nor anyone addicted to vice, for his stomach is so full of poisonous and contrary humors that it would not be able to retain my meat. But let come here all those whose human hunger derives from domestic or civic responsibilities, and let them sit at the same table with others likewise handicapped; and at their feet let all those place themselves who do not merit a higher seat because of their indolence; and let each group partake of my meat with bread, for I will have them both taste of it and digest it. The meat of this banquet will be prepared in fourteen ways: that is, in fourteen canzoni, whose subject is both love as well as virtue. By lacking the present bread they possessed some degree of obscurity, so that to many their beauty was more pleasing than their goodness. But this bread (that is, the present explanation) will be the light that renders visible every shade of their meaning.

If in the present work, which is called *The Banquet*, as I wish it to be, the subject is treated more maturely than in the *Vita Nuova*, I do not intend by this in any way to disparage that book but rather more greatly to support it with this one, seeing that it understandably suits that one to be fervid and passionate, and this one tempered and mature.⁵ For it is proper to speak and act differently at different ages, because certain manners are fitting and praiseworthy at one age which at another are unbecoming and blameworthy, as will be shown below with appropriate reasoning in the fourth book. I wrote the former work at the threshold of my youth, and this one after I had already

³ *the natural thirst* The thirst for knowledge of truth. The same metaphor reappears in Purg. XXI, 1 ("La sete natural").

⁴ *I placed before their eyes some time ago* Dante had written the three canzoni, placed at the beginning of the second, third, and fourth books, some ten years earlier, and now seeks to make their meaning more accessible by extended commentaries, which comprise the prose portion of these books (or treatises). The "meat" is the poetry, the "bread" the commentary.

⁵ *the Vita Nuova* Dante's first literary work (c. 1295), which celebrates his youthful and passionate love for Beatrice. Like the *Convivio*, it collects a number of poems written at an earlier time and supplies a commentary on their meaning.

passed through it. Since my true meaning was other than what the previously mentioned canzoni outwardly reveal, I intend to explain these canzoni by means of an allegorical exposition, after having discussed the literal account, so that both arguments will be savored by those who have been invited to this supper. And if the banquet does not fulfill their expectations, I ask them to attribute every shortcoming not to my will but to my capability; for here it is my desire to be a disciple of complete and loving generosity.

Chapter 2

At the beginning of every well-ordered banquet the servants customarily take the bread placed on the table and cleanse it of any impurity. So I, who stand in their place in the present work, intend first of all to cleanse two impurities from this exposition, which passes for bread in my provision. The first is that for someone to speak of himself seems impermissible; the other is that to speak of matters by going into them too deeply seems unreasonable; and in this way the knife of my judgment will strip away the impermissible and the unreasonable. The rhetoricians grant no one the right to speak of himself, except in the case of necessity, and one is restricted from doing this because in speaking about someone the speaker cannot avoid praising or blaming the person about whom he speaks, and these two kinds of speech are crude since they come from one's own lips.

To dispel a doubt that may arise here, I say that it is worse to blame than to praise, although one should refrain from doing either. The reason is that anything that is blameworthy in itself is more repugnant than something only incidentally blameworthy. To disparage oneself is in itself blameworthy, because a person should tell a friend of his faults in private. No one is a better friend than one is to himself; therefore it is in the chamber of one's thoughts that a person must reprimand himself and bemoan his faults, and not openly. Moreover, a person is usually not blamed for not being able or not knowing how to conduct himself properly, but always for not being willing to, because good and evil are determined by what we will or fail to will; therefore he who blames himself shows that he accepts his faults, accepts that he is not good; thus speaking of oneself with blame is in itself to be rejected. Self-praise is to be avoided as an incidental evil, since one cannot give praise without its being mostly blame.⁶ It may be praise on the surface of the words, but it is blame to him who seeks out their substance; for words are made to reveal what is not known; hence one who praises himself reveals that he does not believe himself to be esteemed, which is something that does not happen unless he has a bad conscience, which he discloses by praising himself; and by disclosing it, he blames himself.

Moreover, self-praise and self-blame must be avoided for the same reason, just like bearing false witness; for there is no one who can take measure of

⁶ *Self-praise is to be avoided* See the Vita Nuova, Ch. XXVIII, for a similar example of this literary topos.

himself in a manner that is true and just, so much are we deceived by our self-love. It happens that in judging the self everyone uses the measures of a dishonest merchant who buys using one measure and sells using another; for everyone measures his bad deeds with a long measure and his good deeds with a short one so that the number, size, and weight of the good deeds appear to him greater than if he had assessed them with a true measure, and less in the case of the bad deeds. Thus in speaking of himself with praise or its contrary, he either speaks falsely with respect to the circumstance he is talking about, or he speaks falsely with respect to its importance, which comprises both falsehoods. Furthermore, because silence signifies agreement, he who praises or blames someone to his face acts discourteously, since the person so judged can neither agree nor disagree without falling into the error of praising or blaming himself—except in those instances in which correction is deserved, which cannot be accomplished without reproving the error meant to be corrected, and in those instances in which honor and praise are deserved, which cannot be accomplished without some mention of virtuous deeds and honors virtuously acquired.

To return to the main topic, however, I say that (as touched on above) speaking about oneself is allowed in cases of necessity, and among the several cases of necessity two are very evident. One is when great infamy or danger cannot be avoided except by talking about oneself; then it is permissible, for the reason that to take the less evil of two paths is almost the same as taking a good one. This necessity moved Boethius to speak of himself, so that under the pretext of consolation he might defend himself against the perpetual infamy of his exile, by showing it to be unjust, since no other apologist came forward.⁷ The other arises when by speaking of oneself very great benefit comes to another by way of instruction; and this reason moved Augustine to speak of himself in his *Confessions*, because by the progress of his life, which proceeded from bad to good, good to better, and better to best, he gave us an example and instruction which could not be provided by any other testimony so true as this.⁸

Consequently, if each of these reasons may serve as my excuse, the bread made from my wheat is sufficiently cleansed of its first impurity. A fear of infamy moves me, and a desire to give instruction moves me, which in truth others are unable to give. I fear the infamy of having yielded myself to the great passion that anyone who reads the canzoni mentioned above must realize once ruled me. This infamy will altogether cease as I speak now about myself and show that my motivation was not passion but virtue. I intend also to show the true meaning of the canzoni, which no one can perceive unless I reveal it, because it is hidden beneath the figure of allegory. This will not only

⁷ *Boethius* The author (d. 524) of the *De consolazione philosophiae* (Consolation of Philosophy), one of the literary models for the *Convivio*. Dante locates him among the saved in the Sphere of the Sun, Par. X, 124-129.

⁸ *Augustine* The reference is to St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Book XIII. He is also one of the saved in the Sphere of the Sun; see Par. XII, 130.

bring true delight to the ear but as well useful instruction concerning both this mode of speaking and this mode of understanding the writings of others.

Chapter 3

Deserving of severe censure is that action which, while intended to remove some defect, itself introduces it, like the man who was sent to break up a quarrel, and before breaking it up began another. Now that my bread has been cleansed on the one side, it is necessary for me to cleanse it on the other to escape a censure of this kind, for my writing, which can almost be called a commentary, is intended to remove the defect of the canzoni mentioned above, and this may itself prove to be perhaps a little difficult in part. This difficulty is deliberate here so as to escape a greater defect, and is not due to a lack of knowledge. Ah, if only it had pleased the Maker of the Universe that the cause of my apology had never existed, for then neither would others have sinned against me, nor would I have suffered punishment unjustly—the punishment, I mean, of exile and poverty.

Since it was the pleasure of the citizens of the most beautiful and famous daughter of Rome, Florence, to cast me out of her sweet bosom—where I was born and bred up to the pinnacle of my life, and where, with her good will, I desire with all my heart to rest my weary mind and to complete the span of time that is given to me—I have traveled like a stranger, almost like a beggar, through virtually all the regions to which this tongue of ours extends, displaying against my will the wound of fortune for which the wounded one is often unjustly accustomed to be held accountable.⁹ Truly I have been a ship without sail or rudder, brought to different ports, inlets, and shores by the dry wind that painful poverty blows. And I have appeared before the eyes of many who perhaps because of some report had imagined me in another form. In their sight not only was my person held cheap, but each of my works was less valued, those already completed as much as those yet to come. The reason why this happens, not only to me but to everyone, I briefly wish to touch on here: first, because esteem inflates things with respect to the truth, and secondly, because presence diminishes things with respect to the truth.

A good reputation is principally engendered by good thoughts in the mind of a friend, and this is how it is first brought to birth; for the mind of an enemy, even though it receives the seed, does not conceive. That mind which first gives birth to it, both to make its gift more fair and for the love of the friend who receives it, does not confine itself within the limits of the truth, but oversteps them. When the mind oversteps them in order to embellish what it affirms, it speaks against conscience; when an error arising from love makes it overstep them, it does not speak against it. The second mind which receives what is said is content not only with the amplification supplied by the first but

⁹ *cast me out of her sweet bosom* Dante was exiled from Florence on 27 January 1302 and condemned to death on 19 March 1302. He was in Rome at the time of his exile, and he never returned to his native Florence.

seeks to embellish it by transmitting it further, as if it were of his own making—and so much so that through this act and through the error caused by the love generated in it, it increases a reputation beyond what it originally was, whether, like the first mind, in accord or in discord with conscience. The third mind that receives it does the same, and the fourth, and hence it is inflated infinitely. And so, by reversing the above-mentioned motives to the contrary, one can perceive the reason for infamy, which increases in the same manner. Thus Vergil says in the fourth book of the *Aeneid* that “Fame thrives on movement and acquires greatness by going about.”¹⁰ Anyone who wishes, then, can clearly see that the image generated by fame alone is always greater, no matter what kind it is, than the thing imagined is in its true state.

Chapter 4

Having presented just now the reason why fame inflates good and evil beyond their true dimension, it remains in this chapter to present those reasons which reveal why presence on the contrary diminishes them; and after presenting them, we will quickly come to the main topic, that is, the excuse mentioned above.

I say then that there are three reasons why a man’s presence makes him less worthy than he really is. The first of these is immaturity, and I do not mean of age but of mind; the second is envy—and these two reside in the one who judges; the third is human imperfection—and this resides in the person judged.

The first can be briefly discussed as follows. The majority of men live according to the senses and not according to reason, like children; as such they do not understand things except simply by their exterior, and they do not perceive the goodness of things, which is ordained to a proper end, because they keep shut the eyes of reason which penetrate to a vision of it. Therefore they quickly see all that they are able to, and judge according to their sight. And since they form some opinion regarding another man’s fame by hearsay, with which, in the person’s presence, their imperfect judgment clashes, which judges not by reason but only by the senses, they regard as a lie what they have previously heard and disparage the person they have previously esteemed. Hence with these, who comprise, alas, almost all of humanity, a man’s presence diminishes the one and the other quality. Such people as these are soon charmed and soon sated, are often glad and often sad with brief delights and sorrows, soon become friends and soon enemies; they do everything like children, without the use of reason.

The second is seen by these reasons: that in vicious people equality causes envy, and envy causes bad judgment, because it does not allow the reason to argue on behalf of whatever is envied, and the faculty of judgment is then like

¹⁰ “Fame thrives on movement . . .” *Aeneid* IV, 175.

a judge that hears only one side. Hence when such people as these see a famous person, they become immediately envious, because they see limbs and powers very much like their own, and they fear, because of the excellence of that person, that they will be less esteemed. These people who are moved by passion not only judge wrongly, but by defaming cause others to judge wrongly too; consequently with them presence diminishes the good and evil in each person presented to them; and I say “evil” because many, taking delight in evil deeds, are envious of evil-doers.

The third reason is human imperfection, which attaches to him who is judged and does not obtain without some familiarity and intimacy with him. To make this clear, we must observe that man is blemished in many ways, for as Augustine says, “no one is without blemish.” Sometimes a person is blemished by a passion which occasionally he cannot resist; sometimes he is blemished by some physical deformity; sometimes he is blemished by some stroke of misfortune; and sometimes he is blemished by the infamy of his parents or someone close to him. Fame does not bear these things with itself, whereas presence does, revealing them through intimacy. These blemishes cast a shadow on the brightness of his goodness, so that they make it seem less bright and less worthy. This is the reason why every prophet is less honored in his own country; this is the reason why a good man should vouchsafe his presence to few and his intimacy to still fewer, so that his name may be known, but not disparaged. This third cause may obtain for evil as well as for good, if each term in the argument is turned to its opposite. Thus it is clearly seen that because of imperfection, from which no man is free, presence diminishes the good and the evil in everyone more than truth warrants.

Therefore since, as has been said above, I have presented

myself to virtually everyone in Italy, by which I have perhaps made myself more base than truth warrants, not only to those to whom my fame had already spread but also to others, whereby my works as well as my person are without doubt made light of, it is fitting that I should add, with a loftier style, a little weight to the present work, so that it may seem to take on an air of greater authority. This should suffice to excuse the difficulty of my commentary.

Chapter 5

Now that this bread is cleansed of its accidental impurities, it remains to apologize for one pertaining to substance, that is, for its being in the vernacular and not in Latin; which is to say, by way of metaphor, for its being made of oats and not of wheat.¹¹ This impurity is excused in few words for

¹¹ *accidental impurities* “Accident” and “substance” are formal terms of Scholastic philosophy, applied to the ruling metaphor of the bread (commentary). Substance is the thing itself, accident a condition in a substance. The

three reasons which have moved me to choose this language rather than the other: the first arises from precaution against creating an inappropriate relationship; the next from zealous generosity; the third from natural love of one's native tongue. And to counter an objection that might be made for the above-mentioned reason, I intend to discuss these points on their own basis in the following order.

What most adorns and commends human actions and what most directly leads them to a good end is the habit of those dispositions which are directed to an intended end, as, for example, boldness of mind and strength of body are directed to the end of chivalry. So anyone who is placed into the service of another must have those dispositions which are directed to that end, such as submission, understanding, and obedience, without which a man is not equipped to serve well. For if he is not submissive in all of his functions, he will always perform his service with effort and strain and will rarely continue in it; and if he is not understanding of the needs of his master and is not obedient to him, he will never serve except according to his own judgment and his own will, which is more the service of a friend than that of a servant. Hence, to avoid this inappropriate relationship, it is fitting that this commentary, which is made to play the part of a servant to the canzoni placed below, be subject to them in all of its functions and be understanding of the needs of its master and obedient to him.

All of these dispositions would be lacking if it had been in Latin and not in the vernacular, since the canzoni are in the vernacular. For in the first place it would not have been subject but sovereign, because of its nobility, its virtue, and its beauty. Because of its nobility, for Latin is eternal and incorruptible, while the vernacular is unstable and corruptible. Thus in the ancient Latin comedies and tragedies, which cannot undergo change, we find the same Latin as we have today; this is not the case with the vernacular, which, being fashioned according to one's own preference, undergoes change. Thus in the cities of Italy, if we care to take a close look, we find that within the last fifty years many words have become obsolete, been born, and been altered; if a short period of time changes language, much more does a greater period change it. Thus I say that if those who departed this life a thousand years ago were to return to their cities, they would believe that they were occupied by foreigners, because the language would be at variance with their own. This will be more fully discussed elsewhere in a book I intend to write, God willing, on *Eloquence in the Vernacular*.¹²

"accidental" impurities are not inherent in the essence of the bread itself. The choice of Italian as opposed to Latin as the language of the commentaries is, however, a matter of substance and not of accident. The distinction between "oats" and "wheat" expresses the qualities of the Italian and Latin languages. "Oats" refers to all cereals except "wheat."

¹² *Eloquence in the Vernacular* Since Dante was at work on the *De vulgari eloquentia* in February of 1305, it is virtually certain that the *Convivio* was begun in the year 1304.

Moreover, Latin would not have been subject but sovereign because of its virtue. Everything is virtuous in its nature which fulfills the purpose toward which it is directed; and the better it does this, the more virtuous it is. Therefore we call a man virtuous who lives a contemplative or an active life, which he is by nature constituted to do; we call a horse virtuous which runs fast and far, which it is constituted to do; we call a sword virtuous which cuts through hard objects easily, which it is constituted to do. Thus language, which is constituted to express human thought, is virtuous when it does this, and the more completely it does this, the more virtuous it is; therefore, since Latin expresses many things conceived in the mind which the vernacular cannot, as those who speak both languages know, its virtue is greater than that of the vernacular.

Furthermore, Latin would not have been the subject but the sovereign because of its beauty. One calls a thing beautiful when its parts correspond properly, because pleasure results from their harmony. Thus a man appears beautiful when his limbs correspond properly; and we call a song beautiful when its voices are harmonized according to the rules of the art. Therefore that language is the most beautiful in which the words correspond most properly; and they correspond more properly in Latin than in the vernacular, because the vernacular follows custom, while Latin follows art;¹³ consequently it is granted that Latin is the more beautiful, the more virtuous, and the more noble. And this concludes my main point: that is, that Latin would not have been the subject of the canzoni but their sovereign.

Chapter 6

Having shown how the present commentary would not have been subject to the vernacular canzoni if it had been in Latin, it remains to show how it would not have understood them nor have been obedient to them; and then we will reach the conclusion that to avoid creating an inappropriate relationship it was necessary to speak in the vernacular. I say that Latin would not have been an understanding servant to its vernacular master for the following reason. The servant's understanding requires, above all, his understanding two things perfectly. One is the nature of his master. Now there are masters of so asinine a nature that they order the opposite of what they desire, and others who without uttering a word expect to be understood, and others who do not want a servant to set about doing what is necessary unless they order it. Why there are these differences in men I do not intend to explain at present (for this would make the digression much too long), except insofar as to say that in general such men whom reason so little benefits are all but animals. Therefore if the servant does not understand his master's nature, it is evident that he cannot serve him perfectly. The other point is that the servant must understand the friends of his master, for otherwise he could not honor or serve them, and consequently he would not serve his master perfectly; for

¹³ while Latin follows art Latin follows, that is, the rules of grammar and rhetoric.

friends are like the parts of a whole, since their whole consists of unity in willing and in not willing.

Neither would the Latin commentary have understood these things, which the vernacular itself does. That Latin does not understand the vernacular and its friends is proved as follows. He who knows a thing in general does not know it perfectly, just as anyone who recognizes an animal from a distance does not recognize it perfectly because he does not know whether it is a dog, a wolf, or a goat. Latin understands the vernacular in general, but not in particular, for if it understood it in particular it would understand all the vernaculars, because there is no reason why it should understand one better than another. So any man having perfect knowledge of Latin would have the habit of understanding the vernacular in particular. But this is not the case, for a person having perfect knowledge of Latin does not distinguish, if he is from Italy, the English vernacular from the German; nor if a German, the Italian vernacular from the Provençal. Thus it is evident that Latin does not understand the vernacular.

Moreover, it does not understand its friends, since it is impossible to know a person's friends without first knowing the person; therefore if Latin does not know the vernacular, as proved above, it is impossible for it to know its friends. Moreover, without intimacy and familiarity it is impossible to know people, and Latin does not have an affiliation with as many people in any language as does the vernacular of that language, to which all are friends; consequently it cannot know the friends of the vernacular. It is not a contradiction to say, as one might, that Latin all the same does have an association with certain friends of the vernacular; for, it is not therefore familiar with all of them, and so does not understand its friends perfectly, since perfect and not defective knowledge is required.

Chapter 7

Having proved that a Latin commentary would not have been an understanding servant, I will tell why it would not have been obedient. He is obedient who has that good disposition which is called obedience. True obedience should have three things, without which it cannot exist: it should be sweet and not bitter, entirely under command and not self-willed, and within measure and not beyond measure. These three things a Latin commentary could not possibly have possessed, and therefore it would have been impossible for it to be obedient. That this would have been impossible for Latin, as has been said, is made clear by the following reasoning: everything that proceeds by inverse order is disagreeable, and consequently is bitter and not sweet, as, for example, sleeping during the day and lying awake at night, or going backwards and not forwards. For the subject to command

the sovereign is to proceed by inverse order (for the right order is for the sovereign to command the servant); so it is bitter and not sweet. And since it is impossible to obey a bitter command with sweetness, it is impossible for the sovereign's obedience to be sweet when a subject commands. Therefore, if Latin is the sovereign of the vernacular, as has been shown above by many reasons, and the canzoni which play the role of commander are in the vernacular, it is impossible for its obedience to be sweet.

Moreover, obedience is entirely under command and in no way self-willed when the person who obeys would not have acted on his own initiative without a command, either entirely or in part. Therefore if I were commanded to wear two robes, and without being commanded should put on but one, I would say that my obedience is not entirely the result of a command but in part self-willed. Such would have been the obedience of the Latin commentary, and consequently it would not have been entirely the result of a command. That such would have been the case is clear from this: that without having been commanded by this master, Latin would have explained many aspects of his meaning—and it does explain them, as he who carefully examines writings written in Latin knows—which the vernacular in no way does.

Moreover, obedience is within measure and not beyond measure when it goes to the limit of the command, and not beyond it, just as individual nature is obedient to universal nature when it gives a man thirty-two teeth, neither more nor less, and when it gives the hand five fingers, neither more nor less; and man is obedient to justice when he makes a sinner pay his debt to society, neither more nor less than justice demands. Now Latin would not have done this, but would have sinned not only through deficiency, and not only through excess, but through both; and so its obedience would not have been within measure, but beyond measure, and consequently it would not have been obedient. That Latin would not have fulfilled the command of its master and that it would have exceeded it can easily be shown. This master, that is, these canzoni to which this commentary is constituted as servant, command and desire that their meaning be explained to all who can comprehend it, so that when their words are heard they will be understood. And no one doubts, were they to make their command heard, that this would be their command. Latin would not have explained them except to the learned, for no one else would have understood it. Therefore, since among those who desire to understand them the unlearned are far more numerous than the learned, it follows that Latin would not have fulfilled their command as well as the vernacular, which is understood by the learned and the unlearned alike.

Moreover, Latin would have explained them to people of other languages, such as the Germans and the English and others, and here it would have exceeded their command; for it would have been against their will (broadly speaking, I say) for their meaning to have been explained where they could

not convey it together with their beauty. Therefore everyone should know that nothing harmonized according to the rules of poetry can be translated from its native tongue into another without destroying all its sweetness and harmony. This is the reason why Homer has not been translated from Greek into Latin as have been other writings we have of theirs. And this is the reason why the verses of the Psalter lack the sweetness of music and harmony; for they were translated from Hebrew into Greek and from Greek into Latin, and in the first translation all their sweetness was lost. Thus I have fully dealt with what was promised at the beginning of the chapter immediately preceding this one.

Chapter 8

Now that it has been shown by sufficient reasons that to avoid an inappropriate relationship a commentary in the vernacular and not in Latin would be necessary for unfolding and explaining the canzoni mentioned above, I intend also to show how complete generosity made me choose the former and forgo the latter. Now complete generosity may be observed in three things which are a consequence of using the vernacular and which would not have been a consequence of using Latin. The first is giving to many; the second is giving useful things; the third is giving a gift without its being asked.

It is good to give to and to help one, but it is complete goodness to give to and to help many in that it resembles the beneficence of God, who is the most universal benefactor. Moreover, to give to many without giving to one is impossible, since the one is included in the many; however, it is quite possible to give to one without giving to many. Therefore he who helps many does the one good and the other as well; he who helps one does only the one good; and hence we see that lawmakers keep their eyes fixed chiefly on the common good when making laws. Moreover, to give things that are not useful to the recipient is also good, in that he who gives knows at least that he is a friend; but it is not perfectly good, and so it is not complete, as, for example, if a knight were to give a shield to a doctor, or a doctor were to give a knight a copy of Hippocrates' *Aphorisms* or Galen's *Art*. Therefore the wise say that the face of a gift must resemble that of the recipient, that is to say, it should be appropriate and useful to him; and in this the generosity of him who is discerning in his gifts is called complete.¹⁴ But since a discussion of ethics usually engenders a desire to ascertain their origin, I intend in this chapter briefly to point out four reasons why a gift, in order for it to manifest complete generosity, should be useful to the person who receives it.

First, because virtue must be cheerful, and not sad in any of its acts; therefore, if the gift is not cheerful in the giving and in the receiving, there is in it neither perfect nor complete virtue. This cheerfulness can be vouchsafed by nothing

¹⁴ the wise say See, for example, Seneca, *De beneficiis* II, 1; II, 17; IV, 9.

but usefulness which abides in the giver through giving and which comes to the recipient through receiving. The giver, therefore, must have the foresight to act so that on his side there remains the usefulness of integrity which surpasses every usefulness, and so that the usefulness of using the thing given passes to the recipient; in this way both will be cheerful, and consequently generosity will be the more complete.

Second, because virtue must always move things toward the better; for, as it would be a blameworthy act to turn a fine sword into a spade or a beautiful lute into a beautiful goblet, so it is blameworthy to move a thing from a place where it is useful and convey it to a place where it will be less useful. And since it is blameworthy to work in vain, it is blameworthy not only to put a thing in a place where it is less useful but even in a place where it is equally useful. Therefore, for a change in things to be praiseworthy, it must always be for the better, because it should be praiseworthy in the highest degree, and it cannot do this in a gift unless the gift becomes more precious through its transfer; and it cannot become more precious unless it is more useful to the recipient than to the giver. From this we may conclude that the gift, if it is to manifest complete generosity, must be useful to the person who receives it.

Third, because the exercise of virtue in itself should be to acquire friends, since our life has such a need, and the end of virtue is to make ourselves content. Therefore, for a gift to make a friend of the recipient, it must be useful to him, because usefulness stamps the image of the gift in his memory—which is the nourishment of friendship—and much more strongly the greater it is. Thus Martin is used to saying, “The gift that John gave me will never fade from my mind.”¹⁵ So that, for the gift to have its virtue, which is generosity, and for it to be complete, it must be useful to the person receiving it.

Finally, virtue must be free in its action and not compelled. Action is free when a person goes willingly in some direction, as is evident from his keeping his face turned in that direction; action is compelled when a man acts against his will, as is shown by his not looking in the direction in which he is going. Now a gift looks in such a direction when it is directed to the needs of the recipient. Since it cannot be so directed if it is not useful, it is necessary that virtue, in order for it to move with free action, accompany the gift in the direction in which it goes, which is to the recipient; consequently the gift must be useful to the recipient in order for there to be complete generosity in it.

The third trait in which complete generosity can be observed is giving without being asked, because a thing asked for is on one side a matter of commerce, not virtue, since the recipient buys even though the giver does not sell. This is why Seneca says that “nothing is so dearly bought as that which is paid for

¹⁵ *Thus Martin is used to saying* Martin and John are conventional names, typical of the Scholastic practice (compare Thomas Aquinas, S.T. I, 119, 1r.

with prayers.”¹⁶ In order therefore that there may be complete generosity in the gift and that it be manifest in it, it must be free from every act of commerce: the gift must be unasked. Why what is prayed for costs so much I do not intend to discuss here, because it will be discussed sufficiently in the last book of this work.

Chapter 9

From all three of the above-mentioned conditions, all of which must be met in order for complete generosity to be found in a benefit, the Latin commentary was remote, whereas the vernacular is close to them, which can be plainly demonstrated as follows. Latin would not have served many, for, if we call to mind what was said above, the learned to whom the Italian language is foreign could not have availed themselves of this service; and regarding those who are native to this language, if we wish to consider who they are, we shall find that out of a thousand not one would have been served in a reasonable manner, because they would not have received it, so prone are they to avarice that it deprives them of all nobility of mind, a virtue that desires this food above all. To their shame I say that they should not be called learned, because they do not acquire learning for its own use but only insofar as through it they may gain money or honor; just as we should not call a lute-player someone who keeps a lute in his house for the purpose of renting it out, as opposed to playing on it.

Returning to the main proposition, I say that it may clearly be seen that Latin would have conferred its benefits on few while the vernacular will be of service to many. For goodness of mind, which this service attends to, is found in those who because of the world's wicked neglect of good have left literature to those who have changed it from a lady into a whore; and these noble persons comprise princes, barons, knights, and many other noble people, not only men but women, of which there are many in this language who know only the vernacular and are not learned.

Moreover, Latin would not have been the giver of a useful gift as will the vernacular, because nothing is useful except insofar as it is used. Nor does its goodness reside in potentiality, which is not a perfect state of being, just as in the case of gold, pearls, and other treasures that lie buried, and I speak only of what is buried, because what is in the hands of the miser lies in a place lower than the ground in which treasure is hidden. The true gift of this commentary lies in the meaning of the canzoni for which it is made, meaning which is intended above all to lead men to knowledge and virtue, as will be seen in the full course of their treatment. This meaning can be of use only to those in whom true nobility is sown, in the manner that will be described below in the fourth book; and almost all of these persons know only the vernacular, like the noble men and women referred to earlier in this chapter. No contradiction

¹⁶ *This is why Seneca says* De beneficiis II, 1.

arises even if there are some learned persons to be found among them; for, as my master Aristotle says in the first book of the *Ethics*, “one swallow does not make spring.” It is therefore evident that the vernacular will provide something useful and that Latin would not have provided it.

Moreover, the vernacular will give a gift unasked, which Latin would not have done, because it will give itself as a commentary, something that no one has ever asked for; and this cannot be said of Latin, which has already been asked for as a commentary and a gloss on many writings, as may readily be seen at the beginning of many of them. And so it is evident that complete generosity moved me to employ the vernacular rather than Latin.

Chapter 10

A full apology should be made for serving oaten and not wheaten bread at a banquet so noble in its meat and so distinguished in its guests, and the reason why a man departs from what has long been the practice of others, namely, the use of Latin in commentaries, should be evident. Therefore the reason needs to be made clear, for the end of new things is not certain, since that experience has not yet been had by means of which things long observed and long in use are measured both as to their progress and as to their end. This is why the Law was moved to command that a man should take great care in entering on a new path, saying that “in establishing new things, the reason that makes us depart from what has long been in use must be evident.”¹⁷

No one should be surprised, then, if the digression that I make in stating my apology proves lengthy, but since it is necessary let him bear its length patiently. In pursuing this further (since it has been shown how I was moved to employ the vernacular commentary and forsake Latin in order to avoid an inappropriate relationship and by reason of complete generosity), I say that the nature of my full apology requires me to show how I was moved to this act through natural love of my native tongue, which is the third and final reason that moved me to it. I say that natural love above all moves the lover to do three things: first, to magnify the loved object; second, to be jealous for it; next, to defend it, as everyone can observe happens continually. These three things made me adopt it, that is, our vernacular, which naturally and accidentally I love and have loved. I was moved in the first place to magnify it, and in what way I magnify it may be seen by the following argument.

Now things can be magnified, that is, made great, by many conditions of greatness, and nothing makes them so great as the greatness of their own goodness, which is the mother and preserver of all other kinds of greatness—for man can have no greatness greater than that of virtuous action, which is his own proper excellence, by which the greatness of true dignity, true honor, true power, true riches, true friends, and true and glorious fame are both

¹⁷ the Law The Corpus iuris, or Roman Law. The citation is from the Digest I, 4, 2.

acquired and preserved—and this greatness I give to this friend, since what it possesses of potential and latent goodness I make it express actively and openly through its own proper activity, which is to make manifest the meaning conceived.

I was moved in the second place by jealousy for it. Jealousy for a friend makes a man solicitous to provide for the distant future. Thinking, therefore, that the desire to understand these canzoni would have induced some unlearned person to have the Latin commentary translated into the vernacular, and fearing that the vernacular might have been set down by someone who would have made it seem offensive, as did the one who translated the *Ethics* from Latin—and that was Thaddeus the Hippocratist—I arranged to set it down, trusting in myself more than in another.¹⁸ I was moved to defend it from its numerous accusers who disparage it and commend the other vernaculars, especially the language of *oc*, calling that one more beautiful and better than this one, thereby departing from the truth.¹⁹ For by means of this commentary the great goodness of the vernacular of *sì* will be seen, because its virtue will be made evident, namely how it expresses the loftiest and the most unusual conceptions almost as aptly, fully, and gracefully as Latin, something that could not be expressed perfectly in verse, because of the accidental adornments that are tied to it, that is, rhyme and meter, just as the beauty of a woman cannot be perfectly expressed when the adornment of her preparation and apparel do more to make her admired than she does herself. Therefore, if anyone wishes to judge a woman justly, let him look at her when her natural beauty alone attends her, unaccompanied by any accidental adornment; so it will be with this commentary, in which the smoothness of the flow of its syllables, the appropriateness of its constructions, and the sweet discourses that it makes will be seen, which anyone upon careful consideration will find full of the sweetest and most exquisite beauty. But since the most effective way of revealing the defects and the malice of an accuser is to examine his intentions, I will tell, in order to confound those who attack the Italian language, why they are moved to do this, and I will now write a special chapter on this subject so that their infamy may be rendered even more conspicuous.

Chapter 11

To the perpetual disgrace and humiliation of those contemptible men of Italy who praise the vernacular of others and disparage their own, I say that their impulse arises from five detestable causes. The first is blindness in discernment; the second, disingenuous excusing; the third, desire for glory; the fourth, reasoning prompted by envy; the fifth and last, baseness of mind,

¹⁸ *Thaddeus the Hippocratist* A Florentine physician and author (1235-1295), known for his commentary to Hippocrates in addition to a translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

¹⁹ *language of oc* The words *oc* and *sì* signify "yes" in the Provençal and Italian vernacular languages, respectively.

that is, pusillanimity. Each of these faults has so great a following that few are those who are free from them.

Of the first we may reason as follows. Just as the sensitive part of the soul has eyes by which it apprehends the difference in things with respect to their external coloring, so the rational part has its own eye by which it apprehends the difference in things with respect to how they are directed to some end: and this is discernment. Also, just as he who is blind in the eyes of sense always follows others in judging what is good and what is evil, so he who is blind to the light of discernment always follows the popular cry in his judgment, whether true or false. And so whenever the one who cries is blind, he and the other who leans upon him, being likewise blind, must come to a bad end. For this reason it is written that “if the blind lead the blind, so shall they both fall into the ditch.”²⁰

This popular cry has long been turned against our vernacular, for reasons which will be discussed below after the present one. And the blind mentioned above, who are almost infinite in number, with their hands placed on the shoulders of these liars, have fallen into the ditch of false opinion from which they do not know how to escape. The common people especially are bereft of the habit of this discerning light because, being occupied from the beginning of their lives with some kind of trade, they direct their minds to it by force of necessity, so that they are mindful of nothing else. Since the habit of virtue, whether moral or intellectual, cannot be had of a sudden, but must be acquired through practice, and since they devote their practice to some craft and do not trouble themselves with perceiving other things, it is impossible for them to have discernment. As a result it often happens that they cry “long live their death” and “death to their life,” if someone but raises the cry. This is the most dangerous defect of their blindness. Hence Boethius deems popular glory to be vain because he sees that it lacks discernment.²¹ These people should be called sheep, not men, for if a sheep were to cast itself over a cliff a thousand feet high, all the others would follow after it; and if while crossing the road a sheep for any reason leaps, all the others leap, even though they see nothing to leap over. I have seen many jump into a well after one that jumped in, perhaps believing that they were jumping over a wall, even though the shepherd, weeping and shouting, tried to check them with his arms and body.

The second group against our vernacular arises out of disingenuous excusing. There are many who love to be considered masters rather than to be such, and to avoid the opposite, that is, not being so considered, they always lay the blame on the material furnished for their craft, or on their tools. For example, a bad smith blames the iron supplied to him, and the bad lute player blames

²⁰ “if the blind lead the blind . . .” Matthew 15:14.

²¹ Boethius deems popular glory to be vain De consolatione philosophiae III, 6, 5.

the lute, thinking to throw the fault of the bad knife or the bad music on the iron or the lute, and to remove it from himself. In the same way there are some, and not a few, who wish to be considered writers; and to excuse themselves from not writing or from writing badly, they accuse and blame their material, that is, their own vernacular, and praise another which they have not been required to work with. Whoever wishes to see in what way this iron is deserving of blame should look at the works which good craftsmen make with it and he will recognize the disingenuousness of those who think to excuse themselves by blaming it. Against men of this sort Tully cries out at the beginning of one of his books called *The Book on the End of Good*, because in his time they found fault with Roman Latin and praised the Greek language for reasons similar to those for which these men judge the Italian language vile and Provençal precious.²²

The third group against our vernacular arises out of empty desire for glory. There are many who think that they will be more admired by depicting things in some other language, and by praising it, than by depicting things in their own. Unquestionably the talent of learning a foreign language well is not undeserving of praise; but it is blameworthy to praise it beyond the truth in order to boast of such an acquisition.

The fourth group arises out of reasoning prompted by envy. As was said above, envy always exists where there is some kind of common ground. Among men sharing the same language there is the common ground of the vernacular; and because one cannot use it as another person does, envy springs up. The envious man then argues, not by blaming him who writes for not knowing how to write, but by blaming that which constitutes the material of his work, so that by disparaging the work on that account he may deprive the poet of honor and fame—just like someone who would blame the iron of the sword in order to find fault not with the iron but with the whole work of the craftsman.

The fifth and last group is moved by baseness of mind. The pretentious man always magnifies himself in his heart, and likewise the pusillanimous, conversely, always holds himself for less than he is. Because magnifying and minimizing are always relative to something by comparison with which the pretentious man deems himself great and the pusillanimous himself small, it happens that the pretentious man always deems others to be less than they are, and the pusillanimous always greater. And since man measures himself in the same way he measures his belongings, which are almost a part of himself, it happens that the pretentious man's belongings always seem to him better than they are and those of others worse; the pusillanimous always believes that his belongings are worth little and those of others worth much. Therefore many by means of such abasement disparage their own vernacular and praise that of others.

²² Tully The traditional name for Marcus Tullius Cicero. The reference is to *De finibus* I, 1.

All of these together make up the detestable wretches of Italy who despise this precious vernacular, which, if it is base in anything, is base only insofar as it issues from the meretricious lips of these adulterers under whose guidance go the blind of whom I made mention in treating the first cause.

Chapter 12

If flames of fire were seen issuing from the windows of a house, and someone asked if there were a fire within, and another answered in the affirmative, I would not be able to judge easily which of the two was more deserving of ridicule. No different would be the question and answer if someone asked me whether love for my native tongue resides in me and I replied in the affirmative, for the reasons set forth above. But nevertheless both to demonstrate that not simply love but the most perfect love for it resides in me, and to censure once again its adversaries by demonstrating this to anyone who will rightly understand it, I will tell how I became its friend and then how this friendship was strengthened. I say then, as Tully may be seen to write in *Friendship*, without disagreeing with the opinion of the Philosopher expressed in the eighth and ninth books of the *Ethics*, that nearness and goodness are by nature the causes that engender love; benefit, purpose, and familiarity are the causes that increase love.²³ All these causes are present to engender and strengthen the love which I bear for my vernacular, as I will briefly show.

A thing is nearest to the extent that of all things of its kind it is most closely related to another thing; thus of all men the son is nearest to the father; of all the arts medicine is nearest to the doctor, and music to musician, because they are more closely related to them than are other arts; of all countries the nearest is the one in which one lives, because it is most closely related to him. And so a man's vernacular is nearest to the extent that it is most closely related to him, for it is in his mind first and alone before any other; and not only is it related to him intrinsically but accidentally, since it is connected to those persons who are nearest to him, that is, his kin, his fellow citizens, and his own people. Such is one's own vernacular, which is not simply near but supremely near to everyone. Therefore, if nearness is the seed of friendship, as has been said above, it is clear that it has been among the causes of love that I bear for my language, which is nearer to me than the others. The cause mentioned above, namely that that is more closely related which first exists alone in all the mind, induced people to adopt the custom of making the firstborn sole heirs, since they are the closest, and, because the closest, the most loved.

Moreover, its goodness makes me its friend. Here it should be observed that every goodness proper to a thing is deserving of love in that thing, as in masculinity to have a full beard and in femininity to have the entire face free

²³ Tully Cicero, *De amicitia* V ff.

of hair, just as in the foxhound to have a keen scent, and in the greyhound to have great speed. The more it is proper to it, the more it is deserving of love; thus, although every virtue in man is deserving of love, that is most deserving of love in him which is most human, and that is justice, which resides in the rational or intellectual part, that is, in the will. This is so deserving of love that, as the Philosopher says in the fifth book of the *Ethics*, they who are its enemies, such as thieves and robbers, love it; and therefore we see that its opposite, namely injustice, is hated most of all, as, for example, treachery, ingratitude, falsehood, theft, rapine, deceit, and the like.²⁴ All of these are such inhuman sins that to exonerate himself from being disgraced by them it is granted through long custom that a person may speak of himself, as has been said above, and may declare himself faithful and loyal. Of this virtue I will speak more fully in the fourteenth book; and leaving it aside for now, I return to my topic.

It is therefore proved that there is a goodness which is most proper to a thing; it must now be perceived what is most loved and praised in it, and that will be this goodness. Now we see that in all things relating to speech the apt expression of thought is most loved and praised: therefore this is its prime goodness. Since this is found in our vernacular, as has been clearly shown above in another chapter, it is clear that this is among the causes of love which I bear for it, since goodness, as has been said, is the cause that engenders love.

Chapter 13

Having said how there exist in my native tongue these two characteristics which have made me its friend—that is, nearness to myself and goodness proper to it—I will tell how friendship, through benefits and harmony of purpose, and through a sense of benevolence born of long familiarity, is strengthened and increased. I say first that for myself I have received from it the gift of very great benefits. For we know that among all benefits the greatest is the one that is most precious to him who receives it; and nothing is so precious as the thing for the sake of which all other things are desired; and all other things are desired for the perfection of him who desires them. Therefore, since man has two perfections, one primary and one secondary (the first causes him to exist, the second causes him to be good), I have received, if my native tongue has been the cause of both the one and the other, very great benefit from it. And that it has been the cause of my being, and moreover of my being good—unless I should fall through fault of my own—may briefly be shown.

It is not impossible, according to the philosopher, as he says in the second book of the *Physics*, for a thing to have several efficient causes, although among them one is principal; thus the fire and the hammer are the efficient

²⁴ in the fifth book of the *Ethics* Dante misquotes the source for this passage, which is from Cicero, *De officiis* II, 2.

causes of the knife, although the smith is the principal one.²⁵ This vernacular of mine was what brought my parents together, for they conversed in it, just as it is the fire that prepares the iron for the smith who makes the knife; and so it is evident that it has contributed to my generation, and so was one cause of my being. Moreover, this vernacular of mine was what led me into the path of knowledge which is our ultimate perfection, since through it I entered upon Latin and through its agency Latin was taught to me, which then became my path to further progress. So it is evident that it has been a very great benefactor to me, and this I acknowledge.

Furthermore, it has had the same purpose as I myself, and this I can show as follows. Everything by nature pursues its own preservation; thus if the vernacular could by itself pursue anything, it would pursue that; and that would be to secure itself greater stability, and greater stability it could gain only by binding itself with meter and with rhyme. This has been precisely my purpose, as is so evident that it requires no proof. Consequently, its purpose and mine have been one and the same, so that through this harmony our friendship has been strengthened and increased. There has also been a sense of benevolence born of familiarity; for from the beginning of my life I have looked on it with benevolence and been intimate with it, and have used it in deliberating, explaining, and questioning. Consequently, if friendship increases through familiarity, as seems plain to the senses, it is evident that it has been greatly increased in me, since I have used it all my life. And so we see that all the causes that engender and increase friendship have joined together in this friendship, from which we must conclude that not simply love but most perfect love is what I ought to have, and do have, for it.

So turning our gaze backwards and gathering together the reasons already noted, we can see that this bread, with which the canzoni placed below must be eaten, is sufficiently cleansed of its impurities and of being oaten. Therefore it is time to think of serving the meat. This commentary shall be that bread made with barley by which thousands shall be satiated, and my baskets shall be full to overflowing with it.²⁶ This shall be a new light, a new sun which shall rise where the old sun shall set and which shall give light to those who lie in shadows and in darkness because the old sun no longer sheds its light upon them.²⁷

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²⁵ *second book of the Physics* See St. Thomas' Commentary to the second book of the Physics, lect. 5.

²⁶ *by which thousands shall be satiated* These lines echo John 6:5-13.

²⁷ *the new light* The metaphor refers not to the vernacular as opposed to Latin, but to the commentary in the vernacular as opposed to other works by other authors in the vernacular (Chiappelli).

Canzone One (“Voi che ’ntendendo il terzo ciel movete”)

You whose intellect the third sphere moves,
Now listen to the speech within my heart,
For I cannot speak to others, so strange it seems.
The heaven that moves according to your power
Draws me, O noble creatures that you are,
Into the state in which I find myself.
And hence these words about the life I live
Should properly be told, it seems, to you:
And so I pray that you will listen to me.
I shall recount the strangeness in my heart,
How here within my sad soul weeps,
And how against her speaks a spirit that comes
Upon the rays descending from your star.

The life of my grieving heart was once
A tender thought that frequently would find
Its way into the presence of your Lord,
Where it would see a lady in glorious light
Of whom it would speak to me so sweetly
That my soul would say: “I wish to go there.”
Now one appears who puts it into flight,
Who lords it over me with might so great
That then my heart so shakes it shows outside.
This one makes me behold a lady,
And says: “Let him who would see bliss
Gaze into the eyes of this lady,
Provided he fears not the sighs of anguish.”

The humble thought that used to speak to me
Of an angel who is crowned in heaven
Encounters now a foe who slays it.
The soul cries out, for this still grieves her,
And so she says: “Alas, how he is fled,
The compassionate one who once consoled me.”
And of my eyes this anguished one remarks:
“Unhappy hour when such a lady looked on them:
Why would they not believe my word of her?”

And I: `Now surely in her eyes must dwell
The one who slays the likes of me!’
But my perceiving this did not avail,
For still they gazed on him, whereby I’m slain.”

“You are not slain but only led astray,
Dear soul of ours who so laments,”
A gentle spirit of love replies to me,
“For this fair lady whose power you feel
Has changed your life so very much
That you are frightened, and become a coward!
See how compassionate she is, and humble,
How courteous and wise in her magnificence:
Resolve henceforth to call this one your lady.
Unless you err through self-deceit you’ll see
The beauty of such lofty miracles
That you will say: `Love, my true lord,
Behold your handmaid: Do as you please.’”

My song, I think they will be few indeed
Who’ll rightly understand your sense,
So difficult and complex is your speech.
So if by chance it comes to pass
That you should find yourself with some
Who do not grasp it well at all,
I pray you then, dear newborn song,
Take courage again and say to them:
“Consider at least how fair I am!”

Chapter 1

Now that by way of a preface my bread has been sufficiently prepared in the preceding book through my own assistance, time calls and requires my ship to leave port; thus, having set the sail of my reason to the breeze of my desire, I enter upon the open sea with the hope of a smooth voyage and a safe and praiseworthy port at the end of my feast. But so that this food of mine may be more profitable, I wish to show, before it appears, how the first course must be eaten.

As I stated in the first chapter, this exposition must be both literal and allegorical. To convey what this means, it is necessary to know that writings can be understood and ought to be expounded principally in four senses. The

first is called the literal, and this is the sense that does not go beyond the surface of the letter, as in the fables of the poets. The next is called the allegorical, and this is the one that is hidden beneath the cloak of these fables, and is a truth hidden beneath a beautiful fiction. Thus Ovid says that with his lyre Orpheus tamed wild beasts and made trees and rocks move toward him, which is to say that the wise man with the instrument of his voice makes cruel hearts grow tender and humble and moves to his will those who do not devote their lives to knowledge and art; and those who have no rational life whatsoever are almost like stones. Why this kind of concealment was devised by the wise will be shown in the penultimate book. Indeed the theologians take this sense otherwise than do the poets; but since it is my intention here to follow the method of the poets, I shall take the allegorical sense according to the usage of the poets.²⁸

The third sense is called moral, and this is the sense that teachers should intently seek to discover throughout the scriptures, for their own profit and that of their pupils; as, for example, in the Gospel we may discover that when Christ ascended the mountain to be transfigured, of the twelve Apostles he took with him but three, the moral meaning of which is that in matters of great secrecy we should have few companions.²⁹

The fourth sense is called anagogical, that is to say, beyond the senses; and this occurs when a scripture is expounded in a spiritual sense which, although it is true also in the literal sense, signifies by means of the things signified a part of the supernal things of eternal glory, as may be seen in the song of the Prophet which says that when the people of Israel went out of Egypt, Judea was made whole and free.³⁰ For although it is manifestly true according to the letter, that which is spiritually intended is no less true, namely, that when the soul departs from sin it is made whole and free in its power. In this kind of explication, the literal should always come first, as being the sense in whose meaning the others are enclosed, and without which it would be impossible and illogical to attend to the other senses, and especially the allegorical. It would be impossible because in everything that has an inside and an outside it is impossible to arrive at the inside without first arriving at the outside;

²⁸ *the usage of the poets* What Dante means in distinguishing between the allegory of the poets and the allegory of the theologians is not entirely clear and has given rise to endless speculation. The theologians insist on the veracity of all four levels of meaning, and conceived of the allegorical levels (the typological, tropological, and anagogical) to depend on a literal level which was historically true. In the allegory of the poets, as exemplified by the allusion to the myth of Orpheus, the literal level is a "bella menzogna," a beautiful fiction having no basis in historical reality. In the allegory of the theologians, moreover, the second level always refers to some aspect of Christ's historical being, of which he is the ideal type, which is not the case with the poets. The third and fourth levels are shared in common by both modes of allegory.

²⁹ *he took with him but three* The apostles Peter, James, and John (see Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:1-7, Luke 9:28-36).

³⁰ *when the people of Israel went out of Egypt* The reference is to Psalm 113, *In exitu Israel de Egypto*. Dante employs this same psalm in his Letter to Cangrande to illustrate the various levels of allegory, and the souls of the saved sing this psalm entering Purgatory.

consequently, since in what is written down the literal meaning is always the outside, it is impossible to arrive at the other senses, especially the allegorical, without first arriving at the literal.

Moreover, it would be impossible because in every natural or artificial thing it is impossible to proceed to the form unless the subject on which the form must be imposed is prepared first—just as it is impossible for a piece of jewelry to acquire its form if the material (that is, its subject) is not first arranged and prepared, or a chest to acquire its form if the material (that is, the wood) is not first arranged and prepared. Consequently, since the literal meaning is always the subject and material of the other senses, especially of the allegorical, it is impossible to come to an understanding of them before coming to an understanding of it. Moreover, it would be impossible because in every natural or artificial thing it is impossible to proceed unless the foundation is laid first, as in a house or in studying; consequently, since explication is the building up of knowledge, and the explication of the literal sense is the foundation of the others, especially of the allegorical, it is impossible to arrive at the other senses without first arriving at it.

Moreover, even supposing it were possible, it would be illogical, that is to say out of order, and would therefore be carried out with great labor and much confusion. Consequently as the Philosopher says in the first book of the *Physics*, nature wills that we proceed in due order in our learning, that is, by proceeding from that which we know better to that which we know not so well; I say that nature wills it since this way of learning is by nature innate in us.³¹ Therefore if the senses other than the literal are less understood (which they are, as is quite apparent), it would be illogical to proceed to explain them if the literal had not been explicated first. For these reasons, therefore, I shall on each occasion discuss first the literal meaning concerning each canzone, and afterwards I shall discuss its allegory (that is, the hidden truth), at times touching on the other senses, when opportune, as time and place deem proper.

Chapter 2

To begin, then, I say that after the passing of that blessed Beatrice who lives in heaven with the angels and on earth with my soul, the star of Venus had twice revolved in that circle of hers, which at different times of the year makes her appear in the evening or in the morning,³² when that gentle lady, of whom I

³¹ *the Philosopher* See St. Thomas' commentary to Phys. I, lect. 1.

³² *the star of Venus* . . . that circle of hers The planets were considered stars that wandered through the heavens, in distinction to the Fixed Stars which were immovable and always appeared in the same position in the sky at all times of the year. Venus is a moving "star," and the circle or orbit in which she moves in Dante's description is her epicycle, a circle whose center lies on the main orbit which circles the earth, according to the Ptolemaic system.

made mention at the end of the *New Life*, first appeared before my eyes, accompanied by Love, and took a place within my mind.³³

As I have recounted in the above-mentioned little book, it came to pass that I consented to be hers more because of her gentleness than through choice of my own; for she showed herself to be impassioned by so great a pity for my widowed life that the spirits of my eyes became most friendly toward her. And having accomplished this, they then so fashioned her within me that my pleasure was content to wed itself to that image. But because love is not born and does not grow and reach perfection in a moment but requires time and nourishment of thought, especially where there are opposing thoughts that impede it, it was necessary before this new love could become perfect that there be much strife between the thought that nourished it and the one that opposed it, which still held the citadel of my mind on behalf of that glorious Beatrice.³⁴ For the one was continually reinforced by the part of the memory in front, and the other by the part of the memory in back; and the support in front, being that which hindered me from turning my gaze in any way backward, increased with each day, which the other could not do; hence it seemed to me so wonderful and also so hard to endure that I could not bear it. And almost crying out aloud, to excuse myself for the change in which I seemed to show a lack of strength, I directed my voice to that quarter from which the victory of the new thought emerged, which was most powerful, like celestial virtue; and I began by saying *You whose intellect the third sphere moves*.³⁵

To apprehend the meaning of this canzone properly it is first necessary to know its parts, so that afterwards it will be easy to perceive its meaning. And so that there should be no need of placing these words in front of the expositions of the other canzoni, I say that the order which will be adopted in this book I intend to maintain also for the others.

I say then that the canzone before us is composed of three principal parts. The first is the first stanza of the canzone: here certain Intelligences, or Angels, as we are more accustomed to call them, which preside over the revolution of the heaven of Venus as its movers, are invited to listen to what I intend to say. The second comprises the three stanzas which follow the first: here is shown what was heard within, spiritually, between the different thoughts. The third is the fifth and last stanza: here one generally addresses the work itself, as if

³³ *when that gentle lady* The "gentle lady" at the window who consoled Dante during his period of grief after the loss of Beatrice (see the *Vita Nuova*, XXXIV). The planet Venus circles the earth in 584 days, so that the period referred to is at least three years and two months after the death of Beatrice, which occurred on 8 June 1290.

³⁴ *which still held the citadel of my mind* The struggle is between the old love for Beatrice and the new thought, his emergent love for Lady Philosophy, which assails it.

³⁵ *to excuse myself for the change* The text here is defective. Simonelli reads *per iscusare me de la [novi]tade*, Busnelli-Vandelli has *v[a]ri[e]tade*, and Chiappelli-Fenzi have recently returned to the reading *veritade* (truth). Simonelli notes that Dante uses the very word *novitade* in the canzone's first stanza, verse ten.

to encourage it. All three of these parts, as has been indicated above, will be explicated in order.

Chapter 3

In order to discern more clearly the literal sense of the first part according to the division made above (which is our present concern), we must know who and how many they are who are summoned to hear me, and what this third heaven is which I say they move; first I will speak of the heaven, and then I will speak of those whom I address. Although these things can be but little known with respect to their true reality, that portion of them that human reason sees brings more delight than the plenitude and the certainty of the things which we judge more fully, according to the opinion of the Philosopher in his book *On Animals*.

I say then that concerning the number and the position of the heavens many different opinions are held, although the truth has at last been discovered. Aristotle, merely following the longstanding ignorance of the astrologers, believed that there were only eight heavens, of which the outermost, containing the whole, was the one on which the stars are fixed, namely, the eighth sphere, and that beyond it there was no other. Moreover, he believed that the heaven of the Sun was contiguous to that of the Moon, that is to say, was second from us. Anyone who wishes can find this extremely erroneous opinion of his in the second book of his *Heaven and the World*, which is in the second of the books about Nature. However, he excuses himself for this in the twelfth book of the *Metaphysics*, where he plainly shows that he was only following the opinion of others where he was obliged to speak of astrology.

Later Ptolemy, perceiving that the eighth sphere moved with several movements (since he saw that its circle deviated from the true circle which turns everything from east to west) and constrained by the principles of philosophy, which necessitated the simplest *primum mobile*, supposed that another heaven existed beyond that of the Fixed Stars which made this revolution from east to west, a revolution that, I say, is completed in about twenty-four hours (that is, in twenty-three hours and fourteen out of fifteen parts of another, roughly speaking).³⁶

So that according to him and according to the received opinion in astrology and in philosophy since the time those movements were first perceived, there are nine moving heavens; and their position is manifest and determined by the art called optics, and by arithmetic and geometry, as is perceived by the senses and by reason, and by other demonstrations to the senses. Thus during an eclipse of the Sun it appears to our senses that the Moon lies below the Sun, and this is also the testimony of Aristotle who with his own eyes (as he

³⁶ *Later Ptolemy* The model of the universe devised by Ptolemy, who flourished in Egypt around 140 A.D., was officially adopted by the Church of Rome. It is, of course, the model for Dante's Paradiso.

tells us in the second book of *Heaven and the World*) saw the Moon, half-full, pass below Mars with her dark side forward, and Mars remain hidden till it reappeared from the other, bright side of the Moon, which was facing west.

The order of their position is as follows.³⁷ The first in number is the one in which the Moon resides; the second is the one in which Mercury resides; the third is the one in which Venus resides; the fourth is the one in which the Sun resides; the fifth is that of Mars; the sixth is that of Jupiter; the seventh is that of Saturn; the eighth is that of the Stars; the ninth is the one which is not perceptible to the senses except for the movement mentioned above, and which many call the Crystalline (that is to say, the diaphanous or completely transparent) Heaven. Moreover, outside all of these the Catholics place the Empyrean Heaven, which is to say, the “heaven of flame,” or “luminous heaven”; and they hold it to be motionless because it has in itself, with respect to each of its parts, that which its matter desires. This is the reason why the *Primum Mobile* has the swiftest movement; for because of the most fervent desire that each part of the ninth heaven has to be conjoined with every part of that divinest, tranquil heaven, to which it is contiguous, it revolves beneath it with such desire that its velocity is almost incomprehensible. Stillness and peace are the qualities of the place of that Supreme Deity which alone completely beholds itself. This is the place of the blessed spirits, according to the will of the Holy Church, which cannot lie. Aristotle, to anyone who rightly understands him, seems to hold the same opinion in the first book of *Heaven and the World*. This is the supreme edifice of the universe in which all the world is enclosed and beyond which there is nothing; it is not itself in space but was formed solely in the Primal Mind, which the Greeks call *Protonoe*.³⁸ This is that magnificence of which the Psalmist spoke when he says to God: “Your magnificence is exalted above the heavens.”³⁹ So to sum up what has been said, it is apparent that there are ten heavens, of which the heaven of Venus is the third, mention of which is made in that part of the canzone which I now intend to explicate.

We should know that each heaven beneath the Crystalline has two stationary poles, stationary with respect to itself; and in the ninth they are stationary and fixed, and immutable in every respect. Each one, the ninth as well as the rest, has a circle which may be called the equator of its own heaven, which in every part of its revolution is equally distant from both poles, as anyone can see from experience by spinning an apple or any other round object. In every heaven this circle has greater swiftness of movement than any other part of its heaven, as anyone can see upon careful consideration. And each part moves

³⁷ *the order of their position* The order of the spheres discussed here reappears in *Paradiso*. According to medieval astronomy, the planets were attached to great, transparent, empty shell-like spheres which carried them around the earth.

³⁸ *it is not itself in space* The Empyrean is beyond time and space; cf. *Par.* XXII, 64-67.

³⁹ “Your magnificence . . .” Psalm 8:1.

faster the nearer it is to the equator, and slower the farther away it is from it and closer to the pole, because its revolution is smaller and must of necessity be completed in the same period of time as the greater. I say, moreover, that the nearer a heaven is to the equatorial circle, the more noble it is in comparison to its poles, because it has more movement and more actuality and more life and more form, and it approaches more closely the heaven which is above it, and consequently has more virtue. Therefore the stars of the Starry Heaven are more full of virtue, compared with each other, the nearer they are to this circle.

On the outer edge of this circle, in the heaven of Venus, which we are treating at present, there is a small sphere which revolves by itself in that heaven, whose circle the astrologers call an epicycle.⁴⁰ And just as the great sphere revolves on two poles, so does this small one; and so does this small one have its equatorial circle, and so is it nobler the nearer it is to this; and upon the arc or outer edge of this circle is fixed that most brilliant star of Venus. Although we have said that according to strict truth there are ten heavens, this number does not comprise them all; for the one just mentioned, namely, the epicycle on which the star is fixed, is a heaven or sphere in and of itself, and is not of one essence with that which carries it, although it shares its nature more with it than with the others, and is spoken of as one heaven with it, and both are named after the star. How it is with the other heavens and the other stars is not to be dealt with at present; let suffice what has been said of the truth of the third heaven, with which I am at present concerned and about which all that is necessary for the present has been fully explained.

Chapter 4

Now that in the preceding chapter it has been shown what this third heaven is and how it is ordered in itself, it remains to show who they are who move it. And so we must first know that its movers are substances separate from matter, namely Intelligences, which the common people call Angels. Although the truth is now known, different people have held different opinions about these creatures as they have about the heavens. There were certain philosophers, among whom seems to be Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* (although in the first book on *Heaven* he appears incidentally to think otherwise), who believed that there were only as many of these beings as there were circular movements in the heavens, and no more, saying that any others would have existed in vain for eternity and have lacked all activity, which would be impossible since their being consists of their activity. There were others, like Plato, a most eminent man, who maintained

⁴⁰ *an epicycle* According to Ptolemaic cosmology, as Venus proceeds to circle the earth, it performs a second kind of circular movement, one whose center is situated on the circumference of its orbit around earth. This model was adopted to account for the fact the perceived motion of some planets did not accord with a simple revolution around the earth. Indeed, Venus and Mercury were observed to move in a retrograde motion at various times of the year. Dante will refer to the epicycle of Venus again at the beginning of *Paradiso VIII*.

that there are not only as many Intelligences as there are movements in heaven but also as many as there are species of things, just as there is one species for all men, another for all gold, another for all dimensions, and so on. They held that just as the Intelligences of the heavens brought them into being, each its own, so other Intelligences brought into being all other things and exemplars, each its own species; and Plato called them “ideas,” which is as much as to say universal forms and natures.

The pagans call them Gods and Goddesses, although they did not think of them in a philosophical sense as did Plato, and they venerated images of them and built great temples to them, as, for example, to Juno whom they called goddess of power, to Pallas or Minerva whom they called goddess of wisdom, to Vulcan whom they called god of fire, or to Ceres whom they called goddess of grain. These matters and opinions are made evident by the testimony of the poets, who depict in various places the custom of the pagans both in their sacrifices and in their creed, and they are also manifest in the many ancient names which survive as names or surnames of places and of ancient buildings, as anyone who wishes can easily discover.

Although the above-mentioned opinions were the product of human reason and no scant observation, they nevertheless did not perceive the truth because of both a deficiency of reason and a lack of instruction; for even by reason alone it can be perceived that the creatures mentioned above are of far greater number than are the effects which men can apprehend. One reason is this: no one, whether philosopher, pagan, Jew, Christian, or member of any sect, doubts that they are full of all blessedness, either all or the greater part of them, or that these blessed ones are in the most perfect state of being. Consequently, since human nature as it exists here has not only one blessedness but two, namely that of the civil life and that of the contemplative life, it would be illogical for us to find that these beings have the blessedness of the active (that is, of the civil) life, in governing the world, and not that of the contemplative life, which is more excellent and more divine. And since the one that has the blessedness of governing cannot have the other because their intellect is one and perpetual, there must be others outside this ministry who live by contemplation alone. Because this life is more divine, and the more divine a thing is the more it is like God, it is manifest that this life is more loved by God; and if it is more loved, the more has its blessedness been bountiful; and if it has been more bountiful, the more living beings has he given to it than to the other. We conclude from this that the number of these creatures is much greater than the effects reveal.

This does not run counter to what Aristotle seems to say in the tenth book of the *Ethics*, namely that the contemplative life alone befits separate substances.⁴¹ Although the contemplative life alone befits them, to the contemplative life of just a certain number of them falls the circular

⁴¹ *separate substances* Beings that have a soul but no body, namely the Angels.

movement of the heaven, which is the governing of the world, which is a kind of civil order conceived within the contemplation of its movers.

The other reason is that no effect is greater than its cause, because the cause cannot give what it does not have; consequently, since the divine intellect is the cause of everything, above all of the human intellect, it obtains that the human intellect does not transcend the divine, but is out of all proportion transcended by it. Therefore if for the above reasons and for many others we understand that God could have created almost innumerable spiritual creatures, it is manifest that he has made this greater number of them. Many other reasons can be adduced, but let these suffice for the present.

No one should be surprised if these and other reasons which we might have concerning this matter are not fully demonstrated; but nevertheless we should admire the excellence of these creatures—which transcends the eyes of the human mind, as the Philosopher says in the second book of the *Metaphysics*—and affirm their existence. For although we cannot perceive them with the senses (from which our knowledge originates), yet there shines in our intellect some light of their most lively existence insofar as we perceive the above-mentioned reasons and many others—just as one whose eyes are closed may affirm that the air is luminous because some slight radiance or ray of light, such as passes through the pupils of a bat, reaches him. For in just this way the eyes of our intellect are closed, as long as the soul is bound and imprisoned by the organs of our body.

Chapter 5

It has been said that because of a lack of instruction the ancients did not perceive the truth concerning spiritual creatures, even though the people of Israel were in part taught by their prophets, “through whom, by many manners of speech and in many ways, God had spoken to them,” as the Apostle says.⁴² But we have been taught about this by him who came from him, by him who made them, by him who preserves them, that is by the Emperor of the Universe, who is Christ, son of the sovereign God and son of the Virgin Mary, the true woman and daughter of Joachim and of Adam, the true man who was slain by us, by which he brought us to life. “He was the light that shines for us in the darkness,” as John the Evangelist says; and he told us the truth concerning those things which without him we could not know nor truly perceive.⁴³

The first thing and the first secret that he showed us was one of the above-mentioned creatures, and this was his great ambassador who came to Mary, a young maiden thirteen years of age, on behalf of the heavenly Healer. Our

⁴² as the Apostle says Paul, Hebrews 1:1.

⁴³ as John the Evangelist says John 1:5.

Saviour said with his own lips that the Father was able to give him many legions of angels; when he was told that the Father had ordered the Angels to minister unto and serve him, he did not deny it was true. Consequently it is evident to us that those creatures exist in extraordinary numbers, for his spouse and secretary the Holy Church—of whom Solomon says “Who is this that comes from the desert, laden with those things that give delight, leaning upon her friend?”—affirms, believes, and preaches that these most noble creatures are all but innumerable.⁴⁴ And she divides them into three hierarchies, which is to say three holy or divine principalities, each hierarchy having three orders, so that the Church holds and affirms that there are nine orders of spiritual creatures.⁴⁵ The first is that of the Angels, the second of the Archangels, the third of the Thrones; and these three orders make up the first hierarchy: not first in order of nobility, nor of creation (for the others are nobler and all were created at one time), but first in the order of our ascent to their degree of elevation. Then come the Dominations, next the Virtues, then the Principalities, and these make up the second hierarchy. Above these are the Powers and the Cherubim, and above all are the Seraphim, and these make up the third hierarchy.

The principal motive of their contemplation lies in the numerical position in which the hierarchies and in which the orders reside. For, since the Divine Majesty exists in three persons who have one substance, it is possible to contemplate them in a threefold manner. For it is possible to contemplate the supreme power of the Father, upon which the first hierarchy gazes, that is, the one which is first in nobility and which we count as last. It is also possible to contemplate the supreme wisdom of the Son; this the second hierarchy gazes upon. And it is possible to contemplate the supreme and most fervent love of the Holy Spirit; this the last hierarchy gazes upon, which being nearest to us bestows upon us the gifts which it receives. Since each person of the divine Trinity can be considered in a threefold manner, there are in each hierarchy three orders that contemplate in different ways. It is possible to consider the Father with regard to but him alone, and this contemplation the Seraphim perform, who perceive more of the First Cause than any other angelic nature. It is possible to consider the Father with respect to the relation he has to the Son, that is, how he is separated from him and how united with him; and this the Cherubim contemplate. It is further possible to consider the Father with respect to how the Holy Spirit proceeds from him, and how it is separated from him and how united with him; and this contemplation the Powers perform. In this same way it is possible to contemplate the Son and the Holy Spirit: consequently it is appropriate that there should be nine classes of

⁴⁴ *of whom Solomon says* Song of Songs 8:5.

⁴⁵ *nine orders of spiritual creatures* Dante follows the order of angels established by Gregory the Great in Book XXXII of his *Moralia*. In *Paradiso*, he adopts the order proposed by Dionysius the Areopagite (see *Par.* XXVIII, 98-135): Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominations, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels, Angels.

contemplative spirits, to gaze upon the light which can only be completely beheld by itself.

Here one word must not be left unsaid. I say that of all these orders a certain number were lost as soon as they were created, perhaps one-tenth in number, for the restoration of which part human nature was afterwards created.⁴⁶ The moving heavens, which are nine, declare the numbers, the orders, and the hierarchies, and the tenth proclaims the very unity and stability of God. Therefore the Psalmist says: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork."⁴⁷ Consequently it is reasonable to believe that the movers of the heaven of the Moon belong to the order of the Angels, and those of Mercury to that of the Archangels, and those of Venus to that of the Thrones; all of whom, receiving their nature from the love of the Holy Spirit, perform their operation, which is innate in them, namely, the movement of that heaven, filled with love, from which the form of the said heaven derives a potent ardor by which the souls here below are kindled to love, according to their disposition. Because the ancients recognized that this heaven was the cause of love here below, they said that Love was the son of Venus, as Vergil attests to in the first book of the *Aeneid*, where Venus says to Love: "My son, my power, son of the supreme father, who heeds not the darts of Typhoeus";⁴⁸ and Ovid, in the fifth book of the *Metamorphoses*, when he says that Venus said to Love: "My son, my arms, my power."⁴⁹

These Thrones, who are assigned to govern this heaven, are not great in number, though the philosophers and the astrologers have estimated it diversely according to how diversely they have estimated its rotations, although all are agreed on this point: that there are as many of them as there are movements made by the heaven. According to the best demonstration of the astrologers as we find it summarized in the book of the *Constellations of the Stars*, these movements are three: one according to which the star moves along its epicycle; a second according to which the epicycle moves together with the whole heaven in concert with that of the Sun; a third according to which that whole heaven moves, following the movement of the starry sphere, from west to east, one degree every one hundred years.⁵⁰ Thus for these three movements there are three movers. Moreover, the whole of this heaven moves and revolves with the epicycle from east to west once every day. Whether this movement derives from some intellect or from the pull of the Primum Mobile,

⁴⁶ *a certain number were lost* The fallen angels, who became devils and populated Hell. See Par. XXIX, 49 and Inf. VII, 11-12.

⁴⁷ "The heavens declare . . ." Psalm 19:1 (King James Version).

⁴⁸ "My son, my power, . . ." Aeneid I, 664.

⁴⁹ "My son, my arms, my power." Metamorphoses V, 365.

⁵⁰ *the book of the Constellations of the Stars* The text referred to is the Liber de aggregationibus scientiae Stellarum, by the ninth-century Arab astronomer Alfraganus.

only God knows, for it seems to me presumptuous to reach a conclusion on this point.

These movers by their intellect alone produce the revolution in that proper subject which each one moves. The most noble form of heaven, which has in itself the principle of this passive nature, revolves at the touch of the motive power which understands it; and by touch I mean contact, though not in a bodily sense, with the virtue which is directed toward it. These are the movers to whom my speech is addressed and about whom I make my inquiry.

Chapter 6

According to what was said above in the third chapter of this book, it was necessary, in order to understand properly the first part of the canzone before us, to speak of those heavens and of those who move them, and in the preceding three chapters this has been discussed. I say then to those whom I have shown to be the movers of the heaven of Venus: *You whose intellect—that is, whose intellect alone, as has been said above—the third sphere moves, Now listen to the speech*; and I do not say “listen” as though they should hear sound, for they have no sense perception, but I say “listen,” that is, with that hearing which they do have, which is understanding by the intellect.⁵¹ I say: Listen to the speech that is in my heart, that is, within me, for it has not yet appeared without. And we must know that throughout this entire canzone, according to the one sense and the other, the “heart” is to be taken as the secret place within and not as some special part of the soul or body.

After I have summoned them to listen to what I wish to say, I assign two reasons why it is fitting for me to speak to them. One is the strangeness of my condition, which not having been experienced by other men could not be so well understood by them as by those beings who understand their own effects in their operation; and this reason I touch on when I say *For I cannot speak to others, so strange it seems*. The other reason is that when a person receives a benefit or an injury, he must first relate it to the one who has brought it about, if he can, rather than to others; so that if it is a benefit, he who receives it shows himself grateful toward his benefactor; and if it is an injury, he should move the malefactor with gentle words to kind compassion. I touch on this reason when I say *The heaven that moves according to your power Draws me, O noble creatures that you are, into the state in which I find myself*—that is to say, your operation (that is, your revolution) is what has drawn me into my present condition. Consequently I conclude by stating that my speech must be to them, as has been said; and this I say with the words *And hence these words about the life I live Should properly be addressed to you*.

⁵¹ *for they have no sense perception* The angels have no body and therefore no power of sensation. Consequently they have no power nor need of language, as Dante explains in the *De vulgari eloquentia* I, 2.

After assigning these reasons, I beg them to listen to me when I say *And so I pray that you will listen to me*. But because in every kind of discourse the speaker should above all be intent on persuading (that is, on charming) his audience to listen—for this is the beginning of all other persuasions, according to the practice of the rhetoricians—and since the most potent persuasion for rendering the listener attentive is to promise to tell new and momentous things, I arrange to have this persuasion (that is, this charm) follow after the petition to be heard, announcing my intention to them, which is to speak of new things (that is, of the division that is in my soul) and of momentous things (that is, of the influence of their star). And this I say in the last words of this first part: *I shall recount the strangeness in my heart, How here within my sad soul weeps And how against her speaks a spirit that comes Upon the rays descending from your star*.

To convey the full meaning of these words, I say that this spirit is nothing other than a frequent thought to praise and adorn this new lady; and this soul is nothing other than another thought accompanied by an act of assent, which, opposing the former, praises and adorns the memory of that glorious Beatrice.⁵² But since the final verdict of my mind (that is, its act of assent) was still held fast by this thought which my memory reinforces, I call it *soul* and the other *spirit*; just as we are used to calling a “city” those who hold it and not those who are attacking it, even though both are citizens. I say, moreover, that this spirit comes upon the rays of the star, because it is necessary to know that the rays of each heaven are the paths along which their virtue descends upon these things here below. Since rays are nothing other than the shining which comes from the source of the light through the air to the thing illuminated, and there is no light except from the body of the star, because the rest of the heaven is diaphanous (that is, transparent), I do not say that this spirit (that is, this thought) comes from their heaven as a whole but from their star. This star, by reason of the nobility of those who move it, is of such great virtue that it has immense influence upon our souls and upon all things belonging to us, notwithstanding that its distance from us, when it is nearest to us, is 167 times the distance to the center of the earth (and more), which is 3250 miles. This is the literal exposition of the first part of the canzone.

Chapter 7

The literal meaning of the first part may be sufficiently understood by the above words; consequently the second must now be attended to, which reveals what I experienced of conflict within. And this part has a further division, for in the first, that is, in the first stanza, I relate the nature of these conflicting thoughts which were within me, according to their root; then I relate what each of these conflicting thoughts said: first what the side that lost said (that is, in the stanza which is the second of this part and the third of the

⁵² *adorn this new lady* The donna gentile who consoled Dante immediately after the death of Beatrice (see the Vita Nuova, XXXV-XXXIX).

canzone) and then what the new thought said (that is, in the stanza which is the third of this part and the fourth of the canzone).

To make clear then the meaning of the first division, we must observe that things should be named according to the highest nobility of their form, as, for example, man from reason and not from the senses, nor anything else that is less noble. Therefore when we say that man lives, what is meant to be understood is that he uses his reason, which is his special life and the actualizing of his most noble part. Therefore he who departs from his reason and uses merely his sensitive part lives not as a man but as a beast; as that most excellent Boethius says, "He lives the life of an ass."⁵³ Rightly so, I say, because thought is an act peculiar to reason, for beasts do not think, since they have no reason; and I say this not only of the lesser beasts, but of those that have the semblance of a man and the spirit of a sheep or some other detestable animal.

I say, then, that the life of my heart (that is, of my inner self) used to be a sweet thought ("sweet" is the same as "suasive," that is, charming, gentle, pleasing, and delightful), a thought which would often go to the feet of the Lord of those beings whom I address, namely God; this is to say that I, in thought, contemplated the kingdom of the blessed. And immediately I tell the final cause of my ascending there in thought when I say *Where it would see a lady in glorious light*, to make it understood that it is because I was certain, and still am, by reason of her gracious revelation, that she was in heaven. So to the extent of my ability I often went there in thought, as if I had been seized.

Then subsequently I tell the effect of this thought, which was so great that to make its sweetness understood it made me long for death, so as to go where it had gone, and this I say with the words *Of whom it would speak to me so sweetly That my soul would say: "I wish to go there."* This is the root of one of the conflicting thoughts within me. It should also be known that what ascended to behold that blessed one is here called "thought" and not "soul," because it was a thought especially conceived for that act. By soul is meant, as was said in the previous chapter, thought in general with assent.

Then when I say *Now one appears who puts it to flight*, I tell of the root of the other conflicting thought, saying that just as this thought, mentioned above, used to be my life, so another appears which makes that one cease to exist. I say "to flight," to show this one to be contrary, for by nature one contrary flees another, and the one that flees shows that it flees for lack of strength. And I say that this new thought that appears has the power to seize me and to conquer my entire soul, saying that it so rules that the heart (that is, my inner self) trembles, and my outer self shows it by a certain new semblance.

⁵³ "He lives the life of an ass." De consolazione philosophiae IV, 3, 11.

Subsequently I show the power of this new thought by its effect, saying that it makes me gaze upon a lady and addresses words of flattery to me (that is, speaks before the eyes of my intellectual affection in order the better to draw me over, promising me that the sight of her eyes is its salvation). And the better to convince the experienced soul of this, it says that the eyes of this lady are not to be looked upon by anyone who fears sighs of anguish. It is a fine rhetorical figure which makes a thing seem outwardly lacking in beauty, while inwardly making it truly beautiful. The new thought of love could not better induce my mind to give consent than by speaking so profoundly on the virtue of that lady's eyes.

Chapter 8

Now that it has been shown how and why love is born and what conflict embattled me, it is appropriate to disclose the meaning of that part in which conflicting thoughts contend within me.⁵⁴ I say that first it is appropriate to speak on the side of the soul (that is, of the old thought) and then of the other, for this reason: that what the speaker intends above all to stress must be reserved for the last, because what is said last remains most in the mind of the listener. Consequently since I intend to say and speak more about that which the work of those beings whom I address does than that which it undoes, it was reasonable first to mention and discuss the condition of the side which was being destroyed, and afterwards of that which was being brought to birth.

Here, however, arises a doubt which cannot be passed over without clarification. Someone might ask: "Since love is the effect of these Intelligences whom I address, and the former thought was love as much as the latter, why does their power destroy the one and give birth to the other, since it should rather preserve the former, for the reason that every cause loves its own effect, and, loving the one, preserves the other?" This question may easily be answered by saying that their effect is love, as has been said; and since they cannot preserve it except in those subjects which come under the influence of their revolution, they transfer it from that region which is outside of their power to that which is within it, that is to say, from the soul departed from this life to the soul which is still in it; just as human nature transfers its own preservation in the human form from father to son, because it cannot preserve its effect perpetually in the father. I say "effect" in that the soul conjoined with the body is its effect; for the soul, once it is departed, endures perpetually in a nature which is more than human. Thus the question is settled.

But since the immortality of the soul has been touched on here, I will make a digression and discuss this topic; for with this discussion it will be well to finish speaking of that blessed living Beatrice, of whom as a matter of purpose I do not intend to speak further in this work. I say that of all the follies the

⁵⁴ *the meaning of that part* The reference is to the third stanza.

most foolish, the basest, and the most pernicious is the belief that beyond this life there is no other; for, if we look through all the books of both the philosophers and the other sages who have written on this topic, they all agree in this: that there is some part of us which is immortal. Aristotle seems to confirm this above all in his book *On the Soul*; every Stoic seems above all to confirm this; Tully seems to confirm this, especially in his short book *On Old Age*; every poet who has spoken according to the pagan faith seems to confirm this; every creed confirms this—whether Jews, Saracens, Tartars, or whoever else lives according to any principle of reason. If all of these were in error, there would exist an impossibility too horrible even to relate. Everyone is certain that human nature is the most perfect of all natures here below. No one denies this, and Aristotle affirms it when he says in the twelfth book *On the Animals* that man is the most perfect of all the animals.⁵⁵ Consequently since many living creatures are entirely mortal, as for example the brute beasts, and all are, while they are alive, without this hope (that is, of another life), if our hope were vain, the defect in us would be greater than in any other animal, because many people have already lived who have given up this life for the other. So it would follow that the most perfect animal, namely man, was the most imperfect—which is impossible—and that that part which is his greatest perfection, namely reason, was the cause of the greatest defect in him—which seems a very strange thing to say.

Moreover, it would follow that nature had placed this hope within the human mind in opposition to itself, since it has been said that many have hastened the death of the body in order to live in the other life; and this is likewise impossible.

Moreover, we see continual proof of our immortality in the divinations of our dreams, which we could not have if there were not some immortal part within us, since the revealer, whether corporeal or incorporeal, must necessarily be immortal, if we give the matter careful thought—and I say “corporeal or incorporeal” because of the diversity of opinion which I find on this point; and that which is set in motion by or receives its form directly from an informing agent must stand in proportion to the informing agent, and between the mortal and the immortal there is no proportion.

Moreover, we are made certain of this by the most truthful teaching of Christ, which is the way, the truth, and the light: the way, because by it we proceed without impediment to the happiness of this immortality; the truth, because it is not subject to error; the light, because it illuminates us in the darkness of earthly ignorance. This teaching, I say, makes us certain above all other reasons, for he has given it to us who sees and measures our immortality, which we cannot see perfectly while our immortal part is mixed with our mortal part; but we see it perfectly by faith, and by reason we see it with a shadow of obscurity, which happens because of the mixture of the mortal with

⁵⁵ in the twelfth book In fact, it is Book XIII.

the immortal. This should be the strongest argument that there exist in us the one and the other; and I therefore believe, affirm, and am certain that I shall pass to another and better life after this one, where that lady lives in glory, of whom my soul was enamored when I was caught up in my struggle, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 9

Returning to the subject, I say that in the stanza which begins *The humble thought*, I intend to reveal what my soul discoursed within me—that is, the old thought in opposition to the new. First I briefly reveal the cause of her sorrowful words when I say *The humble thought that used to speak to me Of an angel who is crowned in heaven Encounters now a foe who slays it*. This is that special thought of which it is said above that it was once *The life of my grieving heart*. Then when I say *The soul cries out, for this still grieves her*, I show that my soul is still on its side and speaks with sadness; and I say that she speaks words while lamenting, almost as if she were amazed at the sudden transformation, saying: *Alas, how he is fled, The compassionate one who once consoled me*. Well may she say “consoled,” for in her great loss this thought, which ascended to heaven, had given her much consolation.

Then afterwards to excuse her I say that all my thought (that is, the soul), which I call this anguished one, turns and speaks against my eyes; and this is made manifest by the words *And of my eyes this anguished one remarks*. And I tell how she says three things about them and against them. The first is that she curses the hour when this lady looked on them. Here it should be known that although many things can enter the eye at the same time, nevertheless that which enters along a straight line into the center of the pupil is the only one that is truly seen and which stamps itself upon the imagination. This is because the nerve along which the visual spirit runs is pointed in this direction; and therefore one eye cannot really look into another eye without being seen by it; for just as the one which looks receives the form in the pupil along a straight line, so along that same line its own form proceeds into the one it looks at; and many times along the extension of this line is discharged the bow of him against whom all arms are light. Therefore when I say that *such a lady looked on them*, it is as much as to say that her eyes and mine looked upon one another.

The second thing she says is that she reprimands their disobedience, when she says *Why would they not believe my word of her?* Then she proceeds to the third, saying that she should not reproach herself, as though she had not foreseen, but should reproach them for not having obeyed, since she says that on occasion in speaking of this lady she would say: In her eyes would reside power over me, if she opened the pathway to it; and this she says with the words *And I: ‘Now surely in her eyes.’* And indeed we must believe that my soul knew that its own disposition was capable of receiving the actuality of

this lady, and therefore feared her; for the actuality of the agent is apprehended in the patient disposed toward it, as the Philosopher says in the second book of *On the Soul*.⁵⁶ And therefore if wax had the spirit of fear, it would more greatly fear encountering the rays of the sun than would a stone, because its disposition receives the rays with greater efficacy.

Finally the soul makes manifest in her discourse that the eyes' presumption endangered them, when she says *But my perceiving this did not avail, For still they gazed on him, whereby I'm slain*; she says *gazed on him*, on the one about whom she had earlier said *the one who slays the likes of me*. With this she ends her words, to which the new thought replies, as will be explained in the following chapter.

Chapter 10

We have thus explained the meaning of the part in which the soul speaks (that is, of the old thought which was destroyed). Subsequently the meaning of the part in which the new and opposing thought speaks must now be explained; and this part is completely contained in the stanza which begins *You are not slain*. To be correctly understood, this part must be divided in two: in the first part the opposing thought reprimands the soul for cowardice; and later in the second, beginning with the words *See how compassionate she is*, he declares what this reprimanded soul must do.

He says then, continuing from her last words: it is not true that you are slain; but the reason that you seem to be slain is the bewilderment into which you have fallen so abjectly for this lady who has appeared. Here it must be noted that, as Boethius says in his *Consolation*, “no sudden change in things can take place without some perturbation of the mind.”⁵⁷ This is the meaning of the reprimand made by this thought, which is called a “little spirit of love,” to indicate that my consent inclined towards him; and so we can understand this all the better and recognize his victory, since he already says “our soul,” thereby making himself intimate with her. Then as has been said, he declares what this reprimanded soul must do in order to come to him, and he says to her *See how compassionate she is, and humble*, for the appropriate remedy to fear, by which the soul seems possessed, consists of two things; and these, especially when joined, are what cause a person to have good hope, and above all compassion, which makes every other goodness shine with its light. This is why Vergil, in speaking of Aeneas, sings his greatest praise by calling him compassionate. And compassion is not what the common people think it is, namely, grieving over another's misfortune, which is one of its special effects that is called pity, and is an emotion. Compassion, however, is not an

⁵⁶ in the second book of *On the Soul* II, 2.

⁵⁷ “no sudden change . . .” *De consolatione philosophiae* II, 1, 3.

emotion, but rather a noble disposition of the mind, ready to receive love, pity, and other emotions arising out of charity.

Then he says: See also how she is *courteous and wise in her magnificence*. Here he speaks of three things which, among those that can be acquired by us, especially make a person pleasing. He says “wise”: now what is more beautiful in a woman than to be wise? He says “courteous”: nothing is more becoming in a woman than courtesy. And the wretches of the common herd should not be deceived as well by this word, thinking courtesy nothing other than liberality; for liberality is a special, not a general, kind of courtesy! Courtesy and dignity are one and the same; and because in the courts in times past virtue and fine manners were practiced, just as the contrary is now the case, this word was derived from courts and “courtesy” was as much as to say “the custom of the court.” If this word were derived from the courts of the present day, especially those of Italy, it would mean nothing but rudeness.

He says *in her magnificence*. Temporal greatness, which is meant here, is most of all becoming when accompanied by the two previously mentioned goodnesses, because it is the light which clearly reveals the good and its opposite in a person. How much wisdom and how much habit of virtue go unnoticed for lack of this light! How much stupidity and how many vices are discerned by possessing this light! It would be better for the wretched, stupid, foolish, and despicable nobles to dwell in low estate, for neither in this world nor in the afterlife would they be so disgraced. Indeed it is for them that Solomon says in Ecclesiastes: “There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun, namely riches preserved for their owner’s ruin.”⁵⁸ Then he subsequently compels her, my soul that is, to call this one her lady, promising her that she will be gladdened by this when she becomes aware of her adornments; and this he says with the words *Unless you err through self-deceit you’ll see*. Nor does he say anything else for the remainder of this stanza. This completes the literal meaning of all that I say in this canzone in addressing these celestial Intelligences.

Chapter 11

Finally, as the letter of this commentary stated above when it divided this canzone into its principal parts, I address my discourse directly to the canzone itself, and speak to it. In order that this may be more fully understood, I say that in every canzone this is generally called a “tornata,” because the poets who first made a practice of employing it did so in order that when the canzone had been sung they might return to it with a certain part of the melody.⁵⁹ But I have rarely employed it with that intention, and so that others might perceive that this is the case, rarely have I composed it

⁵⁸ Solomon says Ecclesiastes 5:13.

according to the metrical pattern of the canzone, with regard to the number of verses which are required for the melody; but I have employed it for the adornment of the canzone when there was a need to say something lying outside its meaning, as may be seen in this one and in the others. Therefore I say here that the goodness and the beauty of every discourse are separate and different from one another; for goodness lies in the meaning, and beauty in the adornment of the words; and both the one and the other give pleasure, although goodness is especially pleasing. And so, since the goodness of this canzone was difficult to perceive because of the diversity of persons in it who are presented as speakers, where many distinctions are required, and since its beauty was easy to perceive, it seemed to me necessary for the canzone that others consider its beauty more than its goodness. And this is what I say in this part.

But since it often happens that an admonition appears presumptuous, a rhetorician is accustomed in certain circumstances to speak to people indirectly, addressing his words not to the person for whom they are meant, but to another. This method is in fact adopted here, for the words are addressed to the canzone and their meaning to men. I say therefore, “My song, I think they will be few indeed,” that is to say quite few, “who understand you well.” And I give the reason, which is twofold. First, because your speech is complex—I say “complex” for the reason that has been mentioned; and second, because your speech is difficult—I say “difficult” with regard to the newness of the meaning. Now afterwards I admonish it and say: So if by chance it comes to pass that you should find yourself with some who appear perplexed by your argument, do not be dismayed, but say to them: Since you do not perceive my goodness, consider at least how fair I am. For I mean nothing by this, as has been said above, save: You men who cannot perceive the meaning of this canzone, do not therefore reject it; rather consider its beauty, which is great by virtue of its composition, which is the concern of the grammarians, by virtue of the order of its discourse, which is the concern of the rhetoricians, and by the virtue of the rhythm of its parts, which is the concern of the musicians. These things can be perceived within it as beautiful by anyone who looks closely.

This is the complete literal meaning of the first canzone, which, as has been indicated above, constitutes the first course.

Chapter 12

Now that the literal meaning has been sufficiently explained, we must proceed to the allegorical and true exposition. Therefore, beginning again from the beginning, I say that when I lost the first delight of my soul, of which mention is made above, I was pierced by such sorrow that no comfort availed

⁵⁹ *it is generally called a “tornata”* The tornata (return) is a Provençal term for the final short stanza of a poem.

me.⁶⁰ Nevertheless after some time my mind, which was endeavoring to heal itself, resolved (since neither my own consolation nor that of others availed) to resort to a method which a certain disconsolate individual had adopted to console himself; and I began to read that book of Boethius, not known to many, in which, while a prisoner and an exile, he had found consolation.⁶¹ And hearing further that Tully had written another book in which, while discussing Friendship, he had addressed words of consolation to Laelius, a man of the highest merit, upon the death of his friend Scipio, I set about reading it.⁶² Although it was difficult for me at first to penetrate their meaning, I finally penetrated it as deeply as my command of Latin and the small measure of my intellect enabled me to do, by which intellect I had perceived many things before, as in a dream, as may be seen in the *New Life*.

And just as it often happens that a man goes looking for silver and apart from his intention finds gold, which some hidden cause presents, perhaps not without divine ordinance, so I who sought to console myself found not only a remedy for my tears but also the words of authors, sciences, and books. Pondering these, I quickly determined that Philosophy, who was the lady of these authors, sciences, and books, was a great thing. I imagined her fashioned as a gentle lady, and I could not imagine her in any attitude except one of compassion, so that the part of my mind that perceives truth gazed on her so willingly that I could barely turn it away from her. I began to go where she was truly revealed, namely to the schools of the religious orders and to the disputations held by the philosophers, so that in a short period of time, perhaps some thirty months, I began to feel her sweetness so much that the love of her dispelled and destroyed every other thought.

Consequently, feeling myself raised from the thought of that first love to the virtue of this one, almost in amazement I opened my mouth to speak the words of the canzone before us, revealing my condition beneath the figure of other things, because no rhyme in any vernacular was worthy to treat openly of the lady of whom I was enamored; nor were the listeners so well prepared that they would have understood the fictive words so easily; nor would they have given credence to their true meaning, as they did to the fictive, because in fact they fully believed that I was disposed toward this love, and not, as they believed, to the other. I began therefore to say *You whose intellect the third sphere moves*. Since this lady, as has been said, was the daughter of God, queen of all things, most noble and beautiful Philosophy, we must consider who were these movers and this third heaven. And first I will speak of the heaven, according to the order already employed. Here it will not be

⁶⁰ *the first delight of my soul* This is Beatrice.

⁶¹ *that book of Boethius* The Consolation of Philosophy was composed by Boethius while in prison in Pavia in the year 523 A.D. Condemned to exile and death, he was executed in the following year. Dante must have seen in him an alter ego of his own being.

⁶² *while discussing Friendship* Cicero's Laelius sive de amicitia (On Friendship).

necessary to proceed by dividing and explaining the text word by word; for, by turning the fictive words from what they say into what they mean, the meaning will be sufficiently clear from the position already given.

Chapter 13

To see what is meant by the third heaven we must first see what I mean by the word “heaven” itself; and then it will be seen how and why it was necessary to speak of this third heaven. I say that by heaven I mean “science” and by heavens “the sciences,” because of three kinds of similarity that the heavens have above all with the sciences, and by the order and number in which they seem to agree, as will be seen in speaking of the word “third.”

The first kind of similarity consists of the revolution of the one and the other around something that is motionless with respect to it. For each moving heaven turns on its center, which is not moved by the motion of the heaven; and likewise each science moves around its subject, without moving it, because no science demonstrates its own subject, but presupposes it.

The second similarity is the illuminating power of the one and the other; for each heaven illuminates visible things, and likewise each science illuminates things that are intelligible.

The third similarity consists of bringing about perfection in those things disposed thereto. Concerning the bringing about of perfection, insofar as the first perfection is concerned, namely substantial generation, all philosophers agree that the heavens are the cause, although they explain it differently, some imputing it to the movers, as do Plato, Avicenna, and Algazel; some to the stars themselves, especially in the case of human souls, as do Socrates and also Plato and Dionysius the Academician; and some to celestial virtue which is in the natural heat of the seed, as do Aristotle and the other Peripatetics. Similarly, the sciences are the cause in us of bringing about the second perfection, by the possession of which we are able to contemplate the truth, which is our ultimate perfection, as the Philosopher says in the sixth book of the *Ethics* when he says that truth is the good of the intellect. Because of these as well as many other kinds of similarity, science may be called “heaven.”

Now it remains to be seen why “third” heaven is said. For this it is necessary to give consideration to a comparison that obtains between the order of the heavens and that of the sciences. As was stated above, then, the seven heavens nearest to us are those of the planets; next come two heavens above them, which are in motion, and one above them all, which is still. To the first seven correspond the seven sciences of the Trivium and the Quadrivium, namely Grammar, Dialectics, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Music, Geometry, and Astrology. To the eighth sphere, namely the Starry Heaven, corresponds natural science, which is called Physics, and the first science, which is called Metaphysics; to

the ninth sphere corresponds Moral Science; and to the still heaven corresponds Divine Science, which is called Theology. And the reason why this is so must be briefly considered.

I say that the heaven of the Moon resembles Grammar because it may be compared to it; for if the Moon is closely examined, two things will be seen peculiar to it which are not seen in the other stars: one is the shadow in it, which is nothing but the rarity of its substance in which the rays of the Sun cannot terminate and be reflected back as in its other parts; the other is the variation of its luminosity, which shines now on one side, now on the other, according as the Sun looks upon it.⁶³ These two properties Grammar possesses; for because of its infinitude the rays of reason are not terminated, especially in the particular of words; and it shines now on this side, now on that, insofar as certain words, certain declensions, and certain constructions are now in use which formerly were not, and many were formerly in use which will yet be in use again, as Horace says at the beginning of his *Poetics*, when he says: "Many words shall be born which have long since fallen out of use."⁶⁴

The heaven of Mercury may be compared to Dialectics because of two properties: for Mercury is the smallest star of heaven, because the magnitude of its diameter is not more than 232 miles, according to Alfraganus, who says it is 1/28th of the diameter of the earth, which is 6500 miles; the other property is that in its passage it is veiled by the rays of the sun more than any other star. These two properties are found in Dialectics, for Dialectics is less in substance than any other science, for it is entirely constituted by and contained within that text alone which is found in the Old Art and in the New; and its passage is veiled more than that of any science, in that it proceeds by a more sophisticated and polemical mode of argument than any other.

The heaven of Venus may be compared to Rhetoric because of two properties: one is the brightness of its aspect, which is sweeter to look upon than that of any other star; the other is its appearance now in the morning, now in the evening. And these two properties are found in Rhetoric: for Rhetoric is sweeter than all of the other sciences, since this is what it principally aims at; and it appears in the morning when the rhetorician speaks before the face of his hearer, and it appears in the evening (that is, behind) when the rhetorician speaks through writing, from a distance.

The heaven of the Sun may be compared to Arithmetic because of two properties: one is that all the other stars are informed by its light; the other is that the eye cannot look at it. And these two properties are found in Arithmetic: for by its light all sciences are illuminated, because all their

⁶³ *the rarity of its substance* The theory that the spots on the moon were the result of the varying density of lunar material from place to place, later rejected by Dante in Par. II, 61 ff. as false, derives from Averroes.

⁶⁴ *as Horace says* Ars poetica, 70-71.

subjects are considered under some numerical aspect, and in considering them we always proceed by number. For example, in Natural Science, the subject is a body in motion, which body in motion has in itself the principle of continuity, and this has in itself the principle of infinite number; and its foremost consideration is to consider the principles of natural things, which are three—namely matter, privation, and form—in which we perceive this numerical aspect. Number exists not only in all of them together, but also, upon careful reflection, in each one individually; for this reason Pythagoras, as Aristotle says in the first book of the *Physics*, laid down even and odd as the principles of natural things, considering all things to have numerical aspect.⁶⁵ The other property of the Sun is also seen in number, of which Arithmetic is the science: the eye of the intellect cannot look upon it, because number insofar as it is considered in itself is infinite, and this we cannot comprehend.

The heaven of Mars may be compared to music because of two properties: one is its most beautiful relation, for in counting the moving heavens, from whichever we begin, whether from the lowest or the highest, this heaven of Mars is the fifth and the middlemost of them all, that is, of the first, second, third, and fourth pairs. The other, as Ptolemy says in the *Quadripartitus*, is that Mars dries things out and incinerates them because its heat is like that of fire;⁶⁶ and this is why it appears fiery in color, sometimes more and sometimes less, according to the density or rarity of the vapors which accompany it, which often ignite by themselves, as is established in the first book of *Meteorics*.⁶⁷ For this reason Albumassar says that the ignition of these vapors signifies the death of kings and the changing of kingdoms, because they are effects of the lordship of Mars, and this is why Seneca says that at the death of the Emperor Augustus he saw on high a ball of fire. This is also why in Florence, at the beginning of its ruin, there was seen in the sky in the shape of a cross a great quantity of these vapors which accompany the star of Mars. And these two properties are found in Music, which consists entirely of relations, as we see in harmonized words and in songs, whose harmony is so much the sweeter the more the relation is beautiful, which relation is the principal beauty in this science, because it is its principal aim. Moreover, Music attracts to itself the human spirits, which are, as it were, principally vapors of the heart, so that they almost completely cease their activity; this happens likewise to the entire soul when it hears music, and the virtue of all of them, as it were, runs to the spirit of sense which receives the sound.

⁶⁵ as Aristotle says in the first book of the *Physics* Dante is referring to the commentary on the *Physics* by St. Thomas, I, 10.

⁶⁶ as Ptolemy says in the *Quadripartitus* A treatise on astronomy by Claudius of Tolomea (Egypt) written in the third century A.D.

⁶⁷ in the first book of *Meteorics* A work by Albert the Great; the reference is to Book I, 4, 9.

The heaven of Jupiter may be compared to Geometry because of two properties: one is that it moves between two heavens that are antithetical to its fine temperance, namely that of Mars and that of Saturn; consequently Ptolemy says, in the book referred to, that Jupiter is a star of temperate constitution between the cold of Saturn and the heat of Mars; the other is that among all the stars it appears white, almost silvery. And these things are found in the science of Geometry. Geometry moves between two things antithetical to it, namely the point and the circle—and I mean “circle” in the broad sense of anything round, whether a solid body or a surface; for, as Euclid says, the point is its beginning, and, as he says, the circle is its most perfect figure, which must therefore be conceived as its end. Therefore Geometry moves between the point and the circle as between its beginning and end, and these two are antithetical to its certainty; for the point cannot be measured because of its indivisibility, and it is impossible to square the circle perfectly because of its arc, and so it cannot be measured exactly.⁶⁸ Geometry is furthermore most white insofar as it is without taint of error and most certain both in itself and in its handmaid, which is called Optics.

The heaven of Saturn has two properties by which it may be compared to Astrology: one is the slowness of its movement through the 12 signs, for according to the writings of the astrologers, a time of more than 29 years is required for its revolution; the other is that it is high above all the other planets.⁶⁹ And these two properties are found in Astrology: for in completing its circle (that is to say, to master this science) a very great span of time passes, both because of its handmaids, which are more numerous than those of any of the above-mentioned sciences, and because of the experience required in it for making proper judgments. Furthermore, it is far higher than all the others, since, as Aristotle says at the beginning of *On the Soul*, a science is high in nobility by virtue of the nobility of its subject and by virtue of its certainty; and this one, more than any of those mentioned above, is high and noble because of its high and noble subject, which regards the movement of the heaven, and high and noble because of its certainty, which is flawless, as coming from a most perfect and regular principle. And if anyone believes that there is a flaw in it, it does not pertain to the science, but as Ptolemy says, it results from our negligence, and so must be attributed to that.⁷⁰

Chapter 14

After having made these comparisons concerning the first seven heavens, we must proceed to the others, which are three, as has several times been stated.

⁶⁸ *it is impossible to square the circle perfectly* The last simile of the Divine Comedy embraces this concept; see Par. XXXIII, 133 ff.

⁶⁹ *the 12 signs* The signs of the Zodiac.

⁷⁰ *it results from our negligence* The reference is to the Quadripartitus I, 1, 2. It is likely that “negligence” signifies indolence. Dante uses the same root word to describe Belacqua’s moral condition (Purg. IV, 110-111).

I say that the Starry Heaven may be compared to Physics because of three properties, and to Metaphysics because of three others: for it displays to us two visible objects, namely the multitude of stars and the Galaxy, that is, that white circle which the common people call Saint Jacob's Way; and it discloses one of its poles to us and keeps the other hidden; and it discloses one of its movements to us, from east to west, and keeps the other, which it makes from west to east, almost hidden from us.⁷¹ Consequently proceeding in order we must consider first the comparison to Physics and then the one to Metaphysics.

I say that the Starry Heaven manifests many stars to us, for according to what the wise men of Egypt have observed, including the last star that appears to them in the south, they count 1022 starry bodies, and it is of them that I speak. In this respect it has a very great resemblance with Physics, if we consider very closely these three numbers: namely two, twenty, and a thousand. For by two we understand local movement, which is necessarily from one point to another. By twenty is signified the movement by alteration, for since we cannot proceed beyond ten without altering ten itself by means of the other nine or itself, and since the most beautiful alteration which it receives is its own alteration by itself; and since the first alteration occurs at twenty, it is reasonable that the above-mentioned movement should be signified by this number. By a thousand is signified the movement of growth; for this "thousand" is the largest number that has a name, and there can be no further growth except by multiplying it. And Physics manifests only these three movements, as is proved in the fifth book of the first group of books.⁷²

Because of the Galaxy this heaven has a great resemblance to Metaphysics. Hence it should be known that concerning this Galaxy philosophers have held different opinions. For the Pythagoreans said that the Sun at one time strayed from its path, and, passing through other regions unsuited to its burning heat, set aflame the place through which it passed, leaving there traces of that conflagration. I believe they were influenced by the fable of Phaëton, which Ovid recounts at the beginning of the second book of the *Metamorphoses*.⁷³ Others, as for example Anaxagoras and Democritus, said that it was the light of the Sun reflected in that region, and they refuted the other opinions by demonstrative reasoning. What Aristotle said on this matter cannot be known with certainty because his opinion is not the same in

⁷¹ *the Starry Heaven* The heaven of the Fixed Stars. The Arctic Pole is considered visible because the human race lives in the northern hemisphere, but the Antarctic Pole, the site of Mt. Purgatory, was thought visible only from the southern and uninhabited hemisphere (see Inf. XXVI, 127 ff). The revolution of the Fixed Stars on its axis from east to west took place every twenty-four hours, but a second, virtually invisible motion ("almost hidden from us"), along the equinoctial circle, occurred in the opposite direction at the rate of one degree every one hundred years.

⁷² *the fifth book of the first group of books* Aristotle's works used to place the group of books entitled *Octo libri Physicorum*, more generally known as the *Physica*, at the beginning of his published works on science.

⁷³ *the fable of Phaëton* *Metamorphoses* II, 35 ff.

one translation as in another. I believe that this is due to an error on the part of the translators; for in the New Translation he seems to say that it is a collection of vapors beneath the stars in that region, which attracts them continuously; this does not seem to have any foundation in truth.⁷⁴ In the Old Translation he says that the Galaxy is nothing but a multitude of fixed stars in that region, so small that we are unable to distinguish them from here below, though from them originates the appearance of that brightness which we call the Galaxy; this may be so, for the heaven in that region is denser, and therefore retains and throws back this light. Avicenna and Ptolemy seem to share this opinion with Aristotle. Consequently, since the Galaxy is an effect of those stars which we cannot see, except that we understand these things by their effects, and Metaphysics treats of the primal substances, which we likewise cannot understand except by their effects, it is clear that the Starry Heaven bears a great resemblance to Metaphysics.

Moreover, the pole which we see signifies the sensible things, which, taking them as a whole, Physics treats; and the pole which we do not see signifies the things that are immaterial, which are not sensible, which Metaphysics treats; and therefore the aforesaid heaven bears a great resemblance to the one science and to the other. Moreover, by its two movements it signifies these two sciences. For by the movement with which each day it revolves and completes a new circuit from point to point, it signifies the corruptible things of nature, which day by day complete their course, their matter changing from form to form; and these Physics treats. By the almost imperceptible movement which it makes from west to east at the rate of one degree in a hundred years, it signifies the incorruptible things which had their beginning through creation by God and shall have no end; and these Metaphysics treats. Therefore I say that this movement signifies these things, because this revolution had a beginning and shall have no end, for the end of a revolution consists of returning to the same point, to which this heaven, according to its movement, shall never return. For since the beginning of the world it has completed little more than one-sixth of the revolution, and yet we are already in the last age of the world and are still awaiting the consummation of the celestial movement. So it is manifest that the Starry Heaven, because of many properties, can be compared to Physics and to Metaphysics.

The Crystalline Heaven, which has previously been designated as the *Primum Mobile*, has a very clear resemblance to Moral Philosophy; for Moral Philosophy, as Thomas says in commenting on the second book of the *Ethics*, disposes us properly to the other sciences.⁷⁵ For, as the Philosopher says in the fifth book of the *Ethics*, “legal justice disposes the sciences for our learning, and commands that they be learned and taught in order that they

⁷⁴ in the New Translation . . . The new translation carried St. Thomas' commentary, the old that of Albert the Great.

⁷⁵ the second book of the *Ethics* St. Thomas' commentary on the *Ethics* II, 1, 245.

not be forsaken”;⁷⁶ so with its movement the aforesaid heaven governs the daily revolution of all the others, by which every day they all receive and transmit here below the virtue of all their parts; for if the revolution of this heaven did not govern in this way, little of their virtue would reach here below, and little sight of them as well. Consequently if we suppose that it were possible for this ninth heaven not to move, there is no place on earth from which a third of the Starry Heaven could as yet have been seen; and Saturn would be hidden for 14 ½ years, from any given place on earth, and Jupiter would be hidden for 6 years, and Mars for almost a year, and the Sun 182 days and 14 hours (I say “days,” meaning the length of time which is measured by so many days), and Venus and Mercury would be hidden and visible almost as long as the Sun, and the Moon would be concealed from all mankind for a period of 14 ½ days. In truth there would be no generation here below, either of animal or of plant life; there would be no night or day, or week or month or year, but rather all the universe would be disordered, and the movement of the other heavens would be in vain. Likewise if Moral Philosophy ceased to exist, the other sciences would be hidden for some time, and there would be no generation or happiness in life, and in vain would these bodies of knowledge have been discovered and written down long ago. Consequently it is quite evident that this heaven may be compared to Moral Philosophy.

Moreover, the Empyrean Heaven by its peace resembles the Divine Science, which is full of all peace and suffers no diversity of opinion or sophistical reasoning because of the supreme certainty of its subject, which is God. Christ says of this science to his disciples: “My peace I give to you, my peace I leave with you,” giving and leaving to them his teaching, which is this science of which I speak.⁷⁷ Solomon, speaking of this science, says: “The queens number sixty, and the concubines eighty; and of the young handmaids there is no number: one is my dove and my perfect one.”⁷⁸ He calls all sciences queens and friends and handmaids, but this one he calls perfect because it makes us see truth perfectly, in which our souls find rest.

Therefore, since the comparison of the heavens to the sciences has been discussed, we may perceive that by the third heaven I mean Rhetoric, which resembles the third heaven, as is clear from above.

Chapter 15

By the resemblances discussed it may be seen who are these movers to whom I speak, who are the movers of this heaven, like Boethius and Tully, who with the sweetness of their discourse guided me, as has been said above, along the path of love—that is, into the pursuit of this most gentle lady Philosophy, by

⁷⁶ *in the fifth book of the Ethics* Not in Aristotle's work, but in a commentary on the Ethics by Averroes (I, 2).

⁷⁷ *Christ says of this science* John 14:27.

⁷⁸ *Solomon, speaking of this science* Song of Solomon 6:8-9.

the rays of their star, which is their writing about her; for in every science the written word is a star filled with light which reveals that science. Once this is understood, we may perceive the true meaning of the first stanza of the canzone before us by means of the fictive and literal exposition.⁷⁹ By means of this same exposition the second stanza may be sufficiently understood, as far as the part where it says *This one makes me behold a lady*.

Here we must observe that this lady is Philosophy, who truly is a lady full of sweetness, adorned with honor, wondrous in wisdom, glorious in freedom, as will be made manifest in the third book, which will treat her nobleness. And where it says *Let him who would see bliss Gaze into the eyes of this lady*, the eyes of this lady are her demonstrations, which when directed into the eyes of the intellect, enamor the soul that is liberated from its earthly condition. O most sweet and ineffable looks, sudden captors of the human mind, who appear in the demonstrations of the eyes of Philosophy when she converses with her lovers! Truly in you is salvation, by which he who gazes on you is made blessed and saved from the death of ignorance and vice. Where it is said *Provided he fears not the sighs of anguish*, we must understand provided he fears not the strain of study and the turmoil of uncertainty which spring forth in profusion from this lady's first glances, and then, as her light continues, fall away like morning clouds before the face of the sun, so that the intellect becomes accustomed to her and remains free and full of certainty, like the air that is purged and made luminous by the midday rays.

The third stanza is likewise understood by means of the literal exposition up to where it says *The soul cries out*. Here we must carefully attend to a certain moral which may be noted in these words: that a man should not, for the sake of a greater friend, forget the services rendered by a lesser one; but if indeed he must follow the one and forsake the other, he should follow the better one, abandoning the other with some honest expression of regret, whereby he gives to the one he follows cause for greater love. Then where it says *And of my eyes*, it means that difficult was the hour in which the first demonstration of this lady entered the eyes of my intellect, which was the most immediate cause of this love. Where it says *the likes of me* is meant the souls that are free from wretched and vile delights and from vulgar habits, and endowed with intellect and memory. Then it says *slays*, and then *I'm slain*, which seems contrary to what has been said above of this lady's power to save. Therefore it should be known that one of the sides speaks here, and the other there, the two contending diversely, as has been made clear above. Hence it is not surprising that the one says "yes" and the other "no," if we note carefully which is falling and which is rising.

Then in the fourth stanza where it says *a gentle spirit of love*, it means a thought that is born of my study. Here it should be known that by love in this allegory is always meant that study which is the application of the mind to

⁷⁹ the fictive and literal exposition The fictive level is the literal level of meaning.

that thing of which it is enamored. Then when it says *you will See the beauty of such lofty miracles*, it declares that through her shall the beauty of these miracles be perceived; and it speaks truly, for the beauty of wonders is the perception of their causes which she demonstrates, as the Philosopher seems to assert at the beginning of the *Metaphysics* when he says that by the sight of these beauties men began to fall in love with this lady. We will speak more fully of this word “wonder” in the following book. All the rest that follows in this canzone has been made sufficiently clear by the previous exposition. So at the end of this second book I assert and affirm that the lady of whom I was enamored after my first love was the most beautiful and honorable daughter of the Emperor of the universe, to whom Pythagoras gave the name of Philosophy.

Here ends the second book, whose purpose has been to explicate the canzone which is served as the first course.⁸⁰

Book 03

Canzone Two (“Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona”)

Love, that speaks to me within my mind
With fervent passion of my lady,
Awakens often thoughts of her such that
My intellect is led astray by them.
His speech is filled with sounds so sweet
That then my soul, which hears and feels him, says:
“Alas, I lack the power to speak
Of what I hear about my lady!”
And surely I must leave aside, if I
Should wish to treat of what I hear of her,
That which my intellect does not conceive,
As well as much of what it understands,
Because I know not how I should express it.
And so if fault is found to mar my verse
Which undertakes the praise of her,
Cast blame on my weak intellect
And on our speech, which lacks the power
To say in words the things that Love relates.

The Sun that circles all the world
Sees nothing so gentle as at that time
When it shines upon the place where dwells

⁸⁰ *as the first course* With this last reference to the canzoni as courses of meat and the ensuing commentaries as bread, Dante abandons his metaphor of the banquet.

The lady of whom Love makes me speak.
Every Intelligence admires her from above,
And those down here who are in love
Still find her in their thoughts
When Love makes felt the peace he brings.
Her being so pleases God who gave it to her
That he endlessly instills in her his power
Beyond the point of nature's measure.
Her pure soul,
Which takes from him this bliss,
Reveals him then in what she brings with her:
For among her beauties such things are seen
That the eyes of those on whom she shines
Send messengers to the heart, full of desire,
Which unite with air and turn to sighs.
Into her descends celestial power
As it does into an angel that sees him;
And if some gentle lady disbelieves this,
Let her walk with her and mark her gestures.
Here where she speaks a spirit
Comes down from heaven to testify
That this high worth which she possesses
Transcends whatever is allotted to us.
The graceful gestures that she displays
Contend with each other in calling on Love
In terms of speech that make him listen.
Of her it can be said:
Gentle is in woman what is found in her,
What most resembles her is beauty.
And we may say her countenance helps us
Regard as true what seems a miracle,
By which our faith is fortified:
For this she was ordained by eternity.

In her countenance appear such things
As manifest a part of the joy of Paradise.
I mean in her eyes and in her sweet smile,
For here Love draws them, as to himself.
They overwhelm our intellect,
As a ray of sunlight does weak vision;
And since I cannot fix my sight upon them,
I am content to say but little of them.
Her beauty rains down little flames of fire,
Enkindled by a gentle spirit,
Who is the creator of all good thoughts;
And like a lightning bolt they shatter

The inborn vices that make man vile.
And so let every woman who hears her beauty
Slighted for not seeming serene and humble
Gaze on her, the model of humility.
This is she who humbles every haughty person,
Conceived by him who set the heavens in motion.

My song, it seems you speak contrary to
Words spoken by a sister whom you have;
For this lady, whom you claim to be so humble,
She calls proud and disdainful.
You know the sky is always bright and clear,
and of itself is never clouded.
And yet our eyes, for many reasons,
Sometimes say a star is dim.
Likewise when she calls her proud,
She views her not according to the truth
But only as she seems to her.
For my soul was full of fear,
And still is, so much that everything I see
Seems proud, when she casts her gaze on me.
So excuse yourself, should the need arise;
And when you can, present yourself to her
And say: "My Lady, if it is your wish,
I will speak of you in every place."

Chapter 1

As I explained in the preceding book, my second love took its beginning from the compassionate countenance of a lady. Finding my life disposed toward ardor, this love later blazed up like a fire, from a small to a great flame, so that not only while I was awake but also during my sleep the light of her penetrated my mind. The magnitude of the desire to see her which Love accorded me can neither be told nor understood. I was full of desire in this manner not only of her but of all those who were in any way close to her, whether through acquaintance or kinship. How many were the nights when the eyes of others lay closed in sleep while mine were gazing intently on the dwelling of my love! Just as a spreading fire must also reveal itself externally, since it cannot possibly remain hidden, a wish to speak of love came over me which I was not entirely able to restrain. Although I was able to exercise very little control over my own counsel, nevertheless on several occasions I so nearly achieved it, either through the will of love or my own boldness, that upon reflection I concluded that in speaking of love no discourse was more fair or more profitable than that which sought to praise the person who was loved.

Three reasons brought me to this conclusion, one of which was my own love for myself, which is the beginning of all other loves, as anyone can see. For there is no more acceptable or gracious a way for a person to do honor to himself than by honoring his friend; for since there can be no friendship between those who are unlike, wherever friendship is seen likeness is understood to exist; and wherever likeness is understood to exist praise and blame go in common. From this reasoning two great lessons can be learned. One is that one should not desire any vicious person to present himself as a friend, because in this case no good opinion is formed of the one to whom this person shows himself to be a friend; the other is that no one should blame his friend in public, because he puts his finger in his own eye, if the foregoing reasoning is carefully considered.

The second reason was a desire for this friendship to be lasting. Here we must understand that, as the Philosopher says in the ninth book of the *Ethics*, in a friendship of persons of unequal rank there must exist, in order to preserve it, a relation between them that in some way transforms the unlikeness into likeness, as, for example, exists between a master and his servant.⁸¹ For although the servant cannot render a like benefit to his master when he receives a benefit from him, he must nevertheless render what best he can with so much solicitude and spontaneity that what in itself is dissimilar will make itself similar by the display of good will. Once it is displayed, the friendship becomes strengthened and preserved. Therefore, considering myself inferior to this lady and finding myself benefited by her, I resolved to praise her according to the scope of my power, which, if it is not in itself similar to hers, at least shows my eager desire. For if I were able to do more, I would do so. In this way, then, my power becomes similar to that of this gentle lady.

The third reason was an argument arising from foresight. For as Boethius says, "It is not enough to see only what lies before the eyes," that is, the present; and this is why we are given foresight, which looks beyond to what may happen in the future.⁸² I say that I thought that I might perhaps be criticized for inconstancy of mind by many coming after me upon hearing that I had changed from my first love. To dispel this criticism there was no better argument than to tell who that lady was who had brought about this change in me. For by her manifest excellence we can form some idea of her virtue; and by understanding her great virtue we can perceive how any steadfastness of mind is capable of being changed by it, and consequently how I might not be judged inconstant and unsteadfast. I therefore undertook to praise this lady, and if not in a fitting manner, at least insofar as I was able; and I began by saying *Love, that speaks to me within my mind*.

⁸¹ in the ninth book of the *Ethics* Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* IX, 1260 ff; see as well VIII, 3.

⁸² For as Boethius says Consolation of PhilosophyII, 1, 10.

This canzone has three principal parts. The first consists of the whole first stanza, which serves as a proem. The second consists of all three of the following stanzas, which concern what is intended to be spoken of, namely, the praise of this gentle one, of which the first begins *The Sun that circles all the world*. The third part consists of the fifth and last stanza in which, by addressing my words to the canzone, I resolve a certain confusion arising from it. And these three parts must be discussed in order.

Chapter 2

Beginning then with the first part, which was devised as a proem to this canzone, I say that it should be divided into three parts. For first it touches on the ineffable quality of the theme. Second, it describes my inadequacy to treat it perfectly, and this second part begins *And surely I must leave aside*. Finally, I excuse myself for my inadequacy, for which fault should not be found in me, and this I begin when I say *And so if fault is found to mar my verse*.

I say then *Love, that speaks to me within my mind*. Here above all we must specify who this speaker is, and the place in which he speaks. Love, taken in its true sense and subtly considered, is nothing but the spiritual union of the soul and the thing which is loved, to which union the soul of its own nature hastens quickly or slowly according to whether it is free or hindered. The reason for this natural tendency may be this: that every substantial form proceeds from its first cause, which is God, as is stated in the book *On Causes*, and these forms receive their diversity not from it, which is most simple, but from the secondary causes and from the matter into which it descends. Thus in the same book, in treating of the infusion of divine goodness, the following words appear: “And the goodnesses and the gifts are made diverse by the participation of the thing which receives them.”⁸³ Consequently, since every effect retains part of the nature of its cause (as Alpetragius says when he affirms that what is caused by a circular body must in some way be circular), every form in some way partakes of the divine nature; not that the divine nature is divided and distributed to them, but that it is shared by them in almost the same way that the nature of the Sun is shared by the other stars.⁸⁴ The nobler the form, the more it retains of this nature; consequently the human soul, which is the noblest form of all those that are generated beneath the heavens, receives more of the divine nature than any other. And since the will to exist is most natural in God—because, as we read in the book cited above, “being is the first thing, and before that there is nothing”—the human soul by nature desires with all its will to exist; and since its being

⁸³ *as is written in the book On Causes* This work was erroneously attributed to Aristotle. Dante refers to St. Thomas' commentary on it in the passage he cites.

⁸⁴ *Alpetragius* An Arabic astronomer who flourished in the twelfth century and wrote a work on the heavens frequently cited by Albert the Great.

depends on God and is preserved by him, it naturally longs and desires to be united with God in order to strengthen its being.

Because the divine goodness reveals itself in the goodnesses of nature, it happens that the human soul naturally unites itself with them in a spiritual manner, more quickly and more strongly as they appear the more perfect, which appearance is determined by the degree to which the soul's power of recognition is clear or hindered. This union is what we call love, whereby we are able to know the quality of the soul within by seeing outside it those things which it loves. This love (that is, the union of my mind with this gentle lady in whom so much of the divine light was revealed to me) is that speaker of whom I speak, for thoughts were continually being born of him that would gaze upon and ponder the worth of this lady who spiritually was made one with my soul.

The place in which I say he speaks is the mind. But in saying that it is the mind we gain no better understanding of it than before, and therefore we must see what this word "mind" properly signifies. I say then that in the second book of *On the Soul*, the Philosopher, in distinguishing its powers, asserts that the soul has three principal powers: namely life, sensation, and reason; he also mentions motion, but this can be included with sensation, since every soul that senses, either with all the senses or with one alone, also has motion, so that motion is a power conjoined with sensation.⁸⁵ And, as he says, it is perfectly obvious that these powers are interrelated in such a way that one is the basis of the next; and the one that is the basis can exist separately by itself, but the other, which is based upon it, cannot exist separately from it. Thus the vegetative power, by which life is sustained, is the basis upon which sensation—namely sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch—rests; and this vegetative power can exist as a soul by itself, as we see in all the plants. The sensitive soul cannot exist without it: there is nothing that has sensation without being alive. This sensitive power is the basis of the intellectual power, that is, of reason. Therefore in living mortal beings the rational power is not found without the sensitive, but the sensitive is found without the other, as we see in beasts, birds, fish, and every brute animal. The soul that comprehends all these powers, and the one that is the most perfect of them all, is the human soul, which by the nobility of its highest power (that is, reason) participates in the divine nature as an everlasting intelligence. For the soul is so ennobled and divested of matter in this supreme power that the divine light shines in it as in an angel; and therefore man is called a divine living being by the philosophers. In this most noble part of the soul there exist many powers, as the Philosopher says, especially in the third book of *On the Soul* where he observes that there exists a power in it that is called scientific, and one that is called ratiocinative or deliberative, and with it are found certain powers—as Aristotle says in that same place—such as the inventive and the judicial. And all of these most noble powers, and the others within this

⁸⁵ the soul has three principal powers Aristotle, *On the Soul* II, 3, 2.

excellent power, are called collectively by this name, whose meaning we desired to know: that is, “mind.” Thus it is manifest that by mind is meant the highest and noblest part of the soul.

That this was his meaning is obvious, for this mind is predicated only of man and of the divine substances, as may be clearly seen in Boethius, who predicates it first of men when he says to Philosophy: “You and God, who placed you in the minds of men,” and then to God when he says to God: “You produce all things from the supernal exemplar, you, most beautiful, bearing in your mind the beautiful world.”⁸⁶ Not only was it never predicated of brute animals, but in fact it does not seem possible or proper to predicate it of many men who seem lacking in this most perfect part; and therefore in Latin such persons are called “mindless” or “demented” (that is, without mind). So now we may see what is meant by mind, that distinguished and most precious part of the soul which is deity.⁸⁷ This is the place in which I say Love speaks to me about my lady.

Chapter 3

It is not without cause that I say that this love performs its operation in my mind, but with good reason, so that by telling of the place in which it operates we might understand what kind of love this is. Thus we should know that every thing, as has been said above, for the reason shown above, has its own special love. As the simple bodies have within themselves a natural love for their proper place—and this is why earth always inclines toward its center, why fire has a natural love of the circumference above, near the heaven of the Moon, and so always rises toward it—so the first of the compound bodies, such as minerals, have a love for the place where their generation is brought about, and there they grow and there they acquire vigor and power; thus we find that the lodestone always takes its power from the place where it was generated.⁸⁸ Plants, which are the first of the living things, have a more manifest love for certain places, according to the requirements of their constitution, and so we find that certain plants almost always take root near water, and certain others on summits of mountains, and certain others on slopes and at the foot of hills, which, if transplanted, either wholly perish or live a kind of melancholy life, as things separated from what is friendly to them. Brute animals have a more manifest love not only for places, but we

⁸⁶ *as may be clearly seen in Boethius* Consolation of Philosophy I, 5 and III, meter 9, 6-8.

⁸⁷ *that . . . part of the soul which is deity* Dante does not mean to imply that this part of the soul is itself divine, but rather, as he says at the beginning of the discussion on soul, that it is the part which most possesses, or participates in, the divine nature of God.

⁸⁸ *the simple bodies* These are the four elements—earth, water, air, and fire—which are found in nature in precisely that hierarchical order: water covers earth, air is above water and earth, and fire ascends above air, water, and earth. Fire has a natural tendency to ascend and was thought to inhabit a sphere of space just below the moon, beyond which none of the four elements was to be found.

find moreover that they love one another. Men have their proper love for things that are perfectly virtuous. And since man—although his whole form consists of a single substance for its nobility—has in himself a divine nature, he has the power to possess these things and all these loves, and he does possess them all. For by virtue of the nature of the simple body, which predominates in the subject, he naturally loves to move downward; and therefore when he moves his body upward, he grows more weary.⁸⁹

By virtue of the second nature of the compound body, he loves the place, and also the season, in which he was generated. Everyone therefore is naturally of stronger body in the place where he was generated and in the season of his generation than in any other. Thus we read in the stories of Hercules—both in Ovid the Greater and in Lucan and in other poets—that when he was fighting with the giant Antaeus, whenever the giant grew weary and stretched his body along the ground, whether by his own choice or as a result of Hercules' might, strength and vigor completely surged forth in him anew from the earth in which and from which he had been generated.⁹⁰ Hercules, perceiving this, finally seized him and, gripping him fast and lifting him off the ground, held him so long aloft without letting him touch the earth again that by overwhelming force he defeated and slew him. This battle took place in Africa, according to the testimony of these writings.

By virtue of the third nature, namely of the plants, man has a love for certain foods, not because they can be sensed, but because they are nutritious. Such foods perfect the operation of this nature, while others do not, but make it imperfect. We find therefore that certain foods make men well-built, strong-limbed, and of a healthy-looking complexion, while others bring about the contrary.

By virtue of the fourth nature, that of the animals, namely the senses, man has another love, by which he loves according to sense perception, like the beasts; and in man it is this love which has the greatest need of being controlled, because of its overwhelming power brought about especially by delight arising from taste and touch.

By virtue of the fifth and last nature, namely the truly human or, to be more precise, the angelic nature, which is to say the rational, man has a love of truth and virtue; and from this love springs true and perfect friendship, derived from what is honorable, something about which the Philosopher speaks in the eighth book of the *Ethics* where he discusses friendship.

Therefore since this nature is called mind, as has been shown above, I said that *Love* speaks *within my mind*, to make known that this was that love which springs from that most noble nature (that is, of truth and of virtue),

⁸⁹ he naturally loves to move downward The force of gravity naturally pulls an individual toward the ground.

⁹⁰ the stories of Hercules See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* IX, 183-184 and Lucan, *Pharsalia* IV, 598-660.

and to dismiss any false opinion concerning myself on account of which it might have been suspected that my love was for sensual delight. I then say *with fervent passion*, to make its steadfastness and its fervor known. And I say that it “often stirs thoughts that bewilder the intellect.” I speak truly, for in speaking of her my thoughts many times desired to conclude things about her which I could not understand, and I was so bewildered that outwardly I seemed almost beside myself, like one who looks with his sight fixed along a straight line and at first sees clearly those things nearest him; then, proceeding further away, sees them less clearly; and then, still further away, is left in a state of doubt; and finally, proceeding to the furthest point of all, his vision unfocused, sees nothing.

This is one ineffable aspect of what I have taken as my theme; and, subsequently, I speak of the other when I say *His speech*. I say that my thoughts—which are the words of Love—“have such sweet sounds” that my soul, that is, my affection, burns to be able to tell of it with my tongue; and because I am not able to speak of it, I say that the soul therefore laments, saying *Alas, I lack the power*. This is the other ineffable aspect: that is, that the tongue cannot completely follow what the intellect perceives. And I say *my soul which hears and feels him*: “hears” with respect to the words, and “feels” with respect to the sweetness of the sound.

Chapter 4

Now that the two ineffable aspects of this subject have been discussed, it is fitting to proceed to a discussion of the words which describe my insufficiency. I say then that my insufficiency derives from a twofold source, just as the grandeur of that lady is transcendent in a twofold manner, in the way that has been mentioned. For because of the poverty of my intellect it is necessary to leave aside much that is true about her and much that shines, as it were, into my mind, which like a transparent body receives it without arresting it; and this I say in the following clause: *And surely I must leave aside*. Then when I say *And of what it understands* I assert that my inability extends not only to what my intellect does not grasp but even to what I do understand, because my tongue lacks the eloquence to be able to express what is spoken of her in my thought. Consequently it will be apparent that what I shall say concerning the truth will be quite little. And this, upon close examination, brings great praise to her, which is my principal purpose; and that speech in which every part contributes to the principal purpose can properly be said to come from the workshop of the rhetorician. Then where it says *And so if fault is found to mar my verse*, I excuse myself for a fault for which I should not be blamed, since others can see that my words are inferior to the dignity of this lady. And I say that if fault is found to mar my verse—that is, in my words which are arranged to treat of her—the blame is due to the weakness of the intellect and the inadequacy of our power of speech, which is so overwhelmed by a thought that it cannot fully follow it, especially where

the thought springs from love, because then the soul is stirred in a more profound manner than at other times.

Someone might object, “You excuse and accuse yourself at the same time,” for the present argument is proof of a fault and not a purging of it since the fault is laid to the power of the intellect and of speech, which are mine; for just as I must be praised for it if it is good, to the extent that it is good, so must I be blamed if it is found faulty. To this it may be answered that I do not accuse myself but rather, in fact, do excuse myself. Therefore we should know that, according to the opinion of the Philosopher in the third book of the *Ethics*, man is deserving of praise or blame only for those things which it is in his power to do or not to do; but in those things in which he has no power, he deserves neither blame nor praise, since both must be attributed to another person, even though these things be part of the man himself.⁹¹ So we must not blame a man because he was born with an ugly shape, since it was not in his power to make himself attractive; we should rather blame the faulty disposition of the matter of which he is made, which was the source of nature’s fault. Likewise we should not praise a man for the attractiveness of his body which he possesses by his birth, for he was not its maker; we should rather praise the artisan (namely, human nature), which produces so much beauty in its matter when it is not hindered by it. For this reason the priest spoke aptly to the Emperor who laughed and scoffed at the ugliness of his body: “God is our Lord: He made us and not we ourselves.” These are the Prophet’s words put down in a verse of the Psalter, not a word more or less than was spoken by the priest in his response⁹² Therefore let those deformed at birth who devote their attention to adorning their person and not to perfecting their character, which dignity absolutely requires, know that this is nothing but to ornament the work of another and to neglect one’s own.

Returning then to the subject, I say that our intellect, by defect of that faculty from which it draws what it perceives, which is an organic power, namely the fantasy, cannot rise to certain things (because the fantasy cannot assist it, since it lacks the means), such as the substances separate from matter. And if we are able to have any concept of these substances, we can nevertheless neither apprehend nor comprehend them perfectly.⁹³ Man is not to be blamed for this, for as I say he was not the maker of this defect; rather universal nature was, that is, God, who willed that in this life we be deprived of that light. Why he should do this would be presumptuous to discuss. Consequently

⁹¹ *the third book of the Ethics* Dante cites St. Thomas, Commentary on the Ethics III, 1.

⁹² *These are the Prophet’s words* Psalm 100:3.

⁹³ *an organic power, namely the fantasy* The fantasy is the power that receives and organizes into a comprehensible image the data of sense perception. Unlike the intellect, which is immaterial, it has an organ within the brain and hence is called by Dante an “organic power.” Dante stresses here, as he will also throughout the *Divine Comedy*, that humans have no access to perception of purely spiritual realities, for example the nature of the “separate substances” (i.e., the angels), and hence cannot truly comprehend their nature.

if my contemplation has transported me to a region where my fantasy has failed my intellect, I am not to blame for being unable to understand.

Furthermore, a limit is placed on our intelligence, on each of its operations, not by us but by universal nature; and here we should know that the bounds of our intelligence are wider for thought than for speech, and wider for speech than for signs. Therefore if our thought surpasses our speech—not only that which does not reach perfect understanding but also that which results in perfect understanding—we are not to blame, because it is not of our doing. And so I portray myself as excused when I say *Cast blame on my weak intellect And on our speech, which lacks the power To say in words the things that Love relates*. For good will, which is what we must consider in judging human merit, must be quite clearly visible. And this is the sense in which the first principal part of the canzone, which is at hand, should be understood.

Chapter 5

Now that a discussion of the first part has disclosed its meaning, we may properly proceed to the second, which, for the sake of clarity, will be divided into three parts, corresponding to the three stanzas which it comprises. For in the first part I praise this lady in her entirety and in general terms, regarding both her soul and her body; in the second I proceed to praise specifically the soul; in the third to praise specifically the body. The first part begins: *The Sun that circles all the world*; the second begins: *Into her descends celestial power*; the third begins: *In her countenance appear such things*; and these parts will be discussed in order.

It says then *The Sun that circles all the world*; here, in order to have a perfect understanding, we should know how the world is circled by the Sun. First I say that by the term “world” I do not here mean the whole body of the universe but only the part which, according to common parlance, consists of land and sea, for so it is usually called, just as the phrase “that man has seen the whole world” means the part consisting of land and sea. Pythagoras and his followers maintained that this world was one of the stars and that there was another opposite it that was identical, which he called Antichthon;⁹⁴ and he claimed that both were on a single sphere which turned from west to east, and that because of this revolution the Sun circled around us, and was alternately visible and invisible. He also claimed that fire was present between these two masses, asserting that it was nobler than both water and earth, and that the center was the noblest among the places of the four simple bodies; and therefore he said that fire while seeming to rise was in reality descending toward its own center. Plato, coming later, was of a different opinion and wrote, in a book of his called *Timaeus*, that the earth with the sea was indeed the center of everything, but that its whole globe circled its center, following

⁹⁴ *Antichthon* The term signifies “anti-world.”

the primary movement of the heavens, but very slowly because of its dense matter and its extreme distance from that movement. These opinions are repudiated in the second book of *Heaven and Earth* as false by that glorious philosopher to whom nature most revealed her secrets; and there he proves that this world, that is the earth, stands in itself still and forever fixed. It is not my intention here to relate the proofs that Aristotle gives in order to refute those men and affirm the truth, because it is quite enough for those whom I am addressing to know on his great authority that this earth is fixed and does not turn, and that with the sea it is the center of heaven.

The heavens revolve around this center continuously, as we observe; in this revolution there must necessarily be two fixed poles and one circle equidistant from them which revolves with the greatest speed. Of these two poles one, namely the northern one, is visible to almost all the uncovered land; the other, namely the southern one, is hidden from almost all the uncovered land. The circle that is understood to lie midway between them is that part of the heavens beneath which the sun revolves when it moves with the Ram and with the Scales. Thus we should know that if a stone were dropped from our pole it would fall precisely out there in the ocean on a crest of the sea in such a way that were an observer present, the polar star would always be directly above his head (and I believe that the distance from Rome to this spot, moving due north, would be almost 2600 miles, or a little less).

In order to visualize this more clearly, let us imagine, then, that a city lies on the spot that I have mentioned and that its name is Mary. I say further that if a stone were dropped from the other pole (that is, the southern one), it would fall on a crest of the ocean which is exactly opposite Mary on this globe (and I believe that the distance from Rome to the place where this second stone would fall, moving due south, would be 7500 miles, or a little less). And here let us imagine another city, with the name of Lucy. The distance between the one and the other, from whichever side the cord is drawn, would be 10,200 miles—half the circumference of this entire globe, so that the inhabitants of Mary would consequently have their feet opposite those of the inhabitants of Lucy. Let us also imagine a circle on this globe which is at every point as far from Mary as from Lucy. I believe that this circle—as I understand from the teachings of the astrologers, and from those of Albert the Great in his book *Of the Nature of Places and the Properties of the Elements*, and also from the testimony of Lucan in his ninth book—would divide this uncovered land from the Ocean on the southern side, almost along the entire extremity of the first climatic zone where, among other people, the Garamantes dwell (who are almost always naked), to whom Cato came with the people of Rome when he fled the rule of Caesar.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ I believe that this circle The equator of the earth. The references are to Albert the Great, *De natura locorum* I, 9, and Lucan, *Pharsalia* IX, 438 ff.

Having marked out these three places on this globe, we can easily see how the Sun circles it.⁹⁶ I say then that the heaven of the Sun revolves from west to east, not directly counter to the diurnal movement (that is, that of day and night) but obliquely counter to it; so that this ecliptic, which lies equidistantly from its poles, on which is situated the body of the Sun, cuts the equator of the two primary poles into two opposing regions, that is, at the beginning point of the Ram and at the beginning point of the Scales, and diverges from it along two arcs, one toward the north and the other toward the south. The points marking the centers of these arcs are equidistant from the first circle on either side by 23 degrees; and one point is the beginning point of Cancer, and the other is the beginning point of Capricorn. Therefore when the Sun passes beneath the equator of the primary poles, Mary must necessarily see the Sun, at the beginning point of the Ram, circling around the world, below the earth, or rather the Ocean, like a millstone not more than half of whose mass can be seen; and this she sees rising upward like the screw of a press, until it completes a little more than 91 revolutions.⁹⁷ When these revolutions are completed, its elevation with respect to Mary is almost the same as it is with respect to us on earth in between, when day and night are equal.

If a man were standing upright in Mary, with his face turned continually to the sun, he would see it moving toward his righthand side. Then along the same path it seems to descend another ninety-one revolutions and a little more, until it has circled entirely around, below the earth, or rather the Ocean, only partially showing itself; and then it is hidden and Lucy begins to see it, and sees it rising and descending around her with just as many revolutions as Mary sees. And if a man were standing upright in Lucy, with his face turned continually toward the Sun, he would see it moving toward his lefthand side. Thus it can be perceived that these places have a day six months long each year and a night of the same length; and when one has day, the other has night.

It also obtains, as has been said, that the circle on which the Garamantes dwell on this globe must see the Sun circling directly above it, not like a millstone but like a wheel, only half of which it can see from any given point as it passes beneath the Ram. And then it sees it moving away from itself and approaching Mary for a little more than 91 days, and return toward itself in the same period; and then, when it has returned, it passes beneath the Scales, and again moves away and approaches Lucy for a little more than 91 days, and returns in as many. This place, which encompasses the entire globe, always has its day equal to its night, whether the Sun passes on this or on that side of it; and twice a year it has an extremely hot summer, and two mild winters.

⁹⁶ *these three places on this globe* The two poles and the earth's equator.

⁹⁷ *it completes 91 revolutions* A period of three months ($91.25 = 365 \div 4$). Each revolution is one terrestrial day of twenty-four hours.

It further obtains that the two spaces which lie between the two imaginary cities and the equator must see the Sun differently according as they are further from or closer to these places, as may now, by what has been said, be evident to anyone who has a noble mind, of which it is well to demand some little effort. Thus we may now see that by divine provision the world is so ordered that when the sphere of the Sun has revolved and returned to its starting place this globe on which we dwell receives in every place an equal time of light and darkness.

O ineffable wisdom who has so ordained, how poorly does our mind comprehend you! And you, for whose benefit and delight I am writing, in what blindness do you live, not lifting your eyes up to these things but rather fixing them in the mire of your foolish ignorance!

Chapter 6

In the preceding chapter it has been shown in what manner the Sun makes its revolution, so that now we may proceed to explain the meaning of the part with which we are concerned. I say then that in this part I begin first to praise this lady in comparison to other things; and I say that the Sun, circling the world, sees nothing so noble as she, from which it follows that she is, according to these words, the noblest of all the things on which the Sun shines. I say *in that hour*; here we must know that the word “hour” is understood by the astrologers in two ways. One is when day and night make 24 hours, that is, 12 for day and 12 for night, whether the day is long or short; and these hours become short or long during day or night as day and night wax and wane. The church uses these hours when it speaks of Prime, Tierce, Sext, and Nones, and they are called the temporal hours. The other is when, in allotting 12 hours for day and night, the day at times has 15 hours and the night 9, and at times the night has 16 and the day 8, according to how day and night wax and wane; and these are called equal hours. At the equinox both these hours and those which are called temporal are one and the same, because with day being equal to night such must be the case.

Then when I say *Every Intelligence admires her from above*, I praise her without reference to anything else. I say that the Intelligences of heaven admire her and that those who are noble down here think of her when they must have that which delights them. Here we must know that every Intelligence above, according to what is written in the book *Of Causes*, knows what is above itself and what is below itself.⁹⁸ It therefore knows God as its cause and it knows what is below itself as its effect; and because God is the most universal cause of all things, by knowing him it knows all things, according to the measure of its intelligence. Hence all the Intelligences know the human form insofar as it is determined by intention within the divine mind. The Intelligences who move the spheres know it best because they are

⁹⁸ in the book *Of Causes* The reference is to St. Thomas' Commentary on the Book of Causes VIII.

the most immediate cause of it and of every generated form, and they know the most perfect divine form, insofar as possible, as their paradigm and exemplar. And if the human form is not perfect when reproduced in individual beings, it is not the fault of the exemplar but of the material which furnishes individuality. Therefore when I say *Every Intelligence admires her from above*, I mean only that she is created as the intentional exemplar of the human essence which is in the divine mind, and hence in all other minds, above all in these angelic minds which along with the heavens fashion these things here below.

To confirm this, I add by way of saying *And those down here who are in love*. Here it should be known that each thing most of all desires its own perfection, and in this it satisfies all of its desires, and for the sake of this each thing is desired. It is this desire that always makes every delight seem defective to us, for no delight in this life is so great as to be able to take away the thirst such that the desire just mentioned does not still remain in our thought. Since this lady is indeed that perfection, I say that those who here below receive the greatest delight when they are most at peace find this lady then in their thought, because she is, I affirm, as supremely perfect as the human essence can be. Then when I say *Her being so pleases God who gave it to her*, I show that not only is this lady the most perfect in the realm of human beings, but perfect more than most in that she receives more of the divine goodness than what is due to man. Consequently we may reasonably believe that just as every craftsman loves his best work more than any other, so God loves the best human being more than any other. Since his generosity is not restricted by the necessity of any limitation, his love does not consider what is due to him who receives, but surpasses it through the gift and benefaction of virtue and of grace. This is why I say here that God himself, who gives being to her for the love of her perfection, infuses a part of his goodness in her beyond the limits of what is due to our nature.

Then when I say *Her pure soul*, I give proof of what has been said by testimony provided by the senses. Here we should know that, as the Philosopher says in the second book of *On the Soul*, the soul actualizes the body;⁹⁹ and if it actualizes the body, it is its cause. Since every cause, as is stated in the book *Of Causes* already cited, infuses into its effect a part of the goodness which it receives from its own cause, the soul infuses into and gives to its body a part of the goodness of its own cause, which is God.¹⁰⁰ Consequently since wonderful things are perceived in her, as regards her bodily part, to the point that they make all those who look on her desirous to see these things, it is evident that her form (that is, her soul), which directs the body as its proper cause, miraculously receives the goodness of God's

⁹⁹ *the soul actualizes the body* Aristotle, *De animall*, 1 ff. A body without a soul is only a body in potentiality. The presence of the soul actualizes, or animates, the body.

¹⁰⁰ *in the book Of Causes* De causis I.

grace. Thus outward appearance provides proof that this lady has been endowed and ennobled by God beyond what is due to our nature, which as has been said above is most perfect in her. This is the entire literal meaning of the first part of the second principal section.

Chapter 7

Having praised this lady in a general way with respect to her soul as well as her body, I proceed to praise her in particular with respect to her soul, and first I praise her according as her goodness is great in itself, and then I praise her according as her goodness is great in affecting others and in bringing benefit to the world. This second part begins where I say *Of her it can be said*. So first I say *Into her descends celestial power*.

Here we should know that the divine goodness descends into all things, for otherwise they could not exist. But although this goodness springs from the simplest principle, it is received diversely, in greater or lesser measure, by those things which receive it. Thus it is written in the book *Of Causes*: “The primal goodness makes his goodnesses flow upon all things with a single flowing.”¹⁰¹ Each thing indeed receives of this flowing forth according to the measure of its virtue and of its being, and we find visible evidence of this in the Sun. We see the Sun’s light, derived from one source, received diversely by diverse bodies, as Albert says in his book *On the Intellect*.¹⁰² For certain bodies, because of the high degree of transparent clearness instilled within them, become so luminous as soon as the sun sees them that by multiplying the light within themselves and in their aspect they cast forth a great splendor upon other bodies, as do gold and other stones.

There are others which, because they are entirely transparent, not only receive the light but do not impede it, and rather transmit it to other things, colored with their own color. And there are others so surpassing in the purity of their transparency as to become so radiant that they overwhelm the eye’s equilibrium and cannot be looked upon without their causing discomfort to one’s eyesight, as is the case with mirrors. Still others are so lacking in transparency that they receive scarcely any light at all, as is the case with the earth. Thus God’s goodness is received in one way by the separate substances (that is, by the Angels), who have no material dimension and are, as it were, transparent by virtue of the purity of their form; and in another way by the human soul, which is partly free from matter and partly impeded by it, like a man who is entirely in the water except for his head, of whom it cannot be said that he is entirely in the water or entirely out of it; and in another by the

¹⁰¹ the book *Of Causes* De causis XX, 2.

¹⁰² Albert says in his book *On the Intellect* Albert the Great, De intellectu et intelligibili I, 3, 2.

animals, whose souls are entirely confined to matter, but are nevertheless somewhat ennobled; and in another by the plants; and in another by the minerals; and by the earth in a way different from that of the other elements, because it is the most material, and therefore the most remote from and the most out of proportion with the first, most simple, and most noble virtue, which alone is intellectual, namely, God.

Although only the general gradations are set down here, we could nevertheless set down the particular gradations: that is, that among human souls one receives goodness differently from another. And since in the intellectual order of the universe the ascent and descent are almost by continuous gradations from the lowest form to the highest and from the highest to the lowest, as we see in the order of beings capable of sensation; and since between the angelic nature, which is intellectual being, and the human nature there is no gradation but rather the one is, as it were, continuous with the other by the order of gradation; and since between the human soul and the most perfect soul of the brute animals there is also no intermediary gradation, so it is that we see many men so vile and in such a state of baseness that they seem to be almost nothing but beasts. Consequently it must be stated and firmly believed that there are some so noble and so lofty in nature that they are almost nothing but angels, for otherwise the human species would not be continuous in both directions, which is impossible. Beings like these Aristotle, in the seventh book of the *Ethics*, calls divine, and such, I say, is this lady, for the divine virtue descends into her just as it descends into an angel.¹⁰³

Then when I say *And if some gentle lady disbelieves this*, I substantiate this by the experience that may be had of her in those operations that are proper to the rational soul, into which the divine light radiates most freely: that is, in speech and in those gestures which are customarily called bearing and conduct. Here we should know that among the animals man alone speaks and has conduct and gestures which are called rational, because he alone has reason within himself. If anyone were to speak to the contrary by claiming that certain birds speak, as seems true of some, especially the magpie and the parrot, and that certain beasts perform gestures or possess bearing, as seems the case with the ape and some others, I reply that it is not true that they speak or that they possess bearing because they do not possess reason, from which these things must necessarily proceed; nor is the principle of these operations within them, nor do they know what they are, nor do they intend to signify anything by them, but rather only reproduce what they see and hear. Hence just as an image of bodies is reproduced in some shining body, as for instance in a mirror, and hence the corporeal image which the mirror displays is not real, so the image of reason, namely the gestures and speech which the brute animal reproduces or displays, is not real.

¹⁰³ *Beings like these Aristotle . . . calls divine* Ethics VII, 1.

I say that “if some gentle lady disbelieves what I say let her walk with her and mark her gestures”—I do not say “any man,” because experience can be acquired more decorously from the example of women than from that of men—and I tell what she will hear concerning her, by describing the effect of her speech and the effect of her bearing. For her speech, by its loftiness and its sweetness, engenders in the mind of him who hears it a thought of love, which I call a celestial spirit because its origin is from above and from above comes its meaning, as has already been related, from which thought proceeds the firm conviction that this is a miraculous lady of virtue. And her gestures, by their sweetness and their gracefulness, cause love to awaken and be felt wherever some part of its power is sown in a good nature. This natural sowing is performed as is shown in the following book.¹⁰⁴

Then when I say *Of her it can be said* I mean to describe how the goodness and the virtue of her soul are good and of benefit to others, and first how she is of benefit to other ladies, adding, *Gentle is in woman what is found in her*, where I present a manifest example to women, by gazing upon which they may make themselves, by following it, appear gentle. Secondly, I relate how she is of benefit to all people, saying that her countenance aids our faith, which more than any other thing is of benefit to the human race, since it is that by which we escape eternal death and gain eternal life. It helps our faith, for since the principal foundation of our faith consists of the miracles performed by him who was crucified—who created our reason and willed it to be less than his power—and performed later in his name by his saints; and since many are so stubborn that they are doubtful of these miracles, owing to their beclouded vision, and cannot believe in any miracle without having visible proof of it, and since this lady is visibly a miraculous thing, of which the eyes of men may have daily proof, and which makes it possible for us to believe in the other miracles, it is evident that this lady, with her wonderful countenance, aids our faith. Therefore I say, lastly, that *by eternity* (that is, eternally), *she was ordained* in the mind of God in testimony of the faith to those who live in these times.

And so ends the second part of the second principal section according to the literal meaning.

Chapter 8

Among all the creations of divine wisdom man is the most wonderful, if we consider how the divine power has conjoined three natures in a single form and how subtly his body must be harmonized, having within that form organs for almost all of its powers.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, because of the great degree of

¹⁰⁴ as is shown in the following book Convivio IV, 21.

¹⁰⁵ *three natures in a single form* These natures or powers are the vegetative, sensitive, and the intellectual, discussed above in Chapters 2 and 3. The vegetative and sensitive are governed by specific organs, but the intellect (which perceives what is true) and the will (which brings about action) are spiritual in essence and consequently have

harmony required for so many organs to be in proper accord with each other, there are few within the great number of men that exist who are perfect. If this created being is so wonderful, we ought certainly to approach the treatment of its conditions with fear, not only in words but even in thought.

Here these words from *Ecclesiasticus* stand as a warning: “Who has sought out the wisdom of God that goes before all things?” as do those that admonish: “Do not seek the things that are too high for you, nor search into things that lie beyond your ken, but rather think upon the things that God has commanded, and further about his works do not be curious” (that is, inquisitive).¹⁰⁶ I, therefore, who intend in this third section to speak of some of the conditions of this being (insofar as sensible beauty appears in her body by virtue of the goodness in her soul), propose with fear and lack of confidence to begin to untie, if not entirely, at least some part of this great knot. I say then that since we have explained the meaning of the section in which this lady is praised with respect to her soul, we must proceed to consider how, when saying *In her countenance appear such things*, I praise her with respect to her body. And I say that in her countenance appear things which reveal some of the delights of Paradise. Among them the most noble and the one that is established as the end of all of the others is to achieve happiness, and this is the same as to be blessed. This delight is truly found in the countenance of this lady, although in another way; for, by gazing upon her people become happy, so sweetly does her beauty feed the eyes of those who behold her, although in another way than by the happiness of Paradise that is everlasting, which this cannot be for anyone.

Since someone might ask where this wonderful delight appears in her, I distinguish in her person two parts in which the expression of human pleasure and displeasure are most evident. And so we must know that in whatever part the soul most performs its work, it is this that it is most determined to adorn and at which it works most subtly. So we find that in human faces, where it performs more of its work than in any other external part, it shapes so subtly that, by refining there as much as the material will permit, no one face is like any other, because the ultimate power of the material, which is somewhat different in everyone, is here reduced to actuality.¹⁰⁷ And since in the face the soul operates principally in two places (because in those two places all three natures have jurisdiction, each in its own way)—that is, in the eyes and in the mouth—it adorns these most of all and directs its full attention to creating beauty there, as far as possible. It is in these two places that I maintain these delights appear, saying *in her eyes and in her sweet smile*.

no corresponding organs.

¹⁰⁶ Here these words from *Ecclesiasticus* Ecclesiasticus 1:3 and 3:22.

¹⁰⁷ the ultimate power of the material The maximum or greatest power, which is “reduced to actuality,” that is, actualized in an individual example.

These two places may be called, by way of a charming metaphor, the balconies of the lady who dwells in the edifice of the body, which is to say the soul, because here, though in a veiled manner, she often reveals herself. She reveals herself in the eyes so clearly that the emotion present in her may be recognized by anyone who gazes at them intently. Consequently given that there are six emotions proper to the human soul, of which the Philosopher makes mention in his book on *Rhetoric* (namely, grace, zeal, pity, envy, love, and shame), by none of these can the soul become impassioned without its semblance appearing at the window of the eyes, unless by exercise of great force it is kept closed within.¹⁰⁸ For this reason some in times past have put out their eyes, so that their shame within should not appear without, as the poet Statius remarks of Oedipus of Thebes when he states that “with eternal night he freed himself from his guilty shame.”¹⁰⁹

The soul reveals herself in the mouth, almost like a color behind glass. What is laughter if not a coruscation of the soul’s delight—that is, a light appearing outwardly just as it is within? It is therefore fitting that in order to show one’s soul to be of moderate cheer one should laugh in moderation, with proper reserve and little movement of the lips, so that the lady who then reveals herself, as has been said, may appear modest and not wanton. Consequently the *Book of the Four Cardinal Virtues* charges us: “Do not let your laughter become strident,” that is, like the cackling of a hen. Ah, wonderful smile of my lady of whom I speak, which has never been perceived except by the eye!¹¹⁰

I say that Love brings these things to her there as to their proper place.¹¹¹ Here love can be considered in two ways. First, as the special love of the soul for these places; second, as the universal love which disposes things to be loved and which disposes the soul to adorn these parts. Then when I say *They overwhelm our intellect*, I excuse myself for seeming to say little about such great excellence of beauty when treating of it; and I say that I observe little about it for two reasons. One is that these things which appear in her countenance overwhelm our intellect (the human one, that is); and I tell how this overwhelming dispoccurs, which is in the same way that the sun overwhelms feeble vision, but not a strong and healthy one. The other is that our intellect cannot gaze on it intently, because by so doing the soul becomes intoxicated, so that immediately after gazing it goes astray in all of its operations.

¹⁰⁸ *of which the Philosopher makes mention* Rhetoric II, 1. Indeed, Aristotle makes mention of eleven passions, but Dante finds that only six are manifest externally, in the eyes.

¹⁰⁹ *the poet Statius* Thebaid I, 46-48, lines which Dante mistranslates.

¹¹⁰ *Book of the Four Cardinal Virtues* The Liber de quatuor virtutibus, also known by the title Formula honestae vitae, attributed to St. Martin of Dumio, a Portuguese archbishop who died in 580. Dante erroneously attributes it to Seneca in his Monarchia (II, 5, 3).

¹¹¹ *Love brings these things to her there* Dante is still referring to her eyes and mouth.

Then when I say *Her beauty rains down little flames of fire*, I undertake to describe beauty's effect, since it is impossible to describe the beauty itself completely. Here we must know that all those things which surpass our intellect, so that it cannot perceive what they are, are most suitably described by means of their effects; and thus by approaching God, the separate substances, and the first matter in this way, we can gain some understanding of them. This is why I say that the beauty of this lady *rains down little flames of fire* (that is, the ardor of love and of charity) *enkindled by a gentle spirit* (that is, an ardor taking the form of a gentle spirit, namely right appetite, by and from which springs the origin of good thoughts). And it does not do only this, but also undoes and destroys its opposite, namely the innate vices that are the principal enemies of good thoughts.

Here we must understand that there are certain vices in man to which he is by nature predisposed—as, for instance, certain men of choleric temperament are predisposed to wrath—and such vices as these are innate (that is, part of our nature). Others are vices of habit, for which habit and not temperament is to blame, as, for instance, intemperance, especially in wine; these vices are avoided and overcome by good habit, and by it a man becomes virtuous so that his moderation requires no effort, as the Philosopher says in the second book of the *Ethics*.¹¹² However, there is this difference between the natural passions and those of habit: those of habit disappear completely by exercise of good habit, because their source, namely bad habit, is destroyed by its opposite; but the natural passions, whose source lies in the nature of the person who experiences the passion, though they are much lightened by good habit, do not disappear completely so far as regards their first movement, but do completely disappear so far as their permanence is concerned, because habit is not equivalent to nature, within which these passions have their source. Therefore the man who directs himself and governs his bad nature against the impulse of nature is more praiseworthy than one who, having a good nature, maintains his good conduct or returns to the right way after straying from it, just as it is more praiseworthy to control a bad horse than one that has no vice.

I say then that these little flames which rain down from her beauty, as has been said, destroy the innate vices (that is, those that are part of our nature), to make it understood that her beauty has the power to renew nature in those who gaze upon it, which is a miraculous thing. And this confirms what has been said above in the other chapter, when I say that she is an aid to our faith.

Finally, when I say *And so let every woman who hears her beauty*, I disclose, under the pretense of admonishing someone else, the end for which such beauty was made. And I say that any lady who hears her beauty slighted for some defect should gaze upon this most perfect example, for it is understood that such beauty was created there not only to improve the good, but even to

¹¹² in the second book of the *Ethics* Ethics II, 1 and 2.

turn something bad into something good. At the end I add *Conceived by him who set the heavens in motion*, that is, God, to make it understood that nature produced such an effect by divine intention. And so ends the entire second main section of this canzone.

Chapter 9

Now that the two parts of this canzone have first been explained, as was my intention, the order of the present book requires that we proceed to the third part, in which I intend to clear the canzone of an allegation that might have been unfavorable to it. What I am speaking of is this: that before I came to compose it, when it seemed to me that this lady had become somewhat proud and haughty toward me, I wrote a little ballata in which I called this lady proud and pitiless, which appears to contradict what is said of her above.¹¹³ Therefore I turn to the canzone and under the pretense of teaching her how she must excuse herself, I excuse her; to address inanimate things in this way is a figure of speech, one which the rhetoricians call *prosopopoeia* and which the poets use quite frequently. This third part begins *My song, it seems you speak contrary*. In order for the meaning of this part to be more easily understood, I will divide it into three sections. For first is stated what requires excusing; then we proceed to the excuse, when I say *You know the sky*; finally I address the canzone as a person who is instructed in what to do, when I say *So excuse yourself, should the need arise*.

So first I say: “My song, who speak of this lady with so much praise, it seems that you are contrary to one of your sisters.” I use the word “sister” as a metaphor: for just as we call sister a woman who is born of the same parent, so may one call sister a work that is made by the same maker, for our work is, in a certain sense, begotten. And I explain why she seems contrary to her, saying: “You present her as humble, and the other presents her as proud,” that is, *proud and disdainful*, which is the same thing.

Having set forth this allegation, I proceed to the excuse by means of an example in which the truth is at times in conflict with appearance and at others can be viewed from different perspectives. I say *You know the sky is always bright and clear* (that is, it always possesses brightness), but for certain reasons we are sometimes allowed to speak of it as being dark. Here we should know that properly speaking only color and light are visible, as Aristotle asserts in the second book of *On the Soul* and in *On Sense and Sensibles*.¹¹⁴ It is true that other things are visible, but not properly speaking, because some other sense perceives them, so that they cannot properly be said to be visible, nor, properly, tangible; and such are shape, size, number,

¹¹³ I wrote a little ballata Rime 29 (LXXX), “Voi che savete ragionar d'Amore,” a poem that addresses Lady Philosophy as a cold, cruel, and disdainful mistress.

¹¹⁴ as Aristotle asserts De anima II, 14, 7; De sensu et sensato II.

movement, and state of rest, which we call common sensibles, things that we perceive by more than one sense. But color and light are, properly speaking, visible because we apprehend them by sight alone and by no other sense. These visible things, the proper as well as the common, insofar as they are visible, enter into the eye—I do not mean the things themselves but their forms—through the diaphanous medium, not as matter but as an image, just as through transparent glass.¹¹⁵ The passage that the visible form makes through this medium is completed in the water within the pupil of the eye, because that water has a boundary—almost like a mirror, which is glass backed by lead—so that it cannot pass beyond but is arrested there like a ball that is stopped when struck, so that the form, which cannot be seen in the transparent medium, here appears lucid where it is arrested. This is why an image is seen in leaded glass, and not in any other kind of glass. The visual spirit, which passes from the pupil to the front part of the brain where the principal source of the sensitive power resides, instantaneously reproduces the form, without any lapse of time, and thus we see. And so for vision to be true (that is to say, to be able to see a thing precisely as it is in itself), the medium through which the form reaches the eye must be colorless, and so too the water of the eye; otherwise the visible form would be tinged with the color of the medium as well as that of the pupil. For this reason those who want to make things appear to take on a particular color in a mirror place something having that color between the glass and the lead, so that the glass is suffused by it. Plato and other philosophers, however, said that our sight was not a result of the visible entering the eye but of the visual power going out to the visible, but this opinion is rejected as false by the Philosopher in his book *On Sense and Sensibles*.

Now that we have examined the way in which vision takes place, it may easily be seen that although a star is uniformly bright and shining and undergoes no change except that of local movement, as is proved in the book *Of Heaven and Earth*, for many reasons it may have the appearance of not being bright and shining. It may have this appearance by reason of the medium, which is continually changing. This medium changes from greater light to lesser light, as with the presence or absence of the sun; and with its presence the medium, which is diaphanous, is so full of light that it overpowers the star and therefore no longer appears to shine. This medium also changes from rare to dense and from dry to moist, by reason of the vapors which are continually rising from the earth. By these effects, this medium changes the image of the star which comes through it, creating darkness when dense and color when moist or dry.

¹¹⁵ *through the diaphanous medium* Through the atmosphere, which is transparent. The notion that objects do not physically enter into the eye in order to produce vision may seem a rather primitive philosophical conception, being obvious to the point of absurdity. But it was a stock notion in Scholastic philosophy and the foundation of the medieval theory of perception. The expression “by their forms” is not used in this instance in the Scholastic sense of the term “form” as non-material; it simply means “shape.”

It may have this appearance also by reason of the visual organ (namely the eye), which because of illness or fatigue undergoes change, acquiring a certain coloration and a certain feebleness, as when it often happens that because the membrane of the pupil has become thoroughly bloodshot as a result of some impairment brought about by illness, things have the appearance of being completely red, and so that star seems to acquire color. And because the sight is weakened, some deterioration of the visual spirit takes place, so that things do not seem in focus but blurred, almost as our writing does on damp paper. This is why many, when they wish to read, hold the writing at a distance from their eyes, so that the image may enter the eye more easily and more sharply; in this way writing is made clearer to their vision. And so a star may likewise seem blurred. I had experience of this in the very year in which this canzone was born, for by greatly straining my vision through assiduous reading I weakened my visual spirits so much that the stars seemed to me completely overcast by a kind of white haze.¹¹⁶ But by resting at length in dark and cool places and by cooling the surface of my eyes with clear water, I regained that power which had undergone deterioration, so that I returned to my former state of healthy vision. And so we see that there are many causes, for the reasons noted above, why a star may appear otherwise than it is.

Chapter 10

Leaving behind this digression, which was necessary to clarify the truth, I return to the subject and say that just as our eyes “call” (that is, judge) a star at times otherwise than it is in its true state, so this little ballata considered this lady according to her appearance, which was not in accord with the truth by reason of the infirmity of the soul, which was impassioned by excessive desire. I make this clear when I say *For my soul was full of fear*, so much so that what I saw in her presence seemed frightening to me. Here we must know that the more closely the agent is united with the patient the stronger is the passion, as may be understood from statements made by the Philosopher in his book *On Generation*;¹¹⁷ thus the nearer the object desired comes to him who desires it, the stronger is his desire; and the more the soul is impassioned, the more closely it is united with the concupiscible appetite, and the more it abandons reason, so that it then judges a person not as a human being but almost as a lower animal, according to appearances only, without discerning the truth. This is why a countenance which in truth is noble can seem to us disdainful and proud. It was according to a judgment of the senses of this kind that this little ballata spoke. Thus it may be clearly understood that this canzone, by being in disagreement with the little ballata, considers this lady according to the truth. It is not without reason that I say *when she*

¹¹⁶ *I had experience of this in the very year* The canzone was written between 1294 and 1298, so that Dante was about 30 years old when his vision was temporarily weakened as a result of an intense period of reading. These are the early years of his study of philosophy, shortly after the completion of the Vita Nuova (1292-93).

¹¹⁷ *from statements made by the Philosopher* See St. Thomas' commentary De generatione et corruptione I, 23.

casts her gaze on me, and not when I cast my gaze on her. In saying this I wish to make evident the great power that her eyes had over me, for their rays passed through every part of me as if I had been transparent. Natural and supernatural reasons might be cited to explain this. But let suffice what has been said here: I shall speak about this further in a more appropriate place.

Then when I say *So excuse yourself, should the need arise*, I compel the canzone, for the reasons mentioned above, “to excuse itself where it is necessary” (that is, wherever anyone is in doubt because of this contradiction). This is to say only that whoever finds himself in doubt about this—about the disagreement between this canzone and the little ballata—should reflect on the reason that has been given. A rhetorical figure of this kind is highly praiseworthy and even necessary, namely when the words are addressed to one person and the meaning to another; for words of admonition are always praiseworthy and necessary, though not always becoming on the lips of everyone. Thus when a son is aware of his father’s vice, and when a subject is aware of his master’s vice, and when a friend knows that by admonishing him he would increase his friend’s shame or diminish his reputation, or knows that his friend loses his patience and becomes incensed when admonished, this figure is extremely beautiful and useful and may be called “dissimulation.” It is like the action of an experienced soldier who attacks a fortress on one side in order to dislodge the defense from the other, for the relief is not applied to the site of the battle.

I also compel this canzone to ask permission of this lady to speak of her. Here we should understand that one ought not to be so presumptuous as to praise another without first carefully considering whether it would please the person praised; for often a person, either through fault of the speaker or through that of the listener, believes he is conferring praise on someone when in fact he is laying blame. Therefore in this matter it is necessary to use great discretion; and this discretion is, as it were, an asking of permission, in the way in which I summon this canzone to ask for it.

This brings to a close the entire literal meaning of this book. The arrangement of the work requires therefore that we now proceed, in search of truth, to the allegorical exposition.

Chapter 11

Returning again to the beginning, as the order requires, I say that this lady is that lady of the intellect who is called Philosophy. But since praise naturally instills one with a desire to know the person praised, and since to know a thing means to understand what it is, considered in itself and with respect to all of its causes, as the Philosopher says at the beginning of the *Physics*, and since this is not made explicit by the name, although this is what it signifies, as is stated in the fourth book of the *Metaphysics*, where it is said that a

definition is that conception which a name signifies, it is necessary at this point, before proceeding with further demonstrations of her praises, to say what this thing is which is called philosophy—that is to say, what this name signifies.¹¹⁸ Later, after this has been made explicit, we will be able to treat the present allegory more effectively. I will first say who first gave this name; then I will proceed to its meaning.

I say then that long ago in Italy, around the beginning of the foundation of Rome, which as Paul Orosius states was more or less 750 years before the coming of our Saviour, about the time of Numa Pompilius, second king of the Romans, there lived a very noble philosopher by the name of Pythagoras. That he lived in this period Titus Livy seems incidentally to indicate in the first part of his book.¹¹⁹ Before him those who sought knowledge were not called philosophers but wise men, as were the seven sages of antiquity, whose fame is still renowned, the first of whom was called Solon, the second Chilon, the third Periander, the fourth Cleobulus, the fifth Lindius, the sixth Bias, and the seventh Prieneus. When Pythagoras was asked whether he considered himself a wise man, refused to accept the appellation for himself and said that he was not a wise man but a lover of wisdom. So it came to pass after this that everyone dedicated to wisdom was called a “lover of wisdom,” that is, a “philosopher,” for *philos* in Greek means the same as “love” in Latin, and so we say *philos* for lover and *sophos* for wisdom, from which we can perceive that these two words make up the name of “philosopher,” meaning “lover of wisdom,” which, we might note, is not a term of arrogance but of humility. From this word was derived the name of the act proper to it, “philosophy,” just as from “friend” was derived the name of the act proper to it, namely “friendship.” Thus we may see, considering the meaning of the first and second words, that philosophy is nothing but “friendship for wisdom” or “for knowledge”; consequently in a certain sense everyone can be called a “philosopher,” according to the natural love which engenders in everyone the desire to know.

But since the essential passions are common to all mankind, we do not speak of them by using a term that distinguishes one person from another on the basis of his participation in that essence.¹²⁰ Consequently when we speak of John as a friend of Martin, we do not intend to signify simply the natural friendship by which everyone is a friend to everyone but the friendship which

¹¹⁸ *in the fourth book of the Metaphysics* Metaphysics IV, 16; the previous reference is to Physics I, 1.

¹¹⁹ *I say then that long ago in Italy* Rome was founded, according to tradition, on 21 April 753 B.C. For the references see Orosius, *Historiarum adversus paganos libri septem* VII, 3 and Livy, *History of Rome*, 18, a passage which Dante either did not read carefully or misremembered, since it explicitly discredits the notion that Pythagoras lived in the time of Numa Pompilius (717-673 B.C.).

¹²⁰ *the essential passions* Dante is not referring here to the specific passions inherent in the sensitive appetite but to the tendencies common to all human beings, for example, the tendency to be sociable. Consequently one cannot distinguish one person from another on the basis of these passions or tendencies.

is engendered over and above that which is natural, and which is proper and characteristic of individual persons. Thus no one is called a philosopher by reason of the common love of knowledge. According to Aristotle's definition in the eighth book of the *Ethics*, one is called a friend whose friendship is not hidden from the person loved, and to whom the person loved is also a friend, so that good will is present on both sides; and this must spring from utility, pleasure, or worthiness.¹²¹ And so for someone to be a philosopher there must be a love of wisdom which engenders good will on the one side, and there must be devotion and dedication which engender goodwill on the other side too, so that intimacy and a demonstration of good will can arise between them. This is why anyone lacking love and devotion cannot be called a philosopher, for both must be present. And just as friendship founded on pleasure or utility is not true friendship but friendship by accident, as the *Ethics* demonstrates, so philosophy founded on pleasure or utility is not true philosophy but philosophy by accident. We must therefore not give the name of philosopher to anyone who for the sake of pleasure is a friend of wisdom with respect to only one of its parts, as are many who take pleasure in listening to canzoni and in devoting their time to them, and who take pleasure in studying Rhetoric or Music but shun and abandon the other sciences, all of which are branches of wisdom. Nor should we give the name of true philosopher to anyone who is a friend of wisdom for the sake of utility, as are jurists, physicians, and almost all those belonging to religious orders, who study not in order to gain knowledge but to secure financial rewards or high office; and if anyone were to give them what they seek to gain, they would not persevere in their study. And just as among the kinds of friendship that which exists for the sake of utility can least of all be called friendship, so these I have mentioned share the name of philosopher less than any of the others. Consequently just as friendship founded on worthiness is true, perfect, and lasting, so true and perfect philosophy is that which is engendered by worthiness alone, without ulterior motives, and by the goodness of the friendly soul, which is to say, by right desire and right reason.

So now we can say here that as true friendship among men exists when each person loves the other in full measure, so the true philosopher loves every part of wisdom, and wisdom every part of the philosopher, since she draws him to herself in full measure and does not allow his thoughts to stray to other things. This is why wisdom herself says in the Proverbs of Solomon: "I love those who love me."¹²² And just as true friendship, conceived abstractly apart from the mind and considered solely in itself, has as its subject the knowledge of virtuous action and as its form the desire for it, so philosophy, apart from the soul, considered in itself, has as its subject understanding, and as its form an almost divine love for what is to be understood. And just as the efficient cause of true love is virtue, so the efficient cause of philosophy is

¹²¹ According to Aristotle's definition Ethics VIII, 2, and VI, 9-11.

¹²² in the Proverbs of Solomon Proverbs 8:17.

truth; and just as the end of true friendship is delight in what is good, which proceeds from living together according to what is proper to humanity (that is, according to reason, as Aristotle seems to hold in the ninth book of the *Ethics*), so the end of philosophy is that most excellent delight which suffers no cessation or imperfection, namely true happiness, which is acquired through the contemplation of truth. So it may now be seen who this lady of mine is, by means of all her causes and her objective reality, and why she is called Philosophy, and who is the true philosopher and who the philosopher by accident.¹²³

But since sometimes when the mind is excited by a certain fervor the subject in which both the actions and passions terminate is called by the name of the action or passion itself—as Vergil does in the second book of the *Aeneid* when he has Aeneas call Hector “O light” (which is an action) and “the hope of the Trojans” (which is a passion), even though he was neither a light nor a hope but rather the source from which the light of counsel came to them and the object in which they placed all their hope of salvation; and Statius does when he says in the fifth book of the *Thebaid*, where Hypsipyle speaks to Archemorus: “O comfort of my estate and of my lost fatherland, O honor of my servitude”; and we do ourselves daily when, pointing to a friend, we say “See my friendship,” or when a father calls his son “My love”—by longstanding custom the sciences on which Philosophy most fervently fixes her gaze are called by her name, as, for example, Natural Science, Ethics, and Metaphysics, the last of which is called the First Philosophy because she fixes her gaze on it out of the greatest necessity and with the greatest fervor.¹²⁴ Thus we can see how the sciences are in a secondary sense called Philosophy.

Since we have seen what the primary and true Philosophy is in her very essence—which is the lady of whom I speak—and how her noble name has by custom been extended to encompass the sciences, I will proceed with her praises.

Chapter 12

The cause which moved me to compose this canzone has been so fully explained in the first chapter of this book that there is no need to explain it further, because it may very easily be deduced from the exposition that has already been given. Therefore I will go through the literal exposition, according to the divisions already made, translating the literal meaning into the allegorical where necessary.

¹²³ *her causes and her objective reality* In this passage Dante explicates the nature of true friendship according to Scholastic reasoning, employing its formal terminology. Friendship has as its subject, or matter, knowledge of good actions on the part of some person, who is the friend, and it has as its form the desire, or love, for these actions to take place. The efficient cause of friendship is virtue, and its end is mutual delight in these actions as a result of virtue. The reference to Aristotle appears in *Ethics* IX, 11.

¹²⁴ *by the name of the action or passion itself* Vergil, *Aeneid* II, 281; Statius, *Thebaid* V, 608.

I say *Love that speaks to me within my mind*. By “love” I mean the study which I gave to acquiring the love of this lady. Here we should know that “study” may be considered in two ways: one is the study that leads a man to acquire the habit of an art or a science, the other the study that he employs, by making use of it, once the habit is acquired. And it is the former which I here call “love,” which formed in my mind unceasing, novel, and very profound reflections on this lady who has been the subject of the demonstration above; for this is what study, which sets about acquiring a friendship, is accustomed to do, because by virtue of desiring it study from the beginning reflects on the great things of friendship. This is that study and affection which in men customarily precede the birth of friendship, when love has already been born on one side and desires and seeks to engender it on the other; for, as has been said above, Philosophy exists when the soul and wisdom have become such friends that each is wholly loved by the other, as in the manner stated above. Nor is it necessary in the present exposition to continue to explain the first stanza, which was explained as a proem in the literal exposition, because by means of the first explanation it is very easy to arrive at an understanding of the second.

Hence we must proceed to the second stanza, which constitutes the beginning of the book, where I say *The Sun that circles all the world*. Here we should know that just as it is appropriate to treat of things not perceptible by the senses by way of things that are perceptible, so it is appropriate to treat of things that are not intelligible by way of things that are intelligible. And so just as in the literal exposition we began by speaking of the material and perceptible Sun, so now we must begin by speaking of the spiritual and intelligible Sun, which is God.

Nothing in the universe perceptible by the senses is more worthy to be made the symbol of God than the Sun, which illuminates with perceptible light first itself and then all the celestial and elemental bodies; therefore God illuminates with intellectual light first himself and then the celestial creatures and all other intelligent beings. The Sun with its heat gives life to all things, and if some are destroyed by it, this does not result from the intention of the cause but is, rather, an accidental effect. Likewise God gives life to all things in goodness, and if any is evil, this does not result from the divine intention, but must, because this is so, come about as accident in the unfolding of the intended effect. For if God made the good angels and the bad, he did not make them both by intention, but only the good angels. The malice of the bad came afterwards, outside of his intention, yet not so far outside of his intention that God was not able to foreknow their malice within himself. But so great was his affection in bringing forth spiritual creatures that the foreknowledge that some must come to a bad end did not and could not turn God from this act of creation. For Nature would merit no praise if, knowing in advance that a certain portion of the flowers of some tree were destined to

perish, she should allow it to bring forth no flowers, and on account of the barren flowers should forsake the production of the fruitful.

I say, then, that God, whose understanding embraces everything (for his “circling” is his “understanding”), sees nothing so noble as he sees when he gazes upon the place where this Philosophy dwells. For although God, gazing upon himself, sees all things collectively, yet he sees them discretely insofar as the discreteness of things exists in him in such manner that the effect exists within the cause. He sees then this most noble of things absolutely, insofar as he sees her perfectly in himself and in his essence. For if we recall what has been said above, Philosophy is a loving use of the wisdom which exists in the greatest measure in God, since supreme wisdom, supreme love, and supreme actuality are found in him; for it could not exist elsewhere, except insofar as it proceeds from him. Divine Philosophy is therefore of the divine essence because in him nothing can be added to his essence; and she is most noble because the divine essence is most noble; and she exists in him in a true and perfect manner, as if by eternal marriage. In the other intelligences she exists in a less perfect manner, like a mistress of whom no lover has complete enjoyment; but on her countenance they satisfy their longing. Thus it may be said that God sees (that is, understands) nothing so noble as she is. I say “nothing” since he sees and distinguishes all other things, as said above, by seeing himself as the cause of being in all things. O most noble and excellent is that heart which directs its love toward the bride of the Emperor of heaven, and not the bride alone but the sister and the most beloved daughter!

Chapter 13

Having seen how in beginning the praises of this lady it has been carefully observed that insofar as she is primarily considered she exists within the divine substance, we must go on to see how I affirm that she exists secondarily within the created intelligences. I say, then, *Every Intelligence admires her from above*, where we must observe that I say “from above” to establish her relation to God, who has been mentioned earlier; and here I exclude the Intelligences that are exiled from their heavenly home who cannot philosophize because love in them is entirely extinguished; for as has already been said, to philosophize requires that love be present. Thus we can see that the Intelligences in Hell are deprived of the sight of this most beautiful lady; and since she constitutes the blessedness of the intellect, to be deprived of her is most bitter and full of all sadness.

Then when I say *And those down here who are in love*, I descend to show how she also comes in a secondary manner into the human intelligence, and this human philosophy I then proceed to discuss throughout the book by praising it. I say then that those who are in love “here” (that is, in this life)

perceive her in their thoughts, not at all times, but when Love makes them feel her peace. We must here take note of three things that are touched upon in this text. The first is when it says *those down here who are in love*, where a distinction appears to be made within the human race; and it must necessarily be made, for as is clearly evident and as it is our intention to explain, a vast proportion of mankind lives more according to the senses than to reason; and those who live according to the senses cannot possibly be in love with this lady since they cannot apprehend her.

The second is when it says *When Love makes felt*, where a distinction of time seems to be made. And this likewise must be made, for although the separate Intelligences gaze continuously upon this lady, the human intelligence is unable to do this because human nature—apart from the act of speculation, by which the intellect and reason are satisfied—requires many things for its sustenance; as a result our wisdom is sometimes only in habit and not in act, which is not the case with the other Intelligences, whose perfection consists solely of an intellectual nature.¹²⁵ When our soul is not in the act of speculation it cannot truly be said to be joined with Philosophy except insofar as it has the habit of Philosophy and the power to awaken her; and therefore sometimes she is found with those who are in love here, and sometimes not.

The third is when it speaks of the hour when they are with her (that is, when Love makes them feel her peace), which simply means when one is in the act of speculation, because study does not make the peace of this lady felt except through the act of speculation. So we can see how this lady exists primarily in God and secondarily in the other separate Intelligences, through their continuous contemplation of her, and afterwards in the human intelligence through its discontinuous contemplation of her. Nevertheless one who takes her as his lady should always be called a philosopher even though he is not at all times engaged in the final act of philosophy, because one is named principally according to one's habit. And so we call someone virtuous not only when performing a virtuous action but for having the habit of virtue; and we call a man eloquent even when he is not speaking because he has the habit of eloquence (that is, of speaking well). Regarding this Philosophy, insofar as the human intelligence partakes of her, the following praises are given to show how a great part of her goodness is bestowed upon human nature.

I say then “her being so pleases God who gives it to her”—from whom it derives, as from the primal source—“that it always attracts the capacity of our nature,” and makes it beautiful and virtuous. Thus although some attain to the habit of Philosophy, no one so attains to it that it can properly be called a habit, because the initial study (that is, the study through which the habit is engendered) cannot acquire it perfectly. Here we see her praised in a humble manner: for whether perfect or imperfect, she does not lose the name of

¹²⁵ *in habit and not in act* There are times, that is, when the mind is not engaged in speculation; hence it is not in act but only in habit, that is, it has the power to speculate but that power is potential, not actual.

perfection. And because her perfection is boundless it is said that the soul of Philosophy *makes it manifest in what she brings with her* (that is, that God forever instills in her his light). Here we must call to mind what has been said above: namely, that love is the form of Philosophy and therefore is here called her soul. This love is manifest in the exercise of wisdom, which brings with it wonderful beauties, namely contentment in every temporal circumstance and contempt for all those things which others make their lords. So it happens that the other forlorn beings who perceive this, reflecting on their shortcomings, collapse as a result of yearning for perfection out of a weariness of sighs. This is what is meant by the words *That the eyes of those on whom she shines Send messengers to the heart, full of desire, Which unite with air and turn to sighs*.

Chapter 14

As in the literal exposition we descended from the general praises to the particular, first with respect to the soul and then with respect to the body, so now the text will descend from the general commendations to the particular. As has been said above, Philosophy here has wisdom as her material subject, love as her form, and the exercise of speculation as the combination of the one and the other. Therefore in the stanza that begins with the words *Into her descends celestial power*, I intend to praise love, which is a part of philosophy. Here we must observe that the descent of virtue from one thing into another is nothing but the causing of the latter to take on the likeness of the former; just as in natural agents we clearly see that when their virtue descends into things that are receptive, they cause those things to take on their likeness to the extent that they are capable of attaining to it. Thus we see that the Sun, as its rays descend here below, causes things to take on the likeness of its light to the extent that by their disposition they are capable of receiving light from its virtue.¹²⁶

So I say that God causes this love to take on his own likeness to the extent that it is possible for it to resemble him. And the nature of that causation is indicated by saying *As it does into an angel that sees him*. Here we must further know that the first agent, namely God, instills his power into things by means of direct radiance or by means of reflected light. Thus the divine light rays forth into the Intelligences without mediation, and is reflected into the other things by these Intelligences which are first illuminated. But since light and reflected light have been mentioned here, I will, in order to be perfectly clear, clarify the difference between these terms according to the opinion of Avicenna. I say that it is customary for philosophers to call luminosity *light* as it exists in its original source, to call it *radiance* as it exists in the medium between its source and the first body which it strikes, and to call it *reflected light* as it is reflected into another place that becomes illuminated.

¹²⁶ *from its virtue* The term *virtute* and its alternate form *virtù* both signify power, which communicates the subject's moral qualities to the object. "Virtue" and "power" are interchangeable expressions.

I say therefore that without mediation the divine power draws this love into resemblance with itself.¹²⁷ This can be made evident above all as follows: since divine love is in all respects eternal, so its object must of necessity be eternal, so that those things which it loves are eternal; and in the same way he makes this love enact its loving, for wisdom, on which this love strikes, is eternal. Consequently of her it is written, “I was ordained for all time,” and her eternity may clearly be noted at the beginning of the Gospel of John.¹²⁸

And so it arises that where this love shines all other loves grow dim and are almost extinguished since the eternal object of this love immeasurably overwhelms and surpasses all other objects. The most eminent philosophers have clearly shown this by their actions, which is how we know that they are indifferent to all things except wisdom. Thus Democritus, being indifferent to his own person, did not cut his beard, hair, or nails. Plato, being indifferent to worldly goods, was unconcerned with royal dignity, even though he was the son of a king.¹²⁹ Aristotle, being indifferent to all friends except philosophy, fought against his own best friend (after wisdom), namely against the just mentioned Plato. But why speak of these when we find others such as Zeno, Socrates, Seneca, and many more who despised their lives for these very ideas. It is therefore evident that the divine power descends by this love into men just as it does into the angels. As proof of this the text further on declares *And if some gentle lady disbelieves this, Let her walk with her and mark her gestures*. By “gentle lady” is meant an intellectual soul both noble and free in the exercise of the power proper to it, which is reason. Thus other souls must not be called ladies, but handmaidens, since they do not exist for their own sake but for the sake of others; as the Philosopher says in the second book of the *Metaphysics*, that thing is free which exists for its own sake and not for the sake of another.¹³⁰

It says *Let her walk with her and mark her gestures*—that is, let her join company with this love and look upon what she shall find within it. The text touches on this in part when it says *Here where she speaks a spirit comes down*—that is, where Philosophy is in act, a celestial thought comes down which claims that she is more than human activity; and it says “from heaven,” to indicate that not only she but the thoughts friendly to her are remote from base and earthly things. Subsequently it tells how she strengthens and kindles love wherever she appears with the sweetness of her gestures, for all her expressions are becoming, sweet, and free from all excess. As greater

¹²⁷ *without mediation* The divine power descends upon Lady Philosophy directly, without being mediated through the Angels.

¹²⁸ *the beginning of the Gospel of John* John 1:1; see also Proverbs 8:23 and Ecclesiasticus 24:14.

¹²⁹ *he was the son of a king* Plato was not the son of a king, and Dante’s source for this notion is not known.

¹³⁰ *as the Philosopher says* *Metaphysics* I, 2, 3, not in book two; the passage reappears in *Monarchia* I, 12, 8.

inducement to join her company, it goes on to say *Gentle is in woman what is found in her, What most resembles her is beauty*.

It adds further *And we may say her countenance helps*; here we must observe that the sight of this lady was so generously granted to us in order not only that we might see her face, which she reveals to us, but that we might desire to acquire those things which she keeps hidden from us. For just as because of her much is perceived by our reason, and consequently it becomes comprehensible, which without her would seem miraculous, so because of her it becomes believable that every miracle can be perceived by a superior intellect to have a reasonable cause and, consequently, to have the power to exist. Our good faith has its origin in this, from which comes the hope that longs for things foreseen; and from this springs the activity of charity. By these three virtues we ascend to philosophize in that celestial Athens where Stoics and Peripatetics and Epicureans, by the light of eternal truth, join ranks in a single harmonious will.¹³¹

Chapter 15

In the preceding chapter this glorious lady is praised according to one of her constituent parts, namely love. Now in the present one, in which I intend to explain the stanza that begins *In her countenance appear such things*, it is necessary to take up the praise of the other part, namely wisdom. The text says then “that in her face there appear things which manifest some part of the joy of Paradise,” and it identifies the place where it appears, namely her eyes and her smile.

Here it is necessary to know that the eyes of wisdom are her demonstrations, by which truth is seen with the greatest certainty, and her smiles are her persuasions, in which the inner light of wisdom is revealed behind a kind of veil; and in each of them is felt the highest joy of blessedness, which is the greatest good of Paradise. This joy cannot be found in anything here below except by looking into eyes and upon her smile.

The reason for this is that since everything by nature desires its own perfection, without this perfection man could not be happy, that is to say, could not be blessed; for even if he had every other thing, by lacking this perfection desire would still be present in him, and desire is something that cannot coexist with blessedness since blessedness is something perfect and desire something defective; for no one desires what he has but rather what he

¹³¹ *these three virtues* The theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity, the first generating the second, and the second the third. By these virtues one ascends into the “celestial Athens,” which represents the City of God, Paradise, and symbolizes the happiness of eternal life, the “beatitudinem vite eterne” of which Dante speaks at the close of the *Monarchia* (XVI, 7).

does not have, which is an obvious deficiency. It is in this gaze alone that human perfection is acquired (that is, the perfection of reason), on which, since it is our foremost part, all our being depends; and all of our other activities (feeling, nutrition, and the rest) exist only for the sake of this, and this exists for its own sake and not for the sake of anything else. Therefore if this is perfect, so is the other, to the extent that man, insofar as he is man, sees all his desires brought to their end and is thereby blessed. This is why it is said in the book of Wisdom: “He who casts away wisdom and learning is unhappy,” for that is the deprivation of the state of happiness.¹³² This state is attained, it follows, through the habit of wisdom; and to be happy is to be content, in the opinion of the Philosopher. Consequently we see how some of the things of Paradise appear in her countenance. So we read in the book of Wisdom just cited, where it speaks of her: “She is the brightness of the eternal light and the flawless mirror of the majesty of God.”

Then when it says *They overwhelm our intellect*, I excuse myself by saying that I can say little about these things because of their transcendency. Here we must observe that in a certain way these things dazzle our intellect, insofar as certain things are affirmed to exist which our intellect cannot perceive (namely God, eternity, and primal matter), things which most certainly are known to exist and are with full faith believed to exist. But given the nature of their essence we cannot understand them: only by negative reasoning can we approach an understanding of these things, and not otherwise.

Nevertheless some might have serious doubts here about how it can be that wisdom is able to make a man happy without its being able to reveal certain things to him perfectly, given that man has a natural desire to know, without fulfillment of which he cannot be blessed. To this we may simply reply that the natural desire within all things is proportionate to the capacity within that thing which has desire; otherwise desire would run counter to itself, which is impossible, and nature would have created it in vain, which is likewise impossible. It would run counter to itself because by desiring its perfection it would desire its imperfection, since it would always desire to continue desiring and would never fulfill its desire (and it is into this error that the accursed miser falls, by failing to perceive that he desires to continue desiring by seeking to realize an infinite gain). Nature would also have created it in vain because it would not have been directed to any specific end. Therefore human desire within this life is proportionate to the wisdom which can be acquired here, and this limit is not transgressed except through an error which lies outside of Nature’s intention. Likewise it is proportionate within the angelic nature and limited by the quantity of that wisdom which the nature of each can apprehend. This is the reason why the saints do not envy one another, because each attains to the end of his desire, which desire is proportionate to the nature of his goodness.¹³³ This is why, since it is not within the power of our nature to know what God is (and what certain other

¹³² the book of Wisdom Wisdom 3:11; the second citation is from Wisdom 7:26.

things are), we do not by nature desire to have this knowledge. And in this way our doubts are dispelled.

Then when it says *Her beauty rains down little flames of fire*, it descends to another joy of Paradise, namely to the happiness secondary to the primary happiness, which derives from her beauty.¹³⁴ Here we must know that morality is the beauty of Philosophy, for just as the beauty of the body derives from the degree to which its members are properly ordered, so the beauty of wisdom, which, as has been said, is the body of Philosophy, derives from the order of the moral virtues which enable her to give pleasure perceptible to the senses. Therefore I say that her beauty (that is, morality) rains down flames of fire (that is, right appetite), which is engendered by the pleasure imparted by moral teaching, an appetite that removes us from even the natural vices, not to speak of the others. From this is born that happiness which Aristotle defines in the first book of the *Ethics*, where he says that it consists in “acting in accordance with virtue throughout one’s entire life.”¹³⁵ And when it says *And so let every woman who hears her beauty*, it continues with her praise, imploring others to follow her by telling them how she brings benefit to them, namely that everyone who follows her becomes good. Therefore it says that *every woman* (that is, every soul) who hears her beauty slighted for not appearing as it ought to appear should gaze upon this example.

Here we must observe that the beauty of the soul consists in its actions, above all the virtues which sometimes are rendered less beautiful and less pleasing by vanity or pride, as will be seen in the last book.¹³⁶ Therefore I say that in order to avoid this we should look at her, namely at that place where she is the example of humility (that is, on that part of her which is called moral philosophy). And I add that by gazing upon that part of her (I mean wisdom), every vicious person will become upright and good. Therefore I say *This is she who humbles every haughty person*—that is, who gently turns back whoever inclines away from the proper course.

Finally, expressing supreme praise of Wisdom, I say that she is the mother of all things and the origin of each and every motion by affirming that together with her God created the universe and especially the movement of the heavens which generates all things and from which every other movement takes its origin and its impetus, adding *Conceived by him who set the heavens in motion*. I mean that she existed in the divine thought, which is

¹³³ *desire is proportionate to the nature of his goodness* This is the principle defining the happiness of the saved in Paradiso, as explained by Piccarda, and summed up in the celebrated verse “E ‘n la sua volontade è nostra pace” (Par. III, 85).

¹³⁴ *the happiness secondary to the primary happiness* The primary happiness in this life consists in the possession of wisdom or knowledge, and the second, derivative happiness consists of leading a moral life.

¹³⁵ *in the first book of the Ethics* The reference is to St. Thomas’ Commentary on the Ethics I, 10, 128-130.

¹³⁶ *in the last book* This would have been the fifteenth book of the Convivio, according to Dante’s original plan.

intellect itself, when he made the universe, from which it follows that she made it.¹³⁷ This is why Solomon said in the book of Proverbs, in the person of Wisdom: “When God prepared the heavens, I was there; when he set a circle on the face of the deep with a fixed law and a fixed circuit, when he made firm the skies above and set on high the fountains of the waters, when he enclosed the sea within its boundary and decreed that the waters should not transgress their bounds, when he laid the foundations of the earth, I was with him, ordering all things, and I took pleasure every day.”¹³⁸

O worse than dead are you who flee her friendship! Open your eyes and gaze forth! For she loved you before you existed, preparing and ordering your coming; and after you were made, she came to you in your own likeness in order to place you on the straight way. If not all of you can come into her presence, honor her through the person of her friends and follow their commandments like those who proclaim the will of this eternal empress—do not close your ears to Solomon, who commands this of you with the words “the way of the just is like a shining light that endures and increases until the day of blessedness”—follow after them and study their works, which ought to be a light to you along the way of this most brief life.¹³⁹

Here we may bring to a close the true meaning of the present canzone. For indeed the last stanza, appended as an envoi, may here very easily be inferred from the literal explanation, except insofar as it says that I called this lady *proud and disdainful*. Here it should be known that from the beginning Philosophy itself seemed to me proud, as far as regards her body (that is, wisdom), for she did not smile at me because I did not yet understand her persuasions; and disdainful, because she did not turn her eyes toward me, which is to say that I could not perceive her demonstrations. In all of this the fault was my own. By these words and by what has been supplied in the literal meaning, the allegory of the envoi is manifest, so that it is now time, in order to make further progress, to bring this book to a close.

Book 04

Canzone Three (“Le dolci rime d’amor, ch’i’ solìa”)

The tender rhymes of love
I once sought out within my thoughts
I must now leave; not that I do not hope

¹³⁷ *from which it follows that she made it* In saying that wisdom made the universe, Dante clearly identifies wisdom with God, as a part of his being, in the same way that Christ, as the Logos, is God himself.

¹³⁸ *in the person of Wisdom* Proverbs 8:27-30.

¹³⁹ *through the person of her friends* Those who are wise, namely the philosophers, apostles, and saints. For the reference to Solomon, Proverbs 4:18.

To return to them anew,
But because the proud and scornful manner
That my lady bears
Has barred my access
To my customary speech.
And since it seems a time for waiting,
I will put aside my pleasant style
Which I've sustained in writing poems of love;
Instead, with harsh and subtle rhymes,
I'll speak about the quality
Which makes a person truly noble,
By refuting the false and base beliefs
Of those who claim that riches
Are the source of true nobility.
And first of all I call upon the lord
Who dwells within my lady's eyes,
And makes this lady love herself.

One ruler held that nobility,
According to his view,
Consisted of ancestral wealth
Together with fine manners.
And someone else of lesser wit
Recast this saying,
Dispensing with the second half,
Since he himself was likely lacking!
There follow in his wake all those
Who count a man as noble if his stock
Has had great wealth for quite some time.
And so ingrained
Has this false view become among us
That one calls another noble
If he can say 'I am the son,
Or grandson, of such and such
A famous man,' despite his lack of worth.
But he appears the basest, to those who see the truth,
Who having been shown the way still goes astray
And walks the earth like one who's dead.

He who claims "Man is a living tree"
First says what isn't true
And, having said what's false, leaves much unsaid;
But possibly he sees no deeper.
The ruler of the Empire likewise erred
By making such a claim,
For first he claims that which is false

And then proceeds, moreover, defectively.
For riches, as is generally thought,
Can neither give nor take away nobility,
Because by nature they are base.
And further, he who paints a form, if he
Cannot become this form, cannot portray it;
Nor can an upright tower be made to bend
By a river flowing far away.
It's evident that riches are imperfect,
And base as well, for however great they are,
They bring no peace, but rather grief.
And so the true and upright mind
Is not undone by having lost them.

Nor will they grant that one born base may yet
Be noble, nor that a low-born father's progeny
Be ever thought to qualify as noble;
For this is what they claim.
And so their argument, it seems, negates itself
Insofar as it asserts
That time is a prerequisite of nobility,
Defining it according to this rule.
It further follows from what was said above
That each of us is noble or each base,
Or else that mankind had no origin.
But this I do not grant,
Nor do they either, if they are Christian.
Thus it is clear to every mind that's sound
That what they say lacks sense,
And hence I claim their words are false,
And so dissociate myself from them;
And now I wish to say, as I do feel,
What is nobility and where it comes from,
And specify the signs of noble bearing.

I say that every virtue, at its source,
Comes from a single root:
Virtue, I mean, which makes man happy
In his actions.
This is, as stated in the Ethics,
A chosen habit
Which occupies the mean alone,
Those are its very words.
Nobility, I say, by definition
Always implies a good in one who's noble,
As baseness always implies what's bad.

And virtue, so defined,
Will always manifest itself as good,
So that within a single exegesis
The two agree, by having one effect.
Thus one must issue from the other,
Or else must both then issue from a third.
But if one has the value of the other,
And more besides, then it must be the source.
And let what I have said be taken for granted.

Nobility resides wherever virtue is,
But virtue not wherever there's nobility,
Just as wherever there's a star is heaven,
Although the converse does not hold.
And we perceive this state of well-being
In women and in those of tender age,
Insofar as they are capable of shame,
Which is a quality diverse from virtue.
And just as perse derives from black
So must each virtue come from her,
Or class of virtues, as I said above.
Let no one boast by saying:
"I belong to her by race,"
For they are almost gods
Who have such grace without a spot of vice.
For God alone bestows it on that soul
Which he perceives dwells perfectly
Within its person; and so, as some perceive,
It is the seed of happiness, instilled by God
Within the soul that's properly disposed.

The soul which this goodness adorns
Does not keep it concealed,
For this, from the time she is wed to the body,
She displays till the moment of death.
Obedient, pleasant, and full of shame
Is she in life's first interval,
And she adorns her body with the beauty
That derives from parts well harmonized.
In maturity she's strong and self-restrained
And full of love and courteous praise,
And takes her sole delight in acting honestly.
In old age she's just and prudent
And is renowned for generosity,
And in herself is gratified
To hear and speak of others' worth.

And then in the fourth phase of life
She is married once again to God,
Reflecting on the end awaiting her
While blessing all the times gone by.
Now see how many there are who are deceived!

My song Against-the-erring-ones, go forth.
And when you come
To where our lady is,
Do not conceal from her your goal:
You can say to her with certainty:
“I speak about a friend of yours.”

Chapter 1

Love, according to the unanimous opinion of the sages who have spoken of it and as we see from constant experience, is what joins and unites the lover with the person loved. Consequently Pythagoras says, “Friendship unites the many into one.”¹⁴⁰ Since things that are joined by nature have their qualities in common with one another, to the extent that one is at times completely transformed into the nature of the other, it follows that the passions of the person loved enter into the person who loves, so that the love of the one is communicated to the other, as are hatred and desire and all other passions. Consequently the friends of the one are loved by the other, and the enemies hated; hence the Greek proverb says: “Among friends all things must be shared.”¹⁴¹

Thus having become the friend of this lady who was mentioned above in the true explanation, I began to love and hate in accordance with her love and hatred.¹⁴² I therefore began to love the followers of truth and to hate the followers of error and falsehood, as did she. But since everything in itself merits love, and nothing hatred unless malice should overwhelm it, it is reasonable and proper to hate not the things themselves but the malice within them, and to seek to remove it from them. If anyone strives to do this, it is my most excellent lady who strives the most—strives, I mean, to remove the malice in things, which is the cause of their being hated; because in her is found all reason and likewise the source of dignity. Taking her actions as well as her feelings as my example, I sought, as far as I was able, to scorn and despise the errors of mankind, not to defame or denigrate those who err, but rather their errors. By blaming them I sought to render them displeasing, and

¹⁴⁰ *Pythagoras* Attributed to Pythagoras by Cicero in *De officiis* I, 17, 56.

¹⁴¹ *the Greek proverb* Dante's source is again Cicero, *De officiis* I, 16, 51.

¹⁴² *this lady who was mentioned above in the true explanation* Philosophy, as described in the allegorical exposition of the preceding book.

by rendering them displeasing, to remove them from those persons whom I hated because of them.

Among these errors was one that I condemned more than any other, one which is harmful and dangerous not only to those who are caught up in it but also to those who condemn it, to whom it brings pain and suffering. This is the error concerning human goodness insofar as it is sown in us by nature, and which should be called “nobility,” an error that was so entrenched as a result of evil habit and lack of intelligence that the opinion of almost everyone was thereby rendered fallacious. From this fallacious opinion sprang fallacious judgments, and from fallacious judgments sprang unjust reverence and disdain, with the result that the good were held in base contempt and the bad were honored and exalted. This constituted the worst confusion in the world, as is apparent to anyone who carefully considers what the consequences of such confusion might be. Since this lady of mine had somewhat altered the tenderness of her looks at me, especially in those features at which I would gaze when seeking to learn whether the primal matter of the elements was contained within God—for which reason I refrained for a time from coming into the presence of her countenance—while living, as it were, in her absence, I set about contemplating the shortcoming within man concerning the above-mentioned error. To avoid idleness, which is the greatest enemy of this lady, and to eradicate this error, which robs her of so many friends, I resolved that I would cry out to those who were walking along this evil path so that they might place themselves back on the right way. So I began a canzone commencing with the words *The tender rhymes of love*, in which I proposed to bring men back to the right way regarding the proper conception of true nobility, as may be perceived by gaining an understanding of the text which I now intend to explain. And since I sought to provide a very necessary remedy in this canzone, I did not consider it effective to employ figurative language, but rather to supply this medicine by the quickest way, so that health, which was already so poisoned that it was hastening toward an ugly death, might be quickly restored.

Therefore in discussing this canzone it will not be necessary to unveil any allegory, but only to explain the literal meaning. By “my lady” I mean the same lady whose meaning I addressed in the previous canzone, namely that most virtuous light, Philosophy, whose rays make flowers bloom and bear the fruit of mankind’s true nobility.

Chapter 2

It is proper, at the beginning of the explanation here undertaken, to divide the canzone before us into two parts in order to convey its meaning, for the first part serves as a preface, while the second follows with the treatment of the subject. The second part begins at the beginning of the second stanza, with the words *One ruler held that nobility*. The first part can be further seen to

comprise three sections. The first states why I depart from my accustomed speech; in the second I define my subject; in the third I ask help from what can help me most, namely the truth. The second section begins *And since it seems a time for waiting*. The third begins *And at the outset I call upon the lord*.

I say therefore that “I must leave aside the tender rhymes of love which my thoughts once sought out”; and I mark the reason, for I say that it is not because I no longer intend to write of love but because new looks have appeared in my lady which for the present have deprived me of material for speaking of love. Here it must be known that the gestures of this lady are not said to be “disdainful and proud” except by their appearance, as may be seen in the tenth chapter of the preceding book where, on another occasion, I said that appearance differed from reality. How it can be that one and the same thing is both sweet and yet seems bitter, or is clear and yet seems dark, is made sufficiently evident in that passage.

Next when I say *And since it seems a time for waiting*, I specify, as has been said, my intended subject. Here we must not try to skip over with dry foot what is meant by “time for waiting,” since that is the strongest reason for my change of mind, but rather to consider how reasonable it is that we should await the proper moment in all our undertakings, and most of all in speaking.¹⁴³ Time, as Aristotle says in the fourth book of the *Physics*, is “number of motion with respect to before and after,” and “number of celestial movement” is that which disposes things here below to receive the informing powers diversely.¹⁴⁴ For at the beginning of spring the earth is disposed to receive in one manner the power that informs the grasses and the flowers, and in another manner in winter; and one season is disposed to receive the seed differently from another; and likewise our mind, insofar as it is related to the composition of the body which is disposed to respond to the circling of the heavens differently at different times. This is why great discretion must be shown in using or in avoiding the use of words—which are, as it were, the seed of our activity—so that they may be well received and fruitful in effect, so as to avoid any defect of sterility on their part. The right moment must therefore be predetermined, both for the one who speaks as well as the one who must listen; because if the speaker is ill disposed his words are often harmful, and if the hearer is ill disposed even good words will be poorly received. And therefore Solomon says in the book of *Ecclesiastes* that “There is a time to speak and a time to keep silence.”¹⁴⁵ Consequently feeling that I was too unsettled in disposition to speak of love, for the reason stated in the preceding

¹⁴³ *not . . . skip over with dry foot* The metaphor translates roughly into our expression “need to get one’s feet wet.” In other words, further discussion, is required.

¹⁴⁴ *Time* *Physics* IV, 1. The “number of motion” is the movement of the *Primum Mobile*, the highest of the physical spheres.

¹⁴⁵ *Solomon* *Ecclesiastes* 3:7 and 20:6-7.

chapter, it seemed to me right to await the moment that would bring with itself the goal of every desire and make a present of itself, like a benefactor, to those who are not made impatient by waiting. Hence St. James the Apostle says in his Epistle: "Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, patiently abiding until he receives the early and the late."¹⁴⁶ All our troubles, if we carefully seek out their source, derive in some way from not knowing how to make a proper use of time.

I say that "since it seems a time for waiting, I will put aside," that is, forgo "my pleasant style," namely the style to which I've kept in speaking of love; and I say that I will speak of that "quality" which makes a person truly noble. Although "quality" can be understood in many different ways, here it is taken as a natural capacity, or a goodness conferred by nature, as will be seen below. And I promise to treat of this matter *with harsh and subtle rhymes*. Consequently it should be known that "rhyme" can be understood in two ways, either broadly or narrowly. In the narrow sense it means the agreement commonly made by the last and the penultimate syllables, while in the broad sense it means all speech whose cadences are regulated by rhythm and meter to produce rhymed consonances; and here in this preface the latter sense is to be taken and understood. Therefore the preface says *harsh* with regard to the sound of the words, which should not be sweet with so weighty a subject as this one; and it says *subtle* with regard to the meaning of the words, which proceed by subtle reasoning and argument. I add *By refuting the false and base beliefs*, where I promise to refute the beliefs of those who are laden with error; *false*, that is, removed from the truth, and *base*, that is, affirmed and promoted by baseness of mind.

And this is to be remarked: namely that in this preface we promise first to explain what is true and then to refute what is false, while in the book itself I do the opposite; for first I refute what is false and then explain what is true, which seems contrary to my promise. Therefore we must know that although I intend to do both, I intend principally to explain the truth; and I intend to refute what is false only insofar as the truth is made more evident. I promise here to explain the truth as my main concern, which instills in the mind of the listener the desire to listen; in the book itself what is false is first refuted so that when wrong opinions have been put to flight the truth may then be more freely received. This is the method employed by the master of human reason, Aristotle, who always fought first the foes of the truth and then, after overthrowing them, demonstrated the truth.

Finally, when I say *And first of all I call upon the lord*, I call on truth to be with me, which is the lord that dwells in the eyes (that is, in the demonstrations) of Philosophy. The truth is lord, for when married to the soul, the soul becomes a lady; otherwise she is a servant deprived of all liberty. Then it says *And makes this lady love herself*, because Philosophy,

¹⁴⁶ St. James the Apostle James 5:7.

which, as has been said in the preceding book, is the loving use of wisdom, contemplates herself when the beauty of her eyes is revealed to her. This is but to say that the philosophic soul not only contemplates the truth but, moreover, contemplates its own contemplation and the beauty of that act as well, by turning back its glance upon itself and becoming enamored of itself by reason of the beauty of its first contemplation.

And so ends that which the text of the present book presents, by way of preface, in three sections.

Chapter 3

Now that the meaning of the preface has been examined, we must consider the book; and in order to reveal it better it is necessary to divide it into its principal parts, which are three. For in the first part nobility is treated according to the opinions of others; in the second it is treated according to its own opinion; in the third words are addressed to the canzone, to add beauty to what has been said. The second part begins *I say that every virtue at its source*. The third begins *My song Against-the-erring-ones, go forth*. After these general divisions other subdivisions must be made in order to understand properly the concept that is to be set forth. No one should therefore be surprised if many subdivisions are made in this manner, because a great and lofty undertaking, little examined by the authorities, is now under hand and because the book which I now enter upon must of necessity be long and subtle in order to unravel the text perfectly according to the meaning which it holds.

I say then that this first part is now divided into two: in the first the opinions of others are put down, and in the second they are refuted; and this second subdivision begins *He who claims "Man is a living tree."* Furthermore, the first part, the one which remains, has two parts: the first treats the way in which the opinion of the Emperor goes astray, the second the way in which the opinion of the common people, which is devoid of reason, goes astray. The second part begins *And someone else of lesser wit*. Then I say: *One ruler held*, which is to say, one who exercised imperial authority. Here it should be observed that Frederick of Swabia, the last of the Roman emperors (the last, I say, up to the present time, in spite of the fact that Rudolf, Adolf, and Albert were elected after the death of Frederick and his descendants), when asked what nobility was, replied that it was ancestral wealth and fine manners.¹⁴⁷ And I say that there was *someone else of lesser wit* who, pondering and examining this definition in all its parts, removed the second half, namely "fine manners," and retained the first, namely "ancestral wealth"; and since the text seems perhaps doubtful of his having fine manners, not wishing to lose the name of nobility, he defined the term as

¹⁴⁷ *the last of the Roman emperors* Frederick II of Swabia (1194-1250), the "last" of the Holy Roman Emperors because the others in Dante's list, while elected, were never crowned.

ancestral wealth long possessed simply to suit himself. I state that this opinion is almost universal by saying that there follow in his wake all those who count a man as noble if he comes from stock that has had great wealth for quite some time, since almost everyone barks it out in this manner. These two opinions—although one, as has been said, is of no concern to us—seem to have two very weighty reasons to support them. The first is the Philosopher's belief that what appears true to the majority cannot be entirely false; the second reasoning stems from the most excellent authority of the Imperial Majesty.¹⁴⁸ In order that the power of truth, which outweighs all authority, may be more clearly seen, I intend to discuss to what extent each of these reasons is useful and valid. Since nothing can be known about the imperial authority unless its roots are found, it is first necessary to discuss them expressly in a special chapter.

Chapter 4

The root foundation underlying the Imperial Majesty is, in truth, man's need for human society, which is established for a single end: namely, a life of happiness, which no one is able to attain by himself without the aid of someone else, since one has need of many things which no single individual is able to provide. Therefore the Philosopher says that man is by nature a social animal.¹⁴⁹ And just as for his well-being an individual requires the domestic companionship provided by family, so for its well-being a household requires a community, for otherwise it would suffer many defects that would hinder happiness. And since a community could not provide for its own well-being completely by itself, it is necessary for this well-being that there be a city.

Moreover, a city requires for the sake of its culture and its defense mutual relations and brotherhood with the surrounding cities, and for this reason kingdoms were created. Since the human mind does not rest content with limited possession of land but always seeks to achieve glory through further conquest, as we see from experience, discord and war must spring up between one kingdom and another. Such things are the tribulations of cities, of the surrounding cities, of the communities, and of the households of individuals; and so happiness is hindered. Consequently, in order to do away with these wars and their causes, it is necessary that the whole earth, and all that is given to the human race to possess, should be a Monarchy—that is, a single principality, having one prince who, possessing all things and being unable to desire anything else, would keep the kings content within the boundaries of their kingdoms and preserve among them the peace in which the cities might rest. Through this peace the communities would come to love one another, and by this love all households would provide for their needs, which when

¹⁴⁸ *the Philosopher's belief* Aristotle's opinion may be found in St. Thomas' Commentary on the Ethics VII, 13, 1509.

¹⁴⁹ *man is by nature a social animal* Aristotle, Politics I, 2.

provided would bring man happiness, for this is the end for which he is born.¹⁵⁰

In regard to this argument we may refer to the words of the Philosopher when he says in the *Politics* that when many are directed to a single end, one of them should be a governor or a ruler, and all the rest should be ruled or governed. This is what we observe on a ship, where the different offices and objectives are directed to a single end: namely, that of reaching the desired port by a safe route. Just as each officer directs his own activity to its own end, so there is one individual who takes account of all these ends and directs them to their final end: and this is the captain, whose commands all must obey. We see this in religious orders, in armies, and in all things, as has been said, which are directed to an end. Consequently it is evident that, in order to bring to perfection the universal social order of the human species, it is necessary to have a single individual who, like a captain, upon considering the different conditions in the world, should have, in order to direct the different and necessary offices, the universal and indisputable office of complete command. This pre-eminent office is called the Empire, without qualification, because it is the command of all other commands. And thus he who is placed in this office is called the Emperor, since he is the commander of all other commands; and what he says is law for all and ought to be obeyed by all, and every other command gains strength and authority from his. And so it is clear that the imperial majesty and authority are the highest in the fellowship of mankind.

Nevertheless someone might quibble by arguing that although the world requires an imperial office, there is no sound reason why the authority of a Roman prince should be supreme—which is the point we seek to prove—because the power of Rome was acquired neither by reason nor by decree of universal consensus, but by force, which appears to be the opposite of reason. To this we may easily reply that the election of this supreme officer must in the first place derive from that wisdom which provides for all men, namely God; for otherwise the election would not have been made on behalf of everyone, since prior to the officer named above there was no one who attended to the general good. And because no nature ever was or will be more tempered in the exercise of rule, stronger in its preservation, and more clever in acquiring it than that of the Latin race (as can be seen from experience), that sacred people in whom was mingled the lofty blood of the Trojans, namely Rome, God chose this people for that office. Therefore since this office could not be attained without the greatest virtue, and since its exercise required the greatest and most humane kindness, this was the people best disposed to receive it. Consequently the Roman people secured it originally not by force but by divine providence, which transcends all reason.

¹⁵⁰ *should be a Monarchy* The concept of monarchy as the ideal form of government will be more fully developed in the Latin treatise *Monarchia* (1312), where Dante will reiterate the notion that the monarchy, being exempt from greed by virtue of its possessing universal jurisdiction on earth, is founded on absolute justice.

Vergil concurs in this in the first book of the *Aeneid* when, speaking in the person of God, he says: “To these (namely the Romans) I set no bounds, either in space or time; to these I have given empire without end.”¹⁵¹ Force was therefore not the moving cause, as our quibbler supposed, but rather the instrumental cause, as the blows of a hammer are the cause of a knife, while the mind of the smith is the efficient and moving cause; and thus not force but reason, and moreover divine reason, must have been the origin of the Roman Empire. Two very distinct reasons may be adduced to prove that this city is imperial and had an origin and progress that were especially arranged by God. But since this subject could not be treated in this chapter without undue length, and long chapters are the foe of memory, I will extend my digression to another chapter to set forth the reasons indicated above, not without profit and much delight.

Chapter 5

It is no wonder if divine providence, which wholly transcends angelic and human powers of perception, often proceeds in ways that are hidden to us, inasmuch as human actions frequently conceal their meanings from men themselves. But it is a cause for great wonder when the workings of the eternal counsel are so clearly manifest as to be discerned by our reason. I am therefore at the beginning of this chapter able to recite the words of Solomon who says in Proverbs, in the person of Wisdom: “Listen, for I will speak of great things.”¹⁵²

When the infinite goodness of God willed to bring back into conformity with itself the human creature, who had been deformed by separation from God through the sin of the first man’s transgression, it was decreed, in that most elevated and most united consistory of the Trinity, that the Son of God should descend to earth to bring about this harmony.¹⁵³ Since the world (not only heaven, but earth as well) should be properly disposed for his coming—and the earth is properly disposed under a monarchy (that is, when it is fully subject to one prince, as has been said above)—divine providence ordained that those people and that city, namely glorious Rome, should be chosen to accomplish this end. Since even the abode into which the celestial king was to enter should be most clean and pure, it was arranged that a very holy lineage should come into existence, from which after many virtuous descendants a woman finer than any other should be born to become the chamber of the Son of God. This was the lineage of David, from which was born the pride and honor of the human race, namely Mary. Therefore it is written in Isaiah: “There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall

¹⁵¹ *Vergil concurs in this* *Aeneid* I, 278.

¹⁵² *the words of Solomon* Proverbs 8:6.

¹⁵³ *the Son of God should descend to earth* Dante will treat the theology of the redemption more fully in *Paradiso* VII.

spring from his root.”¹⁵⁴ Jesse was the father of the David referred to above. All this occurred at one point in time: David was born when Rome was born—that is, when Aeneas came to Italy from Troy, which was the origin of the Roman city, according to written records. As a result the divine choice of the Roman empire is made manifest by the birth of the holy city which was contemporaneous with the root of the family of Mary.

Incidentally, it should be observed that from the time that this heaven began to revolve, it has never been in a better position than when he who created and rules it descended from above, as the mathematicians are still able to ascertain by virtue of their arts. Nor was the world ever, nor will it be, so perfectly disposed as at the time when it was guided by the voice of the one sole prince and commander of the Roman people, as Luke the Evangelist testifies.¹⁵⁵ Since universal peace reigned everywhere, which it never did before nor ever shall again, the ship of human society was speeding on an even course directly toward its proper port. O ineffable and incomprehensible wisdom of God who at the same hour both over in Syria and here in Italy made your preparations so well beforehand! O utterly foolish and vile are you brutes who pasture as if you were men and presume to speak against our faith and, while spinning wool and tilling the soil, seek to know what God through his great foresight has ordained! Accursed be you and your presumption, and those who believe your words!

As has been said above at the end of the preceding chapter of the present book, God gave Rome not only a special birth but a special evolution. For, in brief, from Romulus, who was her first parent, up to the age of her greatest perfection, namely the era of the emperor cited above, her evolution was effected by means not only of human but also divine undertakings.¹⁵⁶ For if we consider the seven kings who first governed her—namely Romulus, Numa, Tullus, Ancus, and the Tarquin kings who were the rulers and the tutors, so to speak, of her youth—we will discover from the records of Roman history, especially from Titus Livius, that these were men whose natures differed according to the requirements of the historical moment. If we then consider her more advanced youth, after she was emancipated from the tutelage of the kings, from the time of Brutus, the first consul, up until Caesar, the first supreme prince, we will find that she was exalted not with human but with godlike citizens whose love of her was inspired not by a human but a divine love. This could not and should not have happened unless there was a special end, conceived for her by God, brought about through a very great infusion of celestial grace.

¹⁵⁴ *it is written in Isaiah* Isaiah 11:1.

¹⁵⁵ *as Luke the Evangelist testifies* Luke 2:1 ff.

¹⁵⁶ *the emperor cited above* Augustus, the first Roman emperor.

Who will say that Fabricius was not divinely inspired when he refused to accept an almost infinite amount of gold because he would not abandon his country? Or Curius, whom the Samnites attempted to corrupt, when he refused to accept a huge quantity of gold for love of his country, saying that the citizens of Rome sought to possess not gold but the possessors of the gold? Or Mucius, who set fire to his own hand because the blow by which he thought to deliver Rome fell wide of its mark? Who will say that Torquatus, who sentenced his own son to death out of love for the public good, could have borne his suffering without divine assistance? Similarly the already mentioned Brutus? Who will say this of the Decii and the Drusi who laid down their lives for their country? Who will say that the captive Regulus, having been sent from Carthage to Rome to exchange Cathaginian prisoners for himself and the other Roman prisoners, was moved solely by human and not divine nature when for the love of Rome he gave advice to his own disadvantage after the envoys had withdrawn?

Who will say of Quintus Cincinnatus, who was made dictator and taken from the plough, that he renounced his office after having completed his term and returned of his own accord to the plough? Who will say of Camillus that, after being banished and cast into exile, he returned to free Rome from her enemies, and that after freeing her he went back into exile of his own accord in order not to offend the authority of the Senate, without divine influence? O most hallowed breast of Cato, who will presume to speak of you?¹⁵⁷ Surely we cannot speak of you better than by observing silence and by following the example of Jerome, who says, in his preface to the Bible, where he refers to Paul, that it is better to keep silent than to say too little. Surely it must be evident as we recall the lives of these and all the other godlike citizens that these wondrous events took place, not without some light of the divine goodness over and above their own natural goodness. It must be evident that these men of supreme excellence were the instruments with which divine providence realized the evolution of the Roman empire, where on many occasions the arm of God appeared to be present. For was the hand of God not evident in the battle in which the Albans fought with the Romans, at the beginning, for the control of the Empire, when the liberty of Roman lay in the hands of a single Roman? Was the hand of God not evident when the Gauls, having taken all of Rome, secretly seized the Capitol during the night and only the cry of a goose made it known? Was the hand of God not evident when in the war of Hannibal the Romans, having lost so many citizens that three bushels of rings were taken to Carthage, were ready to abandon their country if that blessed young Scipio had not taken his campaign for the liberation of Rome into Africa? And was the hand of God not evident when a new citizen of

¹⁵⁷ O most hallowed breast of Cato Cato of Utica (95-46 B.C) has a special place in Dante's imagination. He is the guardian of Purgatory and the symbol of human freedom, a pagan endowed with a "santo petto" [holy breast] (Purg. I, 80). In the *Monarchia*, Dante speaks of "the unspeakable sacrifice of Marcus Cato, the strictest champion of true liberty" (II, 5), words that identify him as a type of Christ.

small means, namely Tully, defended the liberty of Rome against so great a citizen as Catiline? Most certainly.

Consequently we need seek no further proof in order to see that this holy city had a special birth and a special evolution, conceived and ordained by God. I am most certainly of the firm opinion that the stones lodged in her walls are worthy of reverence and that the soil on which she rests is more worthy than is commonly proclaimed or established.

Chapter 6

Above, in the third chapter of this book, a promise was made to discuss the loftiness of the imperial and philosophic authorities. Therefore having discussed the imperial authority, I must continue my digression and take up the subject of the authority of the Philosopher, in keeping with my promise. Here we must first observe what this word “authority” means, for there is a greater necessity to know this in discussing the philosophic as opposed to the imperial authority, which by virtue of its majesty does not seem open to question. It should be known, then, that “authority” is nothing but “the pronouncement of an author.”

This word, namely “auctor” without the third letter *c*, has two possible sources of derivation. One is a verb that has very much fallen out of use in Latin and which signifies more or less “to tie words together,” that is, “auieo.” Anyone who studies it carefully in its first form will observe that it displays its own meaning, for it is made up only of the ties of words, that is, of the five vowels alone, which are the soul and tie of every word, and is composed of them in a different order, so as to portray the image of a tie.¹⁵⁸ For beginning with A it turns back to U, goes straight through to I and E, then turns back and comes to O, so that it truly portrays this image: A, E, I, O, U, which is the figure of a tie.¹⁵⁹ Insofar as “author” is derived and comes from this verb, it is used only to refer to poets who have tied their words together with the art of poetry; but at present we are not concerned with this meaning. The other source from which “author” derives, as Uguccione attests in the beginning of his book *Derivations*, is a Greek word pronounced “*autentin*” which in Latin means “worthy of faith and obedience.”¹⁶⁰ Thus “author,” in this derivation, is used for any person deserving of being believed and obeyed. From this comes the

¹⁵⁸ *its first form* According to Uguccione, from whom Dante takes this fanciful etymology, the Latin verb *auieo*, or *avieo*, means “to tie,” as does the other form, *vieo* (from *viere*). The verbs do not in fact exist. For Uguccione (died 1210), see the note below.

¹⁵⁹ *the figure of a tie* The image Dante is trying to convey is of a hand-drawn line that encircles these letters in their alphabetical order. The “*arte musaica*” symbolized by this image is the art of the Muses, or poetry (and not of music, as Wicksteed, for example, mistranslates the phrase).

¹⁶⁰ *as Uguccione attests* The Latin title of this work is *Liber de derivationibus verborum*, also known simply as *Derivationes*.

word which we are presently treating, namely “authority”; hence we can see that authority means “pronouncement worthy of faith and obedience.” Consequently, when I prove that Aristotle is most worthy of faith and obedience, it will be evident that his words are the supreme and highest authority.

That Aristotle is the most worthy of faith and obedience may be proved as follows. Among workmen and craftsmen of various arts and activities which are ordained to a single final activity or art, the craftsman or workman pursuing such an end must above all be obeyed and trusted by everyone as being he alone who considers the final end of all the other ends. Hence the knight should be trusted by the sword-maker, the bridle-maker, the saddle-maker, the shield-maker, and all trades that are established for the purpose of achieving the goals of chivalry. Since all human activities require a final end, namely the end of human life to which man is directed insofar as he is human, the master or the craftsman who studies this and reveals it to us should be obeyed and trusted above all others. That man is Aristotle: he therefore is the most worthy of faith and obedience.¹⁶¹ In order to perceive how Aristotle is the master and leader of human reason, insofar as it is directed to man’s final activity, we must know that this end of ours, which everyone by nature desires, was sought out in very early times by the sages. Since, however, those who desire this end are very numerous and the desires are almost entirely different in each instance, although they have but a single universal end, it was very difficult to discern this single end in which every human desire should rightly find its peace.

There were then very ancient philosophers, the first and most important of whom was Zeno, who perceived and believed that the end of human life consisted solely of strict integrity—that is, in strictly, unreservedly following truth and justice, in not showing sorrow for anything or joy for anything, in not being responsive to any emotion.¹⁶² And they defined this integrity as “that which apart from utility or profit is for its own sake praiseworthy according to reason.” They and their sect were called Stoics, and to them belonged that glorious Cato of whom I did not dare to speak above.

There were other philosophers whose views and beliefs differed from theirs, and of these the first and most important was a philosopher called Epicurus who, seeing that every living creature as soon as it is born is, as it were, directed by nature toward its proper end, avoiding pain and seeking pleasure, said that this end of ours was pleasure—that is, delight free from pain. Because he did not posit any mean between delight and pain, he claimed that

¹⁶¹ *That man is Aristotle* Throughout the Convivio it will be quite evident to the reader that Aristotle Dante’s guide in this world, “the master and leader of human reason” for all men. This is a role that Dante will give to Vergil in the Divine Comedy, a change which derives from Dante’s increased emphasis, in part, on the role of the poet, as opposed to philosopher, as moral guide.

¹⁶² *Zeno* Placed among the pagan philosophers in Limbo (Inf. IV, 138), Zeno of Cithium was the leader of the Stoics.

“pleasure” was nothing but the absence of pain,” as Tully seems to relate in the first book of *On the End of Goods*.¹⁶³ To these, who were called Epicurians after Epicurus, belonged Torquatus, a Roman noble descended by blood from the glorious Torquatus whom I mentioned above.

There were others who owe their origin to Socrates and later to his successor Plato, who, examining with greater care and perceiving that in our actions we might commit a wrong and do so through excess or through defect, said that our action when free from excess and defect and in accord with the mean adopted of our own volition, which is to say virtue, was that end of which we are presently speaking. They called it “acting with virtue.” These were the Academics, like Plato and his nephew Speusippus, who were so named for the place in which Plato studied, that is, the Academy. They did not take their name from Socrates because in his philosophy no affirmative statements were made.¹⁶⁴

Aristotle, however, whose surname was Stagirites, and his companion Xenocrates of Chalcedon, through the singular and almost divine genius which nature conferred on Aristotle, coming to know this end by much the same method as that of Socrates and the Academics, put the finishing touches on moral philosophy and perfected it—especially Aristotle. Because Aristotle initiated the practice of discoursing while walking backwards and forwards they (I mean he and his companions) were called Peripatetics, which means the same as “those who walk about.” And because this moral philosophy was brought to perfection by Aristotle, the name of the Academics faded from memory, and all those who became affiliated with this sect came to be called Peripatetics. This group at present holds universal sway in teaching everywhere, and their doctrine may almost be called universal opinion. Thus it may be seen that Aristotle is the one who directs and guides mankind to this goal; and this is what we wished to show.

Therefore, to sum up, my main point is made clear: namely that the authority of the supreme philosopher with whom we are now concerned is invested with complete power. His authority is not opposed to the imperial authority; but the latter authority without the former creates a danger, and the former authority without the latter creates a weakness, not inherently, but as a result of the lack of harmony among the people. When the one is united with the other they are of the greatest utility and possess the most complete power. Therefore it is written in the book of *Wisdom*, “Love the light of wisdom, all you who are before the people,” which is to say, “Let the philosophic be united with the imperial authority, for good and perfect government.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ as Tully seems to relate Cicero, *De finibus* I, 9-11.

¹⁶⁴ no affirmative statements Socrates' philosophy, that is, was essentially based on negatives or unresolved dialectic.

¹⁶⁵ in the book of *Wisdom* *Wisdom* 6:23.

O pitiful are you who rule at present, and most pitiful you who are ruled! For no philosophical authority is united with your governments, whether by virtue of your own study or through the counsel of others, so that to all may be applied the words of *Ecclesiastes*, “Woe to you, O land whose king is a child and whose princes eat in the morning!”; and to no land may the following words be said: “Blessed is the land whose king is noble and whose princes devote their time to the people’s needs and not to their own wantonness.”¹⁶⁶ Pay attention to what is by your side, you enemies of God who have seized the rods of the governments of Italy. I am speaking to you, Charles and Frederick, and to you other princes and tyrants!¹⁶⁷ Beware who sits by your side and offers advice, and count how many times a day your counselors call your attention to this end of human life. Better would it be for you to fly low like a swallow than to soar aloft like a kite over things that are totally base.

Chapter 7

Since we have seen what reverence is owed to the imperial and the philosophical authorities, we must now return to the straight path of our intended course. I say then that this last opinion is so ingrained in the common people that unreservedly, without reasonable inquiry, anyone who is the son or grandson of a worthy person is called noble, even though he is worthless. This is the part which begins *And so ingrained Has this false view become among us That one calls another noble If he can say ‘I am the son, Or grandson, of such and such A famous man,’ despite his lack of worth*. Consequently it must be observed that it is extremely dangerous to allow a false opinion to take root through negligence. For just as grass spreads in an uncultivated field and overshoots and covers the spikes of wheat so that when seen from afar the wheat disappears, and the fruit is finally lost, so a false opinion, if left uncensured and uncorrected, grows and spreads in the mind so that the spikes of reason, namely of right opinion, are concealed and, as it were, buried and lost. O how great an enterprise have I undertaken in this canzone by desiring now to weed an overgrown field like that of common opinion, so long deprived of cultivation. Certainly I do not intend to clear the entire field, but only those parts in which the spikes of reason are not completely overtaken; that is to say, I intend to set straight those in whom some glimmer of reason still survives by virtue of their good nature, for the rest deserve no more attention than do the animals; for it seems to me no less a miracle to restore to reason someone in whom the light of reason has been entirely extinguished than to restore to life someone who has been buried in the ground for four days.

¹⁶⁶ the words of *Ecclesiastes* *Ecclesiastes* 10:16 and 17.

¹⁶⁷ *Charles and Frederick* Charles II, the Cripple, King of Naples (1248-1309), and Frederick II of Aragon, King of Sicily (1296-1337), both referred to in *Paradiso* XIX, 127 and 130-135.

After the evil state of this popular opinion has been described, the canzone suddenly smites it with an extraordinary reproof as if it were a horrible thing, by saying: "*But he appears the basest, To those who see the truth*, in order to reveal its intolerable wickedness by affirming that they are the worst liars; for he who is wicked though descended from good stock is not only base (that is, not noble) but the basest of all; and I give the example of the way that has been pointed out.

To make this clear I must pose a question and then answer it, as follows. Suppose there is a plain with established paths and fields full of hedges, ditches, stones, timber, with obstacles of every kind blocking the way except along the narrow paths. Snow has fallen so that it covers everything and presents the same image in all places, so that no trace of any path can be seen. A man comes from one side of the plain and wishes to go to a dwelling on the other side, and by his own efforts, that is, by using his own power of observation and intelligence, taking himself as guide, he proceeds along the straight way in the direction in which he intends to travel, leaving footprints behind him. After him comes another wishing to travel to this same dwelling, and he has only to follow the footprints left behind; yet although he has been shown the way which the other man was able to find for himself without guidance, by his own fault he wanders and twists among the bramble and brier and goes where he should not. Which of these ought to be called a worthy man? I reply, he who went first. And what should the other be called? I reply, the basest of men. Why is he not called simply unworthy, which is to say merely base? I reply, because that man should be called unworthy, which is to say base, who having no guidance goes astray; but since this one had guidance, his error and fault could not be greater, and therefore he must be called not simply base but basest. Thus he who is descended of noble stock through his father or some ancestor, and is also evil, is not only base but basest and deserving of contempt and scorn more than any other ill-bred person.

So that we might avoid falling into this utter baseness, Solomon, in the twenty-second chapter of Proverbs, exhorts those who have had a man of worth for an ancestor, "Do not transgress the ancient landmarks which your fathers have set." And in the fourth chapter of the same book he says, "The path of the just," that is, of men of worth, "leads forward as a shining light, and the way of the wicked is dark; they know not at what they stumble."¹⁶⁸ Lastly, when it is said, *And walks the earth like one who's dead*, I say that this vilest man is dead, though he seems alive, in order to discredit him further.

Here it should be observed that a wicked man may truly be said to be dead, and above all he who strays from the path of his good ancestor. This may be demonstrated as follows. As Aristotle says in the second book of *On the Soul*,

¹⁶⁸ Solomon Proverbs 22:28 and 4:18.

“life is the state of being of living things”; and since life exists in many degrees (as in plants, vegetation; in animals, vegetation, sensation, and movement; in man, vegetation, sensation, movement, and reasoning or intelligence), and things must be named from their noblest part, it is evident that in animals life is sensation—I mean the brutes—and in man it is the use of reason.¹⁶⁹ Therefore if such is the life and state of man’s being, to abandon one’s use of reason is to abandon one’s state of being, which is the same as to be dead. And does a man not abandon his reason when he does not reflect upon the end of his life? Does a man not abandon his reason when he does not reflect upon the path which he must take? Certainly he does, and it is most evident in the person who has footprints before him and does not regard them. For this reason Solomon says in the fifth chapter of Proverbs, “He who lacks instruction dies, and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.”¹⁷⁰ This is to say: He is dead who leaves no disciple and does not follow his master; he is the vilest of all. There are some who might ask: How is it that he is dead and yet walks the earth? I reply that he is dead as man and survives as beast. For, as the Philosopher says in the second book of *On the Soul*, the powers of the soul stand one above another as the figure of the quadrangle stands above that of the triangle, and the pentagon (that is, a figure having five sides) stands above the quadrangle: so the sensitive power stands above the vegetative power, and the intellectual power stands above the sensitive power.¹⁷¹ Therefore if what is left by removing the last side of a pentagon is a quadrangle, and no longer a pentagon, then what is left when the last power of the soul is removed is no longer a man but something possessing only a sensitive soul, which is to say, a brute. And this is the meaning of the second stanza of the canzone under examination, in which the opinions of others are expressed.

Chapter 8

The fairest branch that springs from the root of reason is discrimination. For as Thomas says at the head of his prologue to the *Ethics*, “to know the relationship between one thing and another is the proper act of reason,” and this is discrimination. One of the fairest and sweetest fruits of this branch is the reverence which a lesser owes to a greater. Consequently Tully, in the first book of *On Offices*, speaking of the beauty which shines forth from integrity, says that reverence is a part of it. And just as reverence is one of the beauties of integrity, so its opposite is the defilement and degradation of integrity, and

¹⁶⁹ As Aristotle says On the Soul II, 4, 7 and I, 18, 2.

¹⁷⁰ “He who lacks instruction dies . . .” Proverbs 5:23.

¹⁷¹ the powers of the soul stand one above another Each succeeding geometric figure contains the previous one, i.e., the triangle’s three sides are contained within the quadrangle which has four sides. The reference is to On the Soul II, 3, 5.

this irreverence in our vernacular may be called arrogance. Therefore Tully himself says in the same place, "To fail to know what others think of us is the mark of one who is not only arrogant but dissolute," which is simply to say that arrogance and dissoluteness constitute a lack of that self-knowledge which is the source and the measure of all reverence. Therefore since it is my wish, in observing all due reverence to the Prince and to the Philosopher, to remove malice from the minds of some in order to instill there the light of truth, before proceeding to refute the opinions stated above, I will show how in refuting them I argue with irreverence toward neither the imperial authority nor the Philosopher. For if I were to show myself to be irreverent in any part of this work, it could not be more unbecoming than if it were in this book, where by treating of nobility I must show myself to be noble and not base. First I will show that I do not impinge against the authority of the Philosopher; then I will show that I do not impinge against the Imperial Majesty.

I say then that when the Philosopher states that "what appears true to the majority cannot be entirely false," he does not mean to speak of outward appearances (that is, of what is perceived by the senses) but of what is within (that is, of what is perceived by the mind), because appearances judged by the senses are, with regard to the majority, in many instances completely false, especially in the case of objects which are perceptible to more than one sense, since then the senses are often deceived.¹⁷² Thus we know that to most people the Sun appears to be a foot in diameter, and this is quite false. For according to the research and findings that human reason has made with the aid of its attendant arts, the diameter of the Sun is 5 1/2 times that of the Earth, so that if the Earth is 6500 miles in diameter, the diameter of the Sun, which by sense perception appears to measure one foot, is 35,750 miles. Consequently it is evident that Aristotle did not have sense perception in mind; therefore I do not go counter to the Philosopher's meaning, nor do I offend the reverence which is due to him, if I seek only to refute the issue of sense perception. And that I intend to refute the claims of sense perception is evident. For those who judge in this way judge only by what they perceive of the things which fortune can give or take away; for when they see high connections and marriages made, and marvelous buildings, and extensive possessions, powerful lordships, they believe that these things are the cause of nobility; indeed, they believe them to be the essence of nobility itself. For if they were to judge according to the mind's perception they would say the opposite, namely that nobility is the cause of these things, as will be seen below in this book.

And just as I do not impugn, as may be seen, the reverence due to the Philosopher in my refutation, so I do not impugn the reverence due to the Empire; and I propose to show the reason why. But because when speaking in the presence of his adversary a speaker must observe great care in his choice of words, so that the adversary does not derive from it material for obscuring

¹⁷² the Philosopher states Ethics I, 8, and *passim*.

the truth, I who speak in this book before a great many adversaries cannot speak with brevity. If consequently my digressions are lengthy, let no one be surprised. I say then that in order to show that I am not irreverent to the majesty of the Empire, we must first see what constitutes “reverence.” I say that reverence is nothing but the confirmation of a due submission by manifest sign. Once this is perceived, we must then distinguish between an “irreverent” person and a person who is “not reverent.” “Irreverent” denotes privation, while “not reverent” denotes negation. Irreverence therefore consists in renouncing a due submission, I mean by manifest sign, while absence of reverence consists in denying a due submission. A man can disavow something in two ways. He can express disavowal in one way by offending against the truth, as when due confirmation is withheld, and this is properly called “renunciation.” He can express disavowal in another way by not offending against the truth, as when he refuses to affirm that which does not exist, and this is properly called “denial,” for when a man disavows that he is wholly mortal, this, properly speaking, constitutes a denial.

Consequently if I deny reverence to the Empire I am not irreverent, but only not reverent, for this is not contrary to reverence since it does not offend against it, just as the absence of life does not offend against life but rather against death, which is the privation of it. Death is one thing and the absence of life is another, for absence of life is found in stones. Since death denotes privation, which cannot obtain in something not endowed with habit, and since stones are not endowed with life, so that they should not be said to be “dead” but “non-living,” likewise I, who in this instance do not owe reverence to the Empire, am not irreverent in disavowing it but rather not reverent, which is not arrogance, nor something to condemn. But to be reverent would constitute arrogance, if it could be called reverence, since one would fall into a real and greater irreverence, namely irreverence toward truth and toward nature, as will be seen below. Aristotle, the master of philosophers, defended himself against this error at the beginning of the *Ethics* when he said, “If we have two friends and one of them is truth, we must concur with truth.”¹⁷³ Nevertheless since I have said that I am not reverent, which denotes the denial of reverence (that is, the denial of due submission by manifest sign), we must see how this is a denial and not a disavowal—that is, how in this instance I am not duly subject to the Imperial Majesty. And since the explanation is of necessity lengthy, I intend to demonstrate it without delay in a separate chapter.

Chapter 9

To see how in this case—that is, in refuting or confirming the Emperor’s opinion—I am not obliged to place myself in submission to him, it is necessary to recall to mind what was discussed above in the fourth chapter of this book concerning the imperial office: namely, that the imperial authority was

¹⁷³ “If we have two friends . . .” *Ethics* I, 4.

created in order to perfect human life and that it is by right the regulator and the ruler of all our activities, and that consequently the Imperial Majesty has jurisdiction just as broad as our activities extend, and beyond these limits it does not go. But just as every art and office of man is held within fixed limits by the imperial office, so this empire is confined by God within fixed limits; and this is no cause for wonder, because we see that the office and the art of nature is limited in all its operations. For if we wish to consider the universal nature of all things, it has jurisdiction co-extensive with the entire universe, I mean heaven and earth; and the universe exists within a fixed limit, as is proved in the third book of the *Physics* and in the first of *On Heaven and Earth*. Therefore the jurisdiction of universal nature is confined within fixed limits, and so consequently is particular nature; and he who is limited by nothing at all sets the limits on nature, that is, the first excellence which is God, who alone comprehends the infinite by his infinite capacity.

In order to perceive the limits of our activities, we must know that only those activities are ours which are subject to reason and to will; for although the digestive activity is found within us, it is not human but natural. We must further know that our reason is related to four kinds of activities, which must be regarded as different. For there are activities which it merely contemplates but does not, and cannot, perform: for example, things natural, supernatural, and mathematical. There are other activities which it contemplates and performs by its own act, and these are called rational, as for example the art of speech. And there are other activities which it contemplates and performs by means of matter external to itself, as for example the mechanical arts.¹⁷⁴ All of these activities, although contemplation of them is dependent on our will, are not in themselves subject to our will. For however much we might wish that heavy things should by nature rise upward, however much we might wish that a syllogism based on false premises should yield a truth by demonstration, and however much we might wish that a house should stand as firmly when leaning as when erect, this could not be, because we are not, properly speaking, the makers of these activities but merely those who have discovered them. It was another who ordained them, and a greater maker who made them. There are also activities which our reason contemplates as an act of the will, as for instance giving offense or assistance, standing ground or fleeing in battle, and remaining chaste or yielding to lust.¹⁷⁵ These are completely subject to our will, and therefore we are considered good or evil, because they are completely of our own making; for as far as our will can reach, so far do our activities extend. Since in all of these voluntary activities justice must be preserved and injustice avoided, and this justice may be lost in two ways (either through not knowing what it is, or through not willing to follow it),

¹⁷⁴ *there are activities* There are the speculative uses of the mind, for example, mathematics, in which man discovers truths but does not create them. A second category involves the use of logic, which is creative, as in the example of the art of speech. Finally, there is the use of the practical intellect applied to external objects, for example, the art of sculpture, which Dante, following St. Thomas' schema, calls the "mechanical arts."

¹⁷⁵ *as an act of the will* This is the fourth of the activities, and the one that involves the moral use of reason.

written Law was invented in order both to establish it and to administer it. So Augustine says, "If men had known it (namely justice) and, when known, had observed it, there would have been no need of written Law." Therefore it is written in the beginning of the Old Digest that "Written law is the art of well-doing and justice."¹⁷⁶ The official of whom we are speaking, namely the Emperor, is appointed to formulate, demonstrate, and enforce precisely this Law, and to him we are subject as far as our own activities extend, which have already been described, and no further. For this reason in every art and in every trade the craftsmen and apprentices are, and should be, subject to the chief and master of the activities within those arts and trades, outside of which the subjection ceases, because the rule of the master ceases. Thus we might say of the Emperor, if we were to describe his office with an image, that he is the one who rides in the saddle of the human will. How this horse pricks across the plain without a rider is more than evident, especially in wretched Italy, which has been left with no means whatsoever to govern herself.¹⁷⁷

It must be observed that the more a thing is peculiar to an art or a rule, the more complete is the subjection; for if the cause is intensified, so is its effect. Hence we must know that there are some things so purely matters of art that nature becomes an instrument of art, as for example rowing with an oar, where art makes propulsion, which is a natural movement, its instrument; or as in threshing wheat where art makes heat, which is a natural quality, its instrument. Here most of all is subjection due to the chief and master of the particular art. There are things in which the art is the instrument of nature, and these are lesser arts; in these the craftsmen are less subject to their chief, as for example in scattering seed upon the earth (for here we must wait on the will of nature), or in leaving port (for here we must wait on the natural disposition of the weather). Therefore we find that in matters of this kind disputes often arise among the craftsmen, and the superior seeking the advice of the inferior. There are others things which do not pertain to the art but seem to be associated with it, with the result that men are often deceived. In these things the apprentices are not subject to the master, nor are they bound to submit to him with respect to their particular art, as for example fishing seems to be associated with navigation and the knowledge of the virtues of herbs with agriculture. Yet they have no ground in common since fishing falls under the art of hunting and is subject to its authority and the knowledge of the virtues of herbs under medicine or under some higher branch of learning.

In like manner what we have discussed with regard to the other arts may be seen to hold true for the art of imperial rule. For in the art of imperial rule there are certain spheres of regulation which are pure arts, such as laws pertaining to marriage, slavery, military service, succession in office, in which

¹⁷⁶ "Written Law . . ." The Corpus iuris (mentioned in I, 10 above). The source for the passage in Augustine has not been discovered. The second is taken from the Digestum vetus de Iustitia et Iure, tit. I.

¹⁷⁷ *in the saddle of the human will* Dante will elaborate this equestrian image in his famous diatribe against a meretricious and wayward Italy in Purg. VI, where the saddle is empty ("la sella è vòta" [89]).

matters we are entirely subject to the Emperor without any possible doubt or question. There are other laws which in a sense follow from the forces of nature, such as determining at what age a man is sufficiently prepared to manage his own affairs, and in these we are not entirely subject. There are many others which seem to be associated with the art of imperial rule, and anyone believing the imperial judgment in such matters to be authoritative was, and still is, deceived. For example, regarding the definitions of maturity and of nobility, the imperial judgment cannot compel assent simply by virtue of the fact that he is Emperor. Therefore let us render unto God that which belongs to God. Consequently we need not submit or assent to the Emperor Nero, who said that maturity is beauty and physical strength, but to him who said that maturity is the pinnacle of the natural life, and that would be the Philosopher. It is therefore evident that defining nobility does not fall within the scope of the art of imperial rule; and if it does not fall within the scope of that art, we are not, in treating of nobility, subject to the Emperor; and if we are not subject to him, we are not bound to reverence him in this matter; and this is precisely the conclusion that we have been in search of. Consequently with full license and with utter conviction we must now strike at the heart of the received opinions and throw them to the earth so that by reason of my victory the true opinion may stand its ground in the minds of those for whom it is a benefit that this light shines strongly.

Chapter 10

Now that the opinions of others concerning nobility have been set down and it has been shown that I am free to refute them, I shall proceed to discuss that part of the canzone which refutes them. It begins, as is said above, *He who claims "Man is a living tree."* We ought to know, however, that the Emperor's opinion, although he put it *defectively* in one phrase, namely where he mentioned *fine manners*, did touch on the manners of the nobility, and therefore it is not my intention to refute this particular point. The other phrase which is entirely foreign to the nature of nobility I do intend to refute, for it appears to mention two things in speaking of *ancestral wealth*, namely time and riches, which are entirely foreign to nobility, as has been said and as will be demonstrated below. Consequently the refutation is divided into two parts: first I refute the idea that riches are a cause of wealth, and then that time is. The second part begins: *Nor will they grant that one born base may yet in time.* We must know that by refuting riches not only is the Emperor's opinion refuted, in the part where he touches on riches, but also the opinion of the common herd, which was based on wealth alone, in its entirety. The first part is divided into two: in the first it is said in general terms that the Emperor erred in his definition of nobility, and in the second the reason why is shown. The second part begins, *For riches, as is generally thought.*

I say then *He who claims "Man is a living tree"* first says *what isn't true* (that is, what is false) insofar as he says "tree"; and then he *leaves much*

unsaid (that is, he speaks defectively) insofar as he says “living” and not “rational,” which is what distinguishes man from the beasts. Then I say that in the same way he erred in his definition of *the ruler of the Empire*; and I do not say “Emperor” but “he who was the ruler of the Empire,” to show, as has been said above, that deciding this issue lies outside the scope of the imperial office. Then I say that he likewise erred by wrongly supposing ancestral wealth to be the subject of nobility, and afterwards he proceeded to embrace a “defective form,” or distinction, namely “fine manners,” which do not comprise each and every formal aspect of nobility but only a very small part, as will be shown below. And though the text is silent on this point, we must not overlook the fact that in this matter the Emperor erred not only in the constituent parts of his definition but also in his method of defining, even though by reputation he was considered a great logician and a very learned man. For the definition of nobility would be more properly derived from its effects than from its sources, since it appears itself to be a kind of source, which cannot be explained by the things that precede it but rather by those that come after. Then when I say *For riches, as is generally thought*, I show how they cannot be the cause of nobility because they are base; and I show how they cannot take it away because they are quite distinct from nobility. I prove that they are base by one of their greatest and most evident defects, and this I do where I say *It’s evident that riches*.

Lastly, by virtue of what has been said above, I reach the conclusion that their transformation does not bring about a change in the upright mind, which proves what has been said above: that they are distinct from nobility because no union is effected. Here we must know that, as the Philosopher puts it, all things which produce something must first have perfection of their own being. Hence he says in the seventh book of the *Metaphysics*, “When one thing is produced by another, it is produced by it by existing in its being.”¹⁷⁸

Moreover, we should know that everything which decomposes does so by undergoing some change, and each thing that is changed must be connected with the cause of change, as the Philosopher puts it in the seventh book of the *Physics* and in the first book of *On Generation*. After setting forth these things I go on to say that riches cannot, as others believe, confer nobility; and in order to show that they are wholly distinct from it, I say that they cannot take it away from whoever possesses it. They cannot give it, since by nature they are base, and by virtue of their baseness they are the opposite of nobility. Here baseness means degenerateness, which is the opposite of nobility, since one contrary does not and cannot produce the other contrary, for the above-stated reason which is briefly touched on with the words *And further, he who paints a form*. No painter could depict any form if he did not first conceive in his imagination how he wishes it to be. Moreover, they cannot take it away because they are remote from nobility, and for the reason stated above that whatever changes or decomposes anything must be connected with it.

¹⁷⁸ “When one thing is produced . . .” *Metaphysics* VII, 8.

Therefore I add *Nor can an upright tower be made to bend by a river flowing far away*, which is meant only as a analogy to what has been said above, namely that riches cannot take away nobility, by saying that this nobility is like an upright tower and that riches are like a river flowing far away.

Chapter 11

It now remains simply to prove in what way riches are base and how they are distinct and remote from nobility, and this is proved in two brief sections of the text to which we presently must turn. After they have been explained, what I have said will become clear: that is, that riches are base and remote from nobility, and thereby the arguments already directed against riches will be completely proved.

I say then, *It's evident that riches are imperfect, And base as well*. To make clear what is meant by these words, we must know that the baseness of each thing derives from its imperfection, and likewise its nobility from its perfection, so that the more a thing is perfect, the nobler is its nature; the more imperfect, the baser. Consequently if riches are imperfect, it is evident that there are base. That they are imperfect is briefly proved by the text when it says, *for however great they are, They bring no peace, but rather grief*. Here not only is their imperfection made evident but their state shown to be most imperfect, and therefore completely base. Lucan attests to this when he addresses them by saying, "Without a fight the laws have perished, and you riches, the basest part of things, have led the battle."¹⁷⁹ Their imperfection may clearly be seen briefly in three things: first, in the lack of discretion attending their appropriation; second, in the danger that accompanies their increment; thirdly, in the ruin resulting from their possession. Before I demonstrate this, a doubt which seems to arise must be cleared up: for since gold, pearls, and property have in their essence a perfect form and actuality, it does not seem correct to claim that they are imperfect. Therefore it must be understood that insofar as they are considered in themselves, they are perfect things, and are not riches but gold or pearls; but insofar as they are conceived as a possession of man, they are riches, and in this sense they are full of imperfection. For it is not incongruous for one thing to be both perfect and imperfect when it is perceived from different perspectives.

I say that their imperfection may be observed first in the lack of discretion attending their appropriation, in which no distributive justice is present, while injustice, which is the effect characteristic of imperfection, almost always is. For if we consider the ways in which riches are acquired, they may all be summarized under three headings. They are acquired either purely by chance, as for example when they are acquired without design or unexpectedly by virtue of some unplanned event; or they are acquired by

¹⁷⁹ "Without a fight the laws . . ." Lucan, *Pharsalia* III, 118.

chance aided by reason, as for example by means of testaments and inheritance; or they are acquired by chance aiding reason, as in the case of acquiring lawful or unlawful gain. By lawful gain I mean gain deriving from a respectable craft, commerce, or service; by unlawful gain I mean gain deriving from theft or robbery. In each of these three ways the injustice of which I speak is evident, for buried wealth which is discovered or recovered presents itself more often to the bad than to the good; and this is so evident that it requires no proof.

Indeed I once saw the place, on the side of a mountain named Falterona, in Tuscany, where the basest peasant of the entire region found, while digging about, more than a bushel of Santelenas of the finest silver which had been waiting for him for perhaps 2000 years or more.¹⁸⁰ It was because he had observed this injustice that Aristotle remarked that “the more man is subject to intelligence, the less he is subject to fortune.”¹⁸¹ I claim that inheritance by bequest or by succession comes more often to the bad than to the good, though I do not intend to submit any evidence for this. Rather, let everyone cast his eyes about to discover what it is that I pass over in silence in order to avoid accusing anyone in particular. Would that it had been God’s pleasure that what the Provençal requested had come to pass, namely that he who does not inherit goodness should forfeit the inheritance of possessions!¹⁸² It is my claim that the recovery of wealth comes more often precisely to the bad than to the good, for unlawful gain never comes to the good, because they refuse it. What good man would ever seek gain by means of force or fraud? That would be an impossibility, for by the very choice of undertaking an unlawful act he would cease to be good. And lawful gain rarely comes to the good, because given the fact that it requires a great deal of attention and the good man’s attention is directed to more important matters, rarely does he devote sufficient attention to it.

Consequently it is evident that the appropriation of these riches in whatever way results in injustice, and therefore Our Lord called them unrighteous when he said, “Make to yourselves friends of the money of iniquity,” thereby inviting and encouraging men to render acts of liberality through benefactions, which engender friendships.¹⁸³ How fair an exchange does he make who gives of these most imperfect things in order to have and acquire things that are perfect, such as are the hearts of worthy men! This market is open every day. Indeed, this kind of commerce is different from all others, for when a man believes he is buying one person with a benefaction, thousands

¹⁸⁰ *bushel of Santelenas* Coins bearing the effigy of Sant’Elena, the mother of Constantine, made in Byzantium, but a popular term for any ancient coin.

¹⁸¹ *Aristotle remarked* Physics II, 8, probably cited from St. Thomas’ commentary on that text.

¹⁸² *the Provençal* This is believed to be either Cadenet or possibly Giraut de Borneil.

¹⁸³ *Our Lord called them unrighteous* Luke 16:9, in the Douay Version, reads: “Make unto you friends of the mammon of iniquity.” The King James supplies “the mammon of unrighteousness.”

and thousands are bought with it. Who does not still keep a place in his heart for Alexander because of his royal acts of benevolence? Who does not keep a place for the good King of Castile, or Saladin, or the good Marquis of Monferrato, or the good Count of Toulouse, or Bertran de Born, or Galeazzo of Montefeltro?¹⁸⁴ When mention is made of their gifts, certainly not only those who would willingly do the same, but those as well who would sooner die than do the same, retain in their memory a love for these men.

Chapter 12

The imperfection of riches, as has been said, may be observed not only by the fact of their appropriation but also in the danger that accompanies their increment; and since more of their defect may be perceived in the latter, the text makes mention of that alone, saying that *for however great they are*, they not only do not bring peace, they bring more thirst and make men more defective and less self-sufficient. Here we should understand that defective things may bear their defects in such a way that they do not appear on the surface, but are concealed beneath the guise of perfection; or they may bear them entirely exposed, so that the imperfection is recognized openly on the surface. Those things that do not reveal their defects at first are more dangerous, since we often cannot place ourselves on guard against them, as we see in the instance of a traitor who on the surface shows himself as a friend, so that he compels us to have faith in him, while beneath the guise of friendship he conceals the defect of enmity. In this way riches are dangerously imperfect in their increment, for by subverting what they promise they bring about the very opposite.¹⁸⁵

These false traitresses always promise to bring complete satisfaction to the person who gathers them in sufficient quantity, and by this promise they lead the human will into the vice of avarice. For this reason Boethius in his book *The Consolation of Philosophy* calls them dangerous, saying, “Alas! who was it that first unearthed the masses of hidden gold and the gems, those precious perils, which sought to remain hidden?”¹⁸⁶ The false traitresses, if one looks closely, promise to take away all thirst and feeling of want and to supply complete satiety and a feeling of sufficiency. This is what they do at

¹⁸⁴ *Who does not still keep a place in his heart* Alexander the Great is the only one of the seven examples of liberality from ancient history. Toynbee has identified the King of Castile as Alfonso VIII (1155-1214), son-in-law of Henry II of England; the Count of Toulouse as Raymond V (1134-1194); and the Marquis of Monferrato as Boniface II (1192-1207). Saladin (1137-1193), well known throughout the Middle Ages for his generosity, appears among the virtuous pagans in Dante's Limbo (Inf. IV). Dante places Bertran de Born (1140-1215) among the Schismatics in Inf. XXVIII. Galeazzo of Montefeltro (d. 1300) was the head of a Ghibelline faction and cousin to Guido da Montefeltro who appears in Inf. XXVII.

¹⁸⁵ *by subverting what they promise* The sense is that riches, by their appearance, offer the promise of satisfaction and thereby diminish the strength of the desire for riches. But once they are possessed, they take away the promise of satisfaction which first appeared, and create anew a desire for their possession.

¹⁸⁶ “Alas! who was it . . .” De consolatione philosophiae, II, meter 5, verse 27.

first for every man, by guaranteeing the fulfillment of this promise when they have increased to a certain amount; and then when they have been accumulated to this point, instead of satiety and refreshment they produce and instill an intolerable and burning thirst in the breast; and in place of sufficiency they set up a new goal: that is, a greater quantity to be desired, and once this has been realized, they instill a great fear and concern for what has been acquired.

Consequently they do not bring peace, but rather grief, which before, in their absence, was not present. Therefore Tully, in his book *On Paradox*, says in denouncing riches, "Never have I ever considered either the money of these men, or their magnificent mansions, or their riches, or their lordships, or the delights by which they are altogether captivated, to be found among things good and desirable, since I have certainly seen men who abound in these things covet the very things in which they abound. For never is the thirst of cupidity satisfied or satiated; and not only are they tormented by a desire to increase the quantity of those things which they possess, but they are also tormented by a fear of losing them."¹⁸⁷ These are the very words of Tully, as they are put down in the book which has been mentioned. Evidence of even greater importance bearing on this imperfection is found in these words spoken by Boethius in his book *The Consolation of Philosophy*: "Even if the goddess of wealth were to lavish riches equal to the amount of sand tossed by the wind-driven sea or to the number of stars that shine, the human race would not cease their lament."¹⁸⁸

Since further evidence is required to establish proof on this point, let us summon up all that Solomon and his father cry out against them, all that Seneca, especially in his letters to Lucilius, all that Horace, all that Juvenal, and, in brief, all that every writer, every poet, and all that truthful Holy Scripture cries out against these false harlots who are steeped in every defect. In order that our belief may be supported by what we see, let us consider the lives of those who chase after them, and how securely they live when they have amassed them, how satisfied they are, how untroubled! And what imperils and destroys cities, territories, and individuals day by day more than the accumulation of wealth by some new person? Such an accumulation uncovers new desires which cannot be satiated without causing injury to someone. What else were the two categories of Law, namely Canon Law and Civil Law, intended to curb if not the surge of greed brought about by the amassing of wealth? Certainly both categories of Law make this quite evident if we read their beginnings (that is, the beginnings of their written record). O how evident it is, indeed how exceedingly evident, that riches are rendered fully imperfect through by their being increased, since nothing but

¹⁸⁷ "Never have I ever considered . . ." On Paradoxl.

¹⁸⁸ "Even if the goddess of wealth . . ." The Consolation of Philosophy, II, meter 2, verses 1-8.

imperfection can come from them, however great their quantity! This is what the text says.

Nevertheless a doubt arises here from a question which cannot be passed over without being brought up and answered. Someone bent on distorting the truth by splitting hairs might object that since riches are rendered imperfect and consequently base by virtue of the fact that their acquisition increases a desire for them, knowledge for the same reason is imperfect and base, since the desire for it always increases with its acquisition. Hence Seneca says, "If I had one foot in the grave I would still wish to go on learning."¹⁸⁹ But it is not true that knowledge is made base by imperfection: therefore, by refuting the consequence of the premise, the increase of desire does not make riches base.¹⁹⁰ The fact that knowledge is something perfect is made evident by the Philosopher in the sixth book of the *Ethics*, which states that knowledge is the perfect record of things which are certain.

This question requires a brief answer, but first we must see whether desire is increased by the acquisition of knowledge, as is proposed in the question, and whether this is for a reason. And so I say that human desire is increased not only by the acquisition of knowledge and of riches, but by every kind of acquisition, although in different ways. The reason is this: that the supreme desire of each thing, and the one that is first given to it by nature, is to return to its first cause. Now since God is the cause of our souls and has created them like himself (as it is written, "Let us make man in our own image and likeness"), the soul desires above all else to return to him.¹⁹¹ And just as the pilgrim who walks along a road on which he has never traveled before believes that every house which he sees from afar is an inn, and finding it not so fixes his expectations on the next one, and so moves from house to house until he comes to the inn, so our soul, as soon as it enters upon this new and never travelled road of life, fixes its eyes on the goal of its supreme good, and therefore believes that everything it sees which seems to possess some good in it is that supreme good.¹⁹² Because its knowledge is at first imperfect through lack of experience and instruction, small goods appear great, and so from these it conceives its first desires. Thus we see little children setting their desire first of all on an apple, and then growing older desiring to possess a little bird, and then still later desiring to possess fine clothes, then a horse,

¹⁸⁹ "If I had one foot in the grave . . ." This saying is not found in Seneca.

¹⁹⁰ *by refuting the consequence* I follow the edition of Busnelli-Vandelli, which gives the reading "distruzione" (also accepted by Vasoli in the Ricciardi edition); the Simonelli text reads "distinzione." Both are technical terms in Scholastic logic.

¹⁹¹ "Let us make man in our own image and likeness." Genesis 1:26.

¹⁹² *just as the pilgrim* See Paul, 2 Corinthians 5:6. The medieval topos of the pilgrim on the road of life will reappear, of course, in the opening verse of the Divine Comedy. Chaucer employs the topos as well in his *Canterbury Tales*, and it should be noted parenthetically that his discussion of gentillesse in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* owes much to Dante's definition of nobility in *Convivio* IV.

and then a woman, and then modest wealth, then greater riches, and then still more. This comes about because in none of these things does one find what one is searching after, but hopes to find it further on. Consequently it may be seen that one object of desire stands in front of another before the eyes of our soul very much in the manner of a pyramid, where the smallest object at first covers them all and is, as it were, the apex of the ultimate object of desire, namely God, who is, as it were, the base of all the rest. And so the further we move from the apex toward the base, the greater the objects of desire appear; this is the reason why acquisition causes human desires to become progressively inflated.

We may, however, lose this path through error, just as we may the roads of the earth. For just as from one city to another there is only one road which is of necessity the best and most direct, and another which leads completely away (namely the one which goes in the opposite direction), and many others, some leading away from it and some moving toward it, so in human life there are different paths, among which only one is the truest way and another the falsest, and some less true and some less false. And just as we see that the path which leads most directly to the city fulfills desire and provides rest when work is finished, while the one which goes in the opposite direction never fulfills it nor provides rest, so it is with our life. A wise traveler reaches his goal and rests; the wanderer never reaches it, but with great lethargy of mind forever directs his hungry eyes before him. Thus although this explanation does not entirely answer the question raised above, it at least opens the way for an answer because it shows that our desires do not all increase in the same way. But since this chapter has become somewhat protracted, an answer to the question must be given in a new chapter, and here the entire argument which I presently intend to make against riches will be brought to a close.

Chapter 13

In answer to this question, I affirm that the desire for knowledge cannot properly be said to increase, although, as has been said, it grows in a certain way. For whatever grows, properly speaking, is always one; the desire for knowledge, however, is not always one but many; and when one desire ends, another begins; so that, properly speaking, its increase is not a growth but a progression from small things to great things. For if I desire to know the principles of natural things, as soon as I know them this desire is fulfilled and brought to an end. If I then desire to know what each of these principles is and how each exists, this is a new and separate desire. Nor by the appearance of this desire am I dispossessed of the perfection to which I was brought by the other; and this growth is not the cause of imperfection but of greater perfection.

However, the desire for riches is, properly speaking, an increment, for it remains always one, so that no progression of goals reached or perfection attained is found here. If someone were to object that just as the desire to know the principles of natural objects is one thing and the desire to know what these principles are is another, so the desire for a hundred marks is one thing and the desire for a thousand another, I would reply that this is not true. For a hundred is part of a thousand and is related to it, just as a part of a line is to the whole line along which there is a single continuous motion, with no progression nor any movement brought to completion at any point. But knowing the principles of natural objects and knowing the nature of each individual principle are not parts of each other, but are related to each other as different lines along which there is no single continuous movement, so that when the motion of the one is completed, it is succeeded by the motion of the other. Thus it appears, as raised in the question, that knowledge may not be called imperfect because of the desire for knowledge, the way riches are imperfect because of the desire for them. For in the desire for knowledge desires are progressively satisfied and brought to completion, while in the desire for riches they are not. Hence the question is answered and has no ground for existence.

This person bent on splitting hairs might well still object by claiming that although many desires are satisfied by the acquisition of knowledge, yet the ultimate desire is never attained, which is almost like the imperfection of a desire which, though remaining one and the same, never comes to an end. Here again we reply that the objection is not true—that is, that the ultimate desire is never attained; for our natural desires, as has been shown above in the third book, are satisfied within a certain limit; and the desire for knowledge is a natural desire, so that a certain limit satisfies it, even though few, because they take the wrong path, complete the journey.¹⁹³ Anyone who understands the Commentator's discussion of the third book of *The Soul* has learned this from him.¹⁹⁴ Therefore Aristotle in the tenth book of the *Ethics*, speaking against the poet Simonides, says that "A man should be drawn as far as possible to divine things," by which he shows that our faculty contemplates a certain end.¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, in the first book of the *Ethics* he says that "the trained student seeks to know the certainty of things, to the degree that their nature admits of certainty."¹⁹⁶ By this he shows that one must contemplate an end not only on the part of man who desires knowledge, but as well on the part of the object of knowledge which is desired. And therefore Paul says, "Do

¹⁹³ *in the third book* See above III, 15, 8-10.

¹⁹⁴ *The Commentator* Averroes (1126-1198), whom Dante refers to in Inf. IV, 144 similarly as the one "che 'l gran comento feo" [made the great commentary].

¹⁹⁵ *Therefore Aristotle* Dante derives the citation not from Aristotle directly, who does not mention Simonides in the passage indicated, but from St. Thomas' *Summa contra Gentiles* I, 5.

¹⁹⁶ "the trained student . . ." *Ethics* I, 2.

not seek to know more than is fitting, but to know in measure.”¹⁹⁷ So that in whatever way the desire for knowledge is understood, whether in general or in particular, it attains to perfection.¹⁹⁸ Therefore perfect knowledge is a noble perfection, and its perfection is not lost by the desire for it, as is the case with detestable riches.

It must now briefly be shown how the possession of riches makes them harmful, and this is the third sign of their imperfection. Their possession may be seen to be harmful for two reasons: first, that it is the cause of evil; second, that it is the privation of good. It is the cause of evil because it makes the possessor fearful and hateful by mere preoccupation with them. How great is the fear of one who is aware of having wealth about him, while either traveling or taking lodging, not only when waking but when sleeping, a fear not only of losing his possessions but his life because of his possessions. The contemptible merchants who travel about the world know this full well, for the leaves swept by the wind make them tremble when they are carrying riches with them; and when they are not, they shorten their journey with songs and conversation, being full of a sense of security. Therefore the Sage says, “If a traveler entered upon his journey empty-handed, he would sing in the face of the thieves.”¹⁹⁹ This is what Lucan means in the fifth book when he praises poverty for the security it offers with the words, “O secure ease of the poor man’s life! O constricted dwellings and furnishings! oh not yet understood riches of the Gods! In what temples, within what walls could this ever happen without their shaking with fear when the hand of Caesar knocks?”²⁰⁰ This is said by Lucan when he tells how Caesar came by night to the cottage of the fisherman Amyclas in order to cross the Adriatic Sea. How great is the hatred that everyone bears the possessor of riches, whether out of envy or out of a desire to seize his possessions! So great is it that often a son, acting contrary to the love he owes, contrives to kill his father; indeed the Italians, both in the region of the Po and in the region of the Tiber, have witnessed the most striking and obvious examples of this behavior. Therefore Boethius says, in the second book of his *Consolation*, “Truly avarice makes men hateful.”²⁰¹

The possession of riches is also the privation of good, for by their possession generosity, which is a virtue, cannot exist; and this virtue brings about good and makes men illustrious and beloved, which cannot come to pass through the possession of riches but only through their surrender. Thus Boethius says,

¹⁹⁷ *And therefore Paul says* Romans 12:3.

¹⁹⁸ *whether in general or in particular* That is, knowledge in general or with respect to specific fields or disciplines of knowledge.

¹⁹⁹ *Therefore the Sage says* Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* II, prose 5.

²⁰⁰ *Lucan* *Pharsalia* V, 527-31.

²⁰¹ “*Truly avarice makes men hateful.*” Perhaps suggested from passages in II, prose 5.

in the same book, “Money, then, is good when, having been transferred to others through generosity, it is no longer possessed.” Consequently the baseness of riches is quite obvious from all of this evidence, and therefore a man of right desire and of true knowledge never loves them; and in not loving them he does not unite himself to them but always wishes to keep them at a distance, except insofar as they are used to perform some necessary service. This is reasonable, because what is perfect cannot be united with what is imperfect. Hence we see that a crooked line never joined with a straight line, and if there is any joining to speak of, it is not of line with line but of point with point. Therefore it follows that the mind which is *upright* (that is, in its appetite) and *true* (that is, in knowledge) is not undone by having lost riches, as the text states at the end of this section.²⁰² In reaching this conclusion the text seeks to prove that riches are a river flowing far away from the upright tower of reason, or nobility, and that for this reason riches cannot deprive anyone of the nobility he possesses. In this way the present canzone moves arguments and proofs against riches.

Chapter 14

Now that the error of others has been refuted, insofar as it is present in that section which addresses riches, we must proceed to refute it insofar as it is present in the section in which time is said to be a cause of nobility with the words *ancestral wealth*. This refutation is made in the part that begins *Nor will they grant that one born base may yet be noble*. First this is refuted by an argument which those who err themselves advance; then, to their greater confusion, their argument is itself destroyed, and this is accomplished where it says *It further follows from what was said above*. Last of all, it concludes that their error is manifest and that therefore it is time to attend to the truth, and this is accomplished where it says *Consequently it is clear to every healthy mind*. I say, then, *Nor will they grant that one born base may yet be noble*. Here we must know that it is the opinion of these wrong-headed men that one born base can never be called noble, and that the son of a man born base can likewise never be called noble. This, however, destroys the very claim of theirs in which, by use the term “ancestral,” they say that nobility requires time, since it is impossible by the passage of time to arrive at the moment when nobility is engendered, according to their reasoning already mentioned, which precludes the possibility that a man born base can ever become noble through his acts, or by chance, and precludes the possibility of a change from a father born base to a noble son. For if the son of a man base born is indeed basely born, then his son is also the son of a man basely born, and his son too, and so on ad infinitum, so that it is never possible in the passage of time to discover the point at which nobility begins. If those holding the opposing view should say by way of defense that nobility will begin at that time when the low state of his forebears will have been forgotten, I reply that they contradict

²⁰² at the end of this section That is, loss of wealth does not cause the mind to lose its nature. Dante here concludes his gloss of the third stanza of the canzone.

themselves since even at that point there would be a change from baseness to nobility, from one man into another or from father to son, which is contrary to what they maintain.

If those of the opposing view should defend themselves tenaciously by arguing that they agree that this change can take place when the forebears' low state is no longer recollected (though the text does not address this), it is proper that this gloss should offer a reply. Therefore I give the following reply, that four extremely serious fallacies arise out of what they say, so that their reasoning cannot be right. The first is that the better human nature became, the harder and slower would the creation of nobility become, which is the greatest fallacy since by nature the better a thing is the more it is a cause of good; and nobility is counted among the things that are good. That this is true is proved as follows. If noble being or nobility, which I understand to be one and the same, were created by lack of remembrance, then the sooner lack of remembrance occurs the sooner nobility is created, and the more absent-minded that men were, so much the more quickly would lack of remembrance occur. Therefore, the more absent-minded that they were, the more noble would they be; and conversely the better their memory, the more slowly would they become noble.

The second fallacy is that this distinction between noble and base could not be made with respect to anything except men, which is highly illogical for the reason that we find the traits of nobility or baseness in every species of thing. Hence we often speak of a noble or base horse, a noble or base falcon, and a noble or base pearl. That this distinction cannot be made is proved as follows. If lack of remembrance of ancestral baseness is a cause of nobility, and if where there was no baseness in ancestors, there could be no lack of remembrance of them—inasmuch as this lack is a deterioration of the memory, and in the other animals, plants, and minerals baseness and loftiness are not distinguished, since each of these occupies the same and equivalent grade of nature—then there can be no creation of nobility in them, nor any baseness, since both are to be regarded as habit and privation, which are predicable of one and the same subject; therefore in these things no distinction could obtain between the one and the other trait. If those holding the opposing view should say that in other things nobility signifies the goodness of the thing but in man it signifies that the memory of their base condition is absent, one would wish to reply not with words but with a blade to such asininity as that of attributing the cause of nobility in other things to goodness, while in the case of men to loss of memory.

The third fallacy is that often what is engendered would come before that which engenders, which is entirely impossible, and this can be shown as follows. Suppose that Gherardo da Cammino had been the grandson of the basest peasant who ever drank of the Sile or the Cagnano, and lack of remembrance of his grandfather had not yet occurred. Who would dare to say

that Gherardo da Cammino was a base man? Who would not agree with me and say that he was noble? No one, surely, as presumptuous as he might be, for he was noble, and so will his memory be forever.²⁰³ If lack of remembrance of his base ancestor had not occurred, as assumed in the objection, and he had been a great noble and nobility had been perceived in him as clearly then as it is now, it would have been in him before that which engendered it had come into being. This is altogether impossible.

The fourth fallacy is that a man should be considered noble after death who was not noble while alive, something that could not be more illogical. This can be demonstrated as follows. Suppose that during the lifetime of Dardanus the memory of his base ancestors survived, and suppose that during the lifetime of Laomedon this memory had faded and lack of remembrance ensued. According to those who oppose us, during their lives Laomedon was noble and Dardanus was base. We, to whom the memory of their ancestors—I mean those prior to Dardanus—has not survived, ought to say that Dardanus was base while alive and noble after death. The claim that Dardanus was the son of Jove does not contradict this, for that is a fable which, in discussions of a philosophical nature, ought to be disregarded.²⁰⁴ Even if those who oppose us should wish to endorse this fable, certainly what the fable conceals undoes all of their arguments. Thus it is evident that the argument that established lack of remembrance as the cause of nobility is false and erroneous.

Chapter 15

After my canzone has proved by their very own doctrine that time is not a requirement for nobility, it proceeds immediately to overturn their previously stated opinion so that their false reasoning does not taint the mind that is disposed toward the truth. It accomplishes this when it says, *It further follows from what was said above*.

Here we must understand that if a man cannot change from base to noble, nor a noble son be born of a base father, as was stated in their opinion, one of two fallacies must obtain. One is that there is no such thing as nobility; the other is that there have always been a great many men in the world, so that the human race is not descended from a single man alone. And this can be demonstrated. If nobility is not engendered anew, as their opinion has many times been said to affirm (that is, its not being engendered by a base man in himself, nor by a base father in his son), a man always remains what he was at the time of his birth, and at birth he is like his father. Hence the evolution of this single condition has continued from our first parent: for as was the first progenitor, namely Adam, so must the whole human race be, because by this

²⁰³ *Suppose that Gherardo da Cammino* Gherardo's death in March, 1306, is almost certain evidence that Dante could not have composed this part and the rest of the Convivio before this date.

²⁰⁴ *Dardanus* According to myth, Dardanus was the son of Jove and Electra, and ancestor of the Trojans. Laomedon, his descendant, was the father of Priam.

reasoning it is not possible to discover any change of condition between Adam and those living in modern times. Therefore if Adam himself was noble, we are all noble, and if he was base, we are all base, which eradicates any distinction between these conditions and so eradicates the conditions themselves. This means that from what has been said above it follows *That each of us is noble or each base*.

If this is not true, still some people must of necessity be called noble and some base: for since the change from baseness to nobility has been eradicated, the human race must have descended from different origins—that is, from one that is noble and from one that is base. My canzone says this when it states *Or else that mankind had no origin*, meaning no single one, for it does not say “origins.” This is utterly false according to the Philosopher, according to our Faith which cannot lie, and according to the law and ancient doctrines of the Gentiles.²⁰⁵ For although the Philosopher does not posit human evolution from a single individual, he nevertheless considers that there is but one essence in all men, which different origins could not produce. Plato believes that all men depend for their existence on only one Idea and not on many, which is the same as giving them a single origin.²⁰⁶ Aristotle would most certainly laugh aloud if he heard talk of two species of the human race, like those of horses and asses; for (with apologies to Aristotle) they who have this thought might well be considered asses.

That it is utterly false according to our faith, which must be completely upheld, is clear from Solomon who, in distinguishing between mankind and the brute animals, speaks of the former as sons of Adam with the following words: “Who knows if the spirits of the sons of Adam ascend above and those of the beasts descend below?”²⁰⁷ That the Gentiles considered this to be false is made evident by the first book of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, where he discusses the creation of the world according to pagan, or Gentile, beliefs, saying, “Man is born” (he did not say “men”: he said “born” and “man”), “whether the maker of things made him of divine seed or whether the newly made earth, just lately separated from the noble body of ether, retained the seeds of the kindred heaven.”²⁰⁸ This earth, mixed with the water of the river, the son of Iapetus, namely Prometheus, fashioned in the likeness of the gods who govern all.” Here he plainly states that the first man was one alone; and thus my canzone says *But this I do not grant* (that is, that man had no origin). The canzone adds *Nor do they either, if they are Christian*. It says “Christian” and not “philosophers” or “Gentiles” (even their opinions are not to the

²⁰⁵ according to the Philosopher See St. Thomas’ commentary on Politics II, 12.

²⁰⁶ Plato believes See St. Thomas, Commentary to the Metaphysics I, 14, 209 and 214.

²⁰⁷ Solomon Ecclesiastes 3:21.

²⁰⁸ the creation of the world Metamorphoses I, 78 ff.

contrary) because Christian doctrine has greater strength and destroys all calumny, by virtue of the supreme light of the heaven which illuminates it.

Then when I say *Thus it is clear to every mind that's sound*, I draw the conclusion that their error is refuted and say that it is time for our eyes to be opened to the truth. I affirm this where I say *And now I wish to say, as I do feel*. I say, then, that from what has been said it is evident to sound minds that these assertions of theirs are empty (that is, they lack the marrow of truth). It is not without reason that I say "sound." For we must understand that our intellect may be said to be sound or sick; and by "intellect" I mean the noble part of our soul, to which the common term "mind" may be said to refer. It may be called sound when illness of mind or of body does not impede its activity, which consists of knowing what things are, as Aristotle asserts in the third book of *On the Soul*.²⁰⁹

For with regard to the sickness of the soul, I have observed three terrible infirmities of the human mind. One is caused by arrogance of nature, for there are many who are so presumptuous as to think that they know everything, and they therefore take for certain what is uncertain. Tully execrates this vice above all in the first book of *On Offices*, as does Thomas in his book *Against the Gentiles* where he says, "Many are so presumptuous of intellect as to believe that all things can be measured with their intellect, considering true whatever seems to them true and false whatever seems to them false."²¹⁰ Consequently it comes to pass that they never reach true learning; and believing themselves to be sufficiently learned, they never ask questions, never listen, seek only to have questions asked of them, and before a question has even been completed, they give the wrong answer. It is with them in mind that Solomon says in Proverbs, "Have you seen a man who is too quick in his answer? From him can be expected more folly than correction."²¹¹

The second is caused by weak-mindedness of nature, for there are many so stubborn in their baseness that they cannot believe that they may be brought to know anything either by themselves or by others. These are men who never seek out knowledge or take positions in arguments and never concern themselves with what others have to say. Aristotle speaks against them in the first book of the *Ethics*, calling them incompetent hearers of moral philosophy.²¹² Dull-witted men such as these live perpetually like beasts, without hope of obtaining any learning.

²⁰⁹ *in the third book of On the Soul* This reference probably derives from St. Thomas' Commentary on the Ethics VI, 5, 1179, and not directly from *De anima*.

²¹⁰ "Many are so presumptuous of intellect . . ." *Summa contra Gentiles* I, 5.

²¹¹ *Solomon* Proverbs 29:20.

²¹² *Aristotle* *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 3.

The third is caused by natural capriciousness of mind, for there are many whose fancy is so capricious that they always jump about in their reasoning and reach their conclusion before establishing the terms of their syllogism, then jumping from one conclusion to another, all the while fancying that they have conducted their arguments with great subtlety, while departing from no established principle, and never truly perceiving in their imagination any one thing as it really is. The Philosopher says that we should not concern ourselves with them nor have anything to do with them, stating in the first book of the *Physics* that “it is not proper to enter into argumentation with whoever denies the established principles.”²¹³ Among these are to be found many uneducated individuals who have scarcely learned the letters of the alphabet but are nevertheless willingly enter into discussions of geometry, astrology, and physics.

By reason of sickness or bodily defect, the mind may be unsound sometimes because of a defect arising from childbirth, as in the case of idiots, and sometimes by a disturbance of the mind, as in the case of maniacs. It is this infirmity of mind that the law refers to when the *Infortiatum* states “In anyone who makes a will soundness of mind, not of body, is required at the time when the will is made.”²¹⁴ Consequently to those intellects who are not sick through infirmity of mind or body but are free, unimpeded, and sound in the light of truth, I say that it is evident that the common opinion referred to is empty (that is, worthless).

Subsequently I add that I therefore judge them to be false and empty, and so I refute them; and this is done where it says *And hence I claim their words are false*. Then I say that we must proceed to demonstrate the truth, which means, namely, that we must show what nobility is and how the man in whom it exists can be recognized. I say this with the words *And now I wish to say, as I do feel*.

Chapter 16

“The King shall rejoice in God, and all those who swear by him shall be praised, because the mouth of those who speak unjust things is shut tight.”²¹⁵ These words may rightly serve here as a beginning because every true king must love truth above all. Consequently it is written in the Book of Wisdom, “Love the light of wisdom, you who stand before the people”; and the light of wisdom is truth itself.²¹⁶ I say then that every king shall rejoice because that

²¹³ in the first book of the *Physics* St. Thomas' Commentary to the *Physics* I, 2.

²¹⁴ *Infortiatum* This is the second part of the *Corpus iuris civilis*, by Justinian.

²¹⁵ “The King shall rejoice . . .” Psalms 63:11 (King James).

²¹⁶ “Love the light of wisdom . . .” Wisdom 6:23.

most false and harmful opinion of evil and deceived men, who have up to now spoken unjustly of nobility, has been refuted.

We must now proceed to the part which treats of the truth, according to the division made above in the third chapter of the present book. This second part, which begins *I say that every virtue, at its source*, proposes to establish the limits of this nobility according to the truth. This part is divided into two, for in the first we intend to show what this nobility is, and in the second to show how the one in whom it exists may be recognized. The second part begins *The soul which this goodness adorns*. The first part is again divided into two, for in the first certain things are examined which are necessary for clarifying the definition of nobility; in the second the definition itself is examined. And the second part begins *Nobility resides wherever virtue is*.

To open a thorough discussion of this subject, two things must first be examined: first, what is meant by the word “nobility,” considered in and of itself; second, what road must be taken in searching out the definition mentioned above. I say then that if we should take into consideration the common manner of speech, the word “nobility” means the perfection of the nature proper to each thing. It is predicated not only of man but also of all things, for a stone, plant, horse, or falcon is called noble whenever perfection is perceived in its nature. Therefore Solomon say in Ecclesiastes, “Blessed is the land whose kind is noble,” which is to say “whose king is perfect according to the perfection of mind and of body.”²¹⁷ This is evident from what he says earlier: “Woe to you, O land, whose king is a child,” that is, a man who has not reached perfection; and a man is a child not simply because of age but because of disorderly conduct or congenital defects, as the Philosopher teaches us in the first book of the *Ethics*.²¹⁸ There are some fools, it is true, who believe that the word “noble” means “to be acclaimed and known by many,” and they argue that it derives from a verb that signifies to know, namely *nosco*. This is utterly false, for if it were true those things that were most acclaimed and best known of their kind would be the most noble of their kind. And so the obelisk of St. Peter would be the most noble stone in the world; Asdente the cobbler of Parma would be nobler than any of his fellow citizens; Albuino de la Scala would be nobler than Guido da Castello of Reggio; yet each of these things is utterly false.²¹⁹ Therefore it is utterly false to say that “noble” comes from “to know.” It comes, rather, from *non vile*, and consequently “noble” is the same as “not base.”

²¹⁷ Solomon Ecclesiastes 10:16-17.

²¹⁸ as the Philosopher teaches us Ethics I, 2.

²¹⁹ Asdente the cobbler of Parma An illiterate known for making predictions, he is placed among the soothsayers in Hell (see Inf. XX, 118-120). Albuino was brother to Can Grande della Scala, Dante's patron, and ruled Verona from 1304-1311. The poet pays tribute to Guido da Castello as “the candid Lombard” in Purg. XVI, 124-126.

It is this perfection that the Philosopher refers to in the seventh book of the *Physics* when he says, “Each thing is most completely perfect when it reaches and attains its own proper virtue, and it is then most completely perfect according to its nature. Hence a circle can then be called perfect when it is truly a circle,” that is, when it attains to its own proper virtue; and then it exists in its nature to the fullest extent, and then it may be called a noble circle.²²⁰ This occurs when there is within the circle a point equidistant from the circumference, which is the virtue particular to it. Therefore the circle that has the shape of an egg is not noble, nor is the one that has nearly the shape of a full moon, because its nature is not perfect in it. Thus we may clearly see that in general this word, namely “nobility,” means in all things perfection of their own nature. This is what we were in search of in the first place, in order best to open our discussion of the part under examination.

In the second place we must see how to proceed in order to find the definition of nobility in man, which is the goal of our present argument. Since we cannot define the highest perfection in those beings that are of one species (for example, the human race) by referring to essential principles which they have in common, it must be defined and known by the effects of those principles. Therefore we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew Christ’s words, “Beware of false prophets . . .; you shall know them by their fruits.”²²¹ So the straight way leads us to find the definition which we are searching after “in their fruits”—that is, the moral and intellectual virtues of which our very nobility is the seed, as its definition will make fully clear. These are the two things that required examination before proceeding to others, as was stated above in this chapter.

Chapter 17

Now that these two things have been examined, which it seemed useful to examine before proceeding with the text of the canzone, we must proceed with it. It begins by saying, *I say that every virtue, at its source, Comes from a single root: Virtue, I mean, which makes man happy In his actions*. And it continues, *This is, as stated in the Ethics, A chosen habit*, setting down the full definition of moral virtue as it is defined by the Philosopher in the second book of the *Ethics*. He emphasizes two things of primary importance: one is that every virtue comes from a single source; the second is that the phrase “every virtue” refers to the moral virtues, which are our subject. This becomes evident when it says, *This is, as stated in the Ethics*. Here we must know that the moral virtues are the fruits most proper to us, since they lie in every respect within our own power. They are defined and enumerated in different ways by different philosophers, but since in matters on which the divine opinion of Aristotle has been voiced it seems best to leave aside the opinions

²²⁰ the Philosopher *Physics* VII, 6.

²²¹ Christ’s words *Matthew* 7:15-16.

of others, and intending to say what they are, I will briefly run through a discussion of them according to his opinion.

The following are the eleven virtues enumerated by the Philosopher named above.²²² The first is called Courage, which is the weapon and bridle for regulating our boldness and timidity in things which threaten to destroy our lives. The second is Temperance, which is the control and bridle of our gluttony and excessive abstinence in things which preserve our lives. The third is Liberality, which regulates us in the giving and receiving of temporal goods. The fourth is Munificence, which regulates great expenditures, in administering them and setting limits to their size. The fifth is Magnanimity, which regulates and procures great honor and renown.²²³ The sixth is Love of Honor, which regulates and prepares us with respect to the honors of this world. The seventh is Gentleness, which regulates our wrath and our excessive patience with regard to evils that confront us. The eighth is Affability, which enables us to live in agreement with others. The ninth is called Truth, which restrains us in our speech from vaunting ourselves as greater than we are and from deprecating ourselves as less than we are. The tenth is called Good Disposition, which regulates us in our amusements, enabling us to use them properly. The eleventh is Justice, which disposes us to love and conduct ourselves with rectitude in all things.

Each of these virtues has two related enemies, that is, vices, one through excess and the other through shortfall. These virtues constitute the mean between them, and they spring from a single source, namely from our habit of good choice. Hence we may say generally of all of them that they are a chosen habit residing in the mean. It is through the exercise of these virtues that a man is made content or happy, as the Philosopher says in the first book of the *Ethics* where he defines Happiness by saying that “Happiness is activity in accordance with virtue in a perfect life.”²²⁴ Many place Prudence, or good judgment, rightly among the moral virtues, but Aristotle numbers it among the intellectual virtues, even though it is the guide of the moral virtues and shows how they are interrelated and how without it they could not exist.

We must know, however, that we may have two kinds of happiness in this life, according to two different paths, one good and the other best, which lead us there. One is the active life, the other the contemplative life; and although by the active, as has been said, we may arrive at a happiness that is good, the other leads us to the best happiness and state of bliss, as the Philosopher proves in the tenth book of the *Ethics*. Christ affirms this with words from his

²²² *the eleven virtues* See the *Ethics* II, 7.

²²³ *The fifth is Magnanimity* Magnanimity means nobleness of mind, awareness of greatness or superiority over others in a person who is truly superior to others. It does not include the modern sense of being magnanimous with gifts or praise.

²²⁴ *where he defines Happiness* Dante is again referring to St. Thomas, Commentary to the *Ethics* I, 10, 128-130.

own lips in the Gospel of Luke, when speaking to Martha and replying to her: “Martha, Martha, you are distressed and trouble yourself about many things; truly one thing alone is necessary,” that is, ‘what you are doing.’ He adds: “Mary has chosen the best part, which shall not be taken from her.”²²⁵

As made clear in the verses just preceding these words of the Gospel, Mary, who was sitting at the feet of Christ, showed no concern for domestic affairs, but simply listened to the words of the Savior. The moral sense of these words is that our Savior sought thereby to show that the contemplative life was the best, even though the active life was good. This is evident to anyone who considers well these words of the evangelist. Some, however, might oppose me by objecting that “Since happiness of the contemplative life is more excellent than the active life, and both can be and are the fruit and end of nobility, why not proceed first with the intellectual rather than with the moral virtues?”²²⁶ To this I would briefly reply that in every kind of teaching the capacity of the learner must be taken into consideration, and he should be led along the path which is most easy for him. Therefore since the moral virtues seem to be and are more common and better known, and more sought after than the others, and more imitated through outward demonstration, it was useful and fitting to proceed by this path rather than by the other; for we would not gain so good a knowledge of bees by speaking about how they produce wax rather than about how they produce honey, although bees produce both of these things.

Chapter 18

In the preceding chapter we determined how every moral virtue springs from one source, namely good and habitual choice, and this is dealt with by the present text up to the part which begins *Nobility, I say, by definition*. In this part, then, we proceed by inference based on probability to discover that every virtue named above, whether considered separately or all together, proceeds from nobility, as does an effect from a cause.²²⁷ This is founded on a philosophical proposition which states that when two things are observed to have any one aspect in common they both must be referred to some third thing, or else one of them to the other, in the manner of effect with respect to cause; because any one aspect, possessed primarily and essentially, can have as its cause but one thing; and if both were not the effect of some third thing, nor one the effect of the other, both would possess this aspect primarily and essentially, which is impossible.²²⁸ Therefore the text says that nobility and *virtue, so defined*, namely moral virtue, have in common this: Each term

²²⁵ Christ affirms Luke 10:41-42.

²²⁶ “why not proceed first . . .” The reasoning is based on the understanding that the intellectual virtues regulate the contemplative life, the moral virtues the active life.

²²⁷ we proceed by inference based on probability This type of argument, which is not demonstrative but inductive, proceeds by syllogistic reasoning in which one of the premisses is probable in nature.

implies praise of the person to whom it is applied. This is stated in the words *So that within a single exegesis The two agree, by having one effect*: that is, praising and commending him who others say possesses nobility. Then it draws a conclusion based on the proposition noted above and says that therefore one must proceed from the other, or both from a third; and it adds that it is to be presumed that the one comes from the other rather than both from the third, if it appears that the one equals or is greater in worth than the other; and it says this in the line *But if one has the value of the other*.

It should be observed that here we do not proceed by necessary demonstration, as we would by arguing “if cold generates moisture and we observe clouds generating moisture then cold generates clouds,” but rather by an agreeable and fitting induction, for if there are in us many things worthy of praise and the source of the praise we merit is found within us, it is reasonable to attribute these things to that source; and it is more reasonable to consider that which comprises several things to be their source than to consider them to be its source.²²⁹ For the base of a tree, which comprises all of its limbs, must be called the source and cause of them, and not they of it. Thus nobility, which comprises every virtue as cause does effect, and many of our other praiseworthy activities as well, must be considered such that virtue is referred to it rather than to a third thing that is in us.²³⁰

Finally, it says that what has been said (namely, that every moral virtue derives from a single source, and that such virtue and nobility have one thing in common, as said above; and that one must therefore be referred to the other or both to a third; and that if one equals or is greater than the other it proceeds more likely from the other than from a third) must all *be taken for granted*, that is, conceived and set down with what follows in mind. So ends this stanza and this present section.

Chapter 19

Since in the preceding section certain points have been thoroughly treated and defined, which was necessary in order to perceive how we might define this good thing about which we are speaking, we must proceed to the following section which begins *Nobility resides wherever virtue is*. This may

²²⁸ *possessed primarily and essentially* Dante means by these terms that aspect or quality which is inherent in a thing as part of its prime essence, as opposed to one which is the result of incidental circumstances (the Scholastic concept of accident).

²²⁹ *by an agreeable and fitting induction* In other words, it is more reasonable to consider nobility to be the source of goodness and the various classes of virtues (e.g., the intellectual, the moral, etc.) than to consider these virtues and goodness as the source of nobility, since they are many and diverse, while nobility is one. By induction, Dante means syllogistic reasoning, as can be deduced from the example he gives in this sentence. I follow the Busnelli-Vandelli text in this passage.

²³⁰ *Thus nobility* Rather than both nobility and virtue to a third thing in man, by implication.

be divided into two parts. In the first a certain thing is proved which was touched on earlier and left unproved; in the second, by way of conclusion, the definition which we have been in search of is found. The second part begins *And just as perse derives from black*.

In order to clarify the first part, we must commit to memory what has been said above: that if nobility equals and extends beyond virtue, virtue will rather proceed from it. This claim, namely that nobility extends beyond it, is proved in the present section, and it offers the heavens as an example, saying that wherever there is virtue there is nobility.

Here it should be observed that, as it is stated in the *Digest* and is held as a rule of Law, there is no need of proof regarding those things which are self-evident; nothing is more evident than that nobility exists where virtue exists, and we see that it is commonly understood that everything after its own nature may be called noble. The text then says *Just as wherever there's a star is heaven*, though *the converse* is not true: that wherever there is heaven there is a star. Likewise nobility is present wherever there exists virtue, though virtue does not always exist wherever nobility is present; and this is an agreeable and fitting comparison, for truly nobility is a heaven in which many diverse stars shine forth. In her shine forth the intellectual and moral virtues, in her shine forth good dispositions conferred by nature, for example piety and religion, and praiseworthy emotions, for example modesty and mercy and many others; in her shine forth the perfections of the body, for example beauty, strength and all but everlasting health.

So many are the stars that spread across the heavens that it surely cannot surprise us if many diverse fruits are produced by human nobility, so many are their natures and their powers, brought together and united in one simple substance; and on them as on diverse branches she bears fruit in diverse ways. Indeed, I would indeed dare say that human nobility, with respect to its many fruits, surpasses that of the angels, although the nobility of the angels is more divine in its unity. The Psalmist had in mind this nobility of ours, which has produced so many and such various fruits, when he composed that Psalm which begins: "O Lord our God, how wonderful is your name in all the earth!", where he praises man, as though marveling at the divine affection for the human creature, saying: "What is man, that you, God, do visit him? You have made him a little lower than the angels, have crowned him with glory and honor, and have set him above the works of your hands."²³¹ Therefore the comparison of human nobility with heaven was truly agreeable and fitting.

Then when the text says *In women and in those of tender age*, it proves what I say, showing that nobility extends to places where virtue does not reside. Then it says *we perceive this state of well-being*, referring to nobility, which is indeed a state of true well-being, to be wherever there is shame (that is, fear

²³¹ The Psalmist had in mind Psalm 8:1, 8:4-6 (King James version).

of dishonor) as it exists in women and in young people, in whom shame is good and praiseworthy, although this shame is not a virtue but a certain kind of good emotion. It says *In women and in those of tender age* (that is, in the young people) because as the Philosopher maintains in the fourth book of the *Ethics*, “shame is not praiseworthy or suitable in the elderly or in the virtuous,” since it is necessary for them to keep themselves from those things which cause them to feel shame.²³² Young people and women have less need for caution, and therefore the fear of being dishonored through some fault is praiseworthy in them; for this feeling comes from nobility, and in them it may be viewed as and given the name of nobility, just as shamelessness may be viewed as and given the name of baseness and absence of nobility. Thus it is a good and perfect sign of nobility in children and in those not fully grown when after a fault shame is painted on their faces, for then it is the fruit of true nobility.

Chapter 20

Then in the words that follow, *And just as perse derives from black*, the text proceeds to the definition of nobility, which we are seeking and which will allow us to perceive the essence of this nobility, about which so many speak incorrectly. It says then, drawing a conclusion from what was said earlier, that every virtue, *Or class of virtues* (that is, the chosen habit occupying the mean), will derive from this, namely nobility. It provides an analogy based on colors, saying that just as perse derives from black, so does this, namely virtue, derive from nobility. Perse is a color composed of purple and black, but black predominates, and so it takes its name from black. Likewise virtue is a thing composed of nobility and passion, but because nobility predominates in it, virtue takes its name from it and is called goodness. Then afterwards the text argues, from what has been said, that no one should think himself to be of nobility simply because he can say “I belong to her by race,” if in fact these fruits are not in him. It provides an immediate explanation, saying that those who have this *grace*, namely this divine thing, are *almost* like *gods*, untainted by vice. No one can grant this gift but God alone, with whom there is no choice of persons, as the divine Scriptures make clear.²³³ It should not appear too lofty for the text to use the words *For they are almost gods*, for as was stated above in the seventh chapter of the third book, just as there exist men who are most base and bestial, so there are men who are most noble and divine, as Aristotle proves in the seventh book of the *Ethics* by citing the words of the poet Homer.²³⁴ So let none of the Uberti of Florence or the Visconti of Milan say “Because I am of such a race I am noble,” for the divine

²³² *as the Philosopher maintains* Ethics IV, 9. The term *studiosi* signifies *virtuosi*, as is apparent from St. Thomas' commentary on the text.

²³³ *no choice of persons* Romans 2:11; Galatians 2:6, and elsewhere (King James version). The biblical phrase is “no respect of persons.”

²³⁴ *Aristotle* Ethics VII, 1, with reference to the *Iliad*, Book XXIV.

seed does not fall upon a race (that is, family stock) but on individuals; and as will be proved below, family stock does not make individuals noble, although individuals make family stock noble.

Then when it says *For God alone bestows it on that soul*, it refers to the one who receives (that is, the subject upon whom this divine gift descends), for it is truly a divine gift according to the words of the Apostle: “Every good gift and every perfect gift comes from above, descending from the Father of lights.”²³⁵ It then says that God alone bestows this grace on the soul of that human being whom he sees dwelling perfectly within his own person, prepared and disposed to receive this divine act. For according to what the Philosopher affirms in the second book of *On the Soul*, “Things must be well disposed to their agents if they are to receive their acts.”²³⁶ Hence if the soul dwells imperfectly in a person, it is not well disposed to receive this blessed and divine infusion, just as if a precious stone is not well disposed or is imperfect, it cannot receive the celestial virtue, as the noble Guido Guinizelli said in a canzone of his that begins “Love hastens ever to the gentle heart.”²³⁷ The soul, therefore, may dwell without vigor in a person because of a defect of temperament, or perhaps because of a defect of age, and the divine radiance is never reflected by a soul such as this.²³⁸ Individuals such as these, whose souls are deprived of this light, may say that they are like valleys pointing to the north or underground caves, where the light of the Sun never descends unless it is reflected from some other place which is illumined by it.

Finally the text draws a conclusion and states, according to what has been said before (namely, that the virtues are the fruit of nobility which God places in the well disposed soul), that to *some*, namely to those few who have understanding, it is clear that human nobility is nothing but “the seed of happiness,” *instilled by God Within the soul that’s properly disposed* (that is, the soul whose body is perfectly disposed in every part). For if the virtues are the fruit of nobility, and happiness is the sweetness attained, it is clear that this nobility is the seed of happiness, as has been said. Careful consideration will reveal that this definition comprises all four causes, namely the material, the formal, the efficient, and the final: the material in saying *the soul that’s properly disposed*, which is the material and subject of nobility; the formal in saying that it is the *seed*; the efficient in say in *instilled by God Within the*

²³⁵ “Every good gift . . .” James 1:17.

²³⁶ *in the second book of On the Soul* De anima II, 2.

²³⁷ *the noble Guido Guinizelli* Born in Bologna, Guinizelli developed the dolce stil novo and became the inspiration for Dante’s poetic style. He is venerated in Purg. XXVI, 92 as “il padre mio.” Dante echoes the famous line cited here in the Vita Nuova, XX, in the sonnet “Amor e ‘l cor gentil sono una cosa” [Love and the gentle heart are a single thing].

²³⁸ *defect of age* It is not entirely clear what Dante means by this phrase, which has been taken diversely to refer to the lack of perfection in a fetus before it is born, to those who are young, as well as to those who are old and in some way incapacitated. In any case, the souls of these individuals do not reflect God’s divine light.

soul; the final in saying *of happiness*.²³⁹ So now we have defined the nature of our human goodness, which descends into us from the supreme spiritual virtue as virtue descends into a stone from the noblest celestial body.²⁴⁰

Chapter 21

In order to have a more perfect understanding of the human goodness which is called nobility, as the source of all good in us, we must clarify in this special chapter how this goodness descends into us, first by way of nature and then by way of theology, that is, by way of the divine and the spiritual. We must first of all know that man is composed of soul and body, but it is in the soul, as has been said, that nobility resides as the seed of the divine virtue.

Different philosophers, it is true, have held different opinions regarding the difference of our souls. For Avicenna and Algazel maintained that they were noble or vile in and of themselves from their beginning. Plato and others maintained that they issued from the stars and were more or less noble according to the nobility of their star. Pythagoras maintained that all souls were of the same nobility, not only human souls but those of the brute animals and the plants, and the forms of minerals; and he said that the only difference lay between their matter and their form.²⁴¹ If each were to defend his own opinion, truth might be seen to exist in all of them. But since upon first consideration they appear somewhat removed from the truth, it is better to proceed not according to them but according to the opinion of Aristotle and the Peripatetics. Therefore I say that when the seed of man falls into its receptacle, namely the matrix, it carries with it the virtue of the generative soul, and the virtue of heaven, and the virtue of the combined elements, namely temperament.²⁴² It matures and disposes the material to receive the formative virtue given by the soul of the generator, and the formative virtue prepares the organs to receive the celestial virtue, which brings the soul from the potentiality of the seed into life.²⁴³ As soon as it is produced it receives from the virtue of the celestial mover the possible intellect, which draws into

²³⁹ *all four causes* Aristotle's discussion of these causes is found in *Metaphysics* I.3. The efficient cause is the agent that brings about change; the final cause is the end for which a change is made; the material cause is that thing in which a change is made; and the formal cause is that which something is changed into.

²⁴⁰ *supreme spiritual virtue* God, who is present in all virtues.

²⁴¹ *between their matter and their form* Dante, in paraphrasing Pythagoras' theory, means that all of these beings are equally noble with respect to their form; but with respect to their material or matter, they are noble in different degrees.

²⁴² *combined elements, namely temperament* Earth, water, fire, and air, combined in different measure in different individuals, produce one of the four traditional characteristic temperaments or dispositions: the choleric, the phlegmatic, the sanguine, and the melancholic.

²⁴³ *celestial virtue* This is the divine power which actualizes the potentiality for life within the seed, thereby bringing to life the vegetative and sensitive souls.

itself in potentiality all of the universal forms as they are found in its maker, to an ever lesser degree the more it is removed from the primal Intelligence.²⁴⁴

No one should be surprised if I speak in a way that seems difficult to understand, for it seems to me indeed a marvel how such a process can be fully described and perceived by the intellect. It is something that cannot be expressed in words—words, I mean, in the vernacular. Consequently I would say in the words of the Apostle, “O the depth of the riches of the wisdom of God, how unfathomable are your judgments and your ways past finding out!”²⁴⁵ Since the temperament of the seed may be more or less good, and the disposition of the sower may be more or less good, and the disposition of Heaven for the effect may be good, better, or best (varying in accordance with the constellations which undergo continuous change), it comes to pass that a soul is created more or less pure from the seed of man and from these virtues. According to its purity the possible intellectual virtue, mentioned above, descends into it, in the manner mentioned. If it happens that because of the purity of the recipient soul the intellectual virtue is quite free of and withdrawn from every bodily darkness, the divine goodness increases in it as in a substance suited to receive it; hence it increases this intelligence in the soul, according to its capacity for receiving it. This is that seed of happiness of which we are presently speaking.

This accords with the opinion expressed by Tully in his book *On Old Age* where he says, speaking in the person of Cato, “Therefore a celestial soul descended into us coming from the highest dwelling into a place which is contrary to the divine nature and to eternity.”²⁴⁶ In a soul such as this there exists its own virtue, the intellectual virtue, and the divine (that is, the influence mentioned above). Therefore it is written in the book *On Causes*, “Every noble soul has three activities, namely animal, intellectual, and divine.”²⁴⁷ There are some who would even claim that if all of the preceding virtues in their best disposition were brought into agreement in the creation of a soul, so much of the Deity would descend into it that it would almost become another God incarnate. This is virtually all that can be said according to the principles of philosophy.

According to the principles of theology it may be said that when the supreme deity (that is, God) sees his creature prepared to receive his benefaction, he endows it with as great a gift as it is prepared to receive. Since these gifts come from ineffable Love, and divine Love is a attribute of the Holy Spirit,

²⁴⁴ *the possible intellect* This is the rational, or intellectual, power of the soul, which possesses the capacity of understanding all truths as they are conveyed by the universal forms. The intellectual soul possesses this capacity “in potentiality,” that is, as a power that can be realized or actualized when universal forms are perceived.

²⁴⁵ *the words of the Apostle* Paul, Romans 11:33.

²⁴⁶ *the opinion of Tully* Cicero, *De senectute* XXI, 77.

²⁴⁷ *in the book On Causes* Aristotle, *De causis* III, 27-33.

they are called the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts, as Isaiah distinguishes them, are seven in number: namely Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Strength, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of God.²⁴⁸ O happy harvest, O happy and wondrous seed! O admirable and generous sower, who waits only for human nature to prepare the earth to be sown! Blessed are they who rightly cultivate such seed! Here we should know that the first and most noble shoot to bear fruit which sprouts from this seed is the appetite of the mind, which in Greek is called *hormen*.²⁴⁹ If this is not cultivated correctly and preserved properly through good habit, the seed is worth little, and it would have been better if it had never been sown. Therefore St. Augustine asserts, as does Aristotle in the second book of the *Ethics*, that one should make a habit of doing well and of restraining one's passions in order that this sprout of which we spoke may grow strong through good habit and be strengthened in its uprightness, so that it may bear fruit and from this fruit bring forth the sweetness of human happiness.

Chapter 22

It is a precept of the moral philosophers who have spoken about giving that one should devote thought and care to making one's gifts as useful as possible in presenting them to the recipient. Thus, out of a desire to obey this rule, I intend to make my *Convivio* as useful as I possibly can in each of its parts. Since in this part the opportunity to speak at some length about human happiness presents itself, I intend to speak about its sweetness, for no other discussion would be more useful to those who have no knowledge of it. For as the Philosopher says in the first book of the *Ethics*, and Tully in his book on *The End of Good*, he who does not see the mark aims poorly, and in the same way he who does not perceive this sweetness cannot attain it properly.²⁵⁰ Therefore, since it is our final solace, for the sake of which we live and devote ourselves to what we undertake to do, it is most useful and necessary to perceive this mark, in order to direct the bow of our activity toward it, for he is most highly regarded who points it out to those who do not perceive it.

Leaving aside, then, the opinions held in this matter by the philosopher Epicurus and by Zeno, I intend to proceed directly to the true opinion of Aristotle and the other Peripatetics. As has been said above, there springs from the divine goodness, sown and infused into us from the beginning of our generation, a shoot which the Greeks call *hormen* (that is, natural appetite of the mind). Just as the various grains which at first, when springing up, look alike in the grass, and then as they grow come to lose their similarity, so this natural appetite, which issues from the divine grace, seems at first not unlike

²⁴⁸ These gifts . . . are seven in number Isaiah 11:2.

²⁴⁹ *the appetite of the mind* The intellect and the will.

²⁵⁰ *he who does not see the mark* Aristotle, *Ethics* I, 1, and Cicero *De finibus* V, 6, 15.

that which comes simply from nature, but is similar to it, just as the first blades of the different grains are similar to one another. This similarity is found not only in men, but in men and in animals; and this is apparent, for every animal, as soon as it is born, rational as well as brute, loves itself and fears and flees those things which are opposed to it, and hates them. Then as this appetite evolves, a dissimilarity, as has been said above, begins to develop in the course of this appetite, for one takes one path and another another. Just as the Apostle says, “Many run for the prize, but one alone is he who captures it,” so these human appetites proceed from the beginning along different paths, and there is but one path alone that leads us to our peace.²⁵¹ Therefore, leaving aside all the others, we must follow in our present book the one that makes a good beginning.

I say, then, that this appetite loves itself from the beginning, although in a general sense; then it begins to make distinctions among those things that it enjoys the most and the least, and hates the most and the least, and it follows or flees them either more or less, to the degree that its understanding of them permits it to make distinctions not only among those things, which it loves secondarily, but to make distinctions within itself, which it loves primarily. Recognizing different parts within itself, it loves those in it most which are most noble; and since the mind is a more noble part of man than the body, it loves that part more. And so loving first itself and all other things for the sake of itself, and loving to a greater degree the better part of itself, it is evident that it loves the mind more than the body or anything else, the mind which it ought by nature to love more than anything else. Therefore if the mind always delights in the use of the thing that is loved, which is the fruit of love, and if in that thing which is loved most of all is found the most delightful use of all, the use of our mind is most of all delightful to us. And whatever is most of all delightful to us constitutes our happiness and our blessedness, beyond which there is no greater delight, nor any equal, as anyone can see who carefully considers the preceding argument.

Let no one say that every appetite is of the mind, for by mind I mean here only that which relates to the rational part (that is, the will and the intellect). Thus if anyone should wish to call the sensitive appetite “mind,” the proposition would not and could not be admissible, for no one doubts that the rational appetite is more noble than the sensitive appetite and is therefore more deserving of love. So it is with this appetite of which we are presently speaking. In point of fact the use of our mind is twofold, namely practical and speculative (“practical” signifying “operative”), each of which is most delightful, although that of contemplation is more so, as has been explained above.²⁵² The practical use of the mind consists in our acting in accordance

²⁵¹ *as the Apostle says* Paul, I Corinthians 9:24.

²⁵² *the use of our mind is twofold* Dante returns to the discussion of the active and contemplative lives, which were treated in Chapter 17 above.

with virtue (that is, uprightly), with prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice; the speculative use consists not in our acting but in reflecting upon the works of God and nature. This together with the other constitutes our blessedness and supreme happiness, as may be seen. This is the sweetness of the seed mentioned above, as is now clearly evident, sweetness to which the seed often does not attain because it has been poorly cultivated or its growth has gone astray. Similarly this may occur by means of much correction and cultivation, for as the seed sprouts some part of its growth may extend to a place where it does not originally fall, so that it may attain to this fruit. This procedure constitutes a kind of grafting of one nature onto a different root. Therefore there is no one who can be excused, for if a person does not acquire this seed from his own natural roots, he may well acquire it by means of a graft. Would in fact that those who have acquired a graft were as many as those who allow themselves to go astray from the good root!

One of these uses is indeed more full of blessedness than the other—namely the speculative which, being inviolate, is the use of the most noble part of our mind which, by reason of that love rooted in us which has been spoken of, is most of all deserving of love, namely the intellect. In this life this part cannot have its perfect use, which consists of seeing God, who is the supreme object of intelligence, except insofar as it contemplates and beholds him through his effects. We will find, if we look closely, that the Gospel of St. Mark teaches us to seek out this blessedness as being the highest, and not the other, namely that of the active life.²⁵³ Mark says that Mary Magdalene, Mary of James, and Mary Salome went to the sepulcher to find the Savior and did not find him. But they found a young man dressed in white who said to them: “You seek the Savior, and I tell you that he is not here; and do not therefore have fear, but go and say to his disciples and to Peter that he will go before them into Galilee, and there you shall see him, as he said unto you.” By these three ladies may be understood the three schools of the active life: namely the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the Peripatetics, who go to the sepulcher (that is, the present world, which is a receptacle of corruptible things) and seek out the Savior (that is, blessedness) and do not find him. But they find a young man in white garments who, according to the testimony of Matthew and others as well, was an angel of God. Therefore Matthew said: “The angel of God descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone and sat upon it. And his countenance was like lightning, and his garments were white as snow.”²⁵⁴

This angel is our nobility which comes from God, as has been said, and speaks within our faculty of reason and says to each one of these schools (that is, to everyone who goes in search of blessedness in the active life) that it is not here, but that they should go and tell the disciples and Peter (that is, those

²⁵³ *the Gospel of St. Mark* Mark 16:1 ff.

²⁵⁴ “*The angel of God . . .*” Matthew 28:2-3.

who go seeking him and those who have gone astray, like Peter who had denied him) that he will go before them into Galilee, that is, that blessedness will go before us into Galilee (that is, into contemplation). Galilee means the same as whiteness, and whiteness is a color more imbued with material light than any other; and likewise contemplation is more imbued with spiritual light than anything else found here below.²⁵⁵ And the angel says: “He will go before you,” and not “He will be with you,” to have us understand that God is always in advance of our contemplation, and that here below we can never reach him who is our supreme blessedness. And he says: “There you will see him, as he said unto you” (that is, there you will possess his sweetness, namely happiness, just as it has been promised to you here, that is, as it has been decreed that you shall be able to possess it). And so it appears that we are first able to find our blessedness (this happiness of which we are speaking) imperfectly, as it were, in the active life (that is, in the exercise of the moral virtues), and later almost perfectly in the exercise of the intellectual virtues. These two kinds of activities are the quickest and most direct paths leading to the supreme blessedness, which cannot be possessed here, as is quite apparent from what has been said.

Chapter 23

Now that the definition of nobility has been sufficiently examined and clarified in all of its parts as far as possible, so that we can now see what constitutes a noble man, it seems appropriate to proceed to that part of the text which begins *The soul which this goodness adorns*, which identifies the signs by which we may recognize the noble man referred to above. This is divided into two parts: in the first it is affirmed that this nobility shines and gleams openly throughout the entire life of a noble man; in the second it reveals the splendors distinctive of nobility; the second part begins *Sweet, obedient, and full of shame*.

With regard to the first part it should be known that this divine seed, of which we have spoken above, springs up immediately in our soul, growing and extending itself diversely into each power of the soul according to its need. It springs up, then, in the vegetative, sensitive, and rational powers, and branches out through the virtues of all of these, directing all of them to their perfection and preserving itself in them until the moment when, together with that part of our soul which never dies, it returns to heaven to the highest and most glorious sower. It says this in the first part, which has been spoken of. Then when it says *Sweet, obedient, and full of shame*, it shows how we may recognize a man who is noble by manifest signs, which constitute the activity of this divine goodness; this part is divided into four, according to its diverse activity in the four ages: that is, in adolescence, maturity, old age, and senility.

²⁵⁵ *Galilee means the same as whiteness* Isidore of Seville, Etymologiae XIV, 3, 23, derives the word Galilee from the Greek word for milk (gala), a derivation to which Dante had access through Uguccione da Pisa, who carries over Isidore's etymology verbatim in his Derivationes.

The second part begins: *In maturity she's strong and self-restrained*; the third: *In old age*; the fourth: *And then in the fourth phase of life*.²⁵⁶ This is the general meaning of this part, regarding which it should be known that every effect, insofar as it is an effect, receives the likeness of its cause to the degree that it is able to retain it. Consequently since our life, as has been said, and the life of every living thing here below is caused by heaven, and heaven discloses itself to all such effects as these not by a complete circling but by a partial circling—and thus its movement above them must necessarily rise somewhat like an arc—all earthly life (and in saying “earthly” I mean both men and the other forms of life), rising upward and descending, must be similar to the image of an arc. Returning, then, to human life, which is our sole concern at present, I say that it takes the likeness of this arc, rising upward and descending.²⁵⁷

It should be observed that this arc here below, like the one above, would be uniform if the material sown into our constitution did not impede the rule of human nature. But since the fundamental humor, being the substance and nutriment of the heat which constitutes our life, varies in degree and in quality, and has greater duration in one effect than in another, it happens that the arc of one man's life has a greater or lesser span than that of another.²⁵⁸ Death is sometimes violent, or is hastened by sudden illness, but only that death which is commonly called natural, and which is natural, constitutes that boundary of which the Psalmist has said: “You have set a boundary which cannot be passed.”²⁵⁹ Aristotle, the master of our life, who knew of this arc of which we are now speaking, seems to have believed that our life is nothing but an ascent and a descent, and therefore he says in his book *On Maturity and Old Age* that maturity is nothing but maturation in life. It is difficult to determine where the highest point of this arc lies, because of the inequality mentioned above, but in most lives I believe it is attained between the thirtieth and fortieth year, and I believe that in those whose nature is perfect it is attained in the thirty-fifth year. My belief is compelled by the argument that our Savior Christ had a perfect nature and desired to die in the thirty-fourth year of his life, because it would not have been fitting for a

²⁵⁶ *the four ages* Dante derives the division of life into four ages from Albert the Great, *De aetate sive de iuventute et senectute* I, 2.

²⁵⁷ *the likeness of this arc* The flow of this passage is made somewhat problematic by numerous textual uncertainties, but its general meaning is clear, as is the ruling image of life as bearing similarity to an arc, or portion of a circle, rather than to a circle, which, being a perfect form, represents a perfection to which human life cannot attain. All living things are conceived and born under the influence of the revolving spheres, during which time a sphere completes only a portion of its full revolution about the earth. This portion, or segment of a circle, is conceived by Dante as an arc whose beginning point initiates a curved line that first rises and then, after cresting, falls. Human life imitates this movement of ascent and descent, that is, of growth and decline, in the four ages described below.

²⁵⁸ *and of better or worse quality* I follow the Busnelli-Vandelli text here, as does Chiappelli-Fenzi. Simonelli deletes the phrase “or worse,” arguing that it is unnecessary to the sense.

²⁵⁹ “You have set a boundary . . .” Psalm 104:9 (King James).

divinity to enter into such a decline as this. Nor can it be believed that he would not have desired to remain alive until he had reached the highest point of this life of ours, since he had lived here during the low estate of youth. This is made evident by the hour of the day of his death, for he desired to make it conform to his life. As Luke says, it was nearly the sixth hour when he died, which is to say the height of day. Thus we may take this word “nearly” to signify that the thirty-fifth year in the life of Christ was the height of his life.

This arc, however, is not characterized in written works solely by reference to its midpoint, but is divided into four parts, according to the four combinations of the contrary qualities that comprise our composition, to which combinations—I mean to each individually—one part of the course of our life seems to correspond, and these are called the four ages. The first is adolescence, which corresponds to the hot and moist; the second is maturity, which corresponds to the hot and dry; the third is old age, which corresponds to the cold and dry; and the fourth is senility, which corresponds to the dry and moist, as Albert states in the fourth book of the *Meteorics*.²⁶⁰ These parts of life are likewise characterized by the year, by spring, summer, autumn, and winter; and by the day, that is, up to tierce, and then nones (omitting sext, midway between, for an obvious reason), and then vespers and from vespers onward.²⁶¹ Therefore the gentiles (that is, the pagans) said that the chariot of the sun had four horses: the first they called Eoüs, the second Pyroüs, the third Aethon, and the fourth Phlegon, as Ovid records in the second book of the *Metamorphoses*.²⁶²

Concerning the parts of the day it should be briefly observed that, as was said above in the sixth chapter of the third book, the Church in distinguishing among the hours of the day makes use of the temporal hours, of which there are twelve in each day, long or short according to the length of the solar day. Because the sixth hour (that is, midday) is the most noble hour of the entire day, and the most virtuous, she draws her offices near to each side of it (that is to say before and after) as much as possible. For this reason the office of the first part of the day, namely tierce, is said at the end of that part of the day, and the offices of the third and the fourth part are said at their beginning.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ *as Albert states* Dante's passage appears to derive very little from the fourth book of Albert the Great's *De meteoris* to which he refers here. The passage, in fact, is taken in its entirety from another work by Albert, his *De aetate sive iuventute et senectute*, mentioned above.

²⁶¹ *(omitting sext, midway between . . .)* The “obvious reason” why Dante omits the sext, which corresponds to noon, may be that the middle of the day is evident to all by the position of the sun, whereas all the other temporal hours are not so evident because they vary, are “long or short,” according to the time of the year. See Dante's previous discussion regarding temporal hours, *Conv.* III, 6, 3. In the canonical hours, tierce corresponds roughly to 9 a.m., sext to noon, nones to 3 p.m., and vespers to 6 p.m.

²⁶² *four horses* *Metamorphoses* II, 153 ff.

²⁶³ *the office of the first part of the day* The office of tierce is said toward the end of tierce, that is, just before the beginning of sext which runs from 9 a.m. to noon, whereas the offices for the third and fourth periods, nones and

And for this reason mid-tierce is said before the bell is rung for that part of the day, and mid-nones after it is rung for that part of the day, and as is mid-vespers.²⁶⁴ It should be clear to everyone, then, that the proper nones must always be rung at the beginning of the seventh hour of the day. And this should suffice for the present digression.

Chapter 24

Returning to the main argument, I say that human life is divided into four ages. The first is called adolescence, which means “increase of life”; the second is called maturity, which means “the age that can be helpful” (that is, that can give perfection, and so it is considered a perfect age, for one can give only what one has); the third is called old age; the fourth is called senility, as has been said above.

Regarding the first age no one is in doubt, for all learned persons are in agreement that it lasts up until the twenty-fifth year. Since up until that time our soul is concerned with the growth and the beauty of the body, when many and great changes occur in one’s person, the rational part cannot discriminate with perfection. Consequently the Law directs that prior to reaching this age a person may not do certain things without a guardian of sufficient age.

Regarding the second age, which is truly the highest point of our life, there are many different opinions as to its duration. But leaving aside what the philosophers and physicians have to say about it and referring to the appropriate law, I say that in the majority (on the basis of which every judgment regarding what is natural can and must be made) this age lasts for 20 years. The reasoning which leads me to this conclusion is that if the highest point of our arc is in the thirty-fifth year, this age of life must have a descent and an ascent of equal duration; this ascent and descent are like the handle of a bow in which but little flection is observed. It obtains, then, that maturity is completed in the forty-fifth year. Just as adolescence lasts for the first twenty-five years, ascending toward maturity, so the descent, that is, old age, lasts for the same number of years following maturity; and so old age concludes in the seventieth year. But since adolescence does not begin at the beginning of life, taking it in the sense that has been stated, but nearly eight months later, and since our nature strives to ascend and holds back in descending because the natural heat is decreased, and has little power, and the moisture is condensed—not in quantity but in quality—so that it evaporates

vespers, are said toward the beginning of those periods. In other words, the offices are said at the hours which incline toward noon, the most noble part of the day.

²⁶⁴ *And for this reason mid-tierce* Mid-tierce (7:30 a.m.) is said before the bell is rung for tierce, which occurs toward the end of tierce; mid-nones (1:30 p.m.) and mid-vespers (4:30 p.m.) are said after the bell is rung for those hours, since it is rung toward the beginning of those hours (noon and 3:00 p.m. respectively). Proper nones signifies the very beginning of nones, which is noon, the beginning of the seventh hour of the day, as Dante stresses in the next sentence.

and is consumed less quickly, it happens that beyond old age there remains to our life a period of perhaps ten years, a little more or a little less; and this period is called senility.²⁶⁵ Hence it is said of Plato, who may be said to have possessed a supremely excellent nature both for the perfection of its being and for the physiognomic image which Socrates observed in him when he first saw him, that he lived to the age of 81, as Tully affirms in his book *On Old Age*.²⁶⁶ I believe that if Christ had not been crucified and had lived out the term which his life could have encompassed according to its nature, he would have undergone the change from mortal body to immortal in his eighty-first year.

Indeed as has been said above, these ages can be longer or shorter according to our temperament and constitution, but whatever they are, it seems to me, as has been said, this proportion must be preserved in all men (that is, to make the ages of life in these men longer or shorter according to the totality of the full term of their natural life).²⁶⁷ Throughout each of these ages the nobility of which we are speaking reveals its effects diversely in the soul that is ennobled, and this is what this stanza, about which I am presently writing, is intended to show.²⁶⁸ Here it should be observed that our nature when good and upright develops in us according to what is reasonable, just as we perceive that the nature of plants develops in them; and therefore some manners and some kinds of behavior are more reasonable at one age than at another, during which the soul that is ennobled develops in an orderly manner along a simple path, employing its activities in the periods and ages of life proper to them accordingly as they are directed to attaining its ultimate

²⁶⁵ *but nearly eight months later* Simonelli's text reads "months" (mesi), which I follow here (as does the most recent Chiappelli-Fenzi). The Busnelli-Vandelli reads "years" (anni). The case for mesi was sustained by Moore (Studies, IV, 110) who notes its appearance in twenty-two manuscripts, as opposed to only five with anni, and by P  zard (Dante, Oeuvres compl  tes, p. 250). The conceptual argument turns on the meaning of Dante's phrase "the beginning of life." Busnelli-Vandelli take it to mean, literally, the moment of birth. Moore and Simonelli take it to refer to the moment of conception, occurring eight months before parturition. For Simonelli the phrase "taking it [i.e., life] in the way that has been stated" refers the reader back to Chapter 21, 4-5, where Dante discusses the process of the conception of a fetus. But while Dante does delineate the soul's acquisition of its various powers, he does not state clearly that life is conceived to begin at this point. The phrase might logically refer back to the opening of this chapter where he defines adolescence as the "increase of life." Nevertheless the logic of the Busnelli-Vandelli is not compelling, since it leaves eight years of life unaccounted for by name, which, given Dante's Scholastic love of completeness ("natura abhorret vacuum"), is an improbability.

²⁶⁶ *as Tully affirms* Cicero, De senectute V, 13.

²⁶⁷ *longer or shorter* The various ages of each individual man, that is, will vary according to the full term of his life. The age of maturity in someone who dies at a younger age, for example, would therefore be shorter than the age specified in the ideal paradigm, whereas in someone who lives longer each of the four ages would extend, in each age, for a longer period of time.

²⁶⁸ *about which I am presently writing* The seventh stanza of the canzone is referred to.

fruit.²⁶⁹ Tully voices agreement with this in his book *On Old Age*.²⁷⁰ Leaving aside the allegorical meaning which Vergil applies to the different ages of human development in the *Aeneid*, and as well what Egidius the Hermit says about it in the first part of his book *The Regimen of Princes*, and likewise Tully in his book *On Offices*, and following only what reason by itself can perceive, I say that this first age is the door and path by which we enter upon this good life of ours.²⁷¹ This entrance must of necessity provide certain things which the goodness of nature, never failing in things that are necessary, gives to us, as we see that she gives leaves to the vine to protect its fruit, and tendrils by which to defend and bind its weakness so as to bear the weight of the fruit.

The goodness of nature, then, gives to this age of life four things necessary for entering into the city of the good life. The first is obedience, the second sweetness, the third a sense of shame, the fourth loveliness of being, as the text says in the first section.²⁷² We should therefore know that just as someone who has never been in a city would not know how to make his way without guidance from someone who is familiar with it, so an adolescent who enters into the meandering forest of this life would not know how to keep to the right path unless it were shown to him by his elders.²⁷³ Nor would it be of any use to point it out if he were not obedient to their commands; and therefore in this age of life obedience is necessary.

Someone might well say: "Can he then be called obedient who obeys commands that are bad as well as he who obeys those that are good?" I reply that this would not be obedience but transgression, for if a king commands one thing and a servant another, the servant is not to be obeyed, for this would constitute disobedience to the king, and therefore a transgression. Therefore Solomon says, in seeking to correct his son (and this is his first command): "Hear, my son, the teaching of your father."²⁷⁴ At once he shields him from the bad advice and teaching of others, saying: "Do not let sinners have the power to beguile you with flatteries or delights so that you will go with them." So as a child clings to the mother's breast as soon as it is born, likewise as soon as some light appears in his mind he ought to turn to the correction of his father, and his father should give him instruction. He should make certain that his own actions do not provide an example that would run

²⁶⁹ *its ultimate fruit* The fruit is, as Dante has previously explained, happiness.

²⁷⁰ *Tully* De senectute IV, 5.

²⁷¹ *Leaving aside* The references are to the allegorical interpretation of the Aeneid of Fulgentius, Egidius Colonna's De regimine principum I, 4, 1 ff, and Cicero's De officiis I, 34, 122.

²⁷² *as the text says* Again, of the seventh stanza of the canzone.

²⁷³ *the meandering forest of this life* The metaphor of the forest as life and the path that leads to goodness will return, of course, in the first terza rima of the Divine Comedy.

²⁷⁴ "Hear, my son . . ." A somewhat free adaptation of Proverbs 1:8-15.

counter to his words of correction, for we see that every son naturally looks more to the footprints of his father than to those of anyone else. For this reason the Law, which takes this into account, states and commands that the person of the father should always appear righteous and upstanding to his sons; so it is clear that in this age of life obedience is necessary. Therefore Solomon writes in Proverbs that he who humbly and obediently endures his chastener and his just reproofs “shall be glorified,” and he says “shall be,” to indicate that he is speaking to an adolescent, one who in the present age of life cannot be glorified.²⁷⁵

If someone should protest that “what is said is said only of the father and not of others,” I reply that all other obedience must redound to the father. Thus the Apostle says to the Colossians: “Children, obey your fathers in all things, for this is the will of God.”²⁷⁶ If the father is no longer living, it redounds to him who is designated father by the father’s last will. Should the father die intestate, it redounds to him to whom the Law entrusts his son’s guidance. And next in order teachers and elders should be obeyed, to whom he seems in some way to have been entrusted by the father or by him who stands in the father’s place. But since the present chapter has become long on account of the useful digressions which it contains, the other points will be discussed in another chapter.

Chapter 25

Not only is this good soul and nature obedient in adolescence, it is also pleasant, which is the other thing which is necessary in this age of life for passing through the gate of maturity. It is necessary because we cannot have a perfect life without friends, as Aristotle asserts in the eighth book of the *Ethics*; and the majority of friendships appear to be sown in this first age of life because in this age a man begins to be gracious, or the contrary.²⁷⁷ This graciousness is acquired through pleasant conduct, namely sweet and courteous speech, and sweet and courteous service and action. This is why Solomon says to his adolescent son: “God scorns scorers, and to the meek God will give grace.” And elsewhere he says: “Keep far away from you an evil mouth, and let base actions be far from you.”²⁷⁸ And so it appears that this pleasantness is necessary, as has been explained.

²⁷⁵ Solomon Proverbs 15:31 and 13:18.

²⁷⁶ the Apostle Paul, Colossians 3:20.

²⁷⁷ as Aristotle asserts Ethics VIII, 1.

²⁷⁸ Solomon says Proverbs 3:34.

Furthermore, in this age of life the emotion of shame is necessary, and therefore a good and noble nature displays it in this age, as the text says. Since shame is a very prominent sign of nobility in adolescence, because it is extremely necessary at that time for making a good foundation for our life, to which the noble nature inclines, we must speak of it with some care. I say that by shame I mean three emotions necessary for the foundation of our good life: the first is awe, the second modesty, the third sense of shame, although the common people do not discern this distinction. All three are necessary in this age of life for the reasons: it is necessary to be reverent and eager, in order to learn; to be restrained, in order to avoid transgressing; to be repentant of an error, so as not to fall into the habit of error. All of these things comprise the emotions mentioned above, which together are commonly called shame. For awe is the amazement of the mind at seeing or hearing, or in some way perceiving, great and marvelous things. Insofar as they seem great, they instill reverence for them in him who perceives them; insofar as they seem marvelous they make him yearn for knowledge about them. For this reason the kings of times past would place magnificent works of gold, gems, and works of art in their palaces so that those who saw them would be amazed, and therefore become reverent, and eager to obtain information about the king's state of honor. Thus Statius, the sweet poet, in the first book of the *Thebaid*, says that when the king of the Argives, Adrastus, saw Polynices clad in a lion's skin, and Tydeus clad in the hide of a wild boar, and recalled the reply which Apollo had given concerning his daughters, he was awestruck, and therefore became more reverent and more eager to gain knowledge.²⁷⁹

Modesty is the recoiling of the mind from things which are ugly for fear of falling into them, as we see in virgins, good women, and adolescents who are so modest that their faces become pallid or tinged with the color of red not only in those instances when they are induced or tempted to commit a fault, but even when some act of sensual pleasure is merely conceived in the imagination. Thus the above-mentioned poet says in the first book of the *Thebaid*, just cited, that when Aceste, the nurse of Argia and Deiphyle, daughters of King Adrastus, brought them before the eyes of their noble father in the presence of two strangers, namely Polynices and Tydeus, the virgins became pallid and flushed, and their eyes averted the glances of everyone and turned upon their father's face alone, as if reassured.²⁸⁰ O how many faults does this modesty curb! How many dishonorable deeds and entreaties does it silence! How many dishonorable desires does it bridle! How many evil temptations does it check, not only in the person who is modest but in the one who looks on him! How many foul words does it restrain! For as Tully says in the first book of *On Offices*, "There is no foul act which it is not foul to speak of."²⁸¹ Therefore a man who is modest and noble never speaks in

²⁷⁹ Statius *Thebaid* I, 395 ff. and 482 ff.

²⁸⁰ the above mentioned poet Statius, *Thebaid* I, 527 ff.

²⁸¹ as Tully says Cicero, *On Offices* I, 35, 127.

such a way that his words would be unsuitable for a woman. Ah, how ill it becomes a man who goes in search of honor to speak of things which would be unbecoming on the lips of any woman!

The sense of shame is the fear of being disgraced for a fault that has been committed. From this fear springs repentance for the fault, which consists of a bitterness that acts as a constraint against renewing the fault. Consequently this same poet says in the same passage that when Polynices was asked by King Adrastus about his origin, he hesitated before speaking for shame of the fault he had committed against his father, and also of the faults of his father Oedipus, for they seemed to abide in the shame of the son. He did not name his father, but his ancestors, and his native land and his mother. From this it is quite evident that shame is necessary in this age of life.²⁸²

The noble nature in this age of life displays not only obedience, pleasantness, and shame, but also beauty and poise of body, as the text affirms when it says *And she adorns her body*. The word “adorns” is a verb and not a noun—a verb, I mean, in the present tense indicative of the third person. Here we must observe that this effect is also necessary for the goodness of our life, for a great part of the operations of our soul must be effected by means of the organs of the body, and it effects them well when the body is well ordered and disposed in its parts. When it is well ordered and disposed it is then beautiful as a whole and in its parts; for the due order of our members accords a pleasure of an inexpressibly wonderful harmony, and their proper disposition, namely their health, confers upon them a color that is pleasant to behold. So to say that a noble nature brings beauty to its body and makes it lovely and poised is to say simply that it adorns it with the perfection of order. It is evident that along with the other things that have been discussed, this characteristic is necessary in the age of adolescence. These are the things which the noble soul (that is, the noble nature as a thing which is sown), as has been said, by divine providence, intends for it to have from the beginning.

Chapter 26

Now that we have discussed the first section of this part, which shows how we can recognize a man who is noble by manifest signs, we must proceed to the second part, which begins: *At maturity strong and self-restrained*. It says, then, that as the noble nature in adolescence shows itself *obedient, pleasant and full of shame*, adorning its own person, so in maturity it is *strong, self-restrained*, loving, courteous, and honest, five qualities which appear to be, and are, necessary for our perfection insofar as we regard it with reference to ourselves. Concerning this we should observe that all that noble nature prepares in the first age of life is set forth and ordered by the foresight of universal Nature, which orders particular nature to its perfection.²⁸³ This perfection of ours can be considered in two ways. It can be considered with

²⁸² in the same passage Thebaid I, 671 ff.

reference to ourselves, and this perfection must be achieved in our maturity, which is the fullness of our life. It can be considered with reference to others; and because it is first necessary to be perfect, and then to communicate this perfection to others, this secondary perfection must be achieved in the following age of life, namely in old age, as will be explained below.

Here, then, we must recall what was discussed above in the twenty-second chapter of this book concerning the appetite which is inborn in us from our beginning. This appetite never does anything except pursue and flee; and whenever it pursues what is proper in the right degree and flees what is proper in the right degree, one keeps within the boundaries of one's perfection. Nevertheless this appetite must be ridden by reason, for just as a horse set loose, however noble it may be by nature, cannot act as its own guide without a good rider, so the appetite, which is called irascible or concupiscible, however noble it may be, must obey reason, which guides it with bridle and spurs like a good horseman.²⁸⁴ It uses the bridle when appetite is in pursuit, and this bridle is called temperance, which marks the limit up to which something may be pursued; it uses the spur when the appetite is in flight, to make it turn back to the place from which it seeks to flee, and this spur is called courage, or magnanimity, a virtue which marks the place where one must take a stand and fight. Vergil, our greatest poet, shows that Aeneas was unrestrained in this way in that part of the *Aeneid* in which this age of life is allegorized, the part comprising the fourth, fifth, and sixth books of the *Aeneid*. How great was his restraint when, having experienced so much pleasure with Dido, as will be recounted below in the seventh book, and having derived from her so much gratification, he took his departure from her to follow an honorable, praiseworthy and profitable path, as is recorded in the fourth book of the *Aeneid*! What spurring was felt when this same Aeneas mustered the courage to enter into Hell alone with the Sibyl in search of the soul of his father Anchises, in the face of so many perils, as is described in the sixth book of the same history. From this it is evident that for us to achieve perfection in the age of maturity it is necessary to be "strong and self-restrained." This is what goodness of nature accomplishes and demonstrates, as the text expressly states.

Moreover, it is necessary to be loving in this age of life for its perfection, because it is appropriate for it to look backward and forward, like something

²⁸³ *the foresight of universal Nature* That is, God.

²⁸⁴ *irascible or concupiscible* Scholastic philosophy divided all passions, or desires, into one of two opposing categories. The concupiscible appetite, which is not to be identified solely with the desire for sexual gratification, seeks to acquire or merge itself with some object of desire. The irascible appetite, which likewise is not to be thought of as relating to anger or wrath, seeks to avoid contact or propinquity with an object that repels the soul. Neither of these two kinds of appetites—and two is all that there are—should be thought of as pertaining to specific sins, for the appetite is in itself neither good nor evil. Good and evil are determined by action consequent to the enactment of the will in conjunction with the particular appetites. The image of the horseman appears repeatedly in Dante's works: see *Purg.* XVIII, 95-96; *Monarchia* III, 16.

that lies on the meridian circle. It is appropriate for one to love one's elders, from whom one has received being, nurture, and education, so as not to seem ungrateful. It is appropriate for one to love one's juniors, so that by loving them it may give them some of its benefits by which it may later, when its prosperity diminishes, derive support and honor from them. As the previously named poet shows in the fifth book mentioned above, this is the love that Aeneas had when he left the aged Trojans behind in Sicily, entrusting them to the care of Acestes, and released them from their labors, and when in this same site he prepared his young son Ascanius, with the other youths, for tournament games.²⁸⁵ From this it is evident that love is necessary in this age of life, as the text states.

Moreover, it is necessary in this age of life to be courteous, for although courteous manners are becoming in all ages of life, in this age they are especially necessary, because in adolescence absence of courtesy readily deserves to be excused because of tenderness of age, and because conversely in old age courtesy is not possible by reason of the seriousness and sternness which it is required to show; and still more so in senility. Our most exalted poet shows in the sixth book previously mentioned that Aeneas had this courtesy when he says that King Aeneas, to honor the lifeless body of Misenus, who had been Hector's trumpeter and had afterwards placed himself in Aeneas' trust, made preparations and took up his ax to help hew the wood for the fire that would be used to burn the body, in keeping with their custom.²⁸⁶ From this it is quite evident that courtesy is necessary in maturity, and therefore the noble soul displays it in that age of life, as has been said.

Moreover, it is necessary in this age of life to be loyal. Loyalty consists of following and putting into practice what the laws decree, and this is especially appropriate in one who is mature; for an adolescent, as has been said, readily deserves to be excused because of tenderness of age; an elder ought to be just by reason of his greater experience, and he ought to conduct himself in a just manner, not as a follower of the law, except insofar as his own right judgment and the law are virtually in conformity, but almost independently of any law, which someone in the age of maturity cannot do. It should suffice for him to follow the law and to take delight in following it, as the previously cited poet in the above-mentioned fifth book says that Aeneas did when he held the games in Sicily on the anniversary of his father's death, for he loyally awarded to each victor what he had promised for victory, according to their longstanding custom, which was their law. From this it is evident that in this age of life loyalty, courtesy, love, courage, and temperance are necessary, as the text presently under discussion states; and therefore the soul that is noble displays them all.

²⁸⁵ *the games in Sicily* Aeneid V, 70 and 304 ff.

²⁸⁶ *as was their custom* Aeneid VI, 166 ff.

Chapter 27

We have quite sufficiently examined and discussed that section of the text which displays the attributes which the noble nature confers on maturity. Consequently it seems proper to take up the third part which begins *In old age*, in which the text seeks to show those things which the noble nature displays and ought to possess in the third age of life, namely old age. It says that in old age the noble soul is prudent, just, liberal, and takes delight in speaking well of others' virtues, and of hearing them well spoken of (that is to say, that it is affable). These four virtues are indeed extremely suitable to this age of life.

In order to perceive this we must know that, as Tully says in his book *On Old Age*: "Our life has a fixed course and our good nature has but a single path; and in each part of our life a season has been given for certain things."²⁸⁷ Consequently just as to adolescence is given that which will bring us to perfection and ripeness, as has been said above, so to maturity perfection and ripeness are given so that the sweetness of its fruit may prove profitable both to itself and to others; for as Aristotle says, man is a social animal, and thus it is required of him that he be useful not merely to himself but to others.²⁸⁸ Hence we read of Cato that he thought of himself as born not for himself, but for his country and for the whole world. Therefore following upon our own perfection, which we acquire in the age of maturity, should come that perfection which illuminates not only ourselves but others; one should open out like a rose that can no longer remain closed, and disperse the fragrance which is produced within; and this should take place in the third age of life, which is our present concern. One should therefore be prudent (that is, wise), and being wise requires a good memory of things seen, a good knowledge of things present, and a good foresight of things future. For as the Philosopher says in the sixth book of the *Ethics*, "It is impossible for a man to be wise without being good," and therefore one who proceeds with subterfuge and deceit is not to be called wise but astute; for just as no one would call a man wise for knowing how to pierce the pupil of an eye with the point of a dagger, so a man who knows how to perform some evil act should not be called wise, since in performing it he always harms himself before harming others.²⁸⁹

If we look more closely, from prudence comes good counsel, which guides a man himself and others to a good end in human affairs and actions. This is the gift that Solomon asked of God upon finding himself placed at the helm of

²⁸⁷ as Tully says Cicero, De senectute X, 33.

²⁸⁸ as Aristotle says Dante takes this concept from St. Thomas' Commentary on the Ethics I, 9, 112, where he says: "Homo naturaliter est animal civile.

²⁸⁹ as the Philosopher says Ethics VI, 13.

the government of the people, as is written in the third book of Kings.²⁹⁰ Nor does a prudent man such as this wait until someone summons him with the words "Counsel me," but, making provision for him, without being asked, he counsels him, just as a rose offers its fragrance not only to one who approaches it for this reason but also to whoever passes near to it. Here some doctor or lawyer might say: "Am I then to carry my counsel and offer it even though it has not been asked for, and make no profit from my art?" I reply as our Lord has said: "Freely have you received, freely give."²⁹¹ I say, therefore, my dear lawyer, that those counsels which are unrelated to your art and which proceed only from the common sense which God has given to you (and this is that prudence of which we are now speaking) you should not sell to the children of him who gave it to you: those that are related to your art, which you have purchased, you may sell, but not such that it is not fitting at times to pay a tithe and make an offering to God (that is, to those unfortunates to whom nothing is left but the gratitude of God).

It is also fitting in this age of life to be just, so that one's judgments and authority may be a light and a law to others. Because this singular virtue, namely justice, was perceived by philosophers in ancient times to display itself to perfection in this age of life, they entrusted the rule of the cities to those who were in this age of life; and therefore the council of rulers was called the "Senate."²⁹² O my miserable, miserable homeland! What pity for you constrains me whenever I read or whenever I write anything that has to do with civil government! But since justice will be treated in the penultimate book of this work, let it suffice for the present to have touched on it briefly here.

It is also fitting in this age of life to be generous, because a thing is fitting when it most satisfies the requisites of its own nature, nor can the requisites of generosity ever be so satisfied as in this age of life. For if we but carefully consider Aristotle's reasoning in the fourth book of the *Ethics*, and Tully's in his book *On Offices*, generosity should occur at a time and a place in which the generous man injures neither himself nor another.²⁹³ This is something that cannot be possessed without prudence and justice, virtues which it is impossible to possess in their perfection by the way of nature prior to this age of life. Ah, you ill-fated and misbegotten men who defraud widows and wards, who steal from the very weakest, who rob and seize by force the rights of others, and with these gains arrange banquets, make gifts of horses and arms, goods and money, dress in striking attire, erect wondrous buildings, and believe yourselves to be acting with generosity! What is this but to act like the

²⁹⁰ the gift which Solomon asked 1 Kings 3:9.

²⁹¹ "Freely have you received . . ." Matthew 10:8.

²⁹² the council of rulers "Senate" is derived from senes, "old men," and is referred to by Cicero in *De senectute* VI, 19.

²⁹³ if we but carefully consider *Ethics* IV, 2; *De officiis* I, 14, 42.

thief who takes the cloth from the altar to cover his own table? We should mock your gifts, you tyrants, like the thief who would invite guests into his house and spread upon his table the cloth stolen from the altar with the ecclesiastical signs still upon it, and think that others would take no notice. Listen, you stubborn men, to what Tully has to say against you in his book *On Offices*: “There are many wishing to be impressive and famous who take from some in order to give to others, believing that they will be well regarded, and make them rich for whatever reason they so choose. But nothing is more contrary to what is proper than this.”²⁹⁴

It is also fitting in this age of life to be affable, to speak of what is good and to hear it spoken of willingly, because it is good to speak of what is good when it has an audience. This age of life even carries with it an air of authority, because men seem more inclined in this age to listen to authority than in any earlier age; and it seems that this age brings with it knowledge of many fine and pleasant stories because of the long experience of life. Consequently Tully says in his book *On Old Age*, in the person of Cato the Elder: “The joy and pleasure I take from conversation is greater now than in the past.”²⁹⁵

Ovid teaches us, in the seventh book of the *Metamorphoses*, that all four of these things are fitting to this age of life by citing the myth of how Cephalus of Athens came to King Aeacus for help in the war that Athens was waging against the Cretans. He shows how old Aeacus was prudent when, having lost almost all of his people to a plague caused by a contamination of the air, he wisely turned to God and asked him to restore his dead people. Because of his wisdom, which enabled him to sustain his patience and turn to God, his people were restored to him in greater numbers than before.²⁹⁶ Ovid shows how he was just when he says that Aeacus divided and distributed his forsaken lands to his new people. He shows that Aeacus was generous, by having him say to Cephalus after his request for aid: “O Athens, do not ask our aid, but take it; do not think that the forces of this island, along with all that is in my possession, are uncertain: forces are not lacking, indeed there are more than are needed; the adversary is mighty, and the time for being generous is opportune and without excuse.”²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ Tully De officiis I, 14, 42 ff.

²⁹⁵ Consequently Tully De senectute XIV, 46.

²⁹⁶ *his people were restored* Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VII, 523-660, tells the story of how Aeacus appealed to Jupiter to provide restitution for his lost people and was granted his wish when Jupiter created a new race of people by turning ants into men.

²⁹⁷ *Aeacus was generous* Metamorphoses VII, 507-511. Dante's rendering of this passage does not square well with the original text in several places, possibly because the manuscript he was working from contained different readings, as Moore surmises (*Studies in Dante, First Series* [Oxford, 1896], p. 219).

Ah, how many things there are to note in this reply! But to one who understands it well it will suffice to set it down here just as Ovid sets it down.²⁹⁸ He shows that he was affable when he tells and diligently recounts, in a long speech to Cephalus, the story of the plague of his people and their restoration. Consequently it is quite evident that in this age of life four things are fitting, which is why the nature that is noble displays them in this age, as the text states. So that the example that is given might be the more memorable, he says of King Aeacus that he was the father of Telamon, of Peleus, and of Phocus, and that from Telamon Ajax was born, and from Peleus Achilles.

Chapter 28

After the section previously discussed we must proceed to the last one: that is, to the one which begins *And then in the fourth phase of life*, by which the text proposes to show how the noble soul acts in the last age of life (that is, in senility). It says that the noble soul does two things: first, that it returns to God as to that port from which it departed when it came to enter into the sea of this life; second, that it blesses the journey that it has made, because it has been straight and good and without bitterness of storm.

Here it should be observed that a natural death, as Tully says in his book *On Old Age*, is, as it were, a port and site of repose after our long journey. This is quite true, for just as a good sailor lowers his sails as he approaches port and, pressing forward lightly, enters it gently, so we must lower the sails of our worldly preoccupations and return to God with all our mind and heart, so that we may reach that port with perfect gentleness and perfect peace. Here our own nature accords us a great lesson in gentleness, for in such a death as this there is no suffering or any harshness; but just as a ripe apple drops from its bough gently and without violence, so without suffering our soul separates itself from the body in which it has dwelled. Hence in his book *On Youth and Old Age* Aristotle says that “death that takes place in old age is without sadness.”²⁹⁹ And just as a man returning from a long journey is met by the citizens of his city as he enters its gates, so the noble soul is met, as it should be, by the citizens of the eternal life. This they do by means of their good works and thoughts: for having already surrendered itself to God and disengaged itself from worldly matters and preoccupations, the soul seems to see those whom it believes to be with God. Hear what Tully says, in the person of Cato the Elder: “I seem to see already, and I lift myself with the greatest longing to see your fathers, whom I loved, and not only them, but also those of whom I have heard speak.”³⁰⁰ The noble soul, then, surrenders itself to God in this age of life and awaits the end of this life with great desire, and seems to

²⁹⁸ just as Ovid sets it down That is, without any further commentary.

²⁹⁹ Aristotle says On Youth and Old Age, 17, 479a, 20-23.

³⁰⁰ Tully De senectute XXIII, 83. The full title of the book is Cato Maior de senectute.

be leaving an inn and returning to its proper dwelling, seems to be coming back from a journey and returning to the city, seems to be coming in from the sea and returning to port.

O you miserable and debased beings who speed into this port with sails raised high! Where you should take your rest, you shipwreck yourselves against the force of the wind and perish at the very place to which you have so long been journeying! Certainly the knight Lancelot did not wish to enter with his sails raised high, nor the most noble of our Italians, Guido of Montefeltro.³⁰¹ These noble men did indeed lower the sails of their worldly preoccupations and late in life gave themselves to religious orders, forsaking all worldly delights and affairs. No one can be excused because of the bond of marriage, which may still bind him late in life; for not only those who conform to the life and ways of St. Benedict, St. Augustine, St. Francis, and St. Dominic dedicate themselves to living a religious life, but even those who are married can dedicate themselves to living a life that is good and truly religious, for it is in our hearts that God wishes us to be religious. This is why St. Paul says to the Romans: “He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outwardly manifested in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in spirit and not in the letter, whose praise comes not from men but from God.”³⁰²

The noble soul in this age of life blesses times past, and well may it bless them, because by turning its memory to them it recalls its virtuous actions, without which it could not come to port, to which it draws near, with so much prosperity and so much gain. It acts like the good merchant who, as he draws near to his port, examines his profits and says: “If I had not made my journey along this road, I would not have this treasure, nor would I have anything in which to take delight in my city, to which I am drawing near”; and so he blesses the way he has taken. The great poet Lucan, in the second book of his *Pharsalia*, shows us by way of an allegory that these two things are appropriate to this age of life. There he says that Marcia returned to Cato and begged and implored him to take her back in her old age.³⁰³ Here Marcia signifies the noble soul. And we may translate the figure of the allegory as follows. Marcia was a virgin, and in that state she signifies adolescence; she later married Cato, and in that state she signifies maturity; then she bore children, and they signify the virtues which are said above to be fitting for those who are young; she then left Cato and married Hortensius, signifying the departure from maturity and the onset of old age; she also bore this man’s children, who signify the virtues which are said above to be fitting in old age.

³⁰¹ *the most noble of the Italians* Guido da Montefeltro will later find himself placed among the fraudulent counselors in the eighth bolgia of the eighth circle of Hell (Inf. XXVII). Lancelot is consigned to the Lustful in the first circle (Inf. V).

³⁰² *St. Paul says* Romans 2:28-29.

³⁰³ *Marcia returned to Cato* *Pharsalia* II, 326 ff.

Hortensius died, by which is signified the end of old age; and having become a widow—which widowhood signifies senility—Marcia returned at the beginning of her widowhood to Cato, signifying that the noble soul returns to God at the beginning of senility. What man on earth was more worthy to signify God than Cato? Surely none.

What does Marcia say to Cato? “While there was blood in me,” that is, in maturity, “while I had the power to bear children,” namely in old age, which is truly the mother of the other virtues, as has been shown above, “I,” says Marcia, “carried out and accomplished all of your commands”—this is to say that the soul remained committed to civic duties. She says: “I took two husbands,” that is, “I was fertile in two ages. Now that my womb is worn-out and I have lost the capacity to bear children,” says Marcia, “I return to you, being unable to serve another spouse”; that is to say that the noble soul, perceiving that it no longer has a womb for bearing fruit (that is, when the soul’s members feel that they have grown weak), turns to God, who has no need of bodily members. And Marcia says: “Give me the rights of our ancient marital chamber; give me only the name of marriage.” This is to say that the noble soul says to God: “My Lord, now give me your peace; grant me at least that in the little of life that remains to me I may be called yours.” And Marcia says: “Two reasons move me to say this: one is that after my death it may be said that I died as the wife of Cato; the other, that after my death it may be said that you did not spurn me, but through your good will you took my hand in marriage.” The noble soul is moved by these two reasons, and it desires to depart from this life as the spouse of God, and desires to show that its activity has been pleasing to God. O you unhappy and misbegotten beings who wish to depart from this life under the name of Hortensius rather than that of Cato! It is good to bring to a close what I have had to say about the signs of nobility with the name of this man, because in him nobility displays them all in every age of life.

Chapter 29

Now that the text has shown the signs which appear in every age of life in the noble man, by which he may be recognized and without which he could not exist, any more than the Sun without light or fire without heat, the text, at the end of what is said about nobility, cries out to all and says: “O you who have listened to me, see how many there are who are deceived!”: that is, those who believe themselves noble because they are of famous and ancient lineage and are descended from excellent fathers, although they have no nobility in themselves.

Here two questions arise which it is good to consider at the end of the present book. Manfred da Vico, who now calls himself Pretor and Prefect, might say: “Whatever I may be, I recall to mind and represent my ancestors, who on the basis of their nobility earned the office of Prefect, merited their participation

in the coronation of the Emperor, and deserved to receive the rose from the Roman Pastor: to me are due the honor and the reverence of the people.” This is the first question. The second is that one of the family of San Nazzaro of Pavia, or one of the Piscitelli of Naples might say: “If nobility is such as has been said, namely, a divine seed graciously planted in the human soul, and if the lineage or race has no soul, as is evident, no lineage or race could be called noble; and this is contrary to the opinion held by those who say that our lineage is the most noble to be found their cities.”

To the first question Juvenal replies in his eighth satire, where he begins as if exclaiming: “Of what benefit are these honors which derive from men of earlier times if he who would clothe himself with them lives an evil life, if he who speaks of his ancestors and describes their great and wondrous deeds dedicates himself to wretched and base acts?” “Will he,” says this same satirist, “become noble because of his family, who is not worthy of that family? This is but to call a dwarf a giant.”³⁰⁴ Then afterwards he says to a man of this sort: “Between you and the statue erected in memory of your ancestor there is no difference except that his head is made of marble and yours is alive.” Here, with all due respect, I disagree with this poet, for a statue of marble, wood, or metal left as a memorial to some worthy man differs greatly in effect from his worthless descendants. This is because a statue always confirms the good opinion of those who have heard tell of the great renown of him whose statue it is, and engenders it in others. A worthless son or grandson does quite the reverse, for he weakens the good opinion of those who have heard his ancestors well spoken of; for one of his thoughts will be: “It is not possible for the renown of his ancestors to be as great as it is said to be, since from their seed we see spring such a plant.” Consequently he who bears false witness against the good should receive not honor but dishonor. For this reason Tully says that “the son of a worthy man must strive to speak well of his father.”³⁰⁵ Therefore, in my judgment, just as he who defames a worthy man deserves to be shunned and ignored by everyone, so a worthless man descended from good ancestors deserves to be cast out by all, and a good man should close his eyes so as to avoid witnessing the disgrace perpetrated on goodness, of which the memory alone remains. This should suffice for the present concerning the first question that was raised.

To the second question we may reply that lineage has no soul in and of itself, and yet it is quite true that it is called noble and in a certain way is noble. It should be observed here that every whole is composed of its parts. There are some wholes which possess together with their parts a single essence, as a single man comprises a single essence in common with all his parts; what is said to exist in a part is said to exist in the same way in the whole. There are

³⁰⁴ *call a dwarf a giant* Juvenal, Satires VIII, 1-5, 9-12, 19-20, 30-32, 51-55.

³⁰⁵ *For this reason Tully says* The source of this aphorism, which does not appear in any of Cicero's works, is uncertain.

other wholes which do not have their essence in common with their parts, for example a heap of grain; this kind of essence is secondary, resulting from the many grains which have a true and primary essence in themselves. In a whole such as this the qualities of the parts are said to exist in this way, secondarily, as does its essence; and so a heap is called white because the grains that comprise it are white. This whiteness, however, resides first in the grains and secondarily as a result in the heap as a whole, and so in a secondary sense it may be called white. In the same way a race or a lineage may be called noble. Hence it should be observed that just as the white grains must be predominant in order for a heap to be white, so in order for a lineage to be noble those who are noble must be predominant in it (I say “predominant” meaning greater in number), so that their goodness by its renown may obscure and conceal the presence of the contrary among them. Just as in a white heap of grain the wheat grain could be removed grain by grain and each grain replaced by red millet until the color of the whole heap had changed, so in a noble lineage the good might die off one by one, and the bad be born into it in sufficient number to bring about a change in its name, so that it would deserve to be called not noble but base. This should suffice in reply to the second question.

Chapter 30

As has been shown above in the third chapter of this book, this canzone has three principal divisions. Therefore, since two of them have been discussed (the first beginning with the previously mentioned chapter, and the second with the sixteenth, so that the first is completed in thirteen chapters and the second in fourteen, not counting the two chapters that comprise the preface to the book on the canzone), we must briefly discuss, in this thirtieth and final chapter, the third principal division, which was composed as a *tornata* to this canzone by way of adornment and which begins *My song Against-the-erring-ones, go forth*. Here it should first be observed that every good craftsman at the end of his work should ennoble and embellish it as much as he can, so that it may become more praiseworthy and more precious when it has left his hands. This I intend to do in this part, not that I am a good craftsman, but because I follow his example.

I say then: *My song Against-the-erring-ones, go forth*. *Against-the-erring-ones* is a single word, and is the title of this canzone, after the example of our good brother Thomas Aquinas, who gave the title *Against the Gentiles* to a book of his which he wrote to confound all those who stray from our Faith.³⁰⁶ I say, then, “go forth” as if to say: “You are now perfect, and it is no longer time to stand still but to go forth, for your undertaking is great.” *And when you come To where our lady is*, tell her your purpose. Here it should be noted that, as our Lord has said, one should do not cast pearls before swine, for it does them no good and brings harm to the pearls; and as the poet Aesop

³⁰⁶ Thomas Aquinas This is the short title for his *Summa de veritate catholicae fidei contra Gentiles*.

says in his first fable, a grain is worth more than a pearl to a cock, and he therefore leaves the one and takes the other.³⁰⁷ Considering this, as a precaution I direct my canzone to reveal its purpose where this lady, namely Philosophy, is to be found. This most noble lady shall then be found when her dwelling-place is found, that is, the soul in which she dwells. And Philosophy does not dwell in the wise alone, but also, as has been above proved in another book, wherever the love of her dwells. To each of these I tell it to disclose its purpose, so that her meaning will prove useful to them, and be received by them.

I say to my canzone: Tell this lady, “*I speak about a friend of yours.*” Truly nobility is her friend, for one loves the other so much that nobility endlessly calls upon her, and Philosophy never turns her most pleasing gaze on any other. O how great and how beautiful an adornment is this which is given to her in the closing verses of this canzone, where she is called the friend of her whose perfection dwells in the most secret recess of the divine mind!

[Dante Alighieri](#), 1304

Recommendations:

[Emma](#), [Northanger Abbey](#), [Pride and Prejudice](#), [Mansfield Park](#) , [Sense and Sensibility](#) by Jane Austen

[Gobseck](#), [Father Goriot](#), [The Magic Skin](#), [Cousin Bette](#) by Honoré de Balzac

[Uncle Tom's Cabin](#) by Harriet Beecher Stowe

[The Decameron](#) by Giovanni Boccaccio

[Wuthering Heights](#) by Emily Brontë

[Life Is A Dream](#) by Pedro Calderon De La Barca

[Alice in Wonderland](#) by Lewis Carroll

[Don Quixote of La Mancha](#) by Miguel de Cervantes

[The Divine Comedy](#), [The New Life](#) by Dante Alighieri

[Robinson Crusoe](#) by Daniel Defoe

[Oliver Twist](#), [David Copperfield](#), [A Tale of Two Cities](#) by Charles Dickens

³⁰⁷ as our Lord has said Matthew 7:6.

[The Idiot](#), [The Brothers Karamazov](#), [Crime And Punishment](#), [The Insulted And The Injured](#), [Demons](#) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

[The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes](#), [His Last Bow](#) by Arthur Conan Doyle

[The Count of Monte Cristo](#), [The Three Musketeers](#) by A. Dumas

[Cleopatra](#), [The Emperor](#) by Georg Ebers

[The Great Gatsby](#) by F. Scott Fitzgerald

[The Red Lily](#), [Penguin Island](#), [Thais](#) by Anatole France

[Dona Perfecta](#) by B. Perez Galdos

[Faust Parts I & II](#) , [The Sorrows of Young Werther](#) , [Hermann and Dorothea](#)
by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

[The Overcoat](#), [The Nose](#), [Dead Souls](#) , [Taras Bulba](#) by Nikolai Gogol

[The Scarlet Letter](#), [The House of the Seven Gables](#) by Nathaniel Hawthorne

[The Hunchback of Notre-Dame](#) , [Les Misérables](#) , [The Man Who Laughs](#) by
Victor Hugo

[The Legend of Sleepy Hollow](#) by W. Irving

[Trois hommes dans un bateau. Sans oublier le chien!](#) by Jerome K. Jerome

[The Trial](#) , [Metamorphosis](#), [The Castle](#) by Franz Kafka

[Snow Country](#) by Yasunari Kawabata

[The Jungle Book](#) by Rudyard Kipling

[A Hero of Our Time](#), [The Demon](#) by M. Y. Lermontov

[Martin Eden](#) , [The Call of the Wild](#), [White Fang](#) by Jack London

[Bel Ami](#) by Guy de Maupassant

[Moby Dick Or The Whale](#), [Bartleby](#), [The Scrivener](#) by Herman Melville

[Amphitryon](#), [The Misanthrope](#) by Moliere

[Thus Spake Zarathustra](#), [The Birth of Tragedy](#), [Ecce Homo](#) by Friedrich
Nietzsche

[Henry IV](#), [Six Characters in Search of an Author](#), [The Late Mattia Pascal](#) by
Luigi Pirandello

[Eugene Onegin](#) , [The Queen of Spades](#), [Boris Godunov](#), [The Captain's Daughter](#), [The Belkin Tales](#) by Alexander Pushkin

[The Headless Horseman](#), [The Scalp Hunters](#) by Mayne Reid

[Treasure Island](#), [The strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde](#) by Robert Louis Stevenson

[The Robbers](#), [Love And Intrigue](#), [Wilhelm Tell](#) by F. Schiller

[The Antiquary](#), [Quentin Durward](#) by Walter Scott

[Othello](#), [King Lear](#), [Romeo and Juliet](#), [Macbeth](#), [The Merchant of Venice](#) by William Shakespeare

[Zeno's Conscience](#) by Italo Svevo

[Fathers and Sons](#) , [A House of Gentlefolk](#), [A Sportsman's Sketches](#) by Ivan Turgenev

[The Adventures of Tom Sawyer](#), [The Prince And The Pauper](#) , [A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's](#) by Mark Twain

[Dick Sands, the Boy Captain](#) , [In Search of the Castaways](#) by Jules Verne

[The Picture of Dorian Gray](#) by Oscar Wilde

[The Fortune of the Rougons](#) by Émile Zola

[Amok](#), [Chess Story](#), [24 Hours in the Life of a Woman](#), [Fantastic night](#) by Stefan Zweig