Ethics, Ontology and Representation: The *Virtù*-Dynamic of Dante's *Commedia*

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

The University of Leeds
School of Modern Languages and Cultures

April 2012

Acknowledgements

I offer my warmest gratitude to the following people for their invaluable help in the writing of this thesis. I thank Professor Brian Richardson whose insightful comments helped in the final stages of my thesis. I also thank Catherine Ribbands, Peter Chester and Wendy Chester, who all undertook to read my work, doing so with precision and kindness. My time as a postgraduate student has been made rich and rewarding thanks to the postgraduate community at the University of Leeds, amongst whom I give my special thanks to Rebecca Ferreboeuf and Cristina Rios, whose willingness to listen and whose sensitive and perceptive criticism helped both my work and myself grow. And I offer my heartfelt thanks to Alfonso Montellano Lòpez, without whose support and patience my work would have been impossible. Finally I thank my supervisor, Matthew Treherne, who saw before I did myself what my work could achieve and who guided me with patience, enthusiasm and generosity towards that achievement.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the conception and representation of *virtù* in Dante's *Commedia*. In order to break the existing limited boundaries of the way virtue is read in the *Commedia*, and to establish a richer sense of the ideas a fourteenth-century poet might have had in relation to the topic, this thesis begins with two chapters which consider notions of virtue in the intellectual and cultural traditions prior to Dante. Chapter One focuses on the philosophical and theological traditions and considers works by Aristotle, Plato, Augustine, Gregory the Great and Thomas Aquinas. Chapter Two turns to look at virtue as a prominent theme in a wide variety of popular cultural forms of the medieval period. These include sermons, devotional literature, visual art and poetry. In the light of these two chapters, the thesis proposes a reading of *virtù* in the *Commedia* which acknowledges it as a notion which is at a nexus of being and doing, of metaphysical and physical, of idea and representation. What I have termed the *virtù*-dynamic in the *Commedia*, is that through which Dante fundamentally connects ethics and ontology, so that human behaviour becomes an expression of an individual's ontological state. The *virtù*-dynamic is the interaction which the *Commedia* traces between the creative action of God and the responsive action of man. The final three chapters of the thesis consider this in relation to different aspects of the poem. Chapter Three considers the role Dante gives to *virtù* in the process of creation and incarnation in his poem. Chapter Four looks at how Dante stages the interactions between God and man which are underpinned by *virtù*. The final chapter considers how Dante conceives the role of *virtù* in relation to the experiences and salvation of his own pilgrim-poet self. This analysis is based on a close focus, not only on the abstract ideas of *virtù* which the *Commedia* proposes, but on how those ideas are manifested and vivified by the text.

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Editions and Abbreviations

Dante's works are cited from the following editions:

La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata, rev. ed. ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols (Florence: Le Lettere, 1994)

Il Convivio, in *Opere minori*, vol. 1, part 2, ed. by Cesare Vasoli and Gianfranco Contini (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1988)

Rime, ed. by Gianfranco Contini (Turin: Einaudi, 1995)

Vita Nuova, ed. by Domenico De Robertis in *La letteratura italiana: storia e testi*, vol. 5, tome I, part I, 1-247 (Milan and Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1974)

The Bible is quoted in Latin from the Vulgate. *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatum versionem.* 4th rev. ed. Ed. by B. Fischer, Robertus Weber and Roger Gryson (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994)

The following abbreviations are used for frequently cited texts:

Conf.	Augustine, *Confessiones*, Loeb edition with Latin and English texts, ed. by Jeffrey Henderson and trans. by William Watts, 2 vols (London: Heinemann, 1912)
Conv.	Dante, *Convivio*
DCD	Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, ed. by Bernard Dombart and Alphonsus Kalb, 2 vols (Turnholt: Brepols, 1955)
DME	Augustine *De moribus Ecclesiae catholicae*, ed. by Johannes B. Bauer (Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1992)
ED	*Enciclopedia dantesca*, 6 vols (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1970-1976)
Inf.	Dante, *Inferno*
NE	Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics*, with Greek and English texts, trans. by H. Rackham, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934)
Par.	Dante, *Paradiso*
Purg.	Dante, *Purgatorio*
ST	Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* with Latin and English texts, ed. and trans. W.D. Hughes, 61 vols (London: Blackfriars, 1964-1981)
VN	Dante, *Vita Nuova*

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Introduction

Virtù, in its various lexical forms, is one of the most prominent terms in Dante's work and there are nearly one hundred instances of it in the *Commedia* alone. But while the term recurs frequently, the contexts in which it appears suggest that its meaning is not always the same. The 'virtute e conoscenza' (*Inf.* XXVI.120) which the damned Ulysses seeks suggests a different meaning from *virtù* when applied to Beatrice, the 'donna di virtù' (*Inf.* II.76), and both are different again from the 'gran virtute' of St Francis (*Par.* XI.57). These instances appear in very different contexts from *virtù* as that which 'rains down' from the Primo Mobile (*Par.* XXVIII) or *virtù* as that which forms the airy bodies of Purgatory (*Purg.* XXV). *Virtù* is used to refer to human quality, to divine creative force, to individual vision and further meanings besides. It appears as a highly complex term in Dante's thought and perhaps because of its complexity, scholarship on virtue as a topic has tended to isolate and separate its meanings rather than tackling it as a whole. The apparent multiplicity of meanings, however, can lead us to consider how the meanings of *virtù* come to be connected in the thought of the poet, the narrative universe of his poem and perhaps in medieval society more broadly. Furthermore, by adopting this holistic approach it becomes possible to see how virtue intersects with and connects other aspects of central importance to Dante's work, aspects of importance both to his conceptual ideas and to his poetic practice. Alongside these differences in conceptual meaning, this approach also brings to the fore the way in which virtue is represented in the poem, suggesting that the images and language through which virtue is represented are equally important to the conceptual idea in shaping notions of virtue. That the representative form has such an impact on conceptual meaning also enables us to give proper weight to the fact that Dante constructs an idea of virtue not only through abstract consideration but through vivified narrative. This thesis will explore the workings of this combination.

Virtue and the Virtues in Dante

Before developing further my own approach to the question, I will give a brief, non-exhaustive summary of how the idea of virtue appears most explicitly in Dante's work. The *Enciclopedia dantesca*, in its entry on *virtù*, identifies two principal meanings of the term in

Dante's works: virtue as a moral characteristic and virtue as power.[1] The former meaning presents virtue as acquired and moral modes of action and structuring principles of human character which pertain chiefly to the characteristics of the Aristotelian and Thomistic models of virtue. The second meaning is *virtù* as the creative, informing power of God imprinting upon the celestial heavens which in turn contain inferior types of *virtù*; these then go on to inform the sublunar world.

Both dimensions of this term appear first in the *Convivio*. Here, Dante reiterates an idea of virtue openly taken from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (*Conv.* IV.xvii).[2] Dante echoes Aristotle's definition of moral virtue as an 'abito elettivo consistente nel mezzo' (*Conv.* IV.xvii.7) which is acquired through repeated actions to become an established disposition of character. As in the Aristotelian source, Dante focuses on individual moral virtues, enumerating the list of eleven according to Aristotle: courage, temperance, liberality, munificence, magnanimity, love of honour, gentleness, affability, truth, good disposition and justice (*Conv.* IV.xvii.4-6). Dante's description of the moral virtues in *Convivio* IV adds something to the Aristotelian account, however, by highlighting their basis as being in God. Virtues are the outward signs of the inner nobility which is placed in the soul by God (*Conv.* IV.xx.3; IV.xvi.9). Dante emphasises nobility as that given by God and moral virtues as the 'frutti' through which that nobility is revealed in human action (*Conv.* IV.xvi.10). *Convivio* III describes God as virtue itself and as the source of all creation. The extent of human virtue then becomes a measure of the extent to which the human can receive God's goodness (*Conv.* III.vii.3). In adopting the Aristotelian concepts of form and matter, Dante describes how divine creative virtue descends into matter and transforms it into its 'likeness' (*Conv.* III.xiv.2). Man receives divine virtue to the extent to which his own capacity for virtue is capable. Divine virtue, however, also has a role in the extension of human virtue beyond its natural capacities in order to enable man to attain his supranatural end (canzone of *Convivio* III). In the transmission of divine virtue Dante allots a central role to the female beloved and her beauty. Beauty acquires a moral significance as the manifestation of the perfection of the soul (*Conv.* III.xv.14). The beautiful woman is therefore the visual evidence of perfectly actuated being and acts as a hope-bringing stimulus to her lover. The *Enciclopedia dantesca* describes the beloved's role as follows: 'la virtù della donna indica da un lato la perfezione e l'eccellenza dell'essere in atto [...] e quindi perfezione morale, dall'altro l'operare *ad extra* della perfezione come potenza attiva che feconda il seme dell'altrui buona natura'.[3] Later, in the *Paradiso*, Dante develops

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[1] Philippe Delhaye and Giorgio Stabile, 'Virtù' in *ED*, 6 vols (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1970-1976), v, 1050-59.
[2] Dante is drawing at this point principally from Books I, II and III of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.
[3] Delhaye and Stabile, p. 1056.

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this idea in relation to Beatrice. It is Beatrice's virtue which compels the pilgrim to improve morally and which draws the pilgrim up through the spheres.

Virtue and the virtues are also prominent as a theme throughout the *Commedia* itself. Particularly evident are references to the four moral or cardinal virtues (justice, prudence, temperance and fortitude) and the three theological virtues (faith, hope and charity). One of the most overt comes in *Purgatorio* VII, in one of Virgil's descriptions of the fault of himself and his fellow Limbo Dwellers: 'sto io con quei che le tre sante / virtù non si vestiro, e sanza vizio / conobber l'altre e seguir tutte quante' (34-36). Much later, towards the end of Paradise, the pilgrim himself is examined in the details of the three theological virtues in the heaven of the fixed stars. There has also been a consistent interpretation of the image of the four stars which appear in *Purgatorio* I, and the three stars and seven nymphs which appear in the Earthly Paradise as allegories of the seven virtues.[4]

The realm of Purgatory proper is structured according to the seven capital vices and their opposing virtues. These vices are identified as the root cause of sinful actions. This is in contrast to Hell in which individual sins, rather than the vices from which they spring, dictated the structure of the realm. Instead, Purgatory works on reforming the basis of human character and this process of reformation is staged through a purgation of vice and an inculcation of virtue. The form in which Aristotelian moral virtue is acquired is echoed in the repetition of suffering on the terraces framed by the presentation of positive and negative exempla. The individual virtues which Dante refers to are, however, different from Aristotle's original list, existing as they do within the new Christianised standards of behaviour. Thus, pride is countered by humility, envy by charity, anger by gentleness, sloth by zeal, avarice by liberality, gluttony by temperance and lust by chastity. The process of Aristotelian correction of vice is, however, maintained. Dante describes the process through the imagery of horse riding and falconry, which act as metaphors for the controlling and taming of the will and appetites which takes place in the acquisition of moral virtue (for example, *Purg.* XIII.37-42; XIV.143-51). The souls undergoing Purgatory do not perform the virtue they are to acquire but they are compelled not to perform their vice. The virtues appear in the exempla presented on the terrace, three on each terrace, which always repeat the same pattern. The primary exemplum is consistently the Virgin Mary, while the other two are taken from the Bible and classical culture.

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[4] This interpretation appears in the earliest examples of commentary on the *Commedia*, for example, in the commentaries of Jacopo della Lana (1324-28), Francesco da Buti (1385-95) and in *L'ottimo commento* (1333). See the online data base of commentaries on the *Commedia* at <http://dante.dartmouth.edu/>.

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In Paradise, the heavens have come to be associated again with different virtues which are themselves associated with the planet to which the heaven pertains. So, for example, the heaven of Jupiter is the heaven of justice, the heaven of Saturn is the heaven of temperance. As well as structuring Paradise according to different virtues, here Dante makes *virtù* itself evident as the essential nature of an individualised created being, whether that be a planet, an angel or a human soul, and as the interactive force between God and creation which establishes the created order. The heavens act as a point of transmission between divine *virtù* and the sublunar world, informing the existence and actions of that world.

Critical Writing on Virtue in the *Commedia*

The scholarly literature on the topic of virtue has tended to focus on the evident areas outlined above, in which virtue and the virtues appear. An influential contribution is that of Patrick Boyde in *Human Vices and Human Worth in Dante's 'Comedy'*, which focuses primarily on the presence of an Aristotelian understanding of virtue in the *Commedia*.[5] Boyde's work gives a clear exposition of Aristotelian virtue itself, in which to be virtuous 'denotes the full and proper use of a particular *potentia* or *virtus* which is inherent in the given substantial form'.[6] Boyde reiterates Aristotle's idea of human goodness as residing in the permanent possession of moral virtue which 'inclines the agent to make the right kind of choice'.[7] He also considers Aristotle's idea of virtue as the mean between two opposing vices. With these ideas in mind he applies the principles of Aristotelian virtue onto the *Commedia*'s structures and events. He is thus able to read the structure of Dante's Purgatory, with its balancing of virtue and vice through activity and exempla, as an Aristotelian process of the acquisition of virtue. Boyde also accepts the categories of four moral and three theological virtues as found in Aquinas and reveals the presence of this structure in the layout of the *Paradiso*.

Marc Cogan's excellent work *The Design in the Wax* recontextualises Aristotelian virtue in the *Commedia*, identifying how the poem adopts and transforms that virtue to act within the Christian context.[8] While Boyde focuses on Aristotle as a principal source, Cogan looks more to Aquinas. Examining first the structural workings of the *Purgatorio*, Cogan identifies a distinction between Hell and Purgatory: 'to understand the relationship

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[5] Patrick Boyde, *Human Vices and Human Worth in Dante's 'Comedy'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[6] Boyde, *Human Vices*, p. 86.

[7] Boyde, *Human Vices*, p. 91.

[8] Marc Cogan, *The Design in the Wax: The Structure of the 'Divine Comedy' and its Meaning* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

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between Hell and Purgatory is [to understand the difference] between sin, as an action of a certain sort, and vice, as a state of character'.[9] The punishments of Purgatory, then, are correcting something more fundamental; the purgation of vice and restoration of virtue is addressing directly the proper workings of man: 'this restoration means the removal of a condition that disposes the soul to improper action [...] the restoration of an original capacity for proper action'.[10] Suffering in *Purgatorio*, following how virtue is acquired in Aristotle's and Aquinas's thought, acts to restore this proper original state. Cogan dedicates much space to the consideration of the seven virtues and vices of *Purgatorio*, exploring their interaction. In the Christianised context which Cogan is considering, he points out the transition which Dantean virtue must make between moral virtue, which is sufficient for human life, and virtue which draws man to God and is therefore spiritually fulfilling. He suggests that 'Dante sees the purgatorial process as one of replacing vices with virtues, [but] he is at the same time deliberately substituting a new set of virtues for an older one'.[11] *Purgatorio* is the reordering of human virtue towards its new eternal ends and Cogan considers in particular the role of the Beatitudes in this reordering: 'the cardinal virtues perfect the soul for actions of this world, the Beatitudes for actions of the next'.[12] Cogan argues that Dante's inclusion of a Beatitude at the exit of each purgatorial circle makes evident this shift, which is occurring in Purgatory, from the forum of the world to the forum of the eternal. In his analysis of *Purgatorio* XXV, Cogan reads Dante's ideas on the creation of the soul as the expression of Aristotelian biology, presenting a consideration of human appetites and intellect, but again in the light of the Christian context.

Cogan's analysis of *Paradiso* paves the way for further reflections on the nature and role of virtue. In stating that '[t]he amount of delight or blessedness a soul experiences depends on the soul's capactiy for the activity in which delight resides',[13] he is opening the way for the soul's positioning to be read directly in terms of virtue, since virtue stands at the nexus of a soul's potential and a soul's perfect activity. Cogan's analysis of *Paradiso* emphasises the role of character potential in the final location of the souls, and highlights how this potential is the result of divine power, their temporal actions and nature having been moved by 'celestial influence'.

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[9] Cogan, p. 85.
[10] Cogan, p. 90.
[11] Cogan, p. 124.
[12] Cogan, p. 125.
[13] Cogan, p. 158.

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Another significant contribution to the question of virtue in Dante is made by Manuele Gragnolati in *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture*.[14] Gragnolati points out that the pattern of *Purgatorio* in which, simultaneously, a vice is curbed and a virtue inculcated on each of the terraces, is formed both through repeated action (that is, an Aristotelian approach) and through the use of exempla, the chief of whom is the Virgin Mary. The role of an exemplum of virtue in its acquisition is a vital point and shifts the question towards the consideration of how virtue is to be communicated and acquired.

Gragnolati also stresses the relation between Mary, Christ and virtue, claiming that, 'the aim of purgatory is to attain the virtues that are represented by Christ and Mary-as-Christ'. The souls in Purgatory are carrying out an imitation of the actions of Christ and Mary and thus acquiring their virtues. This brings in the question of how the *Commedia* itself uses exempla and how they enter into a process of education which is both ethically and spiritually transformative. Gragnolati is focusing on the spiritually transformative role of pain, in which the loving acceptance of that pain is an imitation of Christ.[15]

Other, shorter works deal with specific aspects of virtue. For example, Siegfried Wenzel considers virtue in relation to vice and claims a reliance in Dante on Peraldus's *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus*.[16] Frank Ordiway looks specifically at the theological virtues in relation to the canto of the Heaven of the Moon and in the light of Aquinas' theology.[17] Finally there are specific moments and images of the *Commedia* which, as we have seen in the commentary tradition, have been noted as being concerned with virtue. Imagery such as the stars of *Purgatorio* and Eden and the nymphs in the Earthly Paradise has been further analysed by Charles Singleton.[18] The significance of virtue in the canto of Ulysses has produced various reflections including those of D'Agostino and Pertile.[19] Another important contribution to a particular aspect of virtue is Kenelm Foster's seminal work *The Two Dantes*, which again considers Dantean virtue in the light of Aristotelian ethics, but is particularly sensitive to the role of grace in human eschatological destiny.[20] His

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[14] Manuele Gragnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

[15] Gragnolati, p. 134.

[16] Siegfried Wenzel, 'Dante's Rationale for the Seven Deadly Sins (Purgatorio XVII)', *Modern Language Review*, 60, 4 (1965), 529-33.

[17] Frank Ordiway, 'In the Earth's Shadow: The Theological Virtues Marred', *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, 100 (1982), 77-92.

[18] Charles Singleton, *Journey to Beatrice: Dante Studies 2* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 82, 124-25, 159.

[19] Alfonso D'Agostino, 'Canti XXVI-XXVII: Abusi d'ingegno' in *Esperimenti danteschi: Inferno 2008*, ed. by Simone Invernizzi (Genoa: Marietti, 2009), pp. 203-20; Lino Pertile, 'Dante e l'ingegno di Ulisse' *Stanford Italian Review*, I (1979), 35-66.

[20] Kenelm Foster, *The Two Dantes and Other Studies* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977). See especially Chapter 11, 'The Two Dantes (II)', pp. 190-219.

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focus turns particularly on the problematic situation of the good pagans of Limbo, opening some of the virtue-related questions which surround this episode.

It is apparent, however, that the majority of these works focus on individual virtues rather than virtue or *virtù* itself which is, in fact, a much more predominant term in the *Commedia*. Scholarship has tended to be preoccupied with the individual moral and theological virtues which emerge from the Aristotelian and Thomistic context. This labelling of the virtues under specific categories has limited the interpretative range open to us. There is no extended analysis of how virtue as an abstract power relates to broader metaphysical currents, nor is there a consideration of the significance of the form in which virtue is represented beyond the exempla on Purgatory's terraces. I suggest that virtue ought to be considered both as a complex idea within a varied intellectual tradition and as an active ethical principle which was a frequent subject in many forms of cultural production in the medieval period.

The aim of this thesis is to show how the idea of virtue in the *Commedia* goes beyond the often acknowledged episodes, forms and explicit definitions and instead, in fact, underlies the whole ethical, spiritual, ontological and poetic movement and form of the story: in individual characters, in behavioural models, in the structure of the realms, in communicative modes, in poetic forms and in the vision of the universe itself. To be able to see this requires a re-exploration of the 'presence' of virtue in medieval society and a recognition of it both as idea and as 'living principle'. To this end the thesis will begin with a thorough analysis of virtue both within the intellectual traditions and as the subject of cultural production. Central to this is the recognition that literary forms include within them, indeed sometimes manifest, the very ideas the text is discussing. My thesis will address virtue in relation to the particular demands and possibilities of poetic representation; in fact, those very demands are central to the understanding of virtue I will be putting forward, which is vitally linked to communication, creation and creativity.

The possibility for such a new reading of virtue in the *Commedia* in the light of the text's ethical, metaphysical and poetic issues has been facilitated by other contributions on these broader issues in recent scholarship. One such contribution is that made by Claire Honess who explores the identification of literature and ethics which was a commonplace in the medieval period. Honess points out that literary theory in the medieval period categorised 'any work of literature as falling into the philosophical category of ethics'.[21] Good literature is understood as that which inspires virtue in its audience and this is a valuable

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[21] Claire Honess, '*Salus, venus, virtus:* Poetry, politics, and ethics from *De vulgari eloquentia* to the *Commedia*', *The Italianist* 27 (2007), 185-205.

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key for understanding the purpose of the *Commedia* itself or the way it would have been approached in the medieval period.[22] In analysing the *Commedia*, Honess considers the ethical lessons it teaches as being especially relevant to the construction of a well-ordered community.[23] My particular interest in her work, and the related works of J.B. Allen and Suzanne Reynolds, is the acknowledgement of the ethical imperative of the *Commedia*.[24] Her work establishes the possibility for reading the *Commedia* as a text which seeks to actively change for the better the behaviour of its readers. With this in mind, the role of virtue, as a standard of positive human action, gains an important place in the ethical message of the poem.

There has also been much recent and valuable scholarly work on the *Commedia*'s relationship to theology. Significant amongst this is the work of Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne.[25] As Montemaggi has suggested,

> we might think of theology finding fruitful and illuminating expression as poetry. For this perspective provides a compelling invitation to engage with the idea that if it is true that there is more to theology than propositional objectivity, factual description, or mimetic representation; and if it is true that in theology, form matters as much as content; then this is because God, as the unfathomable ground of existence, is intimately related not only to how one might understand or represent divine being but to the acts of intellection and representation themselves; and because, as love, God is intimately related not only to what one might say about divine being but also to the ethical nature and value of one's utterances.[26]

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[22] That literature has its own ethical imperative is not, of course, limited to the analysis of Medieval thought. Jean-Paul Sartre's 1948 work *What is Literature?* makes a similar claim: 'Thus, the writer's universe will only reveal itself in all its depth to the examination, the admiration, and the indignation of the reader; and the generous love is a promise to maintain, and the generous indignation is a promise to change, and the admiration a promise to imitate; although literature is one thing and morality a quite different one, at the heart of the aesthetic imperative we discern the moral imperative. For, since the one who writes recognizes, by the very fact that he takes the trouble to write, the freedom of his readers, and since the one who reads, by the mere fact of his opening the book, recognizes the freedom of the writer, the work of art, from whichever side you approach it, is an act of confidence in the freedom of men. And since readers, like the author, recognize this freedom only to demand that it manifest itself, the work can be defined as an imaginary presentation of the world in so far as it demands human freedom'. Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2010), p. 47.
[23] Honess, p. 194.
[24] See J.B. Allen, *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages: A Decorum of Convenient Distinction* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1982); Suzanne Reynolds, *Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric and the Classical Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[25] *Dante's 'Commedia': Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010). See especially the editors' introduction, pp. 1-13.
[26] Vittorio Montemaggi, 'In Unknowability as Love: The Theology of Dante's *Commedia*' in *Dante's 'Commedia': Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), pp. 60-94 (p. 61).

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The nexus which Montemaggi identifies by which content and form become statements about man's interaction with God will be central to my own analysis, capturing as it does the creative and interpretative complexity at the heart of the *Commedia*. In this text it appears that interpretation and representation become a theological undertaking. The vital interaction of conceptual content and poetic form has also been brought to light by Christian Moevs in relation to Dantean metaphysics.[27] Moevs is concerned with the revelatory nature of Dante's poetics, in which form manifests content: 'Since Dante conceives his *Comedy* as both an account and an instrument of individual and universal salvation history [...] his central concern is the (revelatory) poetics of his own poem [...] the metaphysical picture that grounds and motivates the *Comedy*, and the relation between those metaphysics and Dante's poetics'.[28] The work of Montemaggi, Treherne and Moevs establishes a vital rebalancing between the ideas of the poem and poetic form, claiming a supraliterary significance to that form. This is particularly interesting when these ideas relate to the nature of creation itself and how the invisible might be revealed in the world, raising the question of how a human work of creativity like the *Commedia* works within this dynamic.

This is an issue which Marc Cogan in fact raises, though not in direct relation to virtue. Cogan considers the significance of the physical manifestation which necessarily takes place in the *Commedia* and its relation to the poem's greater issues:

> The images of the souls Dante sees and the images of the poem which he presents to us share a common nature, and it is that nature that renders them at once revelatory and obscuring. They must be concrete so that he can perceive them, and to be concrete they must be manifested to him (and us) as particulars as if they were physical entities that existed in a discrete place at a determinate time. But the truth they aspire to convey is itself immaterial and eternal, universal and indivisable.[29]

This is a significant tension which I believe is at the heart of Dante's own consideration of virtue. As a concept, it is caught between metaphysical origin and physical expression. It describes a great creative power but one which finds its expression in manifested act. It needs to be tangibly communicated because it teaches the lessons of how man becomes good. Manifested virtue, acting as a revelation of something invisible, will be a recurrent issue within my own analysis.

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[27] Christian Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's 'Comedy'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[28] Moevs, p. 3.
[29] Cogan, p. 151.

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Finally, a work which begins to situate virtue within the wider concerns of the poem is the recent translation with commentary of *Paradiso* by Robin Kirkpatrick. Here he points out that *virtù* is 'perhaps the term most frequently used in the *Paradiso*'.[30] While an analysis of virtue is clearly not the work's principal remit, Kirkpatrick provides the most nuanced understanding of virtue I have yet come across in Dante scholarship in his glossary of terms, also pointing out the insufficiency of the English translation, virtue, to cover all of its meaning: 'For Dante, the moral implications of virtue are directly related to the inner strength, characteristics and excellence which God, as Creator, has instilled into every created being'.[31] That virtue is a point of meeting between man and his God as Creator opens the potential interpretation of virtue in the text exponentially and leads us to search for the concept in previously unacknowledged forms. While the link between virtue and the broader metaphysical, theological and poetic issues the *Commedia* raises has not yet been fully explored in scholarship, Kirkpatrick's thoughts suggest that there is certainly something to be said.

Research Questions and Methodology

In Dante's poetic encyclopedia [...] each word is necessarily wrapped in a network of infinite resonances, of transversal associations with other words which may be either proximate or distant from one another. From this standpoint the meaning of a word in a text can never be definitively fixed or encapsulated: the mobile sense of words is guaranteed, in effect, by the inexhaustible imaginative context surrounding them.[32]

Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge*

Il terreno tradizionale per l'abbraccio tra filosofia e letteratura è l'etica. O meglio: l'etica ha costituito quasi sempre un alibi perché filosofia e letteratura non si guardassero direttamente in faccia, sicure e soddisfatte di potersi trovare facilmente d'accordo nel compito comune d'insegnare agli uomini la virtù.

Italo Calvino, 'Filosofia e letteratura'[33]

Given the new understanding of the context which they provide, the works of Montemaggi, Treherne, Moevs, Honess and Kirkpatrick open the way for new questions concerning

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[30] *Paradiso*, translated with introduction and commentary by Robin Kirkpatrick (London and New York: Penguin, 2007) p. 337.
[31] Kirkpatrick, *Paradiso*, introduction, p. lxxiv.
[32] Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 12.
[33] Italo Calvino, 'Filosofia e letteratura', in *Saggi: 1945-1985*, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1995), I, 188-96 (p. 91).

virtue's significance within the *Commedia*. My research questions which address these new possibilities are the following: What differing concepts of virtue would have been available to a medieval writer? How was virtue represented in medieval cultural production and what connection did this have to the ethical, spiritual or literary aims of a particular work? What other aspects of ethical and theological thought is virtue connected to in the philosophical, theological and representational traditions? Building from the results of these questions, I will turn to the *Commedia* itself and ask, what relationship does Dante establish between virtue and questions of being and creation? How does Dante present ethical behaviour in the light of an idea of virtue? What role does virtue have in the relationship between man and God? How does Dante present the significance of virtue in relation to human development? How does Dante treat the relationship between virtue, language and human fulfilment? What principal images and modes does Dante use to talk about virtue and how do they inflect *on* the meaning of virtue itself?

The methodology of this thesis will be to begin with a thorough re-exploration of virtue in the intellectual traditions before Dante and within the poet's contemporary environment. Importantly, however, this re-exploration will not be confined to only the theoretical definitions of virtue; while the first chapter is dedicated to a consideration of virtue as a philosophical and theological conceptual principle, the second chapter will turn to virtue as it was mediated in medieval representation. The rationale for this approach is to acknowledge that an issue of such central ethical importance is not only the subject matter of theoretical consideration, but is present in forms of more popular and wider-reaching communication. Because of this presence, the idea which a fourteenth-century poet might have of virtue could be influenced by many different factors and consequently the way the issue might appear in his own poem could be equally multiple. My aim is to reconstruct not only the intellectual but also the 'imaginative' context of Dantean virtue. Furthermore, this approach will enable me to explore the interrelation of philosophy and literature which 'traditionally meets in ethics'.[34] How the *Commedia* approaches virtue in a philosophical way and how it does so by literary means are both ultimately working towards the same end: the positive influence of human behaviour. My aim will be to explore how the poet employs the communicative and conceptual tools of both philosophical and theological thought, and the tools of literary, verbal and visual expression to transmit an idea of virtue which is both recognisable and highly original for his own contemporary audience.

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[34] Calvino, p. 191.

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Chapter One, 'Conceiving Virtue', by considering the conceptual ideas of virtue put forward by five thinkers from the philosophical and theological traditions prior to Dante, will build up a more thorough picture of the concept of virtue to which a medieval individual potentially had access. The aim of this chapter is not to identify direct sources for Dante's own ideas, or to establish obvious parallels. Instead it is to widen the sense of definition and expose the network of conceptual connections within which virtue finds its place. This chapter is undertaken in order to help us break the existing limited boundaries of the way virtue is read in the *Commedia* and thus enable us to understand more fully its workings. By considering the thought of Aristotle, Plato, Augustine, Gregory the Great and Aquinas I will build up virtue as an idea within a developing and changing tradition. My aim is not to arrive at a final definition but rather to sensitise the reader to nuances surrounding virtue which transform depending on context. As has already been suggested, in the *Commedia* the term *virtù* appears in widely differing contexts; this chapter aims to unveil some of the contextual meanings and related ideas to which Dante might be appealing. The chapter is structured around three questions which help us to get inside the different aspects relative to virtue and see how they are consistent or transform within different contexts. The questions – what is virtue? How is virtue acquired? And, what is the result of the attainment of virtue? – will reveal the significant issues around virtue: what it is as an abstract concept, the physical and metaphysical significance of virtue, how it relates to human life and behaviour, and the relation of virtue to human happiness. The authors and questions I have selected also facilitate the tracing of a changing intellectual context from classical to Christian thought. The way Dante relates to classical thought has long been a topic of scholarship and, as we have seen, discussions of virtue in particular have been characterised by a predominant dependence on Aristotelian ethics. Instead, by tracing a more diverse tradition of virtue I will be able to highlight further understandings of virtue which allow for its recognition in the *Commedia* in different ways.

Chapter Two, 'Representing Virtue', moves away from considering the idea of virtue *per se* and turns to look at how virtue was represented in other elements of cultural production such as sermons, devotional literature, visual art, and poetry from Dante's own historical context. Part of the originality of my approach stems from the fact that I am concerned not only with what virtue is but how it is communicated and the way in which this form of communication contributes to the concept of virtue itself and, in fact, seeks to bring about the development of virtue in a text's audience. The focus of this chapter will be upon the interaction of form, content and, to a certain extent, purpose, in certain texts which have virtue as a prominent theme. It is also concerned with establishing a theoretical basis for representation in the medieval period which focuses on the metaphysical and doctrinal

significance of manifesting ideas and, in particular, the role of exempla. The range of texts is deliberately very broad, in order to explore the multitude of expressive forms in which the idea of virtue was mediated. As in Chapter One, my aim is not to identify direct sources for Dante's work, and so, rather than categorising texts based on genre or author, I have established four categories which instead focus upon the interrelation of representational form and the way the text is used. These categories are abstract thought, meditation, allegory and storytelling. Texts to be considered in this chapter include the sermons of Giordano da Pisa, the *Lignum Vitae* and *Legenda Major* of Bonaventure, Iacopone da Todi's *Laude*, the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* and Tommaso da Celano's *First Life of St Francis*. In addition to the four categories the chapter will close with an analysis of two case studies which involve a combination of representational forms: Giotto's Arena Chapel frescoes and the poetry of the *Stilnovo*. In considering Giotto's work, I establish ways in which forms of representation can be read in relation to one another to produce the final meaning of a work. In the analysis of the *Stilnovo* I consider how different forms of representation come together to construct an idea of personal experience which holds deeper significance. The *Stilnovo* is particularly relevant, presenting as it does ways of conceiving and representing virtue which are directly connected to Dante.

In order to clarify the shift from my analysis of Dante's context to reading the *Commedia* in the light of that environment, a central section entitled 'Transitions: From the Traditions to Dante' will bring together the issues from Chapters One and Two. Following this I will carry out an analysis of *Purgatorio* XXV which utilises the new information and methodology which I have established. In the analysis of Chapters One and Two my aim is to establish a sense of context and tradition also in order to highlight Dante's own originality. While my initial analysis sensitises us to the multiple significances and manifestations of virtue, Dante's use of the term forges new meanings and manifestations. However, without this thorough initial contextual analysis, Dante's originality and subtlety would remain obscured. I intend to demonstrate that the significance of virtue must be looked for not only in instances where the term is used or in the forms we have come to expect, but instead be seen as vitally connected to other significant terms and images in Dante's thought: love, creation, free will, the body, trees and water to name some. The summary and analysis of *Purgatorio* XXV will fully identify what I have termed the *virtù*-dynamic which is present in Dante's work. I will also at this point shift from the English 'virtue' to the Italian *virtù* in order to make sure we are dealing directly with Dante's term, free from the connotations of the English form. The term *virtù*-dynamic seeks to recognise virtue as a living ethical and ontological principle which is manifested in the interactions and transformations we see in the *Commedia*. For the poet, virtue is not a set of externally

imposed rules but a vivified and vivifying force which underpins the soul's movement to God in its own fulfilment.

Chapter Three, 'Creative *Virtù*', considers how Dante presents the workings of *virtù* within the wider universe, particularly within the relation between the unity of God and the multiplicity of creation. *Virtù* appears as that which distinguishes and identifies individual creations and in doing so endows them with particular capabilites and thus responsibilities. I will first consider how Dante conceives *virtù* as working within the physics and metaphysics of the universe in *Paradiso* XXVIII and II. Within both, the relevance of the Incarnation and its relation to *virtù* becomes ever more apparent so that the experience and possibility of distinct being, becomes an experience of the possibility of Christ. Within this the pilgrim's progression and learning, and the way Beatrice communicates to him, are of paramount importance since he is put into the position of actively experiencing the ideas she presents to him conceptually. Moving from *virtù* and distinction in the universe, I turn to how Dante figures *virtù* in the Earthly Paradise where it appears again as an interaction point between the creative power of God and the created power of redeemed man. In this episode there is a particularly significant connection between the idea and the image through which it is expressed. Having established *virtù* as the distinguishing and transformative power in Dante's vision of the created universe, I turn to consider how he establishes *virtù* as a creative dynamic within his own created afterlife realm of Purgatory. While *virtù* creates distinction and possibility in the universe in general, it performs the same task in the souls of the poet's afterlife, being that which endows them with a new distinct body through which they can be redeemed and that which is an active force in their purgation process. This chapter focuses on *virtù*'s role in creation, both in the poet's vision of the universe and the vision of his own created realms of the afterlife.

Chapter Four, 'Interactive *Virtù*', focuses on *virtù* as an ontological and ethical interactive force which works between God and man, Creator and creature to draw one to the other. I will consider how *virtù*-interaction is presented at different stages throughout the progress through the afterlife. This will begin with an analysis of Limbo to consider a situation of failed interaction and its results. I will argue that the way Dante portrays the situation of the souls in his poetics directly manifests the nature of that failed interaction. In analysing *Purgatorio* X and XI, I will consider how Dante presents the way in which that interaction can be positively re-established. The primary issue at stake is the reordering of created hierarchy and a reopening of the way between human and divine *virtù* through human acts of humility. I will then look at two episodes in the *Paradiso*. The first, cantos XI

and XII, considers the role of the saint in the interaction of man and God. Dante casts the saints Francis and Dominic as providential figures who manifest their divinely appointed roles in ways which evidence their own divine source of being. Finally, I will consider canto XXI in which the nature of human-divine interaction is presented in its most perfect form, again specifically through an interaction of *virtù*. Furthermore, while all of these episodes unfold in the afterlife, Dante emphasises the connection of each to continuing temporal life, thus connecting his visions of time and eternity. Underlying all this analysis is reference to the metaphysical relations between God and Christ, Christ and man, and man and God. Christ-as-man is the necessary interactive nexus point through which man can positively interact with Christ-as-God.

Chapter Five, 'The Becoming of a Virtuous Man', turns to one of the most prominent literary and conceptual features of the *Commedia*: the figure of the pilgrim-poet. *Virtù*, we will come to see, is part of an ethics of character and personal development. By focusing his narrative through the experiences of an individual self, Dante is establishing the principal ethical mode of his narrative as a virtue-ethic. The experiences of the pilgrim-poet are ethically and ontologically transformative, the very two factors to which *virtù* is most relevant. Furthermore, by focusing on the experiences of an individual, Dante locates that individual within the greater metaphysical and theological currents of his work as a whole. In order to demonstrate this, this chapter will be structured around the same three questions which were considered in Chapter One: What is *virtù*? How is *virtù* acquired? And what is the result of the attainment of *virtù*? Beginning with an analysis of *Purgatorio* XVII-XVIII and *Paradiso* I, I will consider the two different models of *virtù* Dante proposes as explained by his two guides, Virgil and Beatrice. I will then turn to consider *Inferno* II and *Purgatorio* XXX-XXXI to explore the role Dante gives to the figure of Beatrice in the pilgrim's development of *virtù*. Then, through a wider analysis, I will consider how Dante conceives the results of the attainment of *virtù* at different points of his journey. Finally I will consider the ways in which the pilgrim figure can be read as a representative of the human condition as a whole as it strives towards *virtù*. In the pilgrim's case, his development in *virtù* is a return to a perfected state reminiscent of prelapsarian Adam. *Virtù* is also significant, however, to the poet's development as poet. The poet's ability to fulfil his potential to communicate (to fulfil his *virtù*) is dependent on the pilgrim's transformative experience of *virtù* in the narrative.

In my Conclusion I will turn to the episode of the pilgrim's examination in the theological virtues which takes place in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars. By ending with this analysis I will demonstrate how an episode long recognised as a focal point of the virtues in the

Commedia, can be read in the light of the new methodology and issues I have established. In this way the episode not only reveals information about the theological virtues but shows how Dante conceives the ways man comes to a union with God through the action of *virtù* itself. I will also suggest some ways in which my research could be built upon and contribute to other issues within Dante studies.

The result of my thesis will be to reveal an ethical, ontological and poetic dynamic which has not been fully recognised in Dante's *Commedia* before. The work will diversify and deepen our understanding of the notions of virtue available to a fourteenth-century writer and thus enable us to engage more fully with its presence in the *Commedia*. Instead of reading *virtù* either as a set of ethical and structural rules or as an abstract creative force, I shall instead consider how these two potential meanings are in fact inseparable in a text in which to be good is to be the full expression of one's created being. They are further inseparable due to the representational nature of the text where ethics is not simply explained but manifested and where the interaction of man and God is conceived through the word. My analysis will seek to place Dante within the tradition of writing about virtue as both a metaphysical nexus and a vivified principle for human life.

1: Conceiving Virtue in the Theological and Philosophical Traditions

1. Introduction

This chapter will establish how western philosophical and theological traditions preceding Dante conceived and discussed virtue in order both to reveal the complexity of the concept which was available to the poet and to better situate his own original thought in relation to that tradition. Virtue is a term relevant to both the philosophical branches of metaphysics and ethics, but is a concept which interconnects and transcends both. It participates both in the questions of *being* common, broadly speaking, to metaphysics[35] (and in particular ontology) and questions of *doing*, the province of ethics.[36] Both of these conceptual approaches will appear pressing to Dante; the movement and action of the *Commedia* is as much about the nature and act of being, or indeed *becoming*, as about doing. But such initial thoughts still leave the all-important question – what is virtue? – unanswered. This chapter will explore the answer in more detail, but I suggest here that essential to understanding notions of the nature of virtue is also an understanding of the intellectual and conceptual context within which virtue makes sense. Virtue as an ethical and ontological term relies on a particular way of seeing the world and the human's place within it and therefore the conception of virtue forms part of an ideological network of interlocking ideas. Divorced from this network, the complexity and subtlety of virtue remains unexplored.

While the chapter will look at the works of five important thinkers, its aim is to build up the complexity of the idea of virtue rather than comprehensively analysing the thoughts of particular contributors. With this in mind it will be structured around three questions: What is virtue? How is virtue attained? What is the result of the attainment of virtue? These questions bring together the principal issues which emerge in the various traditions around virtue and will enable me to form a progressive picture of the idea. By structuring

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[35] Defined in contemporary philosophy as the study of ultimate reality, 'what really exists and what is it that distinguishes that and makes it possible'. See D.W.Hamlyn, 'Metaphysics, History of', in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. by Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 556-59 (p. 556).

[36] Defined in contemporary philosophy both as the more practical codifying of correct and incorrect, moral and immoral behaviour, the more abstract consideration of the nature of morality itself, and the consideration of what constitutes the 'good life' for human beings. See Michael Slote, 'Moral Philosophy, Problems of', in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. by Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 591-95.

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around these questions I will be able to show the continuities, shifts and transformations within the tradition of writing and thinking about virtue while maintaining the integrity of each of the intellectual contributions. Focusing on these questions will also enable me to establish the intellectual contexts which shape the idea of virtue, revealing and acknowledging its complexity. By approaching my analysis in terms of these questions I seek to demonstrate the idea of virtue as part of a diverse living, changing and developing tradition with which Dante engages.

The chapter will return to certain key preoccupations which appear in texts which consider virtue, preoccupations which demonstrate virtue's importance within philosophical and theological explorations, not only of positive and negative human behaviour, but of the human's relation to the universe and to being itself. In the texts under consideration, virtue's role has been to situate human behaviour with regard to that relation, which is why an understanding of how the intellectual context conceived those relations is so vital for a more complete understanding of virtue. A necessary component of the context within which virtue makes sense is the notion that human nature, behaviour and existence must be understood in relation to a final end and aim. This chapter will consider how conceptions of the human *telos* influence and change what virtue is, and significantly the role which virtue plays in attaining that *telos*. It will become clear that throughout the western tradition the final end of human existence, whatever it is, is unreachable without virtue. However, the relationship of virtue to *telos* is closer than simply way and end; it will become apparent that virtue is understood as a constituent aspect of that final end, that the relationship between virtue and *telos* is one of identification rather than simply causal.

With the assumption of a *telos*, there is likewise the assumption of a specific form of human nature which is to find its fulfilment in its identified aim and end. Virtue is consistently related to the idea of human fulfilment and therefore defining what virtue is involves engaging with what it is to be a human being;[37] engaging with the possibility that humans may attain to a kind of perfection in all facets of their dispositional nature. At the same time, changing notions of what constitutes human nature have a subsequent influence on the nature and definition of virtue. My analysis will show the way in which virtue is closely tied to central aspects of the human condition such as desire, free will and knowledge. By revealing these interconnections and putting forward a more thorough

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[37] The etymological root of the Latin *virtus*, *vir* (man), consolidates this point. Virtue is about what it is to be man. The same etymological logic cannot be applied to the most common Greek term for virtue *arete*, which has the more general sense of excellence, although the increased Latin specificity of meaning may itself be enlightening for better understanding changing conceptions of virtue, and the shifting significance of humanity within the cosmos.

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picture of their significance I will be able to engage more fully with the dynamics which underpin Dante's own consideration of the human condition in the *Commedia* and begin to discuss virtue's place in the *Commedia* in previously unrecognised episodes and themes.

Before turning to the analysis of the three central questions which this chapter will explore, I will present a brief account of the contemporary branch of philosophy called 'virtue ethics'.[38] Virtue ethics addresses the more practical and tangible relation of virtue to human behaviour. At this stage, virtue ethics is a useful term from contemporary philosophy that will enable the clarification of certain basic notions connected with the idea of virtue.

To adopt a virtue ethic is above all to situate the centre of moral and ethical discourse within the individual person. Perhaps the most distinct alternative to a virtue ethic would be a deontological ethic in which what is right is understood in terms of duty and adherence to an imposed external law.[39] In contrast, virtue ethics focuses on the individual, their personal moral state and development. A central notion of virtue ethics is that, whatever human nature may be, it is capable of development towards its excellence, when its excellence is understood as the fulfilment of that nature. As John Barton has suggested, a virtue ethic stresses 'the importance of moral formation and the development of the moral character over time'.[40] The possibility of development suggests that what is right and wrong in terms of virtue ethics is identified through experience and subsequent reflection on that experience. Experience-based knowledge constructs 'a sense of which patterns of choice and activity are worthy of praise and condemnation and thus yields a picture of the virtues and vices'.[41] For a virtue to be 'acquired' this experience must lead to the development of a 'fixed and stable moral disposition' that ensures the agent will always behave in a virtuous way. It is not sufficient that an agent *does* virtuous action, they must *be* virtuous. This is one of the vital distinguishing features of a virtue ethic; it

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[38] For a good introduction to virtue ethics see: Peter Byrne, *The Philosophical and Theological Foundations of Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Theory and its Relation to Religious Belief* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992); Alasdaire McIntyre 'Virtue Ethics', in *The Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. by Becker and Becker, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1757-63, and Macintyre's seminal book *After Virtue*, 3rd edition (London: Duckworth, 2007); Jean Porter, 'Virtue Ethics' in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. by Robin Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 96-110.

[39] Deontological ethics has a distinct developed tradition of its own. It is often described as 'an ethics of duty' in which what is right is what is in accord with an imposed duty or law. The action has no integral rightness of its own; its rightness is solely dependent on how far it adheres to that duty. Etymologically speaking, from its Greek root (*deon & logos*) it is the science of doing, or of what one should do. The carrying out of the dutiful act adds no merit to the internal character of the agent; in fact the right or wrongness of the act is entirely independent of the agent's personal moral state. Such factors make a deontological approach to ethics almost entirely opposed to a virtue ethic. See Roger Crisp, 'Deontological Ethics', in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. by Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 187-88.

[40] John Barton 'Virtue in the Bible', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 12 (1999), 12-22 (p. 13).

[41] Byrne, p. 110.

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addresses directly a person's being, what they are, and makes that the centre of ethical value.[42]

Alongside this experience must go self-reflection, the analysis of one's own actions not only in order to better understand and develop oneself, but also to bring one's external actions into one's state of being. Reflection is not only based on the positive or negative outcomes of experience, but rather considers experience in relation to what the individual identifies as the fulfilment of their human nature, the important strand relating to virtue introduced earlier. More specifically, as has been suggested, virtue ethics assumes a *telos* to human nature: 'It is teleological in shaping human experience around the idea of an ultimate goal or end. [...] A notion of what this end is provides the ultimate organising point around which moral thought coheres'.[43] What is *good* is that which enables the human being to approach this *telos*. One of the focal points in the considerations of virtue will be the importance of the changing notions of human *telos* and how these then affect our understanding of virtue's nature and function. The most noble, indeed the most virtuous way of life, is that which in some way adheres to, prefigures or even manifests its *telos*.

Not only is the human *telos* somehow prefigured in human virtue but (to varying degrees) virtue constitutes that *telos*. Virtue is the fulfilment of a thing's particular nature in the action most proper to itself. Thus if a thing's *telos* is to be fully itself, virtue is consitutive of that *telos*: 'The virtues are both partly constitutive of the supreme human good and to be possessed not only for their own sake as genuine excellences, but also for the sake of that good'.[44] The traditions of thought to be addressed in this chapter adopt varying approaches to this concept, and the extent to which human virtue constitutes the human ultimate fulfilment will be questioned.

It is important at this point to make a distinction between *virtue* in a more absolute, abstract sense, and the *virtues*. The virtues, those specific qualities considered to be good in the human character, can be understood as the ways in which virtue is activated in human action in more specific ways. They express more clearly changing social, intellectual and cultural attitudes to right and wrong behaviour and therefore do not necessarily seek to express an absolute statement about metaphysics or human nature. This thesis will focus upon understanding virtue in its more abstracted sense; however, there will be points at which the consideration of individual virtues will be necessary

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[42] Barton, p. 12.
[43] Byrne, p. 108.
[44] MacIntyre, 'Virtue ethics', p. 1757.

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either when they demonstrate a changing sense of what virtue itself and its nature and function actually are or when a particular thinker only develops their idea in terms of virtues.

To build up a picture of virtue as it develops through the tradition, I have focused on five thinkers who have made significant contributions to the idea of virtue and whose contributions would have been relevant to Dante's own intellectual context. Beginning with the influential ideas of Plato and Aristotle, I shall touch on the distinct characteristics of the classical Greek heritage, in which, it has been suggested, virtue ethics was the whole sum of ethics itself.[45] Both thinkers are as influential for their ontological approaches to virtue as for their practical ethics. In moving my analysis directly from Greek to early and medieval Christian thought I am both acknowledging a particularly strong influence of one upon the other and following a line of thought which considers virtue outside of its purely social relevance and instead locates it between ethics and ontology. I have selected three Christian thinkers who represent different periods of Christian thought, who themselves receive their intellectual background from different traditions, who have distinct ways of discussing their ideas, and who were all influential to the development of Christian thought.[46] In considering how Augustine, Gregory the Great and Aquinas approach the question of virtue in their thought, I will trace both their development of existing notions and their novel contributions to the tradition. Augustine's work is significant to this thesis for several reasons.[47] The idea he develops of virtue is connected with and understood through his own personal and intellectual experience. He develops the concept in relation and contrast to the classical past which so informed his early thought, gives it a central role within personal tensions and changes which accompanied his conversion, and finally locates it within the wider framework of Christian doctrine which he goes on to establish. This personal relevance of virtue, for Augustine, relocates it from the realm of intellectual exploration to that of immediate relevance for real life and salvation. I will look at three of

[45] On Aristotle's ethics see: Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1980); Nancy Sherman (ed.), *Aristotle's Ethics: Critical Essays* (Lanham, MD and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999). On Plato see: Aryeh Kosman, 'Justice and Virtue: The Republic's Inquiry into Proper Difference', in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. by Giovanni R.F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 116-37. For a very brief introduction to Aristotle's relation to Dante see John A. Scott, 'Aristotle', in *The Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. by Richard Lansing (New York and London: Garland, 2000), pp. 61-65. For Plato in Dante see Robert M. Durling, 'Plato', in *The Dante Encyclopedia*, pp. 703-704.

[46] On virtue in the Bible and in Christian thought generally see: John Haldane, 'From Law to Virtue and Back Again' in *The Bible in Ethics: The Second Sheffield Colloquium*, ed. by John W. Rogerson, Margaret Davies & M. Daniel Carroll R. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 27-40; see also John Barton.

[47] On Augustine see: James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); G. Scott Davis, 'The Structure and Function of the Virtues in the Moral Theology of Augustine' in *Congresso internazionale su S. Agostino nel XVI centenario della conversione VIII*, 15-20 Settembre 1986 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum 'Augustinianum', 1987), pp. 9-18; Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine City of God: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); Gareth B. Matthews (ed.), *The Augustinian Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Johannes Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon: A study into Augustine's City of God and the Sources of his Doctrine of the Two Cities* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

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Augustine's works which each approach and treat virtue in differing ways. *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* is a more abstract treatise on virtue, addressing its essential nature to produce a radically different concept of virtue to its classical predecessors. The *Confessions* locates virtue within the process of spiritual and moral change, expressed through the personal experiences of Augustine himself, and particularly emphasises its role in directing the desire towards God. Finally *De Civitate Dei* situates virtue within the greater framework of Augustine's Christian doctrine to reveal its vital role in human salvation history. Gregory the Great's additions to the tradition on virtue are significant because of the wide influence of his principal text, *Moralia in Job*, during the Middle Ages.[48] A work of biblical exegesis, it locates virtue directly within Gregory's understanding of man's fallen nature and his total dependence on God. Its language is tangible and urgent, concerned with man's practical existence on earth and how that experience, if used in the right way, is a journey towards the divine; he casts virtue as having a particular role in that journey. Thomas Aquinas, in his vast synthesis of Christian thought, the *Summa Theologiae*, brings together and seeks to harmonise the Aristotelian logical structure of the idea of virtue in the light of Christian thought. The bringing together of different understandings of virtue creates a voluminous definition, but one which is explored through direct and thorough discussion so that the ultimate result is a work of clarity and conviction.

2. What is Virtue?

As the idea of virtue passes through different intellectual and theological contexts the details of what the term means develop, becoming recontextualised and realigned according to the system of thought which surrounds them. In some way the changes to the concept through the tradition are radical but in many ways it is consistent. This section will aim to reveal both changes and consistencies and explore something of the context which affects how virtue is conceived.

From the classical Greek considerations of virtue in the works of Plato and Aristotle, through to the work of St Thomas Aquinas, virtue is defined as the perfection of a power, which perfection is attained through the fulfilment of the act proper to that power. A basic

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[48] For an analysis of Gregory the Great and his work see: Carole Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Charles Dagens, *Saint Grégoire le Grand: culture et expérience chrétiennes* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1977); Kevin L. Hester, *Eschatology and Pain in St Gregory the Great: The Christological Synthesis of Gregory's Morals on the Book of Job* (Bletchley, Milton Keynes and Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2007); Matthew Baasten, *Pride According to Gregory the Great: A Study of the Moralia* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1986); Jean Leclerq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. by Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982). A recent consideration of Gregory the Great's relation to and role within Dante's own work was presented in a paper by Vittorio Montemaggi, 'Dante and Gregory the Great', delivered at 'Reviewing Dante's Theology: A Workshop', hosted by the Leeds Centre for Dante Studies, 27th-28th March 2009.

definition of Plato's virtue as it appears in the *Republic* (written 370s BC) might be as 'a quality that an entity has that enables it to perform its function well'.[49] Plato's emphasis is on function, on an entity having a particular role which it must fulfil, which role it is enabled to fulfil by its virtue. A much later definition by Aquinas in the *Summa theologiae* (written 1265-1274) enters into more complexity both raising and extending the same issues: 'virtus nominat quamdam potentiae perfectionem. Uniuscuiusque autem perfectio praecipue consideratur in ordine ad suum finem. Finis autem potentiae actus est. Unde potentia dicitur esse perfecta, secundum quod determinatur ad suum actum' (*ST* 1a2æ 55,1).[50] What the virtue of a particular entity is depends on an understanding of the potential of that entity, of the act by which that potential is most fulfilled, and the function that entity is carrying out or the end towards which that entity is aiming. Perfection is relative both to the capabilities of the entity and to the ultimate standard to which that entity could attain. Virtue is then that which constitutes all these aspects. It stands as both the act by which that entity is perfectly fulfilled and the state of fulfilment itself. Aquinas establishes that virtue is sometimes both object and activity of an entity: 'quando dicitur quod virtus est *ultimum potentiae*, sumitur virtus pro objecto virtutis' (*ST* 1a2ae 55,1). Virtue is relevant both to an entity's being and its act: 'unde cum duplex sit potentia, scilicet potentia *ad esse*, et potentia *ad agere*, utriusque potentiae perfectio virtus vocatur' (*ST* 1a2ae 55,2). Virtue, then, is both perfect being and perfect doing or rather the perfection of being in act.

When virtue is established as the perfect functioning and being of a thing, it also becomes related to the notion of good and thus becomes a statement of value. To be virtuous is to be perfect, fulfilled, according to a standard of goodness relative to the entity's potential and relative to the good which the entity is seeking to attain since 'omnis virtus dicatur in ordine ad bonum' (*ST* 1a2ae 57,1). Aquinas writes that 'virtus importat perfectionem potentiae [...] Ultimum autem in quod unaquaeque potentia potest, oportet quod sit bonum, nam omne malum defectum quendem importat [...]. Et propter hoc oportet quod virtus cujus libet rei dicatur in ordine ad bonum' (*ST* 1a2ae 55,3). Virtue becomes a statement of value about its subject when it makes the subject good in relation to the good of which that subject is capable. But it is at this stage a statement of ontological rather than ethical goodness.

This definition is applicable to any created thing. In turning to the particular case of human virtue, the issue becomes more complex and comes to depend on an understanding

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[49] Kosman, p. 120.
[50] Aquinas, St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. and trans. by W.D. Hughes, 61 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), XXIII.

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of human nature and purpose. For Aristotle, writing in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (written c.350 BC), 'virtue in a man will be the disposition which renders him a good man and also which will cause him to perform his function well' (*NE*. II.vi.3).[51] The soul of man is made up of three parts – vegetative, sensitive and rational – each of which has its virtue, the functioning by which it is most perfect. But for man as a whole his function is 'the active exercise of the soul's faculties in conformity with the rational principle' (*NE* I.vii.14). Man acquires the disposition which is virtue when the faculties of the soul are trained and become fixed. Virtue is then 'a settled disposition of mind determining the choice of actions and emotions, consisting essentially in the observance of the mean relative to us' (*NE* II.vi.15). Aristotle's understanding of virtue is as a fixed disposition which produces action; action, the fulfilment of potential, is the forum in which virtue is formed and evidenced. This idea of human virtue is in relation to the perceived potential and limits of human power and to the perceived end of human existence. In Aristotle's conception, human happiness is the main aim of human life, and this happiness for man he understands as 'active exercise of his soul's faculties in conformity with excellence or virtue, or if there be several human excellences or virtues in conformity with the best and most perfect among them' (*NE* I.vii.15). The most perfect of the human virtues is the virtuous exercise of reason. Happiness for man is thus to fully and perfectly use reason and the enacting of his rational disposition within human society.

While Aristotle emphasises the operational nature of virtue, for Plato virtue is also a form of psychic unity. Man's mind is tripartite, composed of reason, emotion and appetite, and virtue again is necessary in each part. Morality exists when each part fully fulfils its role but keeps to the boundaries allotted to it so that reason is the guiding principle (444d). In using the term δικα, meaning morality or justice, Plato does not seem to be talking about exactly virtue. Later, however, this psychic unity which Plato calls a state of justice, Aristotle comes to call the whole of virtue itself (*NE* V.i.19). And so, as Porter suggests, 'the virtues are all fundamentally expressions of one quality'.[52] In Plato's case this quality is psychic unity. Human virtue is the harmonious working of all the active principles within human nature which influence human action, reason, emotion and appetite which happens when each individually is in a state of virtue. In Plato's case, however, the virtue of the human psyche is a reflection of the *form* of virtue itself. In his view of the universe there is a standard for existence which is beyond the physical and this provides a useful intellectual bridge between the conception of classical and Christian virtue.

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[51] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. and trans. by H. Rackham, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1934).
[52] Porter, p. 100.

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Once human nature and existence is recontextualised within Christian thought the parameters and fulfilment of human nature shift entirely. Within this shift, while virtue is consistent in its essential definitions, it is at once entirely changed. Both Aristotle in his *Ethics* and Augustine in his early work *De moribus Ecclesiae catholicae* define virtue as that which gives perfection to the soul and therefore as man's greatest good for the attainment of his end. But while the end for Aristotle is happiness understood as the perfect use of reason and man's potential is limited to what is naturally within him, for Augustine these factors are radically different. The ultimate good for man no longer rests within the fulfilment of his own powers but instead in the attainment of his Creator God. What is most perfect for the human soul is therefore what draws man towards God and the soul is in a perfect state when it has attained God. Augustine identifies virtue as that which gives perfection to the soul and which is therefore man's chief good (*DME* 5.8).[53] But it is man's chief good because it helps him to the object of his final happiness, God. Augustine conceives the way in which man moves towards God as 'eum sequimur diligendo' (*DME* 11.18). Love becomes paramount in Augustine's thought, as the natural attraction which draws man to God, just as a creature is drawn to the source of its being. Because love is the mode through which the soul attains to God, then that which aids the soul in its attainment of God must be some form of love and it is as love that Augustine identifies virtue; it is in fact 'summum amorem dei' (*DME* 15.25), perfect love of God. Virtue remains the perfection of the soul but within the Christian context for the soul to be perfect it must be lovingly directed towards God.

While virtue in the general sense is *summus amor dei*, Augustine also explains how the individual cardinal virtues are types of love. As in Plato, while the virtues may be distinguished, they are all expressions of a unified quality, and for Augustine this is love.[54]

> Namque illud quod quadripartite dicitur virtus, ex ipsius amoris vario quodam affectu, quantum intelligo, dicitur. [...] [S]ic etiam definire non dubitem, ut temperantia sit amor integrum se praebens ei quod amatur, iustitia amor soli amato serviens et propterea recte dominans prudentia amor ea quibus adiuuatur ab eis quibus impeditur sagaciter seligens. (*DME* 15.25)

Further distinguished, they describe particular attitudes of the soul towards God. Having God as their object they have distinct forms:

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[53] Augustine, *De moribus Ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum libri duo*, ed. by Johannes B. Bauer (Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1992).

[54] Porter, p. 100. See also John P. Langan, 'Augustine on the Unity and Interconnection of the Virtues', *The Harvard Theological Review* 72:1-2 (1979), 81-95.

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Sed hunc amorem non cuiuslibet sed dei esse diximus, id est summi boni, summae sapientiae summaeque concordiae. Quare definire etiam sic licet, ut temperantiam dicamus esse amorem deo sese integrum incorruptumque servantem, fortitudinem amorem omnia propter deum facile perferentem, iustitiam amorem deo tantum servientem et ob hoc bene imperantem ceteris quae homini subiecta sunt, prudentiam amorem bene discernentem ea quibus adiuuetur in deum ab his quibus impediri potest. (*DME* 15.25)

Virtue is the perfect ordering of love towards God, focusing on God as the perfection of the human soul and thus regulating human action in relation to that perfection. Aquinas, following Augustine's idea, also identifies virtue with love, emphasising that perfectly ordered love is both the action in progress and in fulfilment of virtue (*ST* 1a2ae 55,2). To begin to talk about virtue *as* love introduces an entirely new way of conceiving the dynamic which virtue traces and a new way of understanding its role and manifestation in human life.

With Christianity comes a different way of conceiving the universe and man's place within it. The tradition of seeing creation as an ontological hierarchy which is constantly held in existence by its source finds its roots in Plato's *Timaeus*. The original source of existence is characterised as superlatively Good and as creating the universe through the overflowing of its own perfection.[55] The Supreme ground of being is both entirely 'self-sufficient' in its perfection and at the same time overflowing with the creation of things outside itself. The world, as God's creation, is understood as perfect in its fullness and its completeness. All the created entities come together to form a perfect unbroken '"Great Chain of Being" composed of an immense or [...] an infinite number of links ranging in hierarchical order from the meagerest kind of existences [...] through "every possible" grade up to the *ens perfectissimum*'.[56] Each link in this chain participates in some way with the links either side of it, which is particular in the case of man. Man has a dual nature which means he can choose to orientate himself to either what is corporeal and lower or what is incorporeal or higher; the higher, that is ultimately God, is the best and ultimate object.[57] Within this context, Augustinian virtue, as the perfect love of God, is that by which man enters positively into the ontological interrelation necessitated by his state as a created being. In loving God (i.e. in being virtuous) man is perfectly fulfilling his created potential power. Furthermore virtue as perfect love of God, becomes entirely dependent

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[55] The complex intellectual history of the Chain of Being can be found in Arthur O. Lovejoy's seminal work of that name; here there is only space and need to paraphrase his most illuminating and relevant points. Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea. The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University, 1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961).

[56] Lovejoy, p. 59.

[57] Lovejoy, p. 79. See also Augustine, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini: De Civitate Dei* 11.2.

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for its existence on God himself who is its object. Human virtue dislocated from its ultimate object is no longer virtue.

Gregory the Great goes even further in relating virtue to God by establishing it not as something produced within the soul itself but as something given to it by God. Virtue continues to be the perfection of the human mind, that by which it is raised up (*Moralia* 2.49.76) but, in man's corrupted sinful state after the Fall, this perfection was no longer independently attainable, neither in being nor in action. Virtue, as the perfection of being in action, can therefore come only from the external perfect source of God. Thus virtue becomes a 'donum Spiriti' (*Moralia* 2.49.77), entirely dependent on God's grace.[58] As we shall come to see in the following sections of this chapter, by making virtue dependent, Gregory redraws the boundaries of what it is to be good for humankind. The independent use of reason as man's perfection is not only undermined but is also shown to be dangerous, holding within it the risk of spiritual pride. Gregory instead challenges man's ability to be perfect and the understanding of the way by which he is perfect. It is only in the sacrifice of self-sufficiency and the attainment of humility that virtue, the perfection of man, can come about.

Aquinas stands between the entirely human-centric virtue of Aristotle and the God-dependent virtue of Gregory. In the *Summa Theologiae* he espouses a definition of virtue attributed to Augustine which brings together the different aspects of human virtue considered so far: 'Virtus est bona qualitas mentis, qua recte vivitur, qua nullus male utitur, quam Deus in nobis sine nobis operatur' (*ST* 1a2ae 55,4). Virtue sits between human potential and divine enactment, the nexus which draws man's nature up towards God and which is the fulfilment of the divine potential within man. Aquinas states (quoting Aristotle) that 'virtus cuiuslibet rei determinatur ad ultimum in quod res potest' (*ST* 1a2ae 55,3). As we will come to see, he goes on to explore how the potential virtue of man himself is extended by his interaction with God.

Virtue is not only a quality of created powers, or of humans but is also, within the Christian tradition, an attribute of God himself. Since virtue is the perfection of being through doing, which also expresses the end aim of the subject, in God it is totally recontextualised, 'cum Dei substantia sit eius actio' (*ST* 1a2ae 55,2). The being of God is the perfect fulfilment and existence of God. He is, as such, virtue itself. Virtue as one of the names of God expresses principally God as perfectly fulfilled being which empowers creation. As Durling and Martinez have pointed out, 'the term *virtù* (Latin *virtus*) had long

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[58] Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, ed. by Marc Adriaen, 3 volumes (Turnholt: Brepols, 1979-85).

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been recognised as one of the names of God [...] it has the force of *power as exercised* and thus a particular association with the doctrine of creation and the Logos'.[59] God's virtue is overtly creative and is thus the source of human existence.[60] God as the exemplary form of virtue sets a new standard for human virtue to attain to; human virtue shifts from being autonomous to participative, from being perfect in itself to being a reflection of the perfection of Another. Thus to be virtuous is not only to take the ethical steps which foster the relationship of man and God, but for man to draw towards God in ontological similarity.

God's virtue is also made distinct and individualised in the figure of Christ. Christ, in his metaphysical role as the Logos, is the creative principle of God, *he through whom all is made* (John 1.3-4). Augustine in the *De moribus Ecclesiae* makes reference to this role of Christ, at the same time making use of the names for Christ from 1 Corinthians 1:24, 'Christum Dei virtutem et Dei sapientiam':

> Dei filium, dei virtutem esse atque sapientiam, cumque virtus ad operationem, sapientia vero ad disciplinam pertinere intelligatur – unde in euangelico duo ipsa signantur, cum dicitur: omnia per ipsum facta sunt, nam hoc operationis atque virtutis est, deinde quod ad disciplinam uerique cognitionem attinet, et vita, inquit, erat lux hominum. (*DME* 16.27)

Virtue as perfected being-doing when in reference to the Christ-Logos is the power of creative action; the world is made through the virtue of Christ.

As well as being the creative principle, virtue in reference to Christ is also important to his role as Christ incarnate. In Christ, the believer finds 'the model of perfected virtue'.[61] He is the exemplar of perfect virtue because he is the manifestation of the nature and enactment of the perfect relationship with God which the Christian must seek in order to attain salvation. His ontological unity with God, the unity in difference which is the Trinity, provides the model for the temporal community of the faithful. Once the believer has entered into this relationship through love of the incarnate Christ, according to Augustine, their actions are endowed with value. Christ *informs* the life of those who love him by returning their love with virtue (*DME* 16.27). So while virtue as love is the way to attain towards God, virtue as the perfection of their powers is the gift of God to those who love him. Furthermore, the believer is not only rewarded by their actions being made perfect

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[59] Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, *Time and the Crystal: Studies in Dante's 'Rime Petrose'* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), p. 158.
[60] For virtue as the power with which God creates see Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* 1a45,5 & 6.
[61] Haldane, p. 34.

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and valuable but is rewarded with Christ himself as virtue. The interrelation of virtue as being and doing is recontextualised by the ontological and ethical relationship of man to Christ; to do is to receive the being of Christ; to be is to take part in Christ's doing as the maker of the universe.

In this first stage of defining virtue we have seen the concept transform from one grounded upon a human-centric understanding of human powers and human purpose to one which sees virtue as a focal point in the relationship between man and his Creator, indeed as an attribute of that Creator himself. Virtue is always the perfection of the potential being of a power in the act proper to itself. What changes is the sense of a man's potential, the sense of the acts proper to him, and the sense of the end towards which those acts are directed. The Christian tradition locates man's perfection ultimately in his relation to God.

3. How is virtue acquired?

This section will now consider the concept of virtue further by examining how the different writers and traditions under consideration discussed how virtue could be attained. The answer to the question of how virtue is acquired is again largely dependent on intellectual contexts which began to be apparent in section one.

The acquisition of Aristotelian virtue – a good disposition which results in the good functioning of man (NE II.vi.3) – is firmly fixed within human action. Based on the faculties of the human soul, Aristotle divides virtue into two types, intellectual and moral, each of which is produced differently: 'intellectual virtue is for the most part both produced and increased by instruction and therefore requires experience and time; whereas moral or ethical virtue is the product of habit (ethos)' (NE II.i.1). Aristotle's focus in the Ethics is primarily upon the moral virtues. While the capacity for moral virtue is naturally present within the human, it is only through practice and the development of a habit that the virtue comes to fruition (NE II.i.4). This habit is developed through repeated action (NE II.iv.3). Through continued good practice a fixed disposition towards virtuous activity is instilled in the active subject: 'we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts' (NE II.i.4). This fixed disposition, the result of continued practice, may be termed the possession of a virtue.[62] Because dispositions are

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[62] Aristotle specifies virtue as a disposition, rather than an emotion or a capacity, for several reasons. First arguing from a linguistic point he states that when discussing emotions we describe being 'moved by' whereas with virtues and vices we use being 'disposed' (II.v.4). Also virtue is connected to choice, whereas emotion is not in our control. Thus we can be justly praised or blamed for virtue or vice, but not for emotions. Virtue is

created through repeated actions, Aristotle emphasises that 'it is incumbent on us to control the character of our activities, since on the quality of these depends the quality of our dispositions' (*NE* II.i.8). The standard for the rightness or wrongness of an action is established through social interaction and it is only within these interactions that virtue can be developed: 'It is by taking part in transactions with our fellow-men that some of us become just and others unjust' (*NE* II.i.7). As there is seemingly no external standard for virtue in the Aristotelian system, the value of what is good or bad must be negotiated within the system itself.[63] Virtue, as an unformed potentiality in the human soul, is qualified in its activity by the testing of interaction; what is good and bad is understood in terms of how actions affect other people. While the acquisition of virtue is an internal process, its field of action is social.

Moral virtue, however, is relative both to acting and to feeling (*NE* III.i.1). In Book II.ii.6, Aristotle states that 'moral qualities are so constituted as to be destroyed by excess and by deficiency' of pain and pleasure (*NE* II.iii.5). Pleasures and pains act on the emotional as well as the rational part of the human and Aristotle, like Plato, does not deny the motivating power of emotional stimuli. It is important, therefore, that the emotions, as well as the reason, are trained. The acquisition of virtue in the emotions is not the *wiping out* of the feelings attendant on pleasure and pain because feeling and emotions are a necessary and inescapable part of human nature; Aristotle absolutely denies that the virtues are states of continual non-feeling. Rather they are feeling at the right time and to the right degree (*NE* II.iii.5); they are not the removal of pleasure and pain but the learning of how to respond to these in accordance with right principle and in such a way that promotes real human happiness: 'moral virtue is the quality of acting in the best way in relation to pleasures and pain' (*NE* II.iii.6). So not only is virtue developed in order to ensure the morally correct action in a given situation, it is also developed to train the emotions to respond correctly, to the right degree and to the right stimuli (*NE* II.iii.3). Although Aristotle's emphasis is on the practical application of virtue in activity, this must go hand in hand with a proper way of feeling, which feeling is also the province of virtue.[64] It is important in the training of virtue, both in practice and in emotion, that virtue is tested; such a testing is the way in which virtue develops (*NE* II.ii.8). The necessity of

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likewise not a capacity, as a capacity suggests something we inherently have by nature, while virtue comes through a process of acquisition (II.v.1-6).

[63] Martha Nussbaum has suggested that 'the acceptance of an anthropocentric conception of ethical truth increases the vulnerability of ethical trust and confidence in situations of upheaval [...] a belief that the fundamental distinctions in the world of practice are human, backed by nothing more eternal or stable than human things, contributes to an agent's sense of ethical risk'. *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 238.

[64] For a fascinating study on Aristotle's treatment of action and feeling see Aryeh Kosman's essay 'Being Properly Affected: Virtues and Feelings in Aristotle's Ethics', in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* ed. by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 103-16.

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testing in the formative process of virtue, as we shall see, finds profound echoes in the work of Augustine and Gregory the Great.

What stands out in the process of the acquisition of virtue in Aristotle's thought is the interaction between external action and internal state of being. His is very much a virtue ethic, locating the value of an action within the moral state of the subject performing that action rather than within the action itself. A virtuous action is not a virtuous action unless it proceeds from a fixed dispositional character:

> acts done in conformity with the virtues are not done justly or temperately if they themselves are of a certain sort, but *only if the agent also is in a certain state of mind when he does them:* first he must act with knowledge; secondly he must deliberately choose the act, and choose it for its own sake; and thirdly the act must spring from a fixed disposition of character. (*NE* II.iv.3; my italics)

As we have seen, habitual actions create dispositions, but it is only when the disposition becomes permanent, and the subject could act in no other way, that they are truly virtuous. This is not, however, deterministic but instead dependent on the action being the free and willing choice of the subject.

The development of virtue is the responsibility of the individual. As it is within their power to do or not do, this is how virtue gains its quality of being worthy of praise. Without the freedom of choice, an act has no value (*NE* III.i.1). Aristotle believes in the freedom of activity of the human subject, but activity can only take place within situations which humans can change: 'a man is the origin of his actions, and [...] the province of deliberation is to discover actions within one's power to perform' (*NE* III.iii.15). Choices are therefore made over aspects within human control, or more specifically, the *means* to reach a desired *end*; the end itself cannot be changed but the means can (*NE* III.iii.11).[65] Once an end has been identified as desirable, this desire is fixed through the choices of action to lead the subject towards that end. The power and responsibility for reaching this end remain with the human subject. As activity is the province (and in some way the cause) of virtue, and choice and activity are within human control, then acquiring virtue is also the responsibility of the human subject:

> whereas we wish for our end, the means to our end are matters of deliberation and choice, it follows that actions dealing with these means are done by choice and

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[65] See *NE* III.ii.17 for Aristotle's discussion on the nature of choice.

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voluntary. But the activities in which the virtues are exercised deal with means. Therefore virtue also depends on ourselves. (*NE* III.v.1-2)

The choice to act virtuously or not concerning the means to an end is within human power and is therefore worthy of praise or blame. A choice is the result of an internal process of deliberation and making the right choice in relation to a right end is dependent on the way in which the natural capacity for virtue has been developed. Virtue is not only a neutral, natural capacity when its fulfilment or failure becomes a thing of value in the judgement of human moral success. A person comes to be good or bad dependent on the extent to which they have freely worked towards the fulfilment of themselves in virtue.

The attainment of human virtue for Aristotle, it appears, is entirely determined by the power and capacities of man's nature. This idea is also adopted but importantly recontextualised by Aquinas: 'virtus cuiuslibet rei determinatur ad ultimum in quod res potest' (*ST* 1a2ae 55,3). While Aquinas maintains much of Aristotle's intellectual structure, as I shall demonstrate, he makes significant developments. Like Aristotle, he locates human virtue in the intellect and the sensitive appetites, which are perfected by intellectual and moral virtue respectively. While the intellectual virtues are essential in perfecting the judgement so that action can be orientated towards the correct end, they are incomplete without the perfection of moral virtue which controls the distracting passions and gives both the ability to do right and the fixed desire which ensures that a thing will be done (*ST* 1a2ae 61,1). The central factor is the virtue and perfection of the will since it is the source of human action: 'Subjectum vero habitus qui simpliciter dicitur virtus, non potest esse nisi voluntas vel aliqua potentia, secundum quod est mota a voluntate. Cujus ratio est quia voluntas movet omnes alias potentias quae aliqualiter sunt rationales ad suos actus' (*ST* 1a2ae 56,3). Intellectual virtue makes man capable of good activity, but does not ensure that good activity will be carried out. Instead, 'virtus quae perficit voluntatem, ut caritas vel iustitia, facit etiam bene uti hujusmodi speculativis habitibus' (*ST* 1a2ae 57,1). Human virtue is dependent predominantly on the perfection of the will because it is the will which is attracted to an object and draws the action of the soul towards that object. What changes therefore in Aquinas's Christian understanding of virtue is the object of human virtue and the capacities and roles of the faculties which are perfected by it. While maintaining this two-part structure of intellect and will, Aquinas changes the boundaries by which those faculties are limited. With the coming of Christianity and its faith, humanity is no longer bound by its own capacities and instead has two ends to its nature, the perfection of reason and the attainment of God. For the attainment of the first end its natural powers, perfected in virtue, are sufficient. But the

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attainment of the second requires interaction with the object, God himself, man's nature being insufficient on its own. Aquinas describes how man's powers are infused with a new order of activity and so a new form of virtue which aligns man's activity with his new end: the infused moral virtues and the theological virtues. The acquisition of both is dependent on interaction with God.

The locus of this interaction Aquinas identifies as the will; when aiming towards a good beyond its natural capacity or immediate horizon, the will requires different and special virtues in order to be perfected beyond itself:

> Sed si quod bonum immineat homini volendum, quod excedat proportionem volentis, sive quantum ad totam speciem humanam, sicut bonum divinum, quod transcendit limites humanæ naturæ, sive quantum ad individuum, sicut bonum proximi, ibi voluntas indiget virtute. Et ideo huiusmodi virtutes quæ ordinat affectum hominis in Deum vel in proximum, sunt in voluntate sicut in subjecto, ut caritas, justitia et huiusmodi. (*ST* 1a2æ 56,6).

These types of special virtues fall into two categories, infused moral virtues and theological virtues, both of which emphasise the importance of divine interaction with human nature in order for that nature to be raised upwards. The doctrine of infused moral virtue suggests that once a person has been baptized, God infuses a kind of extension to the human moral virtues which allows them to live and act in the temporal world in conformity with the new spiritual life, whose aim is beyond that world. God infuses these moral virtues which are 'totally supernatural in form, a thoroughly new ordering of human activity, yet seated within the natural powers of the mind and will, from the conscious consent to God's revealed mysteries'.[66] It has become apparent that positive interaction is vital; it is the willing and openness of man to God which makes this infusion happen and so the development of virtue which will draw man to God is a two-way process of human willingness and divine beneficence. The infused moral virtues act as a bridge between human and divine nature but their focus of activity remains temporal human life. Infused moral virtues enable temporal actions to be ordered towards an eternal end, guiding human interaction with the rest of creation in the light of divine revelation: 'Sed oportet quod per alias virtutes infusas perficiatur anima circa alias res, in ordine tamen ad Deum' (1a2æ 63,3). The nature of virtue changes or is changed depending on the forum in which it exists and the end of the power of which it is the perfection. Thus,

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[66] W.D. Hughes, 'Appendix 3' in St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, XXIII, pp. 247-48.

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> Habitus distinguuntur specie secundum ea ad quae ordinantur. [...] Et per hunc etiam modum differunt specie virtutes morales infusae, per quas homines bene se habent in ordine ad hoc quod sint cives sanctorum et domestici Dei; et aliae virtutes acquistae, secundum quas homo se bene habet in ordine ad res humanas. (*ST* 1a2æ 63,4)

The doctrine of infused moral virtue as expressed by Aquinas emphasises that, in order for man to attain towards his supernatural end in God, the standard of his activity must be changed in a way which is beyond his natural capabilities. As the end is beyond human nature, so the virtues of the powers attaining to that end must come from a source beyond human nature; they must be infused directly by God. In fact, the definition of virtue which Aquinas adopts from Augustine's work is most aptly fitted to infused moral virtue: 'virtus est bona qualitas mentis, qua recte vivitur, qua nullus male utitur, quam Deus in nobis sine nobis operatur' (*ST* 1a2ae 55,4). Infused moral virtue is the transformation of natural qualities when the end of those qualities changes from being the temporal world to the world of God. Aquinas's argument emphasises the continuity of human development in virtue; human virtue is not replaced or removed but transformed.

By laying the foundation of an active spiritual life on earth, the infused moral virtues act as a step between moral and theological virtues. Aquinas suggests the necessity of these virtues before theological virtues can be acquired, otherwise the gap between capability and desired end remains too great:

> Omnes autem virtutes tam intellectuales quam morales, quae ex nostris actibus acquiruntur, procedunt ex quibusdam naturalibus principiis in nobis praeexistentibus. [...] Loco quorum naturalium principiorum conferuntur nobis a Deo virtutes theologicae, quibus ordinamur ad finem supernaturalem. [...] Unde oportet quod his etiam virtutibus theologicis proportionaliter respondeant alii habitus divinitus causati in nobis, qui sic se habeant ad virtutes theologicas sicut se habent virtutes morales et intellectuales ad principia naturalia virtutum. (*ST* 1a2æ 63,3)

The theological virtues are totally infused, going beyond human nature, having their end only in God. The theological virtues differ from the infused moral virtues in that, while both attain towards the supernatural happiness, the infused moral virtues are concerned with directing man's interaction with the rest of creation. The theological virtues, on the other hand, are so called '[t]um quia habent Deum pro objecto, inquantum per eas recte

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ordinamur in Deum; tum quia a solo Deo nobis infunduntur; tum quia sola divina revelatione in sacra Scriptura huiusmodi virtutes traduntur' (1a2æ 62,1). Aquinas, however, maintains the structure of the soul he has outlined in relation to moral virtue. As the source of human action is always either in the reason or in the will, then virtues which raise the human powers in accordance to their supranatural end must be likewise located in and inform these sources. Thus faith is a virtue of the intellect, and hope and charity of the will. By forming such an argument, Aquinas is validating the potential of human nature as it exists after the revelation of Christ. He is also recontextualising his definition of virtue as both the perfection through which one attains one's end and the state of attainment itself.

Christian thought entails a new understanding of the capabilities and capacities of human nature and therefore a new understanding of how that nature can attain its perfection, virtue. Post-lapsarian human nature is flawed, having renounced its positive place in the ontological hierarchy by the sin of Adam. Human nature is unable to be good in itself; the best it can do is to follow divine law and so it is that the ethical model of the Old Testament is deontological; what is *good and virtuous* is that which is done in accordance with God's law: 'prius autem quam veniret fides sub lege custodiebamur conclusi' (Galatians 3:23). The emphasis is on following a command from above, and if the action is in accordance with that command it is good. The Old Testament seeks to guide human nature in its corrupted, lapsed state; in a state in which its internal corruption makes good independently initiated by man impossible because the human root of action is diseased. In contrast, the New Testament expresses an ethical view much closer to what we have understood so far as virtue ethics. It is concerned with transforming the internal moral character of the subject in the redeemed light of the revelation of Christ. Haldane neatly clarifies the shift in thinking as, '[i]nstead of asking what God has commanded it became common to wonder what Christ would do'.[67] With the advent of Christ, humanity has the possibility again to be ontologically whole and perfect, and the role of the Testament is to guide the way towards perfection. In such a situation internal perfection of the individual is not only possible but vital. Rather than a corrupt being following necessary, externally imposed laws to counteract that corruption, the human individual has the capacity for transformation, a return to the perfect prelapsarian being and his or her responsibility becomes to fulfil that potential through the dynamics of virtue.

Christ as the locus for a Christian idea of virtue has already begun to be apparent in this survey so far. In Christ's Incarnation and Crucifixion, which redeems mankind, human

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[67] Haldane, p. 30.

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nature is restored to its potential for salvation, its potential to be virtuous. Significantly in his incarnate form, Christ demonstrates how the new order of human nature is to be fulfilled in virtue. With the coming of Christ incarnate, God's grace, his 'unmerited love and favour',[68] is brought visibly into the world. This visible offer of grace requires an active response on the part of the faithful in order for it to positively empower an individual's life: 'While unmerited grace has been extended through the righteousness of Christ, the believer is to demonstrate gratitude by means of a virtuous life'.[69] Virtue as an expression of gratitude designates it in an inter-relational role in the interaction between man and God. In the New Testament, Christ's grace and virtue are presented as being given to humanity in response to their faith. In both Mark 5:30-34 and Luke 6:19, virtue is understood abstractly as the power of Christ, which emanates from him in response to the touch of a faithful follower. Christ's virtue then manifests itself in healing for the faithful woman in question. But Christ not only transmits ontological virtue but is the exemplum of ethical virtue.

Christ, as well as being the visible manifestation of proffered grace, is also the exemplum of the virtuous life: 'He had become a man so that human beings could imitate his human life and could not dismiss his virtues as something beyond the realm of possibility'.[70] The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke present Jesus as 'teacher' and 'model' of morality. He is to be imitated both in practical life and in his total awareness of God.[71] The Christian is required to imitate Christ and this imitation is described in terms of the Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity.[72] The shift entailed by the change in the basis of virtue required this wholly new set of forms into which virtue was distinguished. In addition, Christ is associated with another virtue, entirely alien to classical virtue ethics: humility.[73] It is Christ's humility which his followers are most required to manifest as it is this which asserts the proper hierarchy between God and his creation. Humility is what correctly places humankind within the ontological spectrum but, by being also the virtue of Christ, it is that through which the human can be raised above himself, to move from the individuated human state to participation in the being of God.

Gregory the Great casts humility as the 'magistra [...] omnium materque virtutum' (*Moralia* 23.13.24), guarding as it does against the root of all sin, pride. As humility

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[68] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press: 1971-1989), I (1971), p. 294.

[69] J.Daryl Charles, *Virtue amidst Vice: The Catalog of Virtues in 2 Peter 1* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 151.

[70] Pelikan, III (1978), p. 125.

[71] Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, 2 vols (London: SCM, 1992-1995) I (1992), p. 66.

[72] Pelikan, III, 23.

[73] 'The humility of Christ was the nobility of his followers', Pelikan III, 125.

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counteracts pride, it enters into a greater dynamic which plays out in Christian salvation history; while it is Adam's pride which condemns humanity in original sin, it is Christ's humility which removes the ultimate penalty of that sin and restores the potential of human nature. Christ, by manifesting, indeed debasing, himself by taking on human nature, '[i]nde quippe annuntiat aequitatem nostram, unde suscipere dignatus est infirmitatem nostram' (*Moralia* 24.2.4). The salvation and perfection which Christ achieves is through humility, demonstrating the way in which men after him can return to God:

> Ad hoc namquam unigenitus Dei Filius formam infirmitatis nostrae suscepit, ad hoc invisibilis, non solum uisibilis, sed etiam despectus apparuit, ad hoc contumeliarum ludibria, irrisionum opprobia, passionum tormenta toleravit, ut superbum non esse hominem doceret humilis Deus. Quanta ergo humilitatis virtus est, propter quam solam ueraciter edocendam is qui sine aestimatione magnus est, usque ad passionem factus est paruus? (*Moralia* 34.23.54)

Christ's humility bridges the gap between man and God, a gap which is both moral and perceptual: 'Videri autem debuit qui corrigebat, ut praebendo imitationis formam, anteactae malitiae mutaret uitam [...] Iustus igitur atque inuisibilis Deus, apparuit similis nobis homo uisibilis, ut dum uidetur ex simili, curaret ex iusto' (*Moralia* 24.2.2). Gregory, in his concern to give practical, tangible advice, to reveal the everyday lessons which are present and applicable from Scripture, focuses strongly on the practical exemplum of the incarnate Christ. Christ's humility then is to be actively imitated.

At the heart of the new Christian theology of the fulfilment of human nature and thus, of virtue, is the relationship between man and God. Pelikan aptly captures this change in considering the role of grace in man's perfection:

> Neither free will of itself nor instruction in the law and will of God would suffice to achieve righteousness, for free will was good only for sinning unless man knew the law, and even after he knew it he still lacked a love for it and a delight in it; this came only through the love of God shed abroad.[74]

Man comes to attain virtue not by the repetition of good actions directed only to the human sphere but by the renunciation of his self dependency and his submission to and love for God. It is no longer 'the repeated act which creates the disposition, but rather a

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[74] Pelikan, I, 301.

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logically prior relationship upon which the disposition, and whatever ensuing act, depend [...] [an act] has no quality, virtuous or vicious, until we determine the relation of the agent to God'.[75] While for Aristotle a virtuous disposition was attained through repeated good actions, now man's relation to God must be the centre of his disposition and only from this relationship can virtue, the fulfilment of potential being in good action, spring.

Augustine explores the dynamics of this relationship and the steps by which virtue is attained within this new context by reference to his own personal experience. We remember that for Augustine virtue is *perfect love of God*. The failure of virtue is therefore when love is directed away from God. The problems which Augustine recounts in the earlier books of the *Confessions* as he strives towards conversion are compounded by his inability to overcome physical desire, or more technically, first to order correctly his will and then bring his appetites under its control.[76] In sin, the will is disordered, confused in its apprehension of what is really good. Sin, which in Augustinian terms can be understood as love misdirected, has as its object things of the temporal world, taking them for real goods and thus finding satisfaction in the world alone.[77] As such, the human soul who follows sin is submitting its power and will to something inferior to itself; inferior as the world is finite and the soul eternal. By submitting one's desires to the world, the soul gives up control of its own happiness, making it depend on that which must ultimately die. As Wetzel suggests, the soul is giving up the capacity to 'self-determine'.[78]

The major difficulty in man's overcoming of sin is the reordering of the will both towards God, but also in submission to God. This is the tension Augustine is under; whether to 'give up' his own will or not: 'et hoc erat totum nolle, quod volebam, et velle, quod volebas. Sed ubi erat tam annoso tempore, et de quo imo altoque secreto evocatum est in momento liberum arbitrium meum, quo subderem cervicem leni iugo tuo, et umeros levi sarcinae tuae' (*Conf.* 9.1.1).[79] Once he does submit to God's will he discovers that his own was in thrall to concupiscible desire, and his new found submission is in fact freedom. The

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[75] Davis, p. 12.

[76] It has already been suggested in the section on Plato, that the appetites require their own virtues in order to bring them into accord with reason. This notion will be taken up again later by Aquinas.

[77] Wetzel, pp. 63-67.

[78] Wetzel, p. 67.

[79] Wetzel has argued that Augustine in fact undergoes not a conflict of wills, as he has already fully intellectually assented to God, sometime before he actually accepts him; instead it is his weakness of will which holds him back. To explain this, Wetzel uses the image of past and present self as being in disagreement: 'Our present state of will [...] includes its past states in the form of habit and therefore the discrepancy between our past practices of willing and our present willingness for change can be expressed as volitional paralysis, or our experience being constrained from within'. Such a 'dualizing' of human will in terms of one's own past and present, supports the value of intense and continual self examination in order to understand and correctly value one's past and present desires in order to not be held in thrall by them. In addition, as it is weakness of will which holds Augustine back, there appears a necessity for something which strengthens the will. Virtue as a psychologically fortifying force has already appeared in Plato's work, and indeed will find its most striking Christian reappearance in the work of Gregory the Great. See Wetzel, pp. 130-35.

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freedom Augustine discovers is the power to freely and perfectly love God, liberated from the destructive distractions of desire for contingent things.

Because the object of virtue is spiritual, not material, eternal not temporal, it is through virtue that the soul progresses away from the desires of the world. Virtue fixes the vision, fixes the desires beyond the world while at the same time ordering and guiding the faculties of the soul to reach their desired object. Virtue for Augustine is therefore attained through a reunderstanding of the potential of man and human free will. Man has free will to choose or fail to choose God. Because the soul is naturally attracted towards God, as a being to the source of its existence, the only way in which the soul can be distanced from God is through its own choice; not even natural death can halt the trajectory because one only truly dies when one no longer loves God (*DME* 11.19). The will is truly freed when it has made that choice of God over the world. While every movement of the will is a kind of love, a state of virtue may be understood as a movement of the will correctly orientated towards God. Once this orientation is established, man can positively fulfil the activity perfected by virtue by correctly interacting with the temporal world.

Augustine is concerned with the submission of both the will and the mind to God. In opposition to the intellectual autonomy of classical thought, he locates knowledge and truth only in God. Knowledge is no longer produced by intellectual enquiry but by a knowledge of God's will and a harmonising of one's own will with it: 'what is to be done, for Augustine, requires some form of access to what God wills'.[80] G. Scott Davis has given an apposite description of the changing intellectual attitudes to virtue, highlighting Augustine's own development:

> The Aristotelian virtue, conceived as a craft, locates the epistemic power in the virtue itself, thus requiring only a two level structure of act and habit. Its function is to enable acts which [...] craft a worthy life. [...] Augustinian virtue [...][shifts] the source of practical wisdom to God, changing the internal disposition from detached peace of mind to loving service and locating the telos of human life to an otherworldly end.[81]

In Augustine's concept the 'epistemic power' is with God. God alone is the source of true knowledge and man alone is unable to know; the human must give up his attempts to independently know before he is able to, in fact, know anything. Knowing is not only an intellectual activity but one directly related to will; once God's will is known, the will of the

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[80] Davis, p. 14.
[81] Davis, p. 17.

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believer must be harmonised with it and thus one has the experience of true knowledge. Virtue for Augustine is a renouncing of the individual autonomous will to the supreme will of God. Indeed, Augustine elects to renounce his own search for knowledge in order to reach God: 'Non ero curiosus, ne seiungar a deo, nec cuius quam doctrina me ab eo separat' (*DME* 11.19). Only by a subjection of the mind to God by loving, can man really be united with him:

> Ergo cum etiam deus dignis animis notus non nisi per intelligentiam posit esse, cum tamen sit ipsa qua intelligitur mente praestantior, quippe creator eius atque auctor est, verendum erat ne animus humanus, eo quod inter invisibilia et intelligibilia numeratur, eiusdem se naturae arbitraretur esse, cuius est ipse qui creavit et sic ab eo superbia decideret, cui caritate iugendus est. Fit enim deo similis quantum datum est, dum illustrandum illi atque illuminandum se subicit. (*DME* 12.20)

In the giving up of self-sufficient knowing, intellectual pride is replaced by the humility which brings one towards God.

The sacrifice of self-will and autonomous knowledge and action is central to Gregory the Great's consideration of how virtue is attained. Virtue for Gregory is a 'gift of the spirit' and is thus subject to being given and taken away by God. This appears very different from, for example, the Aristotelian approach, in which a virtue is attained when it is a permanent disposition. Instead for Gregory the giving and taking away of virtue is an interactive process between God's grace and man which aims to constantly remind man of his total dependency upon God: 'Unde fit ut aliquando se haec eadem gratia utiliter subtrahat et praesumenti menti, quantum in se infirmatur ostendat' (*Moralia* 2.48.78). The testing power of grace exists to always maintain this awareness in order to counteract human pride: 'sed nonnumquam, dum mens nostra tanti muneris plenitudine atque ubertate fulcitur si continua in his securitate perfruitur, a quo sibi haec sint obliuiscitur; seque a se habere putat quod numquam sibi abesse considerat' (*Moralia* 2.49.78). Human virtue may be a dangerous thing if the possessor attributes it to his own achievement and ceases to remember it as a gift. In contrast, the difficulties and sufferings of human life are just as much signs of grace, being the opportunity for man to turn more whole-heartedly to God: 'Saepe enim donum est gratiae quod iram deputat; et saepe divinae districtionis ira est quod gratiam putat. Nam plerumque gratiam aestimat dona virtutem, et tamen eisdem donis elatus corruit' (*Moralia* 9.13.20). But this process of temptation and suffering is itself the offer of an opportunity from God to man to curb his pride and advance in humility. Life

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for the Christian is presented as a process of acquiring virtues through difficulty, hardship and suffering, and whose success is measured by the response of the individual to the testing grace offered them:

> Et quia per occultam gratiam ad amorem Dei temperata desuper mensura proficimus, quanto in nobis cotidie de Dei spiritu virtus crescit, tanto noster spiritus deficit. [...] Tunc vero in Deo plene proficimus cum a nobis ipsis funditus defecerimus. Hae itaque crescentium mensurae virtutem, sancti viri vocibus grades dicuntur. (*Moralia* 22.20.46)

This process originates and is activated in God, but continues depending on the response of the individual to the grace and opportunities for improvement offered them. The ultimate aim is the renunciation of self-will and the acquisition of humility.

Gregory attaches the virtues to the faculty of reason, which in life is tied to the flesh. The dichotomy of flesh and spirit is ever-present in Gregory's thought, in which the former is negative in substance but which can be positive in terms of virtuous development being the battleground in which humans may overcome its temptation. The spirit itself is not free from the capacity to sin and its union with the flesh helps to restrain the spirit from the worst of sins: pride. But the general emphasis is that immaterial reason must fortify itself against the corruption of the flesh. Straw has argued that,

> Virtue is attained when reason is purified and liberated from the bonds of the flesh, so that the rational soul can remain hard, taut and disciplined within its citadel. For Gregory, spiritual reform will be directed at subjugating the flesh, for this will release the natural goodness of reason and re-establish its proper dominion over man's personality [...].[82]

While God dispenses the events in a person's life, the existence of human free will presents humankind with the possibility to respond to those events either in a way which uses reason and thus develops virtue, or which succumbs to the world and leads to vice. Human life is a period of education provided by God: 'By setting off virtue against temptation, the wondrous dispensation of God allows inward and outward, high and low, spirit and flesh, pride and despair to be balanced. [...] Temptation checks spiritual excess and pride by making the soul humble; indeed weakness is the very "guardian of virtue".[83] What is emerging, in fact, is not such a black and white picture of dependency and reward or flesh

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[82] Straw, p. 136.
[83] Straw, p. 245.

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versus spirit, but rather the notion of human life as an offer of a chance, in which the education and development of virtue is central if one wants to attain towards a positive end in God. Through testing circumstances virtues can be developed which strengthen the mind against the temptations of the flesh and the trials of temporal life, while at the same time the attachment of the spirit to the flesh maintains the spirit's consciousness of its own weakness and potential for sin.

As in Aristotle, human life is seen as the testing ground in which virtue is developed. But while Aristotle's forum is purely human, Gregory sees human life as a dialogue between man and God, creature and Creator. This is one of the central differences in the conceptions of how virtue is attained. Virtue is necessarily tied to the faculties of human nature and the perfection of those faculties in action. What changes is the sense of the extent to which those faculties can be independently perfected. The development of Aristotelian virtue depends on the freely chosen actions of the individual and the extent to which those actions come to be a fixed disposition within the subject. Aquinas builds on the faculties which are perfected in virtue, the intellect and the will, and demonstrates how they are transformed by interaction with God, so that the scope of human action is reordered towards its new end. Augustine and Gregory both focus on the role of the will and establish a new sense of virtue in relation to it. Rather than becoming independently stronger in the attainment of virtue, the will must become stronger through weakness, committing itself to God as the only source of its perfection. In all thinkers there is a sense of the importance of the human temporal life as the period in which man can develop and work towards his ultimate end. Virtue is attained through the interactions of human life and is central to the human process of becoming.

4. What is the result of the attainment of virtue?

Virtue, we have come to see, is a factor which links man to the ultimate good of his existence. This is because it is both that through which man's nature is perfected through the action necessary to bring him to that good, and because virtue is a fundamental part of that good itself. What the more precise result of virtue is again depends on the contextual conception of that good. We shall, however, come to see certain recurring aspects; virtue negotiates the positive interaction of man with his temporal life, it is a state of stability and permanence, and it enables the fulfilment of man's being.

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Aristotelian virtue is central in the thinker's conception for the achievement of the greatest human good, happiness. The nature of happiness as conceived by Aristotle, although it is bound within the limits of human temporal existence, encompasses results of virtue which will appear consistent throughout the tradition. At the opening of the *Ethics*, Aristotle identifies the Supreme Good as 'that at which all things aim' (*NE* I.ii.2) and states that the knowledge of this good serves to positively direct human action towards it, 'like archers having a target to aim at' (*NE* I.ii.2). In trying to come to a definition of absolute good, he identifies categories of things good in themselves, and things good as a means to get to a further good. The former is identified as the more valuable, and therefore the Supreme Good becomes that for which all other things are done. He quickly defines the Supreme Good as the good sought by politics, and shortly after identifies this Good as 'happiness', which he describes in these terms: 'happiness above all else appears to be absolutely final in this sense, since we always choose it for its own sake and never as a means to something else' (*NE* I.vii.5). Happiness is entirely satisfying in itself and as such is the end of all action (*NE* I.vii.8). It has already become apparent that virtue is both not the ultimate end of human action and at once entirely integral and necessary to that end. Aristotle's conception captures this paradox. Happiness is defined by Aristotle as the 'active exercise of his soul's faculties in conformity with excellence or virtue, or if there be several human excellences or virtues in conformity with the best and most perfect among them' (*NE* I.vii.15). Although virtue is not the *end* of human activity in itself, it is defined as the standard by which the human soul functions in order to reach that end, previously identified as happiness. Happiness is in fact made dependent on virtue; to develop the analogy, we might describe virtue as the powerful bow without which the archer cannot strike their target.

The result of virtue is to ensure man's achievement of their supreme good, but an essential part of this good itself is the fulfilment of man's nature. To be happy to one's full human potential is to be able to use one's unique power of reason to its fullest and freest degree, in conformity with virtue. Human fulfilment or happiness is therefore a fully activated state of being, in which virtue is the quality of being fully activated. To be virtuous is to be most fully human, the potential of human nature being most fully activated in its right and proper action.

Because virtue is so tied to the workings of human nature itself and is the result of training and development over time, it contributes to a further demand in Aristotle's definition of human happiness. In his analysis of what makes something 'good', Aristotle states that a necessary quality of the good is as something 'proper to its possessor and not easy to be

taken away from him' (*NE* I.v.4). A true good is therefore under the control of the possessor themselves.[84] In such a scheme, for example, material benefits cannot be the goods which constitute complete happiness (although they can add to it), as they can disappear with a change of fortune. If happiness is threatened by loss it cannot be real happiness. As a quality developed through the free actions of the individual rather than given, virtue is more likely to be something fixed in the character; once virtue has been 'learned' it is unlikely to be 'un-learned'. Later in the *Ethics* Aristotle states that a virtuous character has a permanence, that virtue itself cannot be touched by changing fortune and that a virtuous person will more easily bear the changes of fortune, knowing that they have a permanent 'good' within themselves (*NE*. I.x.7-13). Virtue, focused purely towards the perfection of the immaterial self and keeping the free and full use of reason as its aim, distinguishes and protects man from the mutability of temporal life.

Virtue as something which distinguishes the human soul within the temporal forum of human existence, and somehow protects it, is also a feature of Plato's idea of the result of virtue. In Plato's vision, however, virtue protects from the changeability of temporal life by directing the human psyche towards an eternal realm of existence: the world of form. Morality or justice, as we have seen, is what unifies the elements of the human psyche so that each respects and fulfils its role, and all can work harmoniously together towards the perfected use of the reason. The individual virtue of the reason itself is wisdom. Wisdom is directed to the pursuit of knowledge, 'to know reality as reality' (*Republic* 477b), and it thus attains towards knowledge of the form of the Good, Good as it really is, not only as a subjective application. Those whose psyches are free from the distracting desires of wayward emotions and appetites are able, through the wisdom of their perfected reason, to have some witness of forms. They are able to see beyond the physical temporality of the world to a reality more real, eternal, unchanging; this is to have knowledge (*Republic* 479e). As such they are able to value human events correctly, to see them in their smallness or their importance, in relation to that absolute reality. This knowledge or vision enables the possessor to orientate their action towards the correct good: 'The knowledge both of what each virtue is and how each exemplifies the single form of virtue [...] is a knowledge of timeless forms in the light afforded by the form of the Good, that supreme good towards which every human life informed by the virtues moves in a rational progress'.[85] Such is the power of the reasoning part of the psyche which, by its ability to 'see' beyond the physical, has the authority to correctly guide the person as a whole, without being distracted by specific good or bad, and rather able to see good or bad

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[84] Interestingly, Aristotle appears not to distinctly make 'eternal' one of the necessary qualities of the Supreme Good. In this he seems strikingly different from Christian thought, in which the 'eternity' of a state of Goodness / blessedness is part of its integral quality.

[85] MacIntyre, 'Virtue Ethics', p. 1757.

for the whole. Loving desire follows from a knowledge of this Good which then compels the subject towards that Good; the motivating emotional power of *eros* compels the subject to find its own completion in union with the Good and, adopting the characteristics of a lover, to seek to possess the whole of the beloved object (*Republic* 474d-475c).[86] Knowledge in some sense ensures virtue as it identifies an absolute standard and end of human action towards which the subject will be compelled to strive by the loving desire for that end, which desire is manifested as virtue; that is as the desire of the whole self orientated towards the correct end.[87] Virtue allows for and promotes the attainment of forms, of the *real*. Someone (in Plato's case, the philosopher) who is perfected in virtue and knowledge will make him or herself most like the form of absolute Good:

> someone whose mind really is fixed on reality has no time to cast his gaze downwards on to the affairs of men. [...] His eyes are occupied with the sight of things which are organized, permanent and unchanging [...] and he makes this realm the model for his behaviour, and assimilates himself to it as much as is feasible. (*Republic* 500b-c)

Someone with this perfection is guided by a standard which is more real, something that *is* in a more profound way than time and the world. Virtues and virtue impact on human behaviour, moving its focus away from the contingent temporal happenings of the world and directing it towards the eternal unchanging world of form. While Plato has been distinguishing the roles and virtues of the tripartite psyche for the sake of clarity, in the realm of forms the different virtues are only different manifestations of the unified power, virtue itself. Plato is tracing a movement from multiplicity to unity and stressing the access to greater insight which this facilitates.

Plato is also eager to stress the responsibility which comes with this increased insight. Those who, in their perfected virtue have a clearer vision of the true world of forms, have a responsibility to use that knowledge to influence and improve the actions of others. So it is that in Plato's metaphor of the cave, the philosopher who has walked outside into the light, must return to enlighten his fellows (519c-520a). The reason advances towards a knowledge of the Good, while also using this knowledge to inform the activities of the

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[86] Kahn, p. 589.

[87] There is discussion over the extent to which Plato (in contrast to his teacher Socrates) equates virtue with knowledge, but based on a reading of the *Republic* this cannot be accepted absolutely because of the influence he allows to the irrational desires; good or bad action is not based solely on knowledge of what is good and bad, but also on the correct training of the irrational parts to respond to good or bad in accordance with reason. However, knowledge is an essential attribute of virtue being the recognition of the Form of Absolute Good, and it is through this path that one approaches a Platonic sense of *telos*.

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other parts of the psyche, seeing clearly the standard towards which they aim; the true vision of the human *telos* in the form of the Good becomes the object towards which the virtues are directed, and as such the influence which they have on human behaviour orientates that behaviour towards the supreme form of Good.

The result of Platonic virtue is the active directing of the unified mind towards a more real reality which enables a revaluing of temporal existence. Temporal life, its difficulties and challenges, comes to be seen in the light of the forms and therefore as not an end in itself but a means to an end.

This unity of mind in virtue as a protection against the trials of the world is an image which recurs within Gregory's thought. In his eagerness to communicate through concrete expression, Gregory adopts recurring images to describe this action of virtue in the human soul. A common trope is virtue as a defence or protection of the inner self: 'Tota itaque virtute muniendus est aditus mentis ne quando eam insidiantes hostes penetrent foramina neglectae cogitationis' (*Moralia* 1.35.50). The virtues are conceived of as the 'army' which aids God in his wise ruling of the human mind (*Moralia* 20.5.12); an army which tempers passions and compels right conduct, (a psychological understanding of virtue which cannot help but recall similar descriptions in Plato's *Republic*). In another image the four cardinal virtues are described as the foundations of a house, the metaphorical house of the mind. But Gregory uses the image of the house in order to talk about its foundations and re-emphasise his argument about the dependency of virtue; the only true foundation for the house of virtue is God. Once a stable state of virtue in the reason has been achieved, once God has been recognised as the true source and aim of all things, this provides a constant source of protection against the mutability and difficulties of the world, as those who have achieved this recognise the smallness of human affairs in comparison to the reality of God:

> Aliquando contingit ut qui solam caelestem patriam diligent. [...] Cumque occupationes extrinsecus perstrepunt, intrinsecus in amore pacatissima quies tenetur; atque occupationum tumultus exterius perstrepentes dispensat interius praesidens iudex ratione et tranquillo moderamine ea quae circa se minus sunt tranquilla disponit [...] quia exteriores curae si perverso amore non appetuntur, non confuso sed ordinato animo ministrari queunt. (*Moralia* 18.43.70)

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Once virtue, the ability to direct actions towards their correct aim, God, is acquired, a person can live well in the world, orientating him or herself in such a way as to use the world but not be held captive by it.

While the aim of the Christian believer is to return to God who exists beyond the world, he is nevertheless required to act within that world and those actions are to be taken into account. Virtue is a vital factor in negotiating this tension, being understood both as that which draws human beings towards God, that which orientates human desire towards God, and also that which fulfils and guides human interaction with each other in the light of that orientation.

In Augustine's conception too, virtue balances humankind between the contingent and the eternal, between the world and God. As in Gregory's thought, temporal experience has a value as testing and strengthening the human's desire for God and, within this, virtue maintains the focus of the will upon God, maintaining the individual's place in the ontological hierarchy, protecting him or her from reading the attractions of the contingent world as goods in themselves. Talking specifically of virtues, Augustine explores their role in temporal life as being to work against the vices (*DCD* 19.4/19.10). Virtues use the challenges of the vices and the events and difficulties of temporal life to the benefit of their possessor in more firmly directing them towards their ultimate end. In Paradise, however, 'virtutes, non contra alia vitia vel mala quaecumque certantes, sed habentes victoriae praemium aeternam pacem, quam nullus adversarius inquietet' (*DCD* 19.10). In Augustine's opinion, peace is the object of any conflict; those who fight for the right cause in a conflict are rewarded with this peace. Peace is therefore the aim and reward of temporal virtue, 'tunc est vera virtus quando et omnia bona quibus bene utitur et quidquid in bono usu bonorum et malorum facit, et se ipsam ad eum finem refert, ubi nobis talis et tanta pax erit qua melior et maior esse non possit' (*DCD* 19.10). In the overcoming of sin through the acquisition of virtue – the fulfilment of the self in focused love of God – human kind is returned to the potential of the prelapsarian state and moves towards the peace of beatitude.

The true good of humanity does not rest in this temporal life, but in the eternal life after it (*DCD* 19.4). As such, the faithful who believe this will only see the temporal world in terms of something to be used in the easing of the journey towards eternal life; it may be used but not enjoyed for its own sake, an idea taken up with vehemence by Gregory. Someone who makes his or her happiness depend on the material goods of the world is building that happiness on very shaky foundations which can be easily swept away (*DCD* 19.4).

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Instead, virtue is a worthwhile good because it is not tied to this world. A genuine virtue demonstrates the recognition that the Supreme Good is not of this temporal world and thereby directs all actions and good towards the end of peace in God. This genuine virtue is both directed at God, given by God and rewarded with God: 'Praemium virtutis erit ipse qui virtutem dedit eique se ipsum, quo melius et maius nihil posit esse, promisit' (*DCD* 22.30). The role of virtue is essentially circular; given by God to draw humanity to himself, humanity then draws itself towards God through virtue, to finally be rewarded by God who is virtue itself.

Virtue, then, is the unifying of desires to the desire for God. It is a state of psychic and volitional unity and thus a state of peace:

> et cum in virtute pacem amarem, in vitiositate autem odissem discordiam, in illa unitatem, in ista quondam divisionem notabam, inque illa unitate mens rationalis et natura veritatis ac summi boni mihi esse videbatur: in ista vero divisione inrationalis vitae nescio quam substantiam, et naturam summi mali. (*Conf.* 4.15.24)

The unity which Augustine feels is the unity of single, fulfilled desire. He is no longer torn by physical lust being in conflict with his spiritual and intellectual longings. All his action is now motivated and informed by his love of God: 'Per continentiam quippe colligimur et redigimur in unum, a quo in multa defluximus. Minus enim te amat qui tecum aliquid amat quod non propter te amat' (*Conf.* 10.29.40). We disintegrate into multiplicity when our loves are misdirected and directed towards multiple things; we are unified when our love is all directed to the one true object, God, or when we love something for the sake of our love for God. In contrast physical lust and incontinence scatters the self amongst material things. Augustine sees the figure of Christ as that around whom all the multiple desires of the world can be unified; the figure who connects the multiplicity of humanity with its single ground of being, God: 'et me suscepit dextera tua in domino meo, mediatore filio hominis inter te unum et nos multos, in multis per multa' (*Conf.* 11.29.39). Christ the mediator is the one through whom multiple humanity can come to recognise the ontological unity which underpins its existence.

This focusing around Christ is also a reiteration of virtue as the fulfilment of man's being. For man to love primarily the world is for him to love something which is less real than God who alone truly *is*. This is the movement of sin: 'Motusque voluntatis a te, qui es, ad id quod minus est, quia talis motus delictum atque peccatum est' (*Conf.* 12.11.11). Instead,

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Christ both unifies man's desires towards himself as a tangible figure, metaphysically makes possible the reconnection of man's desire with his ultimate end God, and demonstrates the way which that unity can be achieved. He is the fullness of being in perfect action which man's virtue enables him also to be. The man who loves Christ, that is who has virtue (perfect love of God), is rewarded with Christ's virtue, meaning that his human actions are given value in line with their eschatological scope. Once the believer has entered into a loving relationship with the incarnate Christ, according to Augustine, their actions are endowed with value. Christ *informs* the life of those who love him by returning their love with virtue: 'id est agendi efficacia et sobrietate contemplandi, quae dei virtus et dei sapientia id est dei filius, dilectoribus suis donat' (*DME* 16.27). The result of virtue is then the *revaluing* of human action, the connection of temporal activity to eternal context.

Virtue is the medium through which man can connect or reconnect with God both in terms of ontological fulfilment and ethical action because it is an imitation of the being and doing of God. Aquinas establishes forms in virtue, man's progression through which is a journey towards achieving 'divinam similitudinem' (*ST* 1a2ae 61,5). Virtue is primarily a divine quality and its most perfect form is found in God, 'sicut et in eo praeexistunt omnium rerum rationes' (*ST* 1a2æ 61,5). The virtues are found in God in their most perfect state, or rather the states of God's existence are the exempla of virtue: 'Ita scilicet quod ipsa divina mens in Deo dicatur prudentia; temperantia vero conversio divinae intentionis ad seipsum. [...] Fortitudo autem Dei est eius immutabilitas; justitia vero Dei est observatione legis aeternae in suis operibus' (*ST* 1a2ae 61,5). So by the perfection of his or her powers through virtue, a human is participating in the nature of God. The different forms of virtue explain how humans may move towards this participation. At the opposite end to the exemplum form of virtue is the political form of virtue, that is, the virtue of man in his natural state as a political animal. Such is the virtue of Aristotle who saw human achievement as a complete end. Aquinas, however, moves on progressively from political virtue, which in the Christian context cannot be an end in itself. The Christian moves through two further forms of virtue: purifying, when still in development, and purified, when man has achieved a likeness with God as in the case of the blessed. The same virtue may take on different characteristics, produce different actions, depending on the state in which it exists. So for example in the form of a purifying virtue temperance 'vero relinquat, inquantum natura patitur, quae corporis usus requirit', while in the purified state 'temperantia terrenas cupiditates nesciat' (*ST* 1a2ae 61,5). These states of virtue negotiate the changing relations man has with the world as he moves towards God. Purifying virtue

sees the world the soul inhabits but judges and uses it in the light of the divine existence beyond it, while purified virtue expresses a state beyond temporal and physical influence.

5. Conclusion

In turning to the conclusion of this chapter, such a way of conceiving states of virtue serves to demonstrate more generally the connection which virtue makes between the human and God; that through developing in virtue, one is developing in 'likeness' to God. It is through developing not only individual virtues, but also the state in which that virtue exists within oneself, that one comes to move closer to God. Virtue that sees its end in human reason may be a good thing in its own right and a thing worth having for earthly human existence. However, once the perspective is changed and the end of existence is seen as being beyond human nature and existing in God, then the state in which virtue exists must be transformed, as must the internal state of the individual who possesses it. The actions which virtue produces are related to the motive from which it springs. Once human action is orientated towards God, the virtue of the power which is producing that action must be transformed in relation to the standard of the object it is trying to reach. In trying to reach God, it is God himself who must transform human virtue. Human life and the perfection of reason are conceived of as transitory, incomplete on their own. Life comes to be understood as a journey which is not simply moving towards a different physical place but which is in fact a transformation of being. This process of transformation is a return to the source of being itself; an assimilation into the nature of that Being in whom action and being are entirely in harmony.

To acquire virtue in Christianity is not only to be a better human being but to bring about within oneself an ontological movement which draws one towards the nature of one's Creator. Virtue sits at a nexus point, being both that through which God creates and that through which humankind responds to the offer of salvation which is their created state. At the heart of this is the figure of Christ around whom the dynamics of virtue find their centre. By restoring human natural potential through his crucifixion and re-establishing positive intercourse between man and God, Christ makes virtue – the perfect functioning of human nature in the light of God – possible. In his incarnate form, he provides a sign towards the true end of human existence, God, and acts as a tangible object for virtue – the perfect love of God. In his incarnate action, Christ demonstrates the actions through which man can positively interact with the world while maintaining their perspective beyond that world and more importantly the state of mind from which man should look to God, humility. From this basis man can develop his own virtue in the light of his ontological

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condition which is simultaneously created and therefore dependent, and created and therefore empowered.

My analysis has revealed virtue to be a complex and nuanced dynamic of being and doing. It is fundamentally the perfect expression in action of man's being, but the nature of being and action is dependent on the contextual understanding of man's nature and purpose. Virtue is that which guides human interaction both with other men and with the universe around them. It is the force through which man and God interact, being both the creative basis of existence and the standard for ethical actions by which man acknowledges his createdness. It is a form of unity: unity of the psyche, unity of the desires, and unity with God. Virtue is that through which man expresses himself most fully as man, whether he is understood as the supreme rational being or whether he is the creature who is seeking to return to his Creator.

The complexity of the dynamics which underpin virtue has been largely neglected in Dante scholarship. Reading Dante in the light of the more subtle and complex idea which has been revealed in this chapter will bring to light more thoroughly the relational dynamics which are the foundations of the *Commedia's* narrative of becoming. The journey to God which the *Commedia* narrates is one of simultaneous ethical and ontological transformation, the dynamic which is virtue itself. It is also one in which God comes down to help man as much as man ascends to reach God. While this idea of virtue is integral to the content of the *Commedia* it is also relevant to how writer, protagonist and work are interconnected. If virtue is the fulfilment of man through his own proper action which should be an expression of his ontologically created state, then the act of personal fulfilment and creation which Dante describes in the *Commedia* is ultimately one in which his own virtue is perfected and made manifest.

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2. Representing Virtue in Medieval Devotional Literature, Sermons, Visual Art and Poetry

1. Introduction

Virtue as the object of philosophical and theological reflection has thus far revealed itself to be a complex and dynamic concept. The aim of this chapter is to move from theory to demonstrate instead how virtue is an active ethical and psychological principle present within the many and varied discourses of Dante's cultural setting. This is also a key shift in my discussion to consider texts from Dante's immediate historical context. Virtue essentially is not something that should remain abstract and objective and instead leads to an ethics of action and becoming, or personal responsibility and individual involvement. With this in mind we turn to a consideration of representations of virtue in cultural and artistic discourse in order to better appreciate its permeation of the medieval ethical system on many levels. This chapter will consider texts such as sermons, visual art, poetry and devotional literature. This variety of texts also acknowledges a variety of audiences in order to demonstrate that the question of virtue and its acquisition was pertinent to all levels of society. The value of considering such representations alongside more theoretical concepts is that it allows us to appreciate how virtue was actually conceived of as a working principle for human life. But most importantly we come to see that the principles of virtue are not merely expressed in 'what' is communicated but also manifested in the modes of communication themselves. It is in the communicative act that virtue comes into being. In the various discourses which will be considered, virtue is manifested firstly within the texts themselves and secondly within the mind of the recipient of those works. The way in which ideas about virtue are received then becomes a process of acquiring virtue itself; every act of reception is a re-manifestation of the original idea of virtue. The shift from idea to manifestation is one which every poet must make. But when the idea being manifested is one of such ethical relevance as virtue then its manifestation and communication become of primary importance and indeed relate to the formation of virtue within the audience itself.

In order to appreciate the scope and variation of modes in which virtue is represented in medieval cultural discourse, I will explore a diverse range of texts from the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries: the sermons of Giordano da Pisa (c.1255-1311), the

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Meditationes Vitae Christi (written c. 1300), *Legenda Major* and *Lignum Vitae* by Bonaventure (1217-1274), Tommaso da Celano's *Life of St Francis* (c.1200-1256), the poetry of Iacopone da Todi (c.1230-1306), Giotto's Arena Chapel frescoes (completed c. 1305) and the poetry of two major representative of the *stilnovisti* movement, Guido Guinizzelli and Dante himself. Rather than adopting a structure in this chapter based on genre, I will base my argument around four aspects of representation which I believe draw together the different ways in which virtue is manifested and re-manifested. These four aspects are, I recognise, by no means exhaustive or exclusive and indeed, while I have adopted them as structural categories for grouping texts, I am aware that the texts themselves go beyond and cross over these boundaries. But this itself makes a comment about the variety and subtlety of the medieval treatment of virtue as it constantly shifts between being a feature of the emotions and being one of the intellect, from the experience to the imagination, from the will to the judgement. The aspects I have chosen as categories by which to structure my argument are: abstract thought, meditation, storytelling and allegory. After considering the four aspects I will present two particular case studies which combine different representational forms to begin to understand how different forms interact and contribute to the meaning and interpretation of a single text.

The first mode of representation I will consider, abstract thought, is the closest in stylistic format to the philosophical and theological approaches already considered. But it makes the important step from 'thinking' to 'doing' in so far as it encourages its audience in the intellectual practice of virtue. In this section I will focus on the sermons of Giordano da Pisa. 'Meditation' will consider the power of thought to manifest reality by involving its practitioners in a process of *becoming* the object of that thought through emotional engagement. This is particularly relevant for the tradition of *imitatio Christi*. Both abstract thought and meditation actively put into practice the idea that virtue is in fact a transformation from 'doing' to 'being' by the affective techniques they employ, although they aim to affect this transformation from the different perspectives of intellect and emotion. Under the category of meditation I will consider the *Meditationes vitae Christi* and the *Legenda Major*. 'Storytelling' will address the role of concrete narrative and characterisation in presenting a particular ethical message which becomes real and relevant for its audience by appealing to their own experience. I will look at this in relation to Tommaso da Celano's *Life of St Francis* and Giotto's fresco cycle of the Upper Basilica at Assisi. The section on 'allegory' will look more specifically at the recurring allegorical figures used to present virtue and consider the interactive relationship of concept and figure, looking at how each, in fact, 'creates' the other. This will be based around an analysis of the *Lignum Vitae* and the poetry of Iacopone. The two case studies which

consider the combining of representational forms will be Giotto's Arena Chapel frescoes and the poetry of the *stilnovisti*. These two radically different examples will again highlight the permeation of questions of virtue within different social and and cultural environments with different demands.

The works selected for analysis in this chapter have been chosen to demonstrate two things. Firstly they demonstrate the sheer variety of discourses in the medieval context in which virtue is a relevant topic. Looking across the spectrum of cultural production from popular sermons to intimate religious texts, from elite poetry to vernacular *laude*, from words to images, we find virtue explored and expressed. This generic mix is central to our understanding of the rich formation of Dante's own text. Secondly the works have been selected not simply to demonstrate the variety of what we might call medium, but the variety of modes, methods and purposes of expression. Virtue is expressed in different ways to achieve different results in the recipient of those expressions which results are dependent on the way in which those expressions are engaged with. One work might engage intellectual consideration, while another instead appeals to the emotions to attain its desired effect. We need to consider the way in which what the author of the work is doing with the words on the page (or images on the wall) is related firstly to the message about virtue he wants to communicate and secondly to the way in which he wants his audience to absorb and we might say re-manifest that message.

I would like to outline a central theoretical concept which will recur in this consideration of medieval art and literature and that is the relation between form and content. The meaning of any work comes not simply from what it says but also from the way in which it says it. To appreciate the full richness of what a work is trying to communicate, we must consider not only the ideas expressed but the form in which they are expressed. Such a preoccupation may be more habitual to students of literature and visual art, where form is as primary in importance as content, but this preoccupation is equally important when we consider less obviously 'literary' texts: texts written with a religious and spiritual motivation. We will come to see, in fact, that it is in such texts that the interaction of form and content becomes most profound. For example, Franciscan literature manifests in its concrete, realistic style what Fleming has explained as 'the Franciscan conception of the religious life itself [which] was radically incarnational, seeking to re-establish in a flesh and blood world a vibrant realisation of the transcendent'.[88] There is in Franciscan literature and art a perfect marrying of message, concept and mode of expression. A further specific example which will later be explored in more detail is the fresco cycle of

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the Arena Chapel in Padua, in which it is not simply their narrative or figural content which supplies the images with meaning, but rather their physical combination upon the walls which invites the reader to find meaning in the relationship between things, to appreciate the work as a unity rather than a composition of disparate messages, and to read their own place within the work's narrative. The relationship of form and content will be a recurring preoccupation of the current chapter to acknowledge that the ultimate object of this study, the poetry of Dante, is an artistic creation acutely aware of both the 'what' and 'how' of expression.

2. Abstract Thought, Concrete Purpose

Abstract thought here is taken to mean those techniques of medieval scholasticism, logical thinking and reasoned arguments, which were unafraid to draw on both the rhetorical devices and the philosophical conceptions of the Classical world and which rose to prominence in the medieval universities; such an approach is already familiar to us from our consideration of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. However, we will now turn to consider the genre of sermons, which are not primarily scholastic works but which instead have a practical aim, that of improving the moral and spiritual life of the faithful. Most surviving sermon literature comes from the Dominican milieu and is therefore characterised by the scholastic influences upon that Order's thought system. In turning to consider sermons we enter a different cultural milieu in which the ideas of the intellectual elite come to be transmitted down to the mass of the faithful. The audience would have been extensive, inclusive of people from different levels of society. We therefore encounter a medium of great cultural impact whose ideas about virtue would have had a great influence throughout that society.[89]

The preaching of the mendicant religious orders represents a great opening of religious teaching to the masses. Communicating in the vernacular, mendicant preachers were able to spread reflections on Christianity in a way which, in its involvement of the populace, was unprecedented. Being forbidden from preaching doctrine, the privilege of which remained exclusively to ordained priests, the mendicants preached penance. Their focus was on the actions of their audience and they used their sermons to interpret the lives of biblical figures in such a way that their audience could apply their lessons in their own daily existence. Daniel R. Lesnick has compellingly argued that the mendicant orders' real

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[89] For more detail on medieval preaching and the mendicant orders see: Daniel R. Lesnick, *Preaching in Medieval Florence: The Social World of Franciscan and Dominican Spirituality* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989); Lina Bolzoni, *La rete delle immagini: predicazione in volgare dalle origini a Bernardino da Siena* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002).

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impact was in giving their audiences 'the tools to work for their own salvation'.[90] Salvation was no longer necessarily mediated through the Church and individuals were made aware of their own power and responsibility. By being endowed with the capability and authority to act, the faithful were compelled to act in order to save themselves.[91] The responsibility of the preachers was then precisely to equip the faithful with the necessary 'tools'.

The Dominican preachers of whom we have record were formed in the *studia* and this formation is very evident in their surviving sermons. They employ and transmit scholastic terminology, concepts and argumentation style while at the same time simplifying them for the lay audience: the Dominicans had 'un forte impegno di divulgazione del sapere elaborato negli studia [...] si tratta di comunicare in volgare un ricco patrimonio di cultura scolastica'.[92] Not only did they literally translate scholastic culture, they also broke it down into meaningful explanations; scholastic terms are employed but then carefully clarified. The most common structure of a sermon for Dominican preachers was the 'sermo modernus', a highly organised and structured form which has much in common with the articles of a scholastic *summa*, and which, through its format, guides the listener through an intellectual process of understanding.[93] It is this intellectual process which becomes a re-manifestation of virtue in the minds of the listeners.

Giordano da Pisa and the Development of Virtue

A significant body of surviving medieval Dominican sermons is the transcribed preachings of Giordano da Pisa. Giordano was active in Florence from 1303 to 1307 and although it is too much to suppose that Dante came into direct contact with his work, we can perhaps surmise that the form of Giordano's sermons and their message about virtue would have been familiar to the Florentine poet, and perhaps characteristic of Dominican preaching as a whole. Both the form and the content of Giordano's sermons present a distinctly Dominican, we might say Thomistic, idea of virtue. Virtue is something we can reasonably understand, a rational truth which the educated mind will come to see as correct by following the logical arguments put before it. Giordano's sermons engage his audience in an intellectual process of developing and accreting ideas. Lesnick has suggested that:

> Dominican preachers relied heavily on the rhetorical techniques of divisions,
> distinctions, and rationes as well as a rigid structure comprising thema, prothema,

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[90] Lesnick, p. 37.
[91] Lesnick, p. 38.
[92] Bolzoni, p. 13.
[93] For details on the format and usage of the 'Sermo modernus' see Lesnick pp. 98-99.

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introduction, divisione and clausio. These techniques and structure, even more than the explicitly stated themes of Dominican sermons, taught the popolo grasso the scholastics' mental habits of orderliness, logical clarity, structuration and control.[94]

By adopting this style, Giordano builds into the very communicative fabric of his sermons the habits of rational choice and self control which are so central to the Aristotelian and Thomistic models of virtue.

The Dominican preacher's message on virtue comes through the ever-important combination of content and form and a case study best demonstrates this. In a series of three sermons which Giordano gave on 30th November 1304 in Florence, he expounds the principal elements of Dominican virtue, a concept already familiar to us. He begins his argument with the fundamental point he aims to prove:

> Quelle cose che da sé sono vili e di poca vertude non possono adoperare cosa che sia di fructo quanto da loro, se non sono aiutate con vertù da più nobile cosa e [...] più vertuosa [and so only] quando le nostre opere sono congiunte a Cristo [...] per la vertù sua potemo operare opere di vertude nobili e degne.[95]

Only through Christ's aid can man hope to do good works and give them value. There then begins the extended 'how to' section of the sermon which draws its inspiration from a biblical quote: 'Christo crucifixus sum cruci' (Galatians 2:19). Analysis of the quote reveals three ways of creating the necessary relationship with Christ: 'Prima *per associationem* in ciò che dice *Christo*, il secondo *per unitionem* in ciò che dice *crucifixus sum*, il terzo modo *per compassionem* in ciò che dice *cruci*'. Once these initial subdivisions are made, *associatione* becomes the focus of the first sermon and is further clarified as 'cioè per farti simigliante a lui in virtude'.[96] Giordano then lists the particular virtues which make one similar to Christ: purity, charity, humility and poverty.

Giordano's treatment of each individual virtue is not the preoccupation of this current study, but the way in which he communicates them is of central importance. Dominican sermons, though exploiting the forms of abstract argumentation, draw much of their didactic power by appeals to examples. For instance, in sermon IV Giordano uses saints Andrew and John the Baptist as examples of purity. Given the Dominican's particular

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[94] Lesnick, p. 177.
[95] Giordano da Pisa, *Avventuale fiorentino 1304*, ed. by Silvia Serventi (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006), Sermon IV, p. 94.
[96] Giordano, p. 95.

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reverence, in a later sermon Giordano uses the figure of the Virgin Mary to draw out an extended lesson on different virtues.[97] Taking the biblical narrative of the Marriage at Cana, Giordano demonstrates how Mary's actions there make her the model of all virtues. He explains carefully what each individual virtue is and in what way Mary demonstrates it at this event. Indeed, the principal mode of biblical exegesis which Giordano employs in his sermons is moral. In his sermons there is a careful combination of theory and evidence which come together to build a powerful argument to convince the intellect of his listeners on the right thing to be and do.

Giordano, adapting to the requirements of a listening audience, also builds up his arguments through repetition. Points are made, gone over, restated until we can imagine they become fixed in the minds of the audience. Along with this, each sermon ends with a summary to reinforce the ultimate point. For example in our initial case study:

> Avemo dunque veduto del primo membro, cioè come l'uomo si congiunge a Dio per associatione, cioè per assimigliarsi a llui, per farsi simile a llui in virtude, quando sè vestito di quelle vertudi de le quali fu vestito Cristo, cioè di purità, di carità, d'umilitade, di povertade, de le quali Cristo pienamente era vestito.[98]

The oft-repeated 'cioè' and the many subordinate clauses give further insistent clarification. These are messages intended to be heard and remembered; that they remain as an object of subsequent study is an anomaly. Every effort is made by Giordano to help his audience thoroughly internalise his message in one hearing. By following this internalisation of thought the listener can be said to be 'doing' those actions and habits of intellectual virtue which the Dominican ideal demands. As we saw in Chapter One, virtue is a combination of a state of mind and a habit of action which necessarily arises from that mental state; to think in a virtuous way is therefore already to be doing something virtuous. Thus the form, content and purpose contained within the sermons are working harmoniously together to manifest the message of virtue within the mind of the listener.

While Giordano is concerned with clarity, this does not prevent him from presenting his audience with deep theological concepts for consideration. For example in his explanation of the virtue of charity in sermon IV he tells us that 'Idio è amore e però l'anima amorosa di Dio e del proximo è simile a Dio, anzi è quasi Idio'.[99] That Giordano can present his audience with such a profound statement is a testament both to his own powers of

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[97] Giordano, sermon XXXV, pp. 477-98.
[98] Giordano, sermon IV, p. 98.
[99] Giordano, sermon V, 96-97.

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communication and to his expectations of his audience's ability for comprehension. It may suggest that such profound considerations were not entirely alien to general listening public. In terms of content this statement is perhaps the best example of the faithful being made aware of their own autonomous power to approach God. A similarly complex idea appears in sermon VI of the same day which continues the earlier argument. Now Giordano is considering how humankind joins with Christ 'per compassionem'. An individual can join 'per compassionem' firstly through imitating that compassion which Christ had for humanity in allowing himself to suffer crucifixion, but Giordano also accesses the more literal meaning of 'compassion' as 'feeling with', encouraging his audience to intensely focus upon the 'verità di pena' of Christ's death. This concentrated thought leads to literal 'feeling with': 'se tu pensassi la passione e la pena di Cristo, tutto ti trasformeresti in ciò, in questa pena'.[100] It is perhaps Aristotle's ambiguous third book of *De Anima* that we have in mind when Giordano tells us that the *philosophers* say the soul becomes what it thinks.[101] Giordano's appeal to the power of focused reflection (as testified to by the philosophers) is couched in scholastic terminology and replete with examples: 'Onde se l'anima pensa oro, tuta si meschia con oro e quasi è facta oro; se pensa di terra, si diventa terra, [...] Onde però se pensa di Dio, si è facta quasi Idio altresì'.[102] But at the same time it is a distinctly Christian message:

> la meditatione e 'l pensiero de la pena e croce di Cristo si trasforma quasi in colui che a memoria la si riduce: quasi sente pena come Cristo e tutto t'à a mutare, tutto [...] questa è quella meditatione la quale ti riscalderebbe, che ti darebbe cibo d'amore e di devocione e che ti trasformerebbe in Cristo. [...] E questo è la propria incorporatione de la passione di Cristo, che se tormentato con lui in una medesima passione.[103]

There is a shift from the quasi-scholastic arguments reminiscent of Aristotle to the quasi-mystical language which we might come to associate with the Franciscans. To intensely focus upon the suffering of Christ is in some measure to *incarnate* him within one's own mind. Indeed, as we shall see, it is this emphasis on meditation and union with Christ which becomes a defining feature of Franciscan discourse.

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[100] Giordano, sermon VI, p. 111.

[101] Giordano, sermon VI, p. 110. Aristotle, *De anima*, III.iii.iv. For example: 'Concerning that part of the soul [...] with which the soul knows and thinks, we have to consider what is its distinguishin characteristic, and how thinking comes about. If it is analogous to perceiving, it must be either a process in which the soul is acted upon by what is thinkable, or something else of a similar kind. This part, then, must [...] be receptive of the form of an object, i.e., must be potentially the same as its object, although not identical with it' (III.iv).

[102] Giordano, sermon VI, p. 110.

[103] Giordano, sermon VI, pp. 115-16.

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Giordano's sermons are lessons in organised thought. They build, they define, they clarify and, occasionally, they show glimpses of compelling feeling. The controlled and structured arguments which he presents encourage control and structuring of the self on the part of his audience.[104] Such a format teaches virtue as a logical, perceivable necessity and trains its audience in the control of thought and actions which make up the Thomistic idea of virtue. Virtue is presented as something observable in others and a worthy and necessary object of acquisition; it is the rational and reasoned choice for the educated believer to approach their God. But beyond this it is also supporting the premise that to *think* virtue is, in fact, to *do* it when virtue is understood as the fulfilment of the human creature to be a rational, well-directed being. Dominican virtue is therefore not simply an object of cold rationality, which is intellectually distant from the subject, but rather it is an intellectual habit which is internalised through the practice of clear, rational thought, and inspired by the moral example of biblical figures. Although Giordano's initial message on human virtue is that it is ultimately dependent on Christ, he nevertheless intellectually empowers his audience to actively acquire their own virtue by internalising the structures of thought presented in his sermons.

The Dominican and Franciscan orders may be seen as approaching the same points from different angles. Union with Christ and the living of a good, humble, spiritual life were surely the aim of both. But, 'while the Dominicans were teaching lessons about organisation and abstraction, the Franciscans were encouraging non-mediated experience and the greatest possible involvement with both events and image'.[105] It is worth spending a little time outlining a valuable theoretical point, that of particularisation, as well as considering the more general features of Franciscan thought as these points are of particular relevance to our three subsequent categories of meditation, storytelling and allegory.

3. Meditation

As we have begun to see in Giordano's work, meditation is an intense focusing of thought and emotion which can bring about a transformation of the subject into the object they are focused upon. It is very much a feature of Franciscan thought and goes hand in hand with their emphasis upon the tangibility of experience. Alongside this is a focus upon the physically real over the dislocated abstract and this leads to a particular emphasis in Franciscan communication style upon the particularisation of ideas. It will become

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104 Lesnick, p. 95.
105 Lesnick, p. 145.

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apparent that this approach has a direct impact on the representation of virtue in Franciscan texts.

When we write, paint, or engage in any creative act we are making an idea real in terms of making it sensually accessible. We are transferring it from the immaterial world of thought into a solid forum in which it can communicate with external reality.[106] The world is full of 'big ideas', but if they remain on this abstract level, how are we ever to be affected by them? How are our human senses ever to be able to engage with them in the way in which humans can know things? The key is particularisation which I here understand as the transformation of a nebulous concept into a real, solid act of communication. This is something which the creative minds of the medieval period, and especially those individuals endowed with the role of representing the Church on earth, understood very well; communication with the unlettered faithful is one of the driving forces behind religious cultural production in the medieval period. The transformation of the idea into the image is an impulse both of the learner and the teacher. Eco has pointed out that 'unsophisticated persons found it easy to convert their beliefs into images; and [...] theologians and teachers themselves constructed images for those ideas which ordinary people could not grasp in their theoretical form'.[107] The reaction of the individual to any particular instance of literary or artistic particularity is dependent on the education of that individual; the text or image may function simply as didactic and exemplary, showing and teaching correct behaviour, or it may inspire and induce more profound meditation on the images there presented and encourage metaphysical interpretation. But it will always engage.

While the particularisation of an idea has an important practical role in the education of the faithful, medieval theologians were very conscious of the metaphysical realities which particularisation revealed. St Bonaventure was a writer acutely aware of the power of the image to direct the mind towards spiritual enlightenment. His style has been described as a unique combination of poetry and rhetoric mixed with a specific practical purpose, that of bringing the mind of his audience to God in a real and immediate way; only through this mode can the mind truly come to know God and thence to carry out spiritual and moral change. Bonaventure uses the 'poetic image' both to lead the mind to God and also to manifest something real about the relationship of created things to God. Fleming suggests that 'Bonaventure [...] was always a poet. [...] For him the entire created order was a book

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[106] For a study on the history of the manifestation of the Idea see Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, translated by Joseph J.S. Peake (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968).

[107] Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Hugh Bredin (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 54. The use of images for communication with the faithful was officially authorised in 1025 by the Synod of Arras (Eco, p. 15).

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in which the poetic images led the mind, captivated by truth and beauty, to look beyond the visible to the divine exemplar'.[108] Thus a particular instance of creation always at the same time reveals itself as *created* and as having a source of being beyond itself.

We turn now to a most important instance of particularisation: the exemplum. Delcorno defines literary exempla as 'ogni tipo di narrazione e di immagine che serva ad illustrare un concetto morale'.[109] They are the transmission of abstract concepts of morality into the active human sphere. The exemplar was the prime model of education in the Classical world, in which students were presented with the example of great figures of the past, offered to them for avoidance or for moral imitation.

With the coming of Christianity, however, a vital new element is added to the concept: Brown points out that 'Christianity [...] placed an exceptional weight on the joining points between God and men, and [...] proposed as its central figure, the Exemplar of all exemplars, a being, Christ, in Whom human and divine had come to be joined'.[110] Christ is the manifestation of the ultimate exemplar of being, which is God Himself. The *exemplar* is the 'model of a thing or act' which is 'reflected or imitated' by an *image*.[111] If God the Father is the exemplar then God the Son, is both exemplar and image: Fleming suggests that 'God is the exemplar or defining model both of the created cosmos and of the real but incorporeal world of moral beauty. Jesus Christ, the uncreated Word, is at once and uniquely exemplar and image. That is, He is the model by which the moral world defines itself and the image by which God expresses and knows Himself'.[112] In Christ is the ultimate particularisation of an idea and therefore in some way all subsequent particularisation of ideas partakes in that ultimate Incarnation of the Word made Flesh. The complexity of Christ's nature in the incarnation while unique also reveals the dynamics underpinning all moments of creative particularisation. Eco has explained this as follows: 'there was a puzzling identification of the sender (the divine Logos), the signifying message (words, logoi), the content (the divine message, Logos) – a web of identities and differences complicated by the fact that Christ, as Logos, insofar as he was the ensemble of all the divine archetypes was fundamentally polysemous'.[113] Any moment of artistic particularisation reveals the hand from whence it comes and somehow manifests the nature of that hand itself. As Christ is God's creative principle and the manifestation of God on earth, then all subordinate human creation is only ever a

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[108] Fleming, p. 201.

[109] Carlo Delcorno, 'Dante e l'exemplum medievale', *Lettere italiane* 35 (1983), 3-28.

[110] Peter Brown, 'The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity', *Representations* 2 (1983), 1-25 (p. 6).

[111] Fleming, p. 202.

[112] Fleming, p. 202.

[113] Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. by Hugh Bredin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 145.

reflection of that greater creative act. Indeed, all particularisation becomes a form of *incarnation* and all spiritually informed particularisation must participate in the purpose of incarnation, to lead the mind to God.

The message of Christ incarnate, however, is not only the metaphysical significance of the particularisation of the ultimate exemplum, God himself. It is how that exemplum acts within human life. In his essay on the figure of St Francis in Dante's own work, Auerbach considers the complex interaction of Christ as metaphysical principle and Christ the man: 'The story of Christ is more than the *parousia* of the *logos*, more than the manifestation of the idea. In it the idea is subjected to the problematic character and desperate injustice of earthly happening'.[114] The Incarnation of Christ is precisely the virtue dynamic we began to trace in the first chapter; it is how the eternal can and must act within the temporal, how the being of God can be revealed in the doing of man. Such a message ultimately validates human experience being not only that which brings man to God, but that through which God brought man to himself.

Particularisation in medieval art and literature has been most connected with the rise of the Franciscan movement with its emphasis on the real and concrete. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of Franciscan thought is its impact on the literature of its time. In comparison, as John Fleming has pointed out, 'the impact of technical Thomistic thought on popular religion and its literary expression is insignificant'.[115] If we consider that on the publication of the *Legenda Major* it became a compulsory text for every Franciscan friary in Europe (at that time numbering nearly 1000) then the diffusion of the text becomes obvious.[116] However, apart from the general presence of the texts, it seems fair to attribute the influence of Franciscan thought on contemporary literature not only to its physical accessibility, but to its conceptual accessibility as well. Franciscan faith and the literature which it produced were concerned with bringing the spiritual into real, physical, quotidian experience. The example of its founder was of one who had sought to re-enact Christ's ways and live a life strictly according to the gospels; a way of being which earned the reward of the literal re-enactment of Christ's life in Francis' flesh itself in the receipt of the stigmata. It is difficult to claim that Franciscanism was a direct cause of the artistic development towards realism which takes place in the medieval period, but it has been described as a 'conduit' through which this new realism could increase its reach.[117] The rise of Franciscanism occurs contemporaneously with what Fleming has described as 'a

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[114] Erich Auerbach, 'Historical Introduction: The Idea of Man in Literature', in *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961), pp. 1-23 (p. 13).
[115] Fleming, p. 209.
[116] Fleming, p. 45.
[117] For a more extended discussion of this see Fleming, pp. 237-39.

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general stylistic movement from abstract and lapidary forms to ones which are highly exemplified and kinetic'.[118]

Franciscan texts are typified by their intense preoccupation with the physicality of whatever they are presenting. This may be the intimate, physical details of the life of Christ (*Meditationes*), the personification of abstract concepts (the poetry of Iacopone da Todi), or the use of physical metaphors and images in order to communicate a journey of spiritual progress (*Lignum Vitae*). This 'particularisation' of the unseen manifests the 'clear evangelical intent' of the Franciscan Order which, unlike earlier monastic orders, sought to bring the unseen things of God to the living populace.[119] As such, Franciscan cultural production is not hostile to visual and verbal imagination, nor is it hostile to engaging with the popular world. Franciscan literature and art appears acutely aware that the popular world is full of sceptics and doubters and therefore employs 'a consistent appeal to felt experience, to the authority of ocular demonstration, and to what might be called eyewitness reporting' in order to get its message across.[120] Also, as we have already seen, the particularisation of ideas and the intense relationship between form and content are of especial significance to Franciscan thought.

Therefore, when we consider the representation of virtue in Franciscan literature, we have a great wealth of conceptual riches to bear in mind. If, as we have already seen, Christ is both the creative, metaphysical virtue of God and the incarnation of that virtue on earth, manifesting in his acts a mode of union with God to be imitated by the faithful through the actions of virtue, the Franciscan presentation of virtue takes this all into account in a very real way. There is intense focus upon the events of Christ's life and an interpretation of the virtues which they manifest. These virtues are then presented as a mode of progression towards God. The exact mode that this progression takes introduces us to the variety with which virtue is represented.

We have already seen something of the theory of meditation in the work of Giordano da Pisa; the intense power of focused thought to transform the thinker into the object of that thought. This literal form of transformation was most connected with St Francis. Even the Dominican Giordano is quick to testify to this:

> questa è la ragione per la quale noi crediamo che 'l beato Francesco ricevesse le piaghe nel corpo suo, imperò che tanto fu assiduo a meditare de la croce di Cristo e

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[118] Fleming, p. 237.
[119] Fleming, p. 242.
[120] Fleming, p. 248.

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si la incorporò per pensamento, che tramutò il corpo suo in quelle piaghe a sentì dolore fortissimo pur per via e modo naturale.[121]

Because of the experiences and teachings of their saintly founder, Franciscan writers and preachers maintained the value of focusing on the experiences of the biblical and holy characters as a way to approach quite literally towards the *image* of God. Their texts appeal to the emotions, employ concrete narrative, constantly encourage their audience to see, to feel with the characters there presented and then to reflect back on their own lives and actions. As Lesnick says, St Francis 'put forth life experience as the core of his preaching'[122] and encouraged his followers in the same. While the meditative texts here considered do extrapolate some advice for the daily moral lives of their audiences and indirectly suggest the value of practical action, they more overtly emphasise the value of reflection and emotional engagement with the exemplary lives of others as a way towards spiritual progress.

Meditationes Vitae Christi

Although no transcripts of Franciscan sermons survive from the 13th century, the *Meditationes vitae Christi* (c.1300) were most likely source material for Franciscan preachers and, therefore, have something to tell us not only about the focuses of Franciscan preaching but about the process of Franciscan worship in general.[123] The *Meditationes* was one of the most widely diffused and read works of its time and became a source for sermons, literature and visual art alike. It has much to tell us both about the principles of Franciscanism and in particular about the connection between form and content which creates such a distinctly Franciscan idea of virtue.

The *Meditationes* were written ostensibly to be an object of study given by a Franciscan brother to a sister of the Poor Clares. Its particular combination of creative, intensely descriptive narrative, and guidance on how the reader should respond, make it a work of intimate, practical meditation in which the reader discovers both what should be learned and how the object of that learning can be achieved.

It is an anti-intellectual work which self-avowedly makes its point through appeals to reality rather than clever use of language:

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[121] Giordano, sermon VI, p. 112.
[122] Lesnick, p. 139.
[123] On the *Meditationes* as sermon source material and the lack of transcribed Franciscan sermons from the early medieval period see Lesnick, pp. 140-43.

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Verumtamen judicans melius fore aliqua utcumque dicere, quam penitus tacere, experiar impotentiam mean, et familiariter tecum loquar, rudi et impolito sermone: tum ut melius possis, quae dicuntur, capere, tum ut non aurem, sed mentem studeas inde reficere. Non est enim in ornatis sermonibus, sed in Domini Jesu meditationibus insistendum. (*Meditationes*, Proemium)[124]

Such is the main point of the *Meditationes*: that truth and salvation can only be attained through the constant meditation on Christ. To aid in this meditation the author deems himself entirely in the right to employ the powers of imagination to drive his points home: 'ego vero ad majorem impressionem, ea sic, ac si ita fuissent, narrabo, prout contingere vel contigisse credi possunt, secundum quasdam imaginarias repraesentationes, quas animus diversimode percipit' (Proemium). What is important is not simply narrative truth but that the story brings the audience closer to Christ. Truth is located more in the experience and reception of the individual than in the factual historicity of the events themselves; the individual is the locus of moral transformation.

This idea supports one of the text's central messages about virtue and combines again form and content in making its point. We are told in the text that the virtues 'per experientias cognoscimus, non per doctrinam' (caput XXXIX). The *Meditationes* is nothing if not a process of experiential learning in which the reader participates in the events of the story of Christ. So it is that it is written in the present tense, that it is filled with appeals to its reader to 'look', 'see', 'lift', 'carry', 'help', to actively take part in the events of the story as if she were there and as if she were actually experiencing them.[125] Such direct and emotional participation is a necessary part of the movement towards God. During the meditation on the Annunciation, the reader is to 'in his ergo meditare, in his delectare, et jucundaberis, et forte ostendet tibi Dominus ampliora' (caput IV). By opening oneself to active experience of God, one can spiritually progress. This kind of spiritual progress is also a progression in virtue. Throughout the text, the author guides his reader in how to react to the events witnessed: 'Attende hic et recordare, quae tibi in principio supra dixi, ut discas omnibus, quae dicuntur et fiunt, te exhibere praesentem' (caput III). The feelings evoked by the text are feelings which the reader must actually experience and by experiencing them they are growing in virtues being guided in proper feeling.

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[124] Quotations from *Meditationes vitae Christi* (Paris: Vives, 1868).
[125] The text is full of such calls to direct participation. Here we might mention for example, the episode recounting the coming of the Magi in which the reader is told: 'In praesenti ero negotio sis praesens, et conspice bene singula quia, ut alias tibi dixi, in hoc est tota vis harum meditatioeneum' (caput IX). Or the painfully compelling scenes of the flagellation where the reader is called to focus upon the humanity of Christ's beaten and bloody body (caput LXXVI).

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By participating in the actions of characters within the text, the reader is also developing the virtues exemplified by those figures. For example, in the meditation on the Sermon on the Mount the reader is told to 'respicere coneris faciem eius [Christ's]. Conspice in discipulus, quomodo reverenter, humiliter, et cum tota mentis intentione aspiciunt eum. [...] In hac autem consideratione jucunderis et tu, aspiciendo ac si videres eum loquentem, et approximando eis, si forte vocata fueris, et immorando Ibidem, ut Dominus tibi dabit' (caput XXI). The reader, encouraged to share in the experience of the disciples, is worthy to do so only by her own humility, her own intensity of concentration and belief. If this is sincere enough she may be admitted to further enlightenment.

Through observation of the biblical events, the reader is shown how to apply the lessons observed to their actual lives. There is a very strong connection between meditation and action. So, from Mary's reaction at the Annunciation we are to learn the value of silence (caput IV); from her response to the flight into Egypt we can learn patience (caput XII); and from the actions of the boy Jesus in the temple we learn how to approach God (caput XIV). Although the focus of the text is emotional, there is a strong current of moral exegesis throughout.

The focused meditation of the reader upon the life of Christ not only acts as a powerful and active form of moral teaching but is also conceived as bringing about spiritual transformation. This transformation is conceived around the figures of Mary and Christ. The text filters the reader's approach to Christ through the actions of Mary. It is by imitating her that we can truly approach him and the author puts into her mouth a speech overtly describing how man must act to receive divine virtue: 'Imo dico tibi, quod nullam gratiam, donum vel virtutem habui a Deo sine magno labore, continua oratione, ardenti desiderio, profunda devotione, multis lacrymis, et multa afflictione, dicendo, cogitando, semper placita sibi sictu sciebam et poteram' (caput III). The imitation brings about not only moral similarity to Mary but ontological fulfilment in the receipt of virtue and spiritual fruitfulness. We are exhorted to 'ipsa rumines bene, et delecteris in eis, toto affectu ea memoriae commendando, et opere adimplendo, quia devotissima sunt' (caput III). Just as Mary's meditation upon God brought her virtue and enabled her to bear fruit in giving birth to Christ, so the believer, focusing on Mary and imitating her devotion, can give rise to similar spiritual fruit.

While Mary is the exempla of the birth of Christ within humanity, the writer of the *Meditationes* describes full transformation as taking place through the believer's contemplation of the virtues of Christ in whom virtues are found in their most perfect

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form: 'Ubi enim virtutes excelsae paupertatis, eximiae humilitatis, profundae sapientiae, orationis, mansuetudinis, obedientiae, patientiae, caeterarumque virtutum exempla et doctrinam sic invenies, sicut in vita Domini virtutum?' (Proemium). The contemplation of these virtues, however, is necessarily not passive or academic, but an active emotional and interactive experience: 'Ad cuius virtutes imitandas et adipiscendas, ex frequenti meditatione cor accenditur et animatur' (Proemium). This intense and loving contemplation is what can lead to the transformation of the believer:

> Qui ergo in passione et cruce Domini gloriari desiderat, sedula cordis meditatione debet in ipsa persistere, cuius mysteria, et quae circa eam facta sunt, si toto forent perspecta intuita mentis, in novum, ut puto, statum adducerent meditantem. Nam profundo corde et totis viscerum medullis eam perscrutanti, multi adsunt passus inesperati, ex quibus novam compassionem, novum amorem, novas consolationes, et per consequens novum quemdam statum susciperet, quae sibi praesagium et participatio gloriae viderentur. (caput LXXIV)

As we saw in Chapter One, through the redemption of Christ, the potential of human action to hold value is restored, and that action can be reconnected with God, the proper end of human existence.

The *Meditationes* lays out the steps towards God which the believer must take, using also the figure of the exempla reader: St Cecelia. She is described as one who 'de vita Domini Jesu in Evangelio tradita, quaedem sibi devtiora praelegerat, in quibus meditabatur die ac nocte, corde puro et integro, attentione praecipua et ferventi, et cum plena circulatione reincipiens iterum et dulci ac suavi gustu ruminans, ea in arcano pectoris sui collocabat' (Proemium). Intense study is described as one of Cecelia's 'virtutum' (Proemium). This very study manifests the nature of Christian virtue itself. Virtue, we have seen, is conceived by some Christian thinkers as a focused and perfect love of God which directs all action towards that end. As such we are told in the *Meditationes*, 'anima autem aliquam virtutem habere non potest, si Deum toto corde non diligat' (caput III). This intense focusing is precisely what the *Meditationes* teaches. While focusing upon perfect examples of virtue it at the same time teaches the focus of mind and desire towards God that is Christian virtue. Such focusing shares another feature with the result of virtue which is a separating from the things of the world: 'quod jugis meditatio vitae Domini Jesu roborat et stabilit mentem contra vana et caduca' (Proemium). By meditating upon the life of Christ one is not simply seeing exempla of virtue but one is re-enacting the perfectly focused

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desire for God which is virtue itself. One is re-manifesting within one's own action of reading the idea of virtue manifested in the text.

The *Meditationes* is a powerful combination of message and medium. It presents the figure of Christ and the events of his life as the greatest exemplum of virtue. At the same time it puts great emphasis on the necessity of experience, action and participation as the way for the believer to gain virtue. With this in mind, it adopts a style of writing which calls, through the process of meditation, for the absolute internalisation of events and images in such a way that they become part of the reader; in such a way that the reader is indeed experiencing what is on the page in front of her and is therefore going through the alignment of desire and the transformation of being which is the acquisition of virtue. While both employ the power of the mind and emotions to internally recreate what they receive, the works of Franciscan meditation differ greatly from the intellectual process encouraged by a Dominican sermon which encourages a distinctly Dominican, that is rational and scholastic, idea of virtue. Instead the *Meditationes* are about emotional, lived experience which makes real, indeed incarnates, the biblical story within its readers.

Legenda Major

While Christ's life must be the ultimate exemplum, the lives of the saints who followed him served as a further bridge between the human and divine. According to Fleming, the purpose of hagiographical texts is twofold: 'to demonstrate the sanctity of life of [the] subject and [...] to give intelligible and whenever possible practical example to [...] readers'.[126] Hagiographies were an influential source for popular literature and visual art of the Middle Ages so the messages which they portray would have had great popular impact and familiarity. Realistic biography, in a modern sense, is not the aim of hagiography which instead seeks to provide a 'moral picture' which can 'incarnate an ideal'.[127] Hagiographies are perhaps one of the best generic examples of the particularisation of the idea. The saints described in hagiographies, however, also have an important metaphysical role: in their actions and lives they reveal God.[128] They are exempla and as such hark back to that ultimate divine exemplum. They are those who

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[126] Fleming, p. 37.
[127] Régis Boyer, 'An Attempt to Define the Typology of Medieval Hagiography', in *Hagiography and Medieval literature: A Symposium*, edited by Hans Bekker-Nielsen et al. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981), pp. 27-36 (p. 30).
[128] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, III, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 177.

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actively live God in the temporal world. The virtues which they, and indeed which all humans manifest, are 'representations of the perfections of God'.[129]

The saint as one who both brings God into the world and who has a more intimate relationship with the divine while in human life, is best exemplified here in the figure of St Francis of Assisi.[130] I shall make reference to two of the best known of the lives of the saint, though with a different emphasis in each. Beginning with Bonaventure's *Legenda Major* (1263), I shall focus upon its meditational aspects, before turning to Tommaso da Celano's *First Life of St Francis* (1225-6) to explore the role of story telling.[131]

The *Legenda Major* can be read as telling a journey; it is a journey of the life of its protagonist St Francis, but it is also a journey for the reader as he or she grows in understanding and spiritual development.[132] The reader is both reading about a journey of spiritual progress and undergoing one himself, which fits the nature of the *Legenda*'s audience; it was primarily a text for those already within the Franciscan order. Although the details of Bonaventure's text are largely derived from earlier biographies (principally Tommaso's text) the narrative which he gives is a consciously ordered and constructed one. It is as much a work of theology as it is of biography.

As in the *Meditationes*, the events of the narrative (this time the life of St Francis) are interpreted for the edification of the reader and general lessons are drawn from the events. For example, from the illness with which Francis is afflicted that ultimately leads to his conversion, Bonaventure draws the lesson that physical suffering is beneficial: 'quia spirituali auditui dat intellectum inflicta vexatio' (Cap. I.2).[133] He does not simply recount events but tells us what they mean and how they are important. However, this interpretation also serves the further purpose of giving a typological interpretation of Francis' life. Although when Bonaventure wrote his biography in the 1260s Francis had been recognised as a saint for 20 years, Bonaventure's text was written to be definitive. Using his biography he not only presents the official version of the events of Francis's life, but, more importantly, defines what they mean, thus defining the tenets of a Franciscan

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[129] Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St Bonaventure*, translated by Illtyd Trethowan and F.J.Sheed (London: Sheed & Ward, 1938), p. 425.

[130] On Dante and Franciscanism see Nick Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans: Poverty and the Papacy in the 'Commedia'* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[131] On Dante and Bonaventure see Stephen Botterill, 'Bonaventure', in *The Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. by Richard Lansing (New York and London: Garland, 2000), pp. 120-21.

[132] *St Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies : English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St Francis,* translations by Raphael Brown [et al]; with a research bibliography by R. Brown; edited by Marion A. Habig (London: S.P.C.K., 1979). Reference to the *Legenda Major* will be made to this edition and included within the text.

[133] Bonaventure, 'Opusculum XXIII, Legenda Sancti Francisci', in *Opera Omnia: Opuscula varia*, VIII (Claras Aquas: St Bonaventure College, 1898), pp. 504-64.

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theology and reinforcing the figure of St Francis as a 'type' for Christ. One way in which Bonaventure reinforces Francis's saintliness is by the self-consciousness of his mission. Bonaventure tells us not only what he did but what he thought and ensures that his actions appear to have emerged from a conscious choice to imitate Christ: 'Ideoque magis omnibus quam sibi soli vivere praeelegit, illius provocatus exemplo, qui unus pro omnibus mori dignatus est' (Cap. IV.2). Bonaventure imposes an interpretation onto the events of Francis' life which emphasises the saint's predestined role and saintly acceptance of it.

As well as interpreting the narrative's events, those events are structured in such a way as to present specific stages in the development of virtue, virtue being that which leads to spiritual enlightenment and purity. Again, virtue is both acknowledged in the *content* as a mode of progression,[134] and manifested in the *form* as such. The *Legenda Major* is consciously structured to interpret each of the stages and events of Francis' life as demonstrating a different virtue. Between the initial four chapters, which detail Francis' childhood and conversion, and the final three, which recount his stigmata, death and canonization, are 'nine chapters on the virtues which are organized around themes'.[135] The nine are also divided into three overarching categories of purgation, illumination and perfection. The virtues which Bonaventure praises in Francis are now those we might recognise as characteristically Franciscan: austerity, humility, poverty, piety, charity, prayer, understanding of Scripture and the Stigmata. As each chapter is told, the events which particularly demonstrate the virtue under consideration are highlighted and reinforced with a final summary. For example,

> Procul igitur a pauperibus Christi diffidentia omnis abscedat. Si enim paupertas Francisci adeo copiosae sufficientiae fuit, ut subvenientium sibi defectus tam mira virtute suppleret, quod nec cibus nec potus nec domus deeseet, cum pecuniae et artis et naturae facultas defecerat; multo magis illa merebitur, quae usitato divinae providentiae ordine communiter conceduntur. (Cap. VII.13)

The reader is carefully led through the events of Francis' life and given clear indications of the lessons he should take from them, and is perhaps reassured in his own life difficulties. Thus his own understanding and his own virtue should grow.

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[134] Cap. XI. 1: 'As tantam autem mentis serenitatem indeffessum orationis studium cun continua exercitatione virtutum virum Dei perduxerat, ut, quamvis non habuerit sacrarum litterarum peritiam per doctrinam, aeternae tamen lucis irradiatus fulgoribus, Scriptururum profunda miro intellectus scrutaretur acumine'.
[135] Ewert Cousins, 'Introduction', in Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St Francis* (London: S.P.C.K, 1978), p. 43.

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The last 'virtue' which Francis acquires, the Stigmata, is most distinctive in the story of the saint and represents the culmination of the 'journey' of his life. The *Legenda Major* traces Francis' movement towards perfect imitation of Christ in virtues. He undertakes this movement through love and it is love which joins him to Christ: 'Haec est, quae ipsum per devotionem sursum agebat in Deum, per compassionem transformabat in Christum' (Cap. VIII.1). On the reception of the stigmata, Francis becomes the 'image' of the exemplum Christ: 'Postquam igitur verus Christi amor in eandem imaginen transformavit amantem' (Cap. XIII.5). The stigmata, this perfect assimilation to Christ, are a visible sign of reward, a manifestation of the spiritual state of Francis, 'God's seal on his virtuous life'.[136] Through his following of virtue, Francis has transformed himself into the perfect image of Christ and it is this image which the reader is invited to behold in the *Legenda Major*. From it she is called to meditate both on the practical events of Francis' life, but more importantly on their metaphysical significance. Although the *Legenda Major* is on a certain level a didactic text, calling its readers to meditate upon and imitate the actions of Francis, the extent to which it functions as a practical guide for virtue must be questioned. The figure of Francis is superlatively good and the assimilation to Christ which he is privileged to undergo is unique. Francis appears as a suprahuman exemplum; he is not a normal man who becomes better through good deeds but a predestined saint. The *Legenda Major* and its offshoot the *Legenda Minor* were texts written for use within the Franciscan Order and as such I think we can read them most readily as objects of spiritual and devotional reflection. We are not called so much to go out and imitate the virtues there presented but rather to meditate on their brilliance and be spiritually uplifted by their miraculous nature. The carefully constructed programme of development is to be internalised and that internalisation is the journey.

In these two works of Franciscan meditation, virtue has emerged as something developed by the internalisation of exemplary stories through deep and engaged meditation. The intellectual distance of abstract study is far from these texts which instead invite the reader to follow and share in the events they contain, spurred on by desire and love. The *Meditationes* calls primarily for emotional engagement; through the sharing of the experiences of Christ, the reader comes closer to him. The reader of the *Legenda Major* accompanies St Francis on his journey of spiritual development and is simultaneously guided through their own development. Although I speak of 'sharing experiences' and 'going on journeys' as if they were physical and real, what we must really recognise here is the overwhelming power of the text and the image. These are journeys and experiences of

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[136] Cousins, 'Introduction', p. 45.

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the mind and emotions which are able to have such profound effects because of the frame of mind in which they are studied and the language in which they are communicated.

4. Storytelling

Although we have considered the *Meditationes vitae Christi* and Bonaventure's *Legenda Major* as works of meditation, they equally share the characteristic Franciscan format of telling stories. I have chosen to focus on them as works of meditation because of their conscious use of techniques to very actively draw their readers into the events in terms of engagement, spiritual participation and development, and guided reading, all of which encourage the audience to take a very active emotional part in the story which in itself is the acquisition of virtue. But the very use of narrative alone makes a particular statement about communication and audience involvement. In using the term 'storytelling' I intend it as meaning a constructed text which narrates a progressive series of events grounded in reality and which has a strong emphasis on character. Unlike meditation, which seeks to bring the audience very actively into the events, storytelling relies more on objective example; the stories to be considered have a fable-like quality with a clear message about good and bad and with believable characters. Lesnick has argued that the Franciscans 'use a method of preaching based both in form and content on historical episodes, concrete experience and active narration [...] concretions and the narrative mode [...] have a greater impact on the emotions and the imagination'.[137] To hear stories or to see a pictorial narrative is a much easier, more accessible way of absorbing ideas than to follow the arguments of abstract scholasticism. Stories based around the actions of an exemplary person are the principal teaching mode of the Bible, whose emphasis upon character is particularly important for our consideration of virtue; that is, of an ethical system based primarily on character development. The Bible is peopled with characters who, although they exist in very particular circumstances explicitly influenced by the divine, are nonetheless relatively real people with problems and flaws. This attitude to character is one taken up by Tommaso da Celano in his first *Life of Saint Francis*.

Tommaso da Celano's *First Life*, as the first known hagiography of the saint, is eager to demonstrate Francis's sanctity and aims to show the divine influence within his life. It fulfils the dual purpose of hagiography mentioned earlier, to demonstrate the sanctity of the saint whose story is being told, and to act as an example to the reader.[138] Although, as hagiography, it belongs to the same genre as the *Legenda Major*, it has certain features

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[137] Lesnick, p. 95.
[138] Fleming, p. 37.

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which make it a more concrete story. While the text may be far from Francis' actual life, it does not describe an overtly spiritual or unreal narrative, although it is a story in which the sanctifying characteristics of Francis are given predominance.[139] It is a linear temporal narrative and although the events it recounts are selected, they are not artificially ordered, as in the *Legenda*, to give a specific spiritual message or to provide a guided pattern for spiritual progression. This temporal aspect of storytelling ought not to be passed over as it ensures that the events recounted exist within a history. Thus characters who exist within time can change and develop within it; their lives have a sense of moving towards an end point which may be some form of completion and fulfilment. The figure of Francis is presented as a man who develops through his life, beginning bad and ending good. He is described as profligate in his youth but '[f]acta est proinde super eum manus Domini, et immutatio dexterae Excelsi, ut per eum daretur peccatoribus fiducia in gratiam respirandi, et conversionis ad Deum omnibus fieret exemplum' (Book 1, chap. I.2)[140] This transformation is identified as the work of God, but nevertheless by presenting a 'hero' who is transformed, the audience is empowered to imagine their own transformation and follow Francis towards conversion. As an imperfect figure who becomes perfect, Francis acts as an encouraging exemplum; he is one who *becomes* virtuous and as such his transformation is imitable:

> et non minus exemplo quam verbo aedificans audientes, de toto corpore fecerat linguam. [...] Assuduitas vero subiectionis fecerat eam voluntariam, et ex quotidiana inclinatione sui situm apprehenderat tantae virtutis, quoniam consuetudo saepe vertitur in naturam. (Book 2, chap. IV.97)

This quasi-Aristotelian explanation of the acquisition of virtue is here theoretically and practically presented to Tommaso da Celano's audience for explicit imitation, by presenting the exemplum of a person who has already made this progression.

As in the *Legenda*, Francis is presented as conscious of his exemplary purpose. After the Franciscan Order is authorised by the Pope, Francis and his companions discuss their purpose: 'qualiter in omni sanctitate et religione coram Altissimo ambularent: qualiter denique vita et mores ipsorum, per incrementa sanctarum virtutum, forent proximis ad exemplum' (Book 1, chap. XIV.34). But, importantly, Francis' perfection is not taken as a given thing; instead we see the process of him discovering how to be perfect. Within the narrative Francis works his way towards perfection, while beyond the narrative events

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[139] Fleming, p. 38.

[140] Tommaso da Celano, *S. Francisci vita et miracula*, ed. by Eduardus Alenconiensis (Rome: Desclée, Lefbvre et soc., 1906).

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the narratorial voice interprets and attributes his actions as exemplary: 'Omnibus quoque tribuebat normam vitae, ac salutis viam in omni gradu veraciter demonstrabat' (Book 1, chap. XV.37). Thus the figure of Francis is a believable character within the narrative who is not omniscient, who is not initially perfect and who changes during the story, while at the same time the narratorial voice tells the reader that he is an example we should be following.

The narrator frequently extracts specific messages from the narrative events in order to put forward a particular moral message. For example, the persecution of Francis by his family and friends is interpreted as a general message on the value of tribulation:

> Sed quia melior est patiens arrogante, famulus Dei surdum iis omnibus se praestabat, et nulla fractus aut mutatus iniuria pro iis imnibus gratias Domino referebat. In vanum namque iniquus persequitur ad honesta tendentem, quia quanto plus fuerit ille concussus, tanto fortius triumphabit. Generosum animum, ait quidam, dedecus efficit fortiorem. (Book 1, chap. V.11)

From the particular the general can be extrapolated but in such a way that the message remains more fixed in the mind, being attached to the case of a particular and real individual.

Unlike the *Legenda*, Tommaso da Celano's *Life* provides us with a detailed account of Francis' appearance and character, interspersing physical details with edifying interpretation: 'Facundissimus homo, facie hilaris, vultu benignus, immunis ignaviae, insolentiae expers. [...] [L]ingua placabilis, ignea et acuta, vox vehemens, dulcis, clara atque sonora' (Book 1, chap. XXIX.83). Here is a tangible picture of a real man with real motivations and actions; he is a concrete figure rather than a spiritual vehicle or superlatively good though distant saint. Stubblebine points of that '[t]o read this account is to experience St Francis at close hand and to realise the compelling strength of his devotion to poverty and humility on the path that Christ had trod' whereas '[s]ubsequent accounts increasingly distance us from the reality of the man, expunging as it were his reality in favour of his myth'.[141] Tommaso's Francis is fundamentally real.

The clear narrative and appeals to popular detail are also a notable feature of Giotto's frescoes of the Upper Basilica of St Francis in Assisi (completed c.1290-96), which portray the life of the saint. While being closely tied to Bonaventure's narrative, their intended

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[141] James H. Stubblebine, *Assisi and the Rise of Vernacular Art* (Cambridge: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 80.

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audience goes beyond the boundaries of the Franciscan Order to reach the mass of pilgrims visiting the basilica at Assisi. Stubblebine has termed their visual language 'vernacular'. They are 'intentionally designed in a popular vein, purposefully employing a vernacular language of gesture, expression, costume, and architectural ambience'.[142] The scenes portrayed are familiar, naturalistic, believable, while at the same time establishing 'visual evidence of the saint's miracles' and building 'visual symbols comparable to those long-established ones of early Christian saints'.[143] Nature and iconography are combined to create a polysemous but realistic and popular narrative whose 'quality derives from and is dependent on the very absence of monumentality, that is, the timeless, the abstracted, that which is outside of accidental causality. In the Assisi images, it is this accidental, often trivial and amusing detail that entrances the spectator into the illusion of their reality'.[144] Tommaso da Celano's *Life* and the Assisi frescoes both provide a kind of mirror to the audience in which they see their own reality and therefore are shown how to act within it. Their real world is presented as one in which miracles can happen and the soul can be saved. The virtues which Francis possesses are not those of the meditative friar alone, but are those of the active person, working to better both himself and society. They are virtues which are represented in such a way as to make them attainable through following the example of a man who follows Christ.

5. Allegory: 'imagination aids understanding'

Virtue is a concept both abstract and complex; but it is also, as we have seen, a concept of great practical value. Consideration of the representation of virtue in narrative form has already demonstrated the ways in which virtue can be brought alive as an idea by being manifested in the figures of real people, their actions and the results of those actions. We must now turn to the use of allegory and symbol.

Medieval allegory is a two-way process. In one sense, it is a habitual attitude of mind to read the world as containing different layers of meaning hidden below the superficial. Eco has suggested that '[t]he Medieval inhabited a world filled with references, reminders and overtones of Divinity, manifestations of God in things'.[145] In such a world, everything means more than it seems, the simple leads to the complex. In the second sense, allegory is that created by man in order to represent metaphysical reality in a way which is accessible, which engages the human intellect and imagination: 'fables and symbols were

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[142] Stubblebine, p. 88.
[143] Stubblebine, p. 88.
[144] Stubblebine, p. 91.
[145] Eco, *Art and Beauty*, p. 53.

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able to articulate qualities that theory could not [...] they could make intelligible those doctrines which proved irksome in their more abstract form'.[146] By employing allegory in a work, a writer is choosing to engage the imagination of their audience in an active way; they are presenting a puzzle, a system that must be interpreted. At the same time, the choice of the superficial allegorical figure makes a comment back onto the more complex idea it conceals. Allegorical art expresses the medieval pleasure of deciphering and the revelation of meaning; it is both an aesthetic and intellectual process, which engages different faculties of the mind thus more completely involving the audience.[147]

Although the focus here is allegorical representations of virtue, that is, representations which employ a figure or cohesive system of figures which has a meaning in its own right but which also reveals a more profound significance, within allegory we ought to highlight personification. This figural technique is used either literally to personify different virtues, that is, give them human form, or to talk about abstract virtue in such a way that human actions or feelings are attributed to virtue. By the high Middle Ages the personification of virtue had acquired great complexity. Different virtues acquired attributes in their personified forms which both made them immediately identifiable and often made a comment about the more abstract nature of the virtue itself. In such 'static representations', Katzenellenbogen writes, '[t]here is no dramatic tension. Only the virtues are represented. Distinguished by symbols, they become part of a sphere of illustration which no longer bears any relation to reality, and represent, within a significantly constructed linear framework, the moral qualities treated in the main theme'.[148] Such representations of virtue appear in almost all the texts and images considered so far, not only in this chapter but in the preceding one as well.

The consideration of allegory and personification brings us back to the idea of particularisation. At some point in the transfer of an abstract idea into the realm of reality, it must be attributed with something tangible, comprehensible. These tangible aspects are then employed to develop further the original idea until the figurations become an automatic way of understanding that particular abstraction. We learn to read and recognise the textual and visual images, accepting that those images not only represent something more abstract but that they themselves actually come to form the identity of that abstract. It then becomes normal to understand virtue in terms of 'growth' when it is so often figured as a tree; it becomes normal to talk of the battle between good and evil when virtues and vices are so often personified, clad in armour and ready to engage in

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[146] Eco, *Art and Beauty*, p. 54.
[147] Eco, *Art and Beauty*, p. 61.
[148] Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Medieval Art: From Early Christian Times to the Thirteenth Century* (New York: Norton, 1964), p. 32.

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battle. I am trying to suggest that the image creates the idea as much as the idea originally created the image. Let us now briefly consider three particular 'allegories' of virtue which greatly inform our imaginative conception of the idea. Rather than using one particular text to demonstrate this I shall draw on various examples to show the universality of these representations.

The *Psychomachia* of Prudentius personifies the Virtues and Vices and has them engage in battle. The personification of moral concepts has its origins in Classical art and '[e]arly Christian poetry adapted the classical theme of the conflict of armed forces to the sphere of moral allegory, developed it further and endowed the opposing moral forces with the clearly defined features of personification speaking, acting and struggling with one another'.[149] This 'dynamic representation' of virtue is the manifestation of an idea found in St Paul. Katzenellenbogen suggests that in the *Psychomachia* Prudentius 'develops the Pauline thought that the Christian must arm himself with spiritual weapons in order to face successfully the forces of evil'.[150] The life of the Christian is a continual battle against evil in which his 'spiritual weapons' are the virtues. Thus, the personification of virtues as joining in the fight on the side of the Christian soul we can imagine works as a source of comfort, support and encouragement.[151] In the frescoes and structure of the Arena Chapel, as we will come to see, the Christian soul is physically made to stand in the middle of one such moral battle field, flanked by the virtues and vices who prepare to fight for it. In a more individualised personification, in his *First Life* Tommaso da Celano describes St Francis in the language of secular romance, in which the saint is 'fortissimus miles Christi' (Book 1, caput XV.38) who sets out to woo and defend his 'Lady Poverty'.[152] Francis is allegorically described in such a way as to reveal the spiritual battle which he carries out during his life, battling with his own spirit and the world in order to win the virtue which will bring him to God.

Virtues have been personified as spiritual forces, both in the combative sense of the *Psychomachia* and in the sense of a constructing force. Since Plato, the human soul has been conceived as a kind of edifice. Gregory the Great describes it as a house; Giordano da Pisa calls it 'il tempio di Dio' (p. 472). Within this building that is the human soul, the virtues are those forces which build and support it, which metaphysical concept is transmitted into literary and pictorial figures. Katzenellenbogen lists several artistic instances in which the virtues are personified as active builders, constructing the symbolic

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[149] Katzenellenbogen, p. vii.
[150] Katzenellenbogen, p. 1.
[151] Katzenellenbogen, p. 18.
[152] See Susan J. Hubert, 'Theological and Polemical uses of Hagiography: A Consideration of Bonaventure's *Legenda Major* of St Francis', *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 29.1 (1998), 47-55.

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city of God.[153] As well as virtues personified as builders or supporters of an edifice, to acquire virtue itself is itself conceived of as 'to build'. Again Tommaso da Celano's St Francis is the 'builder' of virtue within his own self and within others, which he constructs through the practice of difficult labours: 'ut sic in solido verae humilitatis fundari mererentur, ut felici dispositione in eis consurgeret omnium virtutum fabrica spiritalis' (Book 1, caput XV.38). From the building blocks of individual actions, the virtuous souls themselves come to build up the edifice of God: 'Revera super constantiae fundamentum charitatis nobilis structura surrexit, in qua vivi lapides, ex omnibus mundi partibus coacervati, aedificati sunt in habitaculum Spiritus Sancti' (Book 1, caput XV.38). The virtuous Christian souls who form the parts of a building are powerfully reminiscent of the Pauline image of the faithful who make up the 'body of Christ' in the form of the Church.

The Franciscan composer of *laude*, Iacopone da Todi, exploring the nature of the vicious rather than the virtuous soul, conceives it as a 'casa fatta da demoni'.[154] In considering the way the ethical make-up of the subject affects the literal structural form of the soul, Iacopone makes a particularly striking point. The vicious soul, rather than being destined for a hell external to itself, in Iacopone's conception already resembles hell itself: 'L'anema ch'è vizïosa / a l'onferno è arsemigliata'.[155] This begs the question that if the vicious soul takes on the form of hell, then the virtuous soul, as its opposite, must logically take on the form of heaven. Iacopone's use of poetic simile here brings us back to the more abstract notion that the soul quite literally becomes what it thinks and does. The forms of behaviour and habit which it adopts have a direct influence on its structural existence; by its ethical choices it becomes either a house made of demons or a temple of God.

Iacopone is particularly relevant in the use of allegory and image to convey the abstract. He is notable for the boldness with which he states foundational points of thought and doctrine and his transformation of them into real, dramatised events. For instance, in his poem 'L'omo fo creato vertüoso' (lauda 3), Iacopone says that man was created in a state of virtue, from which he falls by the following of misdirected loves. Adam's sin is described as having 'deguasto l'ordene de l'Amore' (l.9) and because of this the virtues departed from the human soul. This literally figured abandonment is intended to manifest a conceptual reality; that the misdirecting of love, the turning of human desire away from God, is an abandonment of virtue, that is, love correctly directed to God as we saw in Chapter One. From this beginning, Iacopone then shifts to present a scene also used by the

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153 Katzenellenbogen, pp. 5 and 43.
154 On Iacopone da Todi see George T. Peck, *The Fool of God: Jacopone da Todi* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980); Rosanna Bettarini, 'Jacopone da Todi e le laude', in *Antologia della poesia italiana: Duecento*, ed. by Cesare Segre e Carlo Ossola (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), pp. 278-83.
155 Iacopone da Todi, *Laude*, ed. by Franco Mancini (Roma and Bari: Editori Laterza, 2006). Lauda 59, lines 1-2, p. 172. All future reference to Iacopone's poems will be made to this edition and included in the text.

writer of the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, a dialogue between the personified figures of different virtues who, by putting forward their points of view, serve to set out the doctrinally conceived impasse which humanity was led to by Adam's sin, raising the question of how such a sin can be overcome. Iacopone, by personifying the virtues, is able to make his point not only through the specific words which each say but by the (figurative) point of view from which they say them. Thus, the greater doctrinal dispute between the Justice of God and the Mercy of God is 'put into the mouths' of these figures. From this, the stages of the argument which lead up to the necessity of the Incarnation can be quite literally 'listened in upon'. Finally at the scene of the Annunciation, which Iacopone recounts, the initial point of his poem, that man was created virtuous, is reasserted in relation to the Virgin. She is 'gratia plena, en *vertute*' (l.145); despite the fallen state of humankind she remains 'creata vertüosa'. And again the connection of creation and virtue is reasserted when Mary asks how she, a virgin, can conceive a child, Gabriel tells her 'la vertù de Deo farà umbratura' (l.156). In this Iacopone is directly citing the Bible (Luke 1.35). In this poem, which bases itself around narrative events which are most likely already familiar to his readers, Iacopone is able to express most profound concepts which surround virtue. Iacopone is explicitly not a philosopher and is instead a Franciscan at his most anti-intellectual. Therefore what he is expressing in his poetry is not doctrinal argument, not an abstract debate on the nature of an idea which may or may not be this way; instead he is building from the human experience described in the Bible and his own real emotional experiences of his personal conversion to God to inform his writings.

While unafraid of profound concepts, Iacopone is frequently formulaic in his treatment of virtue, often employing didactic lists of virtues versus vices and their respective effects. However, this is not to say that, in their direct simplicity, they do not make some more interesting comment on the nature of the moral category under discussion and by their figuration enrich their conceptual meaning. Indeed, the figural language which Iacopone employs we find recurring in Dante's work itself and in both writers' work, the figures used make manifest (and therefore more comprehensible) the nature and purpose of virtue itself. For example, in the poem 'Amore contraffatto' (lauda 46), Iacopone is advocating the need for the virtues to correctly direct love as love without virtue to guide it can never attain salvation: 'Amore contrafatto spogliato de vertute, / non pò far le salute là 've lo vero amore' (ll.1-2). He then lists the effects of seven individual virtues, using metaphors to reveal the underlying nature of each virtue. For example:

> Amor se fa lascivo senza la temperanza,

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Nave senza nocclero rompe en tempestanza,

Cavallo senza freno curr'en pricipitanza;

Sì fa la falsa amanza senza vertute, annare. (ll.3-6)

While Charity 'è vita, c'onne atro amor è morto [...] non pò gustar tuo frutto chi fugg'el tuo guidare' (ll.27-30). Control, guidance, truth, life, love, all the aspects which make up the complex medieval concept of virtue are here figured in metaphorical language which perhaps itself goes into the formation of those concepts: for how can we really understand the intangible without the tangible? The invisible without the sensual? The intellectual without the experienced?

The final form in which virtue is represented to be considered here is perhaps the most developed and it finds its roots in the Bible. This is virtue figured as images of natural fertility, in particular, flowering and fruiting trees. From the Garden of Eden, trees have alluded to a choice between good and evil, right and wrong. In Galatians, specific virtues are identified as 'fructus spiritus' (Gal.5:22). Christ himself is the beautiful 'flower of the root of Jesse' (Isa. 11:1). Proverbs and Psalms evoke repeatedly the spiritual fertility of the virtuous actions of the faithful and the joy that comes from the tree of life.[156] In addition there is the exegetical tradition of identifying the Cross of Christ's crucifixion with the tree of life; this 'tree' gives eternal life to those who have faith in it. To follow Christ in actions of virtue is to be spiritually *fertile*.

Tommaso da Celano's Francis, following Christ, is also figured as a source of spiritual fertility. He brings new life to the spiritual desert of his age:

sicque factum est ut in brevi totius provinciae facies sit immutata et laetiori vultu appareret, ubique deposita pristina foeditate. Fugata est prior ariditas et seges in squalenti campo cito surrexit; coepit etiam inculta vinea germinare germen odoris Domini, et productis ex se floribus suavitatis, fructus honoris et honestatis pariter parturivit. Resonabat ubique gratiarum actio et vox laudis, ita ut multi, saecularibus curis abiectis, in vita et doctrina beatissimi patris Francisci, suimet reciperent notitiam et ad Creatoris amorem et reverentiam aspirarent. (Book 1, chap. XV.37)

Francis is the 'farmer' of such fertility amongst the populace; 'agrum cordis ipsorum virtutum floribus exornabat' (Book 1, chap. XV.37). In another Franciscan text, Iacopone

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[156] For example see Psalm 1; Proverbs 11.

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da Todi describes the incarnate body of Christ as perfect ground, fertile for virtue to grow: 'O terra senza tribulo né spina, / germenata de onne bono frutto, / de vertute e de grazie sì t'è plena' (ll.129-31). Christ's body is fecund with potential virtue.

In a much more extended allegory which relates virtue with images of natural growth, Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae* uses a combination of narrative, meditation and allegory to present the story of Christ in such a way that the reader can closely identify with and conform to Christ's Passion:

> Porro huiusmodi affectum et sensum is duntaxat apud se vivaciter experiri meretur [...] laborem et dolorem amoremque crucifixi Iesu tanta memoriae vivacitate, tanto intellectus acumine, tanta voluntatis caritate considerat, quod veraciter illud sponsae proferre potest eloquium: Fasciculus myrrhae dilectus meus mihi, inter ubera mea commorabitur. (Prologue, 1)[157]

In order to appeal simultaneously to intellect, memory and will, Bonaventure moulds his narrative into an allegorical tree which the reader can intellectually and spiritually climb at the same time as actively creating it in their imagination. It is this imagination in the literal sense of forming mental images that we can recognise as a strong Franciscan current along with the desire to communicate since 'imaginatio iuvat intelligentiam' (Prologue, 2).

On this allegorical tree, each fruit is an event in Christ's life which demonstrates a particular virtue. At the same time, Bonaventure emphasises that the unified source of these virtues is Christ himself; he is the single fruit which nourishes the others: 'Verum licet hic fructus unus sit et indivisus, quia tamen secundum eius multiplices status, dignitates, virtutes et opera multiformibus consolationibus devotas animas cibat' (Prologue, 4). As we saw in Chapter One, at the centre of value-holding action must be a particular relationship with Christ. Bonaventure figures this relationship in terms of natural fertility. While the narrative event gives each 'fruit' concrete reality, being a practical exemplum of behaviour from Christ's life, in their allegorical guise the fruits are figured as sensually tempting:

> [F]*olium* eius contra omne genus morbi medicamentum efficacissimum, tam preservans, quem reparans, pro eo quod *verbum crucis virtus Dei est in salutem onmi credenti. Flos* autem sit omnis coloris formositate decorus omnisque odoris

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[157] Bonaventure, *Decem Opuscula: Opusculum III, Lignum Vitae* ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae (Claras Aquas: College of St Bonaventure College Press, 1926).

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suavitate resperus, qui desiderantium anxia corda et reocillet et attrahat. *Fructus* tandem sit duodenus, *habens in se omne delectamentum et omnis saporis suavitatem*, qui sic domesticis Dei ad gustandum proponitur, ut semper eo satientur edentes, et tamen numquam fastidiant. (Prologue, 4; italics in original)

The allegory reveals the spiritual benefits of meditating on the events of the life of Christ, which those events themselves may not so clearly have revealed, in a language which appeals to the most basic ways in which humans take in information: through the senses. As well as structuring Bonaventure's narrative, the allegory develops within it, dictating the reader's reaction to the recounted events, not only as if they were participating in the events but as if they were participating in the allegory that represents those events. Thus, when in the narrative Christ is pierced with the lance the reader is encouraged to apply his or her mouth to Christ's wound, 'ibi os appone, *ut haurias aquas de fontibus Salvatoris*. Hic enim est *fons egrediens de media paradisi*, qui, in *quatuor divisus capita* et in corda devota diffusus, fecundat et irrigat universam terram' (Fructus VIII, 30; italics in original). Including the biblical quotation, Bonaventure appeals to multiple allegorical readings of the event.

While the virtues are the allegorical fruits of the *Lignum Vitae*, the figure of Christ himself is allegorised as that very tree. He is its fruit, its flowers, its source. Christ 'fructus est qui de virginali utero traxit originem' (Prologue, 3); he is the 'flos ille pulcherrimus de radice Iesse, qui in incarnatione floruit, in passione defloruit, sic in resurrectione refloruit, ut omnium esset decor' (Fructus IX, 35). Finally, as we saw above, he is the fountain of spiritual fertility who waters the whole world. The identification of Virtue and Christ is by now conceptually familiar but the interaction of images which Bonaventure presents us with explores this interaction in a much more tangible way than heretofore. By 'eating' of the 'fruit' of virtue one is partaking in Christ himself. By studying the life of Christ, one is 'feeding' oneself with the 'fruits' of virtue, quite literally nourishing the spirit. By climbing the tree of virtue, 'eating' the fruits on the way, one is ascending towards union with Christ.

6. Case Study: Giotto's Arena Chapel Frescoes, a Combination of Representations

In order to demonstrate the ways in which different modes of representing can come together to interact and have a particular effect and message to their audience, I will here briefly consider as a case study Giotto's fresco cycle of the Arena Chapel in Padua

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(completed 1305).[158] Works of art develop their own internal systems of meaning. A particular character or image or word can take their significance from the context surrounding them; the part takes its value from its relation to the whole. When we enter the enclosed space of the Arena Chapel it is precisely this which we must bear in mind. Giotto's fresco cycle brings together different modes of representations of virtue; it is a combination of allegory, meditation and story telling in which each facet takes its meaning from interaction with the other.

Giotto's Paduan cycle incorporates different elements: scenes from the life of the Virgin and her parents, scenes from the life of Christ, an image of the Last Judgement, and individual allegories of a selection of virtues and vices. The narrative scenes obviously have a significance in themselves and can be read as simply recounting a well known story; the Last Judgement contains very familiar elements and in solitude has its own cohesive meaning; and, as we have seen, it is not unusual to see personifications of virtues and vices. However, the true power of the cycle comes from the interrelation of elements. With this in mind, let us consider the Chapel decoration's representation of virtue.

The allegorical images of the virtues and vices are placed on the lowest level of the north and south sides of the chapel, immediately below the narrative scenes from the life of Christ. They therefore stand on the same level as the spectator, surrounding him or her, 'as if readying to do battle in a new arena'.[159] Andrew Ladis has convincingly argued that these symbolic figures become a medium through which the narrative images above them are to be interpreted:

> Giotto's Virtues and Vices [...] are an integral part of Giotto's scheme, because they bring to mind, define and themselves are characterized by figures who appear in the colour-filled, time-bound realm of the narrative. [...] One perforce compares the Virtues and Vices to figures in the narrative [...] but in the comparison one understands that they not only constitute difference classes of being but also represent different levels of reality and meaning.[160]

Because perception of the narrative is filtered through the allegorical figures of moral concepts, the viewer is brought to engage with the stories presented by carrying out a form of exegesis. The literal story is there to be visually read; the allegorical interpretation

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[158] On Dante and Giotto see Caron Cioffi, 'Giotto', in *The Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. by. Richard Lansing (New York and London: Garland, 2000), p. 447.

[159] Andrew Ladis, *Giotto's O: Narrative, Figuration and Pictorial Ingenuity in the Arena Chapel* (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), p. 18.

[160] Ladis, p. 17.

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is implicit in the narrative cycles in which images are paralleled to be read typologically; the depiction of the Last Judgement maintains the anagogical elements always present, making the viewer form the connection between the activities in the narrative and their eschatological outcome; and finally the Virtue and Vice figures constantly encourage the viewer to reflect on the moral messages of the narrative. These figures lead 'one to see the moral content of the narrative which then may be said to give concrete illustrations of certain ethical questions'.[161]

I have already suggested that the viewer stands in the centre of the Chapel surrounded by the Virtues and Vices who stand in antithesis to each other, each facing its opposite. To follow the narrative the viewer must physically traverse the Chapel, following the stories step by step both horizontally and vertically. With the Virtues on one side and the Vices on the other, the viewer is physically led on a 'mental journey' through 'salvation history' which leads them finally to the outcome of that history in the Last Judgement.[162] The lessons are very clear: to follow the path of the Vices is to arrive at the left-hand side of Christ and descend into Hell: to follow the path of Virtue enables one to sit at Christ's right hand and join the ranks of the elect. The viewer becomes actively engaged into the journey of the Chapel which is a journey of moral reflection, aided by the concrete stories recounted on the walls. The programme of images causes the past, present and future to collapse around the focal point of the viewer, forcing him to see himself within salvation history and likewise to *actively place himself* within it.

The internal parallels between the narrative images, and the parallels between the allegorical and narrative figures, are too numerous for full consideration here and such study has been carried out much more expertly elsewhere.[163] But it is worth taking one example to demonstrate the internal harmony and meaning of the Chapel frescoes to exemplify a work of art which, like the *Commedia*, 'introduces a unique internal typology that endows the narrative with a clear moral dimension legible through the specific action of specific figures in specific situations'.[164] It has been convincingly argued by Derbes and Sardona that the Arena Chapel was commissioned by Enrico Scrovegni in an attempt to undo the sin of usury which his father and probably he himself had committed.[165] The Chapel's original dedication to the Madonna della Carità perhaps bears witness to this.

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[161] Ladis, p. 28.

[162] Giuseppe Basile, *Giotto: The Arena Chapel Frescoes* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 14.

[163] For the parallels between the narrative scenes see Michel Alpatoff 'The Parallelism of Giotto's Paduan Frescoes', *Art Bulletin* 29:3 (1947), 149-54; on the parallels between the narrative and allegorical figures see Ladis.

[164] Ladis, p. 50.

[165] See Anne Derbes and Michael Sardona, 'Barren Metal and the Fruitful Womb: The Programme of Giotto's Arena Chapel in Padua', *Art Bulletin* 80:2 (1998), 274-91.

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Within the Chapel's fresco programme, charity features prominently both in narrative, figurative and allegorical ways. In one sense, charity is the driving message of the whole narrative programme. The two pivotal events, Mary's acceptance to be the mother of God which enabled Christ to become incarnate, and Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, were recognisable enactments of ultimate Charity, exempla of charitable acts. We also see a pictorial depiction of the more abstract nature of charity, what charity actually is, in the allegorical representation. The figure of 'karitas' in one hand extends her heart up towards the figure of Christ who eagerly receives it, and in the other extends a basket of fruit and flowers, laden with religious symbols, down to her neighbours. In addition, to reinforce the message of the chapel as a whole, she disparagingly tramples upon sacks of coin. Charity as love of God and neighbour is conceptually manifested in pictorial form, while acts of charity, both quotidian and epic, are played out in the narrative scenes. By pairing a virtue with a particular figure in the narrative the artist is making a specific moral comment and guiding the viewer as to what they should be looking for. Thus, when we come to look at the Last Judgement we see the final results of charity. Those who recognised the charity offered to them in Mary's acceptance and Christ's sacrifice are led towards heaven, including the usurious Enrico Scrovegni who *offers up* his chapel to the Madonna della Carità. She stands, as she does in almost all depictions of her in the Chapel, clothed in symbolic red, *hand outstretched* to receive Scrovegni's offering. Such parallel gestures as these, which re-enact in the narrative what has been figured in the allegory, are one of the main tokens of meaning within the fresco cycle's hermeneutic programme.

Meaning in the Arena Chapel is formed through parallel, antithesis, comparison, reflection. The viewer is constantly pushed to shift between forms of interpretation, employing memory, intellect, judgement, imagination and indeed self-analysis to bring out meaning. By representing virtue both allegorically and as an active force within the narrative, Giotto brings an abstract concept to life while at the same time endowing a life's events with moral meaning. The Arena Chapel is fundamentally about the opposition of good and evil in salvation history. The virtues and vices stand facing their moral nemesis across the architectural space; in the narratives, virtue combats vice to bring about the salvation of mankind.

7. Case Study: *Stilnovo*

The poetry of the *Stilnovo* emerges from a rarefied and highly intellectual construction of the idea of human love and gives a poetic treatment of a concept of virtue which would

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find an easy home within scholastic thought.[166] But this poetry makes a link between the devotional texts considered thus far and the poetry of Dante's *Commedia* to which we will soon turn. It is the immediate product of Dante's own circle and contains his own early poetic production. The way virtue is considered and represented in these texts is a presentation of Dante's own early poetic thoughts on the subject and ideas about how it could be represented. The aspect which the *Stilnovo* importantly adds to the question of virtue is that its attainment is made dependent on the experience of romantic love and that it is this love which connects man ultimately to God, that is, which fulfils his virtue. Furthermore, the *Stilnovo* poetry is a testament to the compulsion to write about this transforming experience, a compulsion which is certainly at home in reading the *Commedia*. The poems are accounts of or inspired by personal meditative and transformative experiences, in which, by devotion to a beloved object, the lover comes to understand how she might lead him to God. Virtue comes to be represented through abstract consideration of the nature of virtue, personal storytelling, through meditative emotional engagement and through active allegories of virtue.

The naturalness of the union between love and virtue is established as a principle of the *stilnovo* in the manifesto canzone 'Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore' by Guido Guinizzelli (1235-1276).[167] Here an abstract consideration of the nature of love and virtue is couched in nature-based metaphors, demonstrating the rightness of the combination of the virtuous heart and the sensation of love:

> Al cor gentil rimpaira sempre amore
> com'a la selva ausgello, l·lla verdura;
> né fe' amor anti che gentile core,
> né gentil core anti ch'amor, Natura. (ll.1-4)

For love and the noble heart to be together is figured as part of the natural order of things. While the metaphor of the 'ausgello' compares love to an external object which enters into the heart, Guinizzelli's later metaphors reveal it to be closer to an internal potential:

> Foco d'amore in gentil cor s'aprende

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[166] For a recent overview and bibliography on the poetry of the *Stilnovo* see: Luciano Rossi, 'Stilnovo', in *Antologia della poesia italiana: Duecento*, ed. by Cesare Segre e Carlo Ossola (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), pp. 370-78; On Dante and the *Stilnovo* see: Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Text, Textuality and Truth in the 'Comedy'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984) and Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 23-101.

[167] On Guinizzelli see: Gianfranco Contini (ed.), *Poeti del duecento*, 2 vols (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960). Dante and Guinizzelli see: Rinaldina Russell, 'Guinizzelli', in *The Dante Encyclopedia*, pp. 465-66. Citations of 'Al cor gentil' come from *Antologia della poesia italiana: Duecento* ed. by Cesare Segre and Carlo Ossola, pp. 385-88.

come vertute in petra prezïosa,

che da la stella valor no i discende

anti che 'l sol la facia gentil cosa. (ll.11-14)

Love is a potential, indeed a *vertute* of the soul waiting to be activated by the *stella*-beloved, only after, however, being purified by the sun. Like virtue, love appears as both the potential for perfection and the perfection itself. The concept of love as a potential of the soul is taken up by Dante himself in 'Amor e 'l cor gentil son una cosa' which openly echoes Guinizzelli's earlier poem, but focuses on the love-virtue interaction personified by man's interaction with woman. Love that lies dormant in the noble heart of the man is awaiting activation by the sight of a worthy beloved: 'Bieltate appare in saggia donna pui, / che piace a li occhi sì, che dentro al core / nasce un disio de la cosa piacente' (*VN*, 20, sonnet, ll.9-11). Both these poems employ the Aristotelian concepts of potential and act, but place them in tangible expressions. Love is the process by which the natural potential for perfection of a soul, virtue, is brought to that perfection; it is the act by which man is perfected. Love and virtue are gifts from God and through these man can return to him. Branca writes that 'L'amore è dunque il più alto dei doni largiti da Dio all'uomo, sintesi armonica di tutte le virtute e di tutte le capacità umane: e Dio lo pone come un bene in potenza in ogni anima virtuosa che sia degna di questo dono altissimo e sappia usarne più nobilmente, ciò in ogni cor gentile'.[168] The coming together of love and virtue is an interaction and the poetry of the *stilnovo* figures this ontological and ethical interaction through the relationship of male and female.

Dante's canzone 'Doglia mi reca', while couching in its poetics a profound philosophical account of the nature of virtue, establishes an idea of the role of women in human love. Dante is here constructing a dialogue addressed to women and ostensibly about female beauty, to also make a comment on male virtue and the lack thereof. In addressing and indeed criticising women for the bestowal of their beauty on unworthy men, Dante is bringing his female and male audience directly into the situations he is considering, making them self-conscious, active participants; he is narrating their reality and holding it up as a mirror in which his audience can see the moral and metaphysical significances which underlie their human relationships.

la beltà ch'Amore in voi consente,

a vertù solamente

formata fu dal suo decreto antico,

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[168] *I rimatori del Dolce Stil Novo*, ed. by Vittorio Branca (Milan: Società editrice Dante Alighieri, 1965), p. 6.

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contra 'l qual voi fallate.

> Io dico a voi che siete innamorate
> che, se vertute a noi
> fu data, e beltà a voi,
> e a costui di due potere un fare,
> voi non dovreste amare,
> ma coprir quanto di biltà v'è data,
> poi che non c'è vertù, ch'era suo segno.   (ll.7-17)[169]

Dante here also introduces the dynamic of beauty into the love-virtue interaction. Man, having distanced himself from virtue (love ultimately directed to God) is no longer to be granted the sight of female beauty as beauty joined to the un-virtuous man can only breed carnal desire, not love. The man without virtue has in fact forfeited his humanity and descended to the level of the beast as Dante suggests in the simile, 'Omo da sé vertù fatto ha lontana; / omo no, mala bestia ch'om simiglia' (ll.22-23). The man without virtue cannot be improved by female beauty because he lacks the potential to move towards the ultimate good to which the union of beauty and virtue through love would lead him. The virtuous man, instead, would desire the beautiful woman primarily as she was demonstrative of a higher spiritual reality, or rather as a manifestation of the blessing of God on earth.

What then is the role of physical beauty in the process of ethical and ontological transformation? As we have considered earlier, the role of the physical image is to draw the mind of the viewer towards the deeper reality which lies beneath it. The *stilnovisti* transpose this idea of metaphysical significance into the realm of romantic experience and by doing so validate that experience as spiritually transformative. In the case of a beautiful image, this image actively engages the desire of the viewer to want to see more and is thus a more effective and active revelation. Eco, citing William of Auvergne, writes that 'sensuous beauty is that which pleases him who sees it [...] interior beauty is that which gives pleasure to the soul which grasps it "and entices the soul to love it"'.[170] Sensual beauty has the role of drawing the desires towards the spiritual beauty beneath. But beauty itself is revealing of an ethical harmony and perfection underlying it; beauty is an

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[169] Dante, *Rime*, ed. by Gianfranco Contini (Turin: Einaudi, 1995).
[170] Eco, *Art and Beauty*, p. 22.

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expression of morality and morality is an expression of beauty.[171] Beauty like virtue is an expression of ontological perfection.[172]

Bearing this in mind, the beauty of a beloved lady, who has activated the virtuous love of a man, then serves to draw him towards a greater reality beyond the physical through his desire for her. By the revelation of her beauty she actualises the potential of the noble heart which, however noble it might be, without feeling love would remain static and unfulfilled. Branca points out that 'senza di lei la perfezione che sviluppa amore nelle anime resta potenziale ed oscura, senza di lei il dono di Dio è vano'.[173] Again it is through interaction that virtue is brought about; in this case beauty, the presence of the attractive physical image, is what impels virtue's development. This construction makes romantic attachment integral to the development of virtue in the thinking of the *stilnovisti*.

This presentation of the beloved woman as the manifestation of heaven for the lover on earth and the one through whom he can receive salvation is the resounding note of both Guinizzelli's 'Al cor gentil' and Dante's 'Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore', the canzone which in Dante's own *Purgatorio* is identified as the exemplary work of the *Stilnovo*. Both poems include a supernatural dialogue either between the poet and God, or the angels and God, and both posit the beloved woman as a heavenly presence on earth. Dante's treatment, however, goes beyond that of Guinizzelli. While Guinizzelli excuses his apparently blasphemous adoration of his lady by claiming she '[t]enne d'angel *sembianza* / che fosse del Tuo regno' (ll.58-59), Dante instead has his God say that his lady is miraculous:

> 'Diletti miei, or sofferite in pace
> che vostra spene sia quanto mi piace
> là 'v'è alcun che perder lei s'attende,
> e che dirà nello inferno: O mal nati,
> io vidi la speranza de' beati'.   (*VN* 19, canzone, ll.24-28)

The beauty which the lady possesses can in fact be read as a manifestation of the ontological and moral perfection of heaven, as her beauty demonstrates her as the perfect manifestation of God's creative virtue; a physical image which fully reveals God and an image which can return man to God through his desire for it. By fictionalising this heavenly dialogue Dante is not only exploring the metaphysical nuances which underlie

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[171] Eco, *Art and Beauty*, p. 5.
[172] Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 203.
[173] Branca, p. 6.

his romantic poetic encounter but also validating that encounter. His reference here to the overwhelming blessing of the vision of the lady which would show hope even to those in Hell is a prefiguration of the descent which his Beatrice will make in *Inferno* II.

Love, virtue and the lady are established as the steps by which man returns to God. These spiritual steps are figured in the movements of these three figures personified in Dante's 'Doglia mi reca'.

> Vertute, al suo fattor sempre sottana,
> lui obedisce e a lui acquista onore,
> donne, tanto che Amore
> la segna d'eccellente sua famiglia
> ne la beata corte:
> lietamente esce da le belle porte,
> a la sua donna torna;
> lieta va e soggiorna,
> lietamente ovra suo gran vassallaggio;
> per lo corto vïaggio
> conserva, adorna, accresce ciò che trova;
> Morte repugna sì che lei non cura.
> O cara ancella e pura,
> colt'hai nel ciel misura;
> tu sol fai segnore, e quest'è prova
> che tu se' possession che sempre giova. (ll.27-42)

Virtue is the handmaiden of her Creator and is sent out into the world from her heavenly home to join with her lady. This allegorised journey holds within it the essential nature of virtue; it is a divine gift which comes from and ultimately returns to God; it is an eternal quality which has heaven as its 'measure' and aim and by its eternity is always a bringer of joy to its possessor. What is striking in Dante's description is the joy which underpins the whole dynamic of virtue as established by the repetition of 'lieta' and 'lietamente' three times at the opening of lines and the final verb of the citation 'giova'. By personifying and therefore endowing with emotion the quality of virtue, the poet captures the essence of the dynamic which makes virtue effective; it is what brings the joyful lover to the fulfilment of his lady, what brings the joyful creature to the joyful Creator.

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While the poetry of the *Stilnovo* claims itself as the product of personal experience, it is also characterised by a careful objectification of that subjective experience so that, as Branca writes, 'l'ineffabile diventa intelleggibile'.[174] The poets of the *Stilnovo* including Guinizzelli, Cavalcanti and Dante himself, are eager to explore, demonstrate and indeed construct the intricacies of their sentimental experience in order to produce a specific message about self-development and moral change; that, although seemingly contradictory, romantic love can be virtuous and therefore the most powerful vehicle by which man returns to God. Their originality of style emerges from their claimed originality of sentimental and ethical experience.[175] At least for Guinizzelli and Dante, love is no longer the agonising, formulaic undertaking of the courtly love poets but is instead spiritually and poetically transformative; indeed it is a quasi-religious experience in which the man's human virtue, that is potential to be directed towards God, is activated by the desire for a woman who is in herself not a distraction from God but rather a way towards him. The movement towards God through virtue love and beauty is characterised by joy. Virtue is represented as presented (or denied) in every human romantic encounter, bringing it directly into the forum of human experience. This rarefied treatment of love and virtue is possible because of the context of writers and readers who make up the *Stilnovo*; that is, they are one and the same. And yet, in the representative techniques which make the experience and result of love tangible – direct address, personification, personal testimony – there is a commitment to communication, clarification and, most importantly, vivification of the love-virtue dynamic.

8. Conclusion

Representations of virtue, as we have seen, are concerned with the tangibility and comprehensibility of the idea. The consideration of representations acknowledges that the meaning of a text comes not only from what it says but from how it says it and why it might say it that way. The transformation of abstracted Aristotelian virtue into the realm of an active process for self-improvement for his followers was part of Giordano da Pisa's Dominican preaching principles. Virtue was represented as a process of developing intellectual control in which the subject became master of him or herself by training in habits of thought and these lessons were vital to Giordano's listening audience's own spiritual welfare. In contrast, the works produced within the Franciscan environment, closely identifying virtue with the imitation of Christ, represented virtue in such a way that the subject was led to desire, empathise and to some extent actively *become* the

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[174] Branca, p. 4.
[175] Barolini, *Dante's Poets*, p. 42.

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virtuous events to which they bore witness. Through meditation, in which the subject becomes the object of thought, the emotions and will are engaged in such a way as to necessitate their participation. Virtue here is *shown* rather than taught. These texts work on the devoted, literate believer who seeks to further progress towards his or her God. Franciscan stories provided clear and concrete examples of virtue within a context which was realistic and recognisable to their more wide-reaching audience, and in this way were able to impress on that audience their own responsibility and autonomy of action to act in the here and now. The representation of virtue allegorically is both inspired by an abstract conceptual understanding of virtue while at the same time forming the language in which those concepts are expressed. There is a close interaction of concept and image in which the allegorical images chosen come themselves to conceptualise and form our idea of the abstract. At some point we become unable to conceive of the abstract without the allegorical.

The two final case studies pave the way for the combination of genres and representations which make up the *Commedia*'s own presentation of virtue. They place the audience at the centre of the artistic or literary experience and this experience itself is constructed in order to be one of moral transformation. The cohesive world of the Arena chapel, in which all elements must be read in relation to each other, is a useful model to prepare us for a way of reading the vast construct which is the *Commedia*. The poetry of the *stilnovo* validates the romantic experience in relation to virtue and gives voice to Dante's own early connection of personal transformation in virtue to a personal vision of God. With this in mind we can now turn to the *Commedia* itself.

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Transitions: From the Traditions to Dante

From my analysis of the traditions of conceiving and representing virtue which contextualise Dante's work, I have identified a series of foundational aspects, the consideration of which will enable me to engage most fully with the significance of virtue in the *Commedia*. These aspects involve a synthesising of the issues relative to both conception and representation in order to demonstrate the essential interconnectedness of the two approaches within Dante's creative work. The focal idea is that virtue is a principle of *interaction*. It is the principle through which the divine and human interact when this interaction is understood as *ontological*: through virtue God creates, while virtue is also the potential for perfection within individualised human nature. The choice to fulfil his nature is man's response to the offer of creation and is an enactment of the ontological movement towards the divine. This movement is figured most tangibly in the tradition of *imitatio Christi*, in which the individual imitating Christ's virtues is developing in likeness to the divine. An understanding of virtue is dependent on an understanding of human nature, just as it is dependent on an understanding of the ontological interaction at the basis of human existence.

Virtue is also a principle of *ethical* interaction. It is that which determines man's active and positive interrelation between himself, God and the created world. How this interaction ought to take place was one of the principal concerns of texts both conceiving and representing virtue, being virtue's more practical aspect. This positive ethical interaction was dependent very much on a focusing of desire and attention upon the proper object of man's existence, God. This focused desire then ordered man's interactions within the created world. Virtue, being the form in which the mind and will are focused and compelled towards God, takes on a central role in man's ethical movement towards God and his distancing from the distracting desires and contingent changeability of the world. To enable man to see, judge and act correctly towards objects of desire is the principal role of ethical virtue. Texts in which virtue was represented were also concerned with the modes of interaction by which virtue could be learned and demonstrated. Virtue is learned through intellectual and emotional interactions which are frequently focused through interaction with, or exemplified by, another individual. Often this is Christ, the ultimate exemplum. Loving God, and the way that love could and ought to be expressed, appeared as part of the purpose of representative texts. They demonstrated how the relationship of God and man could be activated and formalised. Exemplary individuals reveal more

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clearly their relationship to God and thus reveal the divine hand working behind human action. Virtue in representational texts appeared as a principle of interaction, which those texts were concerned both to consider conceptually and represent as a practical ethical guide.

Essential to this ethical guidance is the establishment of the individual person as the locus of virtue. Virtue is a character-based ethics being concerned with how a person's character is both expressed and formed by the actions he or she personally undertakes and the 'stato d'anima' in which he or she undertakes them. Because the development of virtue is concerned with the moral and ontological transformation of the individual, his or her personal experiences come to play a central role as that through which, by a combination of action and self-reflection, the individual comes to develop. This factor contributes to the tradition of presenting the development of virtue through the experiences of an individual character. This practical, representational aspect is also significant to the metaphysical currents which underpin notions of virtue. From an ontological point of view, divine virtue creates man as a unique individual with his own capacities as well as his own responsibility to work towards his salvation through self-fulfilment. Underlying this is the necessity for the individual's personal interaction with their Creator. The individual and his experiences are thus both a significant metaphysical expression and a tangible ethical model in virtue-based texts.

There is a conceptual linking point for all of the above issues, which will underpin my subsequent analysis, and which really demonstrates the importance of reading virtue as a union of idea and expression, of ontology and ethics. Because virtue exists at the nexus of human and divine nature, of being and doing, of form and content, its most profound exemplum in Christian thought is Christ who is himself both definition and representation; Christ who both *is* virtue and *demonstrates* virtue. Christ stands as a communicative bridge at the meeting point of the inexpressible idea of God and the necessary expression of humanity, bringing about the positive relationship of one with the other. Placing Christ at the centre of an understanding of virtue validates, indeed necessitates, an 'incarnational' reading of the *Commedia*. I mean here not simply a focus upon the *Commedia's* treatment of the Incarnation or even of the figure of Christ, but rather an analysis of the mechanics of incarnating the idea of virtue, how the word becomes flesh. Christ is incarnated virtue; the *Commedia* is likewise an incarnation of virtue both human and divine: human in its events, divine in its nature as a manifestation of creation and creativity.

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My analysis of virtue in the *Commedia* will build from the ideas on virtue which have been revealed in these first two chapters. I will argue that the poem presents a much more complex understanding and usage of virtue than has thus far been explored in scholarship. It is a usage which finds significant echoes in the conceptual and representational texts considered so far; without the consideration of these text such echoes would not have become fully evident. The *Commedia* presents virtue's ontological and ethical aspects as essentially connected, suggesting that the actions of human life are what enable man to enter into the ontological dialogue which takes him towards his God. Virtue is not simply a structuring principle of the terraces of Purgatory or the heavenly spheres, but is fundamental to the poem's treatment of human existence, salvation and creation. Dante uses virtue to refer to the power of all things, including man, and to refer to the creative power of God. By doing so he places human nature within an order of existence; human action can then be shown to participate in that order. Man is not isolated or autonomous but is constantly interacting with God and the world around him. These interactions are not only considered abstractly but are manifested and demonstrated in the interactions which make up the *Commedia*'s narrative drama. I suggested in my introduction that the English word *virtue*, and our contemporary understanding of its meaning, narrowed our expectations of how Dante actually uses the term. So, in my analysis of the *Commedia*, I will maintain the Italian *virtù* in order to highlight the freshness and maintain the complexity of the concept I have established; to acknowledge that Dante's use of *virtù* is distinct and that the multiplicity of interconnected contexts in which he employs the term is highly original. To help further in the analysis of Dante's complex construction of the nature, role and results of *virtù*, I will develop the term 'virtù-dynamic' in order to highlight Dante's idea of *virtù* as one which is active and interactive, a living principle and a principle of living. What I have termed the *virtù*-dynamic in the *Commedia* is that through which, I suggest, Dante fundamentally connects ethics and ontology; human behaviour is and ought to be an expression of man's ontological condition. This ontological condition is one of being created through *virtù*. The created condition of the human individual is linked, through the *virtù*-dynamic, to the createdness of the whole universe, so that the human must be read within that universal order. Man's positive ethical fulfilment becomes an expression of his position within that order. Through the *virtù*-dynamic, human action and desire is ordered in relation to man's desire for a return to the source of that existential order, God. Through the development of his own *virtù*, which has God as the ultimate goal of actions and desires, he comes to value and use the world correctly. However, because his action and existence are connected by Dante through the *virtù*-dynamic to the being of God himself, human action and desire are interactive. The

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virtù-dynamic suggests that God reaches down to man as much as man reaches up to God; this interaction takes place through creation and revelation.

Purgatorio XXV

As we will come to see, if we focus upon actual uses of the term *virtù* in the poem, the *Commedia* itself necessitates a reading which connects the ontological and the ethical, which sees human creation and action as constantly related to its Creator. This becomes apparent in turning to one of the many episodes in the poem in which the term *virtù* appears frequently: *Purgatorio* XXV.[176] In beginning with a brief case study focused on this canto, the complexity of the *Commedia*'s presentation of *virtù* will begin to be apparent and this analysis will help establish the methodology of the final three chapters of this thesis. In *Purgatorio* XXV the term is used respectively to denote distinct but fully interconnected ideas in the canto's presentation of the formation of the human being. Statius's response to the pilgrim's question posed at the start of the canto, how can souls which have no need of food be thin?, covers the human soul's formation and then reformation in the realms of the afterlife. His argument, then, is very much concerned with the question of representation; within the narrative of the text he provides the explanation for the appearance of the souls but we might also read his discourse as relevant to the poet's own process of recreation and representation. The poet reforms and manifests the soul into the virtual substance of his poetry.

This canto includes seven uses of the term *virtù*. The fact that the term is so frequent here, in a discourse on the generation and creation of the human soul, implies that it is for the poet a central force within these events. Patrick Gardner in his analysis of this canto has pointed out that *virtù* is not 'a material part of [...] substance, but is properly called a motion'.[177] As will become apparent, *virtù* is a dynamic principle within this passage which expresses active change and interaction. What we will come to see as significant are the changing nuances of the word which conceive a precise process of the interactions relevant to human creation, both in life and the afterlife.

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[176] For readings of *Purgatorio* XXV see: Patrick Meredith Gardner, 'Dante and the Suffering Soul' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Notre Dame, 2009); Sergio Cristaldi, 'Potenza e atto della poesia', in *Esperimenti danteschi: Purgatorio*, ed. by Gian Carlo Alessio, Benedetta Quadrio *et al.* (Genoa and Milan: Marietti, 2010), pp. 253-71; Ernesto Travi, 'Il tema del corpo nella *Divina Commedia*', in *Il corpo in scena*, ed. by Virgilio Melchiorre and Annamaria Cascetta (Milan: Università cattolica, 1983), pp. 197-223. The question of how Dante conceives the body-soul union, a topic often considered in relation to this passage, is not the immediate concern of my analysis. For an up to date bibliography on this issue see Manuele Gragnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife* and Marc Cogan, *The Design in the Wax*.
[177] Gardner, p. 147.

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The first three uses of the word in *Purgatorio* XXV characterize *virtù* as an informing power, that which actively shapes the limbs and then the soul of the new foetus. This 'virtute informativa' (41) or 'virtute attiva' (52) is 'virtù ch'è dal cor del generante' (59). Informing *virtù* originates with the father's blood which, on being transferred to the mother's womb, begins to form the body and primitive soul of the new baby. It is *virtù* which makes and forms and is at this stage a feature of the natural, generative process; what Singleton terms the 'process of becoming'.[178] However, in the shift from describing the natural generation of the human to describing the divine 'breathing in' of the rational, human soul, Statius again uses the term 'vertù' to mean the power of the soul, only this time it is in reference to the supranatural power which makes up the soul that is brought into being directly by God:

> [...] sì tosto come al feto
>
> l'articular del cerebro è perfetto,
>
> lo Motor primo a lui si volge, lieto
>
> sovra tant'arte di natura, e spira
>
> spirito novo, di vertù repleto,
>
> che ciò che trova attivo quivi tira
>
> in sua sustanzia, e fassi un'alma sola,
>
> che vive e sente e sé in sé rigira.   (*Purg.* XXV.68-75)

The implied meaning of *virtù* then has shifted from a materially based power to the informing power of God which endows the soul with consciousness. This giving on the part of God is characterised as *joyful*: at the centre of the soul's creation is an act of loving joy. In the metaphysical and linguistic interaction expressed by 'spira', 'tira' and 'rigira', giving, drawing in and self-reflecting in a circular pattern, the new God-given spirit draws the primitive soul into its own substance to the extent that it finds that soul responsive, 'attivo'. In this way the passage casts the coming into being of the human soul as a positive interaction on both sides and this coincides with the point at which the soul becomes self-conscious. Divine *virtù* makes of the primitive soul a single soul, but also joins itself with that soul making the moment of creation of the human soul a moment of blending, of union of human and divine *virtù*, possible because of willing interaction on both sides. Such a reading is backed up by the next instance of the term in the canto, as Statius moves on to how the soul moves out of the physical body and into the aerial one: 'e in virtute / ne porta seco e l'umano e divino' (80-81). The soul's *virtute* is what contain its humanity and

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[178] Singleton, *Journey to Beatrice*, p. 45.

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divinity and is that through which it reinstantiates itself in an airy body of the afterlife. The *virtù informativa* now shows itself to be a supra-physical quality which not only informs matter but reforms the immaterial soul: 'la virtù formativa raggia intorno / così e quanto ne le membre vive' (89-90). Thus, in fact, what Dante the pilgrim can see in his journey through the realms of the afterlife is the very *virtù* of the souls and their createdness. *Virtù* is no longer simply an attribute, a positive characteristic, but instead that which manifests the soul's very existence, both forming it in the temporal life and reforming it in the eternal, and manifesting the divine-human relationship which is at its origin. It is the very substance of the soul's ontological dependency and individuality, its relationship as creature to Creator.

The final instance of *virtù* in canto XXV throws into perspective its intensely complex meaning at this point and shifts from *virtù* as a principle of ontological interaction, to *virtù* as a principle of ethical interaction. Following a dialogue acutely concerned with the moment of human individual creation which joins man and God, the final appearance of the term 'virtute' is in reference to the specific *virtù* of chastity. The souls of the lustful, singing their exempla, sing of 'donne [...] e mariti che fuor casti, / come virtute e matrimonio imponne' (133-35). It is unimaginable that in the dialogue in the *Commedia* most acutely focused upon the physical union of man and woman and upon human generation, that this emphasis is not retrospective and does not invite us to reinterpret our understanding of *virtù* here, in the light of the way *virtù* has been presented in the canto thus far. *Virtù* is the souls' very existence as created by God, which has endowed them with the potential for perfection. This is what *virtù imposes* on the souls; the responsibility to fulfil potential. The *virtù* of chastity is concerned with the *non-wasting* of human generative power and with the recognition of the combined generation and creation that takes place at human conception and the consequent formation of the human soul. It is the moment at which the human creature is given the potential to come into dialogue with God, the moment at which the relationship between human and divine *virtù* is activated. This instance of the term *virtù* relates specifically to man's relationship to and interaction with the world and the way that interaction must be carried out, while its context serves to demonstrate the intrinsic interconnectedness of ontology and ethics in the poet's treatment of *virtù*. These are notions which appeared in the conceptual and representational traditions. Here Dante, by layering different issues surrounding *virtù* together, demonstrates their fundamental interconnectedness in his thinking, as well as vivifying the issues within the dramatic context.

This canto and its immediate context suggest two more points about Dante's thinking on *virtù* which further demonstrate the scope and relevance of the idea in the *Commedia*.

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Firstly, canto XXV stands between two cantos concerned with Dante as a poet and his poetic development. As canto XXV considers the generation and creation of the human soul, so cantos XXIV and XXVI consider the generation of Dante as a poet. In canto XXV, the verb 'spira' is the action by which divine *virtù*, impelled by God's joy, enters into the developing soul and makes it human and self-conscious, indeed makes it into a 'fante' (61), a speaking being. In canto XXIV, 'spira' is the action of love entering into the poet and making him speak: 'I' mi son un che, quando / Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo / ch'e' ditta dentro vo significando' (52-54). We find here parallel motivations and actions. Just as 'love' breathes into the individual poet the power to speak, the power to express himself as human, so God breathes the same power into the new soul. The interaction of love, *virtù* and expression, we will see, continues to be central in Dante's thinking. Secondly, canto XXV, in certain aspects of its imagery, recalls the Incarnation of Christ. The concern of the canto overall, the incarnation of the soul, is itself a recalling of this exemplum of incarnation. Furthermore, in the simile, which Statius uses to aid the pilgrim's understanding of how the soul's nature transforms, he employs the image of grape juice turning into wine through the action of the sun. If we consider the image in detail, it is the sun itself which becomes the new substance, wine, when it joins with the juices of the grape: 'guarda il calor del sol che si fa vino, / giunto a l'omor che de la vite cola' (77-78). The image conveys how the immaterial heat of the sun, a symbol for the divine, transforms its substance without losing its nature to become a manifested being. Just as in the Incarnation, God, joining with matter, does not lose his proper nature but rather forms a new one. Furthermore, as Christian Moevs has argued, images of the rainbow in the *Commedia*, such as that which appears in lines 91-93, make a striking allusion to the Incarnation itself.[179] Immaterial light, shining through water and not destroying it but transforming it into a visible manifestation of its invisible nature, recalls very much the action of the divine spirit working on perfect matter to produce the visible manifestation of God himself, Christ. Thus we find two images in this canto concerned with the manifestation of *virtù*, which recall the ultimate manifestation of divine *virtù*, the Incarnation of Christ.

My analysis thus far has demonstrated that, conceptually speaking, the *Commedia* establishes *virtù* as the central force behind human creation by God and as that which manifests the result of that relationship both in the temporal and after life. *Virtù* is revealed to be that which becomes physical, which becomes incarnate in the afterlife, and it is this incarnation itself which is worked upon in the soul's punishment or movement towards God. Furthermore, this conceptual presentation of *virtù*, having itself a strong

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[179] Christian Moevs, 'Rainbows and Incarnation in Dante', paper delivered at 'Reviewing Dante's Theology: A Workshop', hosted by the Leeds Centre for Dante Studies, 27th-28th March 2009.

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emphasis on manifestation, is framed by and expressed through images representing the manifestation of the invisible. The *Commedia's* poetry itself becomes the visible manifestation of the inspiration of love, just as Christ became the visible manifestation of God's love for man. It is precisely *virtù* which stands at the meeting point of power and manifestation, of inspiration and expression, of generation and creation, in the *Commedia's* conceptual and figurative economy. The notion of *virtù* apparent in *Purgatorio* XXV both significantly recalls and develops from issues which appeared in Chapters One and Two.

In the light of these insights I will now turn to consider three aspects of the *Commedia* in which the poet's vivification of *virtù* is explored and developed. The first will build upon my analysis of *Purgatorio* XXV and consider what role the poet establishes for *virtù* in the acts of creation and incarnation, manifestation and perfection. This will consider how he conceives the role *virtù* plays in the creation of the universe, its role in the re-manifestation and perfection of the souls, and the relation of the Incarnation to both of the above aspects. The following chapter will turn to the question of interaction between man, God and the created world, to question how the poet represents different forms and outcomes of the human-divine *virtù* interaction which correspond to different degrees of the soul's perfection. Finally, I will consider what role Dante allots to *virtù* in his own development, both as the figure of the pilgrim and as the figure of the poet.

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3. Creative *Virtù*: *Virtù*'s Role in the Formation of the Universe and the Perfection of Man in the *Commedia*

1. Introduction

As we have seen, virtue, in the conceptual and representational traditions, is intimately connected to creation. Firstly, in the theological traditions originating in the Bible and reiterated by Augustine and Aquinas, virtue is the creative principle of God activated through the agency of the Logos. This agent himself is the 'virtute dei'. Virtue stands conceptually at the very root cause of creation itself. Secondly, virtue plays a vital part in the workings of that created universe. Each created thing, including man, has its own proper virtue to fulfil and act on. We will come to see in the *Commedia* that it is in the fulfilment of *virtù* that a created thing locates itself within the great order of being. Thirdly, in Christian thought the fulfilment of human virtue was made entirely dependent upon an individual's relationship to God and so through virtue the creature comes to be conscious of its relationship with its Creator. Fourthly, it became apparent that virtue is what guides man's interaction with the created world; in focusing man's love upon God, virtue orders man's actions in the world towards their supranatural end. In representational terms, virtue is frequently figured through physical, created things; one might recall the allegorical tree of Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae* or the personified exempla of virtue in the hagiographical tradition. The metaphysical nature of virtue came to be expressed and explored through physical examples.

In the *Commedia*, Dante continues to use, and significantly develops, the relation between *virtù* and creation. Within the creative poem he uses the ideas of creation and desire found in the tradition but considers them through a portrayal of material creation; *virtù* is explored in relation to the cosmos, the natural world and the human individual. By exploring the metaphysical through the physical, the poet constructs *virtù* as a force which is common to all elements of creation and presents creation as all part of a universal plan. The *Commedia* suggests that if the creature gazes with sufficient and correct intention into creation, then the Creator becomes literally visible. By focusing on the presence of *virtù* in creation, the poet is stressing the possibilities offered by createdness itself. By being created, man enters into an order of creation; an order which facilitates a positive relationship between creation and its Creator and provides the opportunity for communication of the one with the other. In their physical state, humans can only perceive

the metaphysical through the physical. The physical, therefore, becomes a channel for understanding; this channel, however, is offered to humankind in its own creation.

My analysis of creative *virtù* in the *Commedia* will span not only how the poet presents *virtù* in relation to universal and natural creation, but also the role he allots to *virtù* in the recreation of the souls in his own created afterlife. By identifying *virtù* both as that which individualises creation in the 'real' world and as that which reforms the soul in the next, Dante is drawing a parallel between the possibilities offered by reformation in Purgatory, and the possibilities for salvation offered by created, instantiated existence itself. The interactions by which God aids man in his own perfection in Purgatory become a parallel to the interactions that are part of creation and which God offers to man in temporal life. What emerges is a sense of the possibilities offered by temporal existence and the power and responsibility man has to respond to them.

I will begin my analysis with a consideration of how Dante presents *virtù*'s role in universal creation through an analysis of the cantos of the Primo Mobile and *Paradiso* II. Here Dante casts *virtù* as the individualising principle within creation, which is then proper to each created entity; thus creation is simultaneously united by a common ground and individualised into distinct natures. *Paradiso* II explores how the pilgrim can come to understand this simultaneous unity and multiplicity by placing his own embodied existence within the order of the universe. This discourse is fundamentally underpinned by questions of Incarnation. I will then turn to the Earthly Paradise which, I will argue, Dante presents as the most perfect expression of natural creation, being in direct contact with the source of its existence. I will suggest that the poet constructs the perfectly balanced natural state found in Eden as analogous to the state of the reformed soul who has arrived there. The discussion will then move to consider the role Dante allots to *virtù* within the formation and punishment of the souls in Purgatory, focusing specifically on *Purgatorio* III and XXIII. Here *virtù* becomes the dynamic of recreation through which divine will offers and facilitates the opportunity for the purgating souls to perfect themselves specifically through an understanding and imitation of the incarnate Christ. In this respect, creation, manifestation, incarnation and revelation become closely connected in Dante's thought.

2. Creation through *Virtù*

As became apparent in Chapter One, Christian thought conceives creation as a hierarchy of being which has its source and ground in God. Divine *virtù* is God's power exercised to

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bring this creation into being. *Virtù* is also proper to every created being as the power it has to perfect its own nature. In Dante's work, *virtù* is emphasised as that which makes distinction and individuality in the universe. *Virtù* is that by which a being is endowed with its distinct nature within the cosmos and it is simultaneously the power a being has to be distinctly itself through the active perfection of its own nature; it is the interactive force by which an individual is generated and it is also the power through which that individual expresses and fulfils his individuality. Once in the human sphere, however, along with distinct nature comes the idea that to fulfil human nature is to develop in 'likeness to God'. *Virtù* is then at once that through which God creates and the quality by which man fulfils himself in order to ontologically move towards the complete being of God. This dynamic is apparent both in Dante's consideration of creation and the generation of distinction in the universe, and within the concept of his own realms of the afterlife in which *virtù* is that which reforms the souls, enabling them to carry out their fulfilment. Dante expresses this fulfilment as taking place through a necessary interaction with and imitation of Christ. Individuality is central to Dante's thought; as Barolini has pointed out, 'Dante's view of the universe requires the many, in the same way that his incarnational poetics with its trademark investment in the irreducible historicity of the individual is dependent on multiplicity'.[180] Underpinning both Dante's conception of the universe and the existence of the individual is a dynamic of *virtù*. My analysis will explore how the universal creation is related to the individual, how each is located in relation to the other. It will become apparent that the Incarnation acts as the event through which this relationship can be both understood and brought to fruition.

At the heart of Dante's idea of creation is unity in distinction.[181] Creation as a process which involved all three persons of the Trinity is an idea which appears not least in the works of Augustine and Aquinas. 'Virtus creandi', according to Aquinas, is common to all three persons, but occurs in an order of precendence:

> Unde Creatorem esse attribuitur Patri, ut ei qui non habet virtutem creandi ab alio. De Filio autem dicitur *per quem omnia facta sunt*, inquantum habet eamdem virtutem, sed ab alio, nam haec praepositio 'per' solet denotare causam mediam, sive principium de principio. Sed Spiritu Sancto, qui habet eamdem virtutem ab

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[180] Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.173.

[181] For useful considerations of creation in Dante see: Piero Boitani's 'The Poetry and Poetics of the Creation', in *Dante's 'Commedia': Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), pp. 95-130; also Moevs' chapter on creation in *The Metaphysics of Dante's 'Commedia'*, pp. 107-46; Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, *Medieval Cultural Tradition in Dante's 'Comedy'* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1960), pp. 133-73; also see Attilio Mellone entry, 'Creazione', in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, 6 vols (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1970-1976), II (1970), pp. 251-53.

utroque, attribuitur quod dominando gubernet et vivificet quae sunt creata a Patre per Filium. (*ST* 1a,46,6)

At the centre of creation is an interaction between three persons who are essentially one. Each has a distinct function but a unified end. Dante explores this idea himself in the *Commedia*, transforming this theoretical interaction into living poetics. So at the opening of *Paradiso* X, the order of the universe is made by Trinitarian interaction: 'Guardando nel suo Figlio con l'Amore / che l'uno e l'altro etternalmente spira, / lo primo e ineffabile Valore' (*Par.* X.1-3). However, in *Paradiso* XIII all of created existence comes from the loving interaction of the three persons: 'non è se non splendor di quella idea / che partorisce, amando, il nostro Sire' (53-54). At the centre of creation then is a relationship, the perfect expression of distinction in unity. And the mode of that relationship – loving, looking – brings into being that through which the relationship itself is revealed: creation.

The act of creation is relational but within that relationship the three persons have distinct roles and it is that of the second person, the Logos, which is of particular relevance here. Pelikan has suggested that in medieval thought '[t]he function of the Logos was to be "the simple and the multiple and most principal reason of all things"'.[182] In Dante's conception of the universe, both physically and metaphysically, the initiator of distinction in that universe is the Primo Mobile or, as Moevs expresses it, 'the nexus between pure being and the differentiation of being into identity'.[183] The Primo Mobile performs the function of transmitting and distinguishing the pure being which exists in God into the created universe. It is simultaneously the start and end point of existence, bringing identity into being and acting as the final goal of the world's nature as Dante expresses it in *Paradiso* XXVII:

> La natura del mondo, che quieta
> il mezzo e tutto l'altro intorno move,
> quinci comincia come da sua meta.   (*Par.* XXVII.106-08)

The Primo Mobile is the source and aim of distinct being, but it itself exists within a physical relationship which recalls the metaphysical relationship at the centre of absolute creation: 'questo cielo non ha altro dove / che la mente divina, in che s'accende / *l'amor* che 'l volge e la *virtù* ch'ei piove' (*Par.* XXVII.109-11: my italics). While in the earlier descriptions of creation, the principal actors were *Valore*, *Figlio* and *Amore*, and *Sire*, *Idea* and *Amore*, we now have *Mente Divina*, *Virtù* and *Amor*. Dante's description of the action of

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[182] Pelikan, III, 102. Pelikan is here quoting Florus of Lyon's text 'Against John Scotus Erigena', 4.
[183] Moevs, p. 33.

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the Primo Mobile emphasises the simultaneous unity and distinction of its elements. Both *virtù* and *amor* exist nowhere but in the divine mind and yet both act independently, *amor* turning the fastest-moving sphere and *virtù* as that which is rained down. The image of rain, the unity of water separated into individual drops, figures the cascade of divine *virtù* distinguished into individualised *virtù* by the action of the Primo Mobile. As that which distinguishes the *virtù* which originates in the oneness of the divine mind into the multiplicity of creation, the action of Dante's Primo Mobile recalls the action of the second person of the Trinity: that which makes the simple multiple and grounds all created existence. At the same time, however, it is *virtù* itself which has taken the position of the *Figlio-Idea* within the creation interaction and it is that which is manifested into existence by the Primo Mobile's movement.

In Christian thought the Logos has another purpose beyond being the agent of creation: to return mankind from the multiple to the simple unity of God through revelation. Again Pelikan explains the nexus of significance around the Logos in early Christian thought:

> Creation, revelation both general and special, and redemption could all be ascribed to the Logos; the presupposition for each of these activities was the transcendence of God, who 'cannot be contained, and is not found in a place [...] but *his Logos through whom he made all things, being his power and his wisdom* [*virtute et sapientia*] was the agent through whom God had dealt with mankind, achieving his purpose of creation and revealing his will'.[184]

The Logos, the *virtute et sapientia Dei*, is both the agent of creation and the sign by which God reveals himself to mankind. The Logos fulfils the necessity of the particular in communicating with human perceptual capabilities. Without the created universe or the incarnate Christ, God could be neither conceived nor approached, his transcendence being beyond human perception. In his action as the second person of the Trinity, the Logos makes and in making reveals the generous action of God in creation; as the incarnate second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, God 'deals directly with mankind', revealing the way in which man can return to God both in terms of redeemed nature and temporal action. While it has become evident that *virtù* is the creative principle of God, and thus identified with (the action of) the second person of the Trinity, a further identification between *virtù* and Christ can be made when we consider that it is by an imitation of the temporal *virtù* of Christ that man can return to God. Man's ability to imitate Christ, however, is dependent on his individualised existence in the first place. Through this

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[184] Pelikan, I, 188. Pelikan is here quoting Theophilus of Antioch, 'To Autolycus', 2.22.

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individualised existence and the *virtù* which creates him and the *virtù* with which he is endowed by nature, man can work to perfect that *virtù* and return to God.

As we have begun to see, in Dante's conception the Primo Mobile is the initiator of distinction in the universe, the ground of which is, however, unified, and its role is frequently expressed alongside images of incarnation. Dante establishes an understanding of the Incarnation as a parallel process to an understanding of the cosmic metaphysics of unity and distinction in the universe. The incarnate Christ is the means by which man can perceptually and conceptually approach the transcendent oneness of God through an element of distinct creation. Lombardi has suggested that Christ makes 'the text of humankind meaningful and the text of God intelligible'.[185] As we will come to see, in *Paradiso* II Dante casts the Incarnation as that which both facilitates and initiates mankind's desire to understand the nature of God in Trinity and thus seeks to understand how creation can be both One and many.

Paradiso II presents a further description of the actions of the heavens in the bringing into being of creation which establishes the Primo mobile as the source and maintainer of created existence.[186] The passage is again marked by a simultaneous unity and distinction between the relationships of the upper heavens:

> Dentro dal ciel de la divina pace
>
> si gira un corpo ne la cui virtute
>
> l'esser di tutto suo contento giace.
>
> Lo ciel seguente, c'ha tante vedute,
>
> quell'esser parte per diverse essenze,
>
> da lui distratte e da lui contenute.   (*Par.* II.112-17)

This time, rather than the metaphysical, divine agents of creation, the focus is upon the physical agency and interaction of the heavens. The 'ciel de la divina pace', the Empyrean, holds within it the revolving Primo Mobile. The shift from unified oneness into distinction is matched by a shift from stillness to movement, from one of complete, fulfilled autonomous being, to substance moved by desire to return to that being (*Par.*

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[185] Elena Lombardi, *The Syntax of Desire: Language and Love in Augustine, the Modistae, and Dante* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 43.

[186] On *Paradiso* II and the questions raised by the canto see: Bruno Nardi, 'La dottrina delle macchie lunari', in *Saggi di filosofia dantesca* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1967), pp. 3-39; Michelangelo Picone, 'Canto II', in *Lectura dantis turicensis: Paradiso*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2002), pp. 35-52; for more recent and metaphysically focused readings of the passages see Teodolinda Barolini's chapter 'Problems in Paradise: The Mimesis of Time and the Paradox of più e meno', in *The Undivine Comedy*, pp. 166-93; and Moevs, pp. 111-19.

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XXVII.108).[187] As with all created elements of the universe, the Primo Mobile has its own particular *virtù*, the perfected action by which it most fulfils itself. Its *virtù* is clearly unique: to hold in existence everything which exists below it within the universe. The role of the heaven of the fixed stars further distinguishes being within the universe while at the same time that being remains entirely contained within the Primo Mobile and consequently within the Empyrean or, metaphysically speaking, the *mente divina*. Thus the distinction of the universe is simultaneously one with the divine mind because of the particular nature and *virtù* of the Primo Mobile.

The explanation of the making of the created universe which Beatrice gives in *Paradiso* II, however, stems directly and significantly from a misapprehension on the part of the pilgrim concerning this difficult idea of unity and multiplicity. In trying to understand the cause of moonspots, the pilgrim has relied, quite naturally, on the evidence of his senses and arrived at a physical explanation of the phenomenon; the spots are made by 'i corpi rari e densi' (60). But the ability of the pilgrim's senses to provide correct information is undermined by Beatrice who points out that in this case 'dietro ai sensi / vedi che la ragione ha corte l'ali' (56-57). Instead, as Barolini has suggested, while the pilgrim understands moonspots as purely a 'material phenomenon', 'Beatrice repudiates this derivation of difference from a physical cause, assigning to it instead a metaphysical existence [...] arguing that all difference must have an ontological basis'.[188] Beatrice's correction of the pilgrim's mistake is to bring him to recognise that distinction is at the most fundamental level of existence, occurring simultaneously with the first bringing into being of an entity. What such a recognition reveals is the variety of *virtù* in the universe; the basic component of ontological distinction.

The term *virtù* appears six times in this canto in relation to different active subjects. The mistake behind Dante's physical explanation of moonspots is that it would reduce the variety of *virtù* in the universe: 'Se raro e denso ciò facesser tanto, / una sola virtù sarebbe in tutti' (67-68). Instead, created being is distinguished into different combinations of divine informing power and material substance, so that, 'Virtù diversa fa diversa lega / col prezïoso corpo ch'ella avviva' (139-40). It is 'la virtù mista' (143) that the pilgrim sees in the variety of light and dark of the stars. *Paradiso* II is an exploration of the nature of distinction and unity in the universe which argues for the necessary individuality of every created being and the role which they fulfil, from the Primo Mobile to the 'beati motor' (129) to the human body itself. That by which created beings are distinguished is their

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[187] On movement as an expression of desire, see Lino Pertile, *La Punta del disio: Semantica del desiderio nella 'Commedia'* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2005), pp. 178-79.
[188] Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*, p. 178.

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virtù, their proper action in the fulfilment of their existence. If this multiplicity of *virtù* is denied then the order of the universe breaks down and individuality is fundamentally undermined. It is vital that this individuality does not disappear when we take into account one of the other great questions of the *Paradiso* which Barolini identifies, 'how can the universe be one and yet receive God's light in differing degrees'?[189] If every individual creation was the same in terms of *virtù* then there would be no differentiation in the degree to which each entity participated in divine being. Instead, as Moevs, paraphrasing Aquinas, points out, 'each distinction of finite form (essence) reflects a diverse participation in Being and hence degree of perfection'.[190] Creation is conceived as an order in which individual creatures have their own distinct *virtù* which locates them within that order. At the same time *virtù* itself is essentially unitary, originating in the unified power of God. Each entity has a degree of potential according to their nature and is empowered by that nature to fulfil themselves, but their existence itself comes through the *virtù* of God. Variety of *virtù* is a variety of degrees of relation to God who is *Virtù* itself.

How one can come to understand the simultaneous ontological unity and distinction of the universe is expressed not only in the content of the canto's discourse but by the forms in which that discourse is enacted. Hollander has pointed out that Beatrice's discourse with the pilgrim is carried out in a 'thoroughly Scholastic manner' in which she asks for his own opinion, only then to reveal its falsity through intellectual proofs which 'reform with light' his intellect (109-10).[191] Furthermore, Beatrice's communicative style, with its emphasis on clarity, explication and example, which seeks to actively reform her audience's intellect, is reminiscent of the preaching styles of the Dominicans. Apart from its argumentational style, however, the discourse is significant for the relation it enacts between the physical and the metaphysical as ways of understanding. As we have begun to see, Beatrice's discourse aims to lead the pilgrim from seeing the physical to perceiving the metaphysical. While the pilgrim works from the perspective of one standing on earth looking up and seeing the physical universe, Beatrice shifts the perspective to one having a perception of the workings of the Empyrean, Primo Mobile and Heaven of the Fixed Stars. Only from this perspective, which is raised above the physical universe, can the explanation for that universe be found: only in the universe's ontological foundation and source. However, the pilgrim's process of understanding is necessarily tied to his own bodily experience. It is that experience which opens the question of unity and distinction in the canto as a whole. The question of this interrelation is already made present in the canto's opening images: first in the 'piccioletta barca' which crosses the furrows of the sea before they join again in

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[189] Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*, p. 172.
[190] Moevs, p. 110.
[191] Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (ed. and trans), *Paradiso* (New York: Doubleday, 2007). Note to canto II vv. 61-63. p. 51.

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smooth unity (13-15), one might say, before the individualised images, which the poem has produced, disappear; and secondly in the body of the pilgrim which is received into the heaven of the Moon 'com'acqua recepe / raggio di luce permanendo unita' (35-36). It is the unimaginability of this second state which inspires 'il disio / di veder quella essenza in che si vede / come nostra natura e Dio s'unio' (40-42). The physical experiences of the pilgrim's own body become the essential link by which the reader – it is 'nostra natura' that Dante is considering – comes to desire to understand the Incarnation.[192] By framing the desire in this way, Dante is reiterating the theological role of the incarnate Logos as the conceptual conduit by which man comes to desire and perceive God. But here it is the pilgrim's own experience which arouses and enables understanding. The pilgrim's body also becomes an active conceptual figure in Beatrice's description of the experiment by which the pilgrim must imagine placing himself between three candles and a mirror to observe the candles' consistent brightness.[193] While it is an intellectual game which Beatrice is outlining, it is physically grounded, appealing to human sense-dependency. But while the pilgrim's sense-dependency had previously led his reason astray, now instead, guided by the well-directed sensual information of Beatrice, the pilgrim's understanding is instead cleared of doubts.

The final significant inclusion of the body motif in this canto is perhaps the most striking. In describing the distinct *virtù* which is dispersed through the heavens by the workings of the spheres, Beatrice compares this to the action of the soul within the body:

> E come l'alma dentro a vostra polve
> per differenti membra e conformate
> a diverse potenze si risolve,
>   così l'intelligenza sua bontate
> multiplicata per le stelle spiega,
> girando sé sovra sua unitate.   (*Par.* II.133-38)

Just as celestial *virtù diversa* forms different combinations each with their own nature and purpose, so 'vita in voi, si lega' (141). *Virtù* and *vita* are thus identified one with the other. By this comparison, the poet is casting *virtù* as the vivifying force of the universe since, as Ghisalberti points out, in medieval thought, 'senza l'anima, il corpo sarebbe privo di

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[192] See Picone, 'Canto II', especially pp. 36-39, for a thorough consideration of the significance of the pilgrim's body in this canto.

[193] Drawing on the work of John Kleiner, Moevs' analysis of this passage adds a very valuable aspect: that the pilgrim's body is placed at the centre of a crucifix and that the experiment presumes the transparency of that body. This then becomes the moment at which man stops seeing himself as only distinguished and instead sees the body as 'the self-manifestation, in the world, of the ground of all being' (p.115). For a fuller bibliography on the significance of this experiment see Hollander's commentary to lines 94-105.

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vita'.[194] The parallel is concluded with the way an individual's nature is revealed: 'la virtù mista per lo corpo luce / come letizia per pupilla viva' (143-44). In this stunning parallel of celestial light and human joy as signs of an individual's *virtù*, Dante is placing human nature within the order of the universe.[195] While the pilgrim's isolated, earthbound viewpoint had clouded his understanding of creation, once actively and consciously placed within the created order, man reveals this order within himself. The human body and its potential in *virtù* is placed within the *virtù*-dynamic of the created universe and it enters into the responsibility for fulfilment which a place in the created order necessitates. The body reveals within itself the potential of that order.

Beatrice's discourse is famously obscure, but on closer inspection is one which engages the faculties of the pilgrim in the most active way. Starting with misleading physical evidence it reverses the perspective from earth to heaven, from effect to cause, then places the pilgrim directly within the process of understanding. Importantly, and perhaps reminiscent of aspects of the representational traditions, Beatrice is interpreting the pilgrim's experiences for him, enabling him to understand their deeper significance. Through the analogy of the body, his own body, the pilgrim is led from objective questioning to active involvement and engagement, until finally the pilgrim can come to realise that he has already *enacted* the answer to his question on entering the heaven of the Moon. In a way, *Paradiso* II is the most fundamental expression of *virtù* personified as we came to see it in the representational tradition. Here *virtù* is no longer a concept that must be personified externally in order to be understood. Instead the body, any body, is revealed to hold within it *virtù* as the distinguishing and vivifying factor of the universe. It is an image of personification made more essential; *virtù* is not only personified but made the ground of individual personhood itself. The ethical imperative which the images of personified *virtù* sought to demonstrate is here transformed and the *virtù* of persons becomes the fulfilment of human *being* itself as it exists within the order of the universe.

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[194] Alessandro Ghisalberti, 'Il pensiero medievale di fronte al corpo', in *Il corpo in scena*, pp. 55-68 (p. 59).

[195] Ghisalberti in his essay points out the centrality of man in the universe as developed in Christian thought: 'Punto di convergenza di tutte le creature, l'uomo risulta la creatura più rappresentativa dell'universo [...] in chiave cristina la dottrina dell'uomo microcosmo: il corpo, prodotto dal laborotorio della natura per Bonaventura raccoglie le aspirazioni dell'universo sensibilie a perfezioni ulteriori. Per la sua inclinazione naturale a informare un corpo, l'anima si carica della responsabilità globale di rendere possibile il ritorno dell'intera creazione a Dio', p. 64. While the tradition of man as a microcosm does seem to be one Dante is appealing to here, he does not work by simple analogy but focuses on the revelation inherent in the human body's existence and the interactive role it plays within understanding the created order.

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3. The Fulfilment of Human Nature

Virtù is that which expresses a being's individuality in the universe, endowing it with its own potential for fulfilment. *Paradiso* II expresses this potential in relation to the human in cosmological terms, in which the *virtù* of the individualised body is made analogous to the *virtù*-order of the universe. *Purgatorio* XXVIII, I intend to argue, is also based around an analogy of human *virtù* in which the spiritual condition of the souls who have arrived in the Earthly Paradise can be read through the physical space they inhabit.[196] While in *Paradiso* II the analogy is between the cosmos and the body, the natural images of *Purgatorio* XXVIII locate human nature in relation to the natural world. This setting is directly tied to the lessons which the soul arrived in Eden has learned: its correct relation to created existence.

In *Purgatorio* XXVIII forms of the word *virtù* appear three times in the space of twenty-one lines (109-29), each time associated with the power of plants and water to form and generate life. The environmental condition in which the Earthly Paradise exists is carefully explained by Matelda. Terrestrial weather and conditions do not apply here where "l turbar che sotto da sé fanno / l'essalazion de l'acqua e de la terra' (97-98) do not reach. The mountain was formed to rise above terrestrial disturbance in order to free man from its effects: 'Perché [...] a l'uomo non facesse alcuna guerra, / questo monte salìo verso 'l ciel tanto, / e libero n'è' (100-02). Eden is an isolated and protected place which, while having the physical, natural characteristics of Earth, is not influenced by their negative effects. The only atmospheric movement comes directly from the movement of the first sphere, the Primo Mobile:

> Or perché in circuito tutto quanto
>
> l'aere si volge con la prima volta,
>
> [...]
>
> in questa altezza ch'è tutta disciolta
>
> ne l'aere vivo, tal moto percuote,
>
> e fa sonar la selva perch' è folta.   (*Purg.* XXVIII.103-08)

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[196] For *letture* of *Purgatorio* XXVIII see: Antonio Enzo Quaglio, *Canto XXVIII del Purgatorio: Lectura dantis scaligera* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1966); Bernard König, 'Canto XXVIII', in *Lectura dantis turicensis: Purgatorio*, ed. by Güntert and Picone (Florence: F. Cesati, 2001), pp. 435-45; Olga Sedakova, 'Il paradiso terrestre e il dono della poesia', in *Esperimenti danteschi: Purgatorio*, pp. 273-94; see also Singleton 'Part Two: Return to Eden', in *Journey to Beatrice*.

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This dynamic is essential in coming to understand the Earthly Paradise as the most perfect example of a created natural place. Dante establishes a direct connection between the movement of the Primo Mobile and the movement of the natural elements of Eden; the wind from the Primo Mobile makes the dense trees rustle. But in this natural image of wind in the trees, Dante is able to express a moment of ontological revelation. The pilgrim has been overtly surprised by the sounds of the forest and it is this surprise which leads to Matelda's explanation (85-87). The wind in the trees, the sensual noise it makes, arouses the desire of the pilgrim to understand its origin. At this point material creation is related back to its ontological origin: the physical has revealed the metaphysical. Matelda's explanation shifts between reference both to physical elements (plants, seeds, earth) and their ontological nature – their *virtù* – so again we see the physical and the metaphysical coexistentially:

> [...] la percossa pianta tanto puote
>
> che de la sua virtute l'aura impregna
>
> e quella poi, girando, intorno scuote;
>
> e l'altra terra, secondo ch'è degna
>
> per sé e per suo ciel, concepe e figlia
>
> di diverse virtù diverse legna.   (XXVIII.109-14)

Virtù is first figured as the 'formative power' present in seeds which are scattered in the winds which originate in the Primo Mobile. It is this *virtù* which 'l'aura impregna' and which then fertilises the terrestrial and Edenic soil. This soil itself is in a perfect state, ready to properly receive and bring to fruition that which it receives: 'E sapere dei che la campagna santa / dove tu se' d'ogne semenza è piena' (118-19). The combination of *virtù* moved by the Primo Mobile and the perfectly potential ground, free from terrestrial disturbance, enables the *fullness of being* (119) of the nature found there. Given the understanding of the Primo Mobile which has been established in the chapter thus far, as the point at which the oneness of being becomes the multiplicity of created existence, in its direct relation to the Primo Mobile, the Earthly Paradise contains an analogous enacting of this dispersion of being in the seeds and plants. Here it is precisely *virtù* which is dispersed and which 'impregnates' the air thus enabling fruition. In *Paradiso* II the workings of *virtù* were initially described in the abstract line 'Virtù diverse fa diversa lega' (139); this line is closely paralled in *Purgatorio* XXVIII, 'di diverse virtù diverse legna' (114). *Virtù* is the essence of the differentiation of nature of the trees of Eden. The cosmic dynamics of *Paradiso* II are within the natural manifestation of the Earthly Paradise.

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In the Edenic context, perfectly situated and protected, the resulting manifested being is at its fullest natural potential. If it is the direct and immediate motion of the Primo Mobile which causes the distribution of seeds 'di diverse virtù' in Eden, and the Primo Mobile is the point of 'embodying' contact between God and his creation, then the scattered seeds-virtù in Eden which descend down to Earth are manifestations and moments of God's generous creation. It is divine love which moves the Primo Mobile and facilitates the dispersion of creation. Here in the Garden of Eden is this love most visible and most felt; it is undisturbed and undistracted by earthly physicality figured as terrestrial weather. At the same time divine virtù finds the ground most ready and well disposed to receive it and reveal it; it is 'campagna santa' (118).

But just as an analogy was formed in the discourse of *Paradiso* II between the cosmos and the human body, so here there is an implicit analogy between the Earthly Paradise and the human soul who has arrived there. The natural surroundings in which the events of the *Commedia* take place often invite interpretation as being an externalisation or manifestation of the state of the human souls within them. The dark wood in which the pilgrim finds himself lost in *Inferno* I manifests his own confused and tormented spiritual state. The trees of the wood of the suicides in *Inferno* XIII are themselves the manifestations of the soul's negation of their human existence. Their human nature is entirely removed and the order of being turned upside down as Pier della Vigna's words, which appeal to the order of created beings, suggest: 'Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi' (37). When we come to the Earthly Paradise, therefore, there is a precedent for the natural space to represent a condition of human *being*. And in Eden this is particularly significant. Matelda identifies this place as that made specifically by God, for man:

> Lo sommo Ben, che solo esso a sé piace,
>
> fé l'uom buono e a bene, e questo loco
>
> diede per arr' a lui d'etterna pace. (91-93)

There are two significant aspects of this description. First, man is created good and to do good by God. This is a reiteration of the combination of being and doing which defines *virtù*. Man in Eden is at his most virtuous, in a perfect state of both potential and act. And second, in his state of goodness man is given this place for eternal peace. Peace, as we saw in the intellectual context, was conceived as the reward of virtue.[197] We have already seen how the physical description of Eden states it as being above the disturbances of temporal existence and in direct contact with the source of creation. This situation was established to liberate man from those disturbances (102). In considering the concept of virtue in

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[197] This was most evident in Augustine's *De civitate Dei* 19.10.

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Chapter One, it became apparent that, in Christian thought, virtue was tied to a liberation from man's distracting desire for the earth, and was a focusing of his desire towards the source of his existence, God. This focused desire then led to a proper use of temporal existence on man's part. Creation was no longer distracting or disturbing but instead a forum through which man could come to see God. Eden then, is a place which manifests and facilitates this perfection of human *virtù*. Man is created here fully good and free from the potential corruption of that good. Eden itself fully reveals the source from which it comes. The interactions of Eden are directly between God and man. So it is that in *Paradiso* I, Beatrice is able to tell the pilgrim that,

> Molto è licito là, che qui non lece
>
> a le nostre virtù, mercé del loco
>
> fatto per proprio de l'umana spece.   (*Par.* I.55-57)

In this space, man's *virtù* can be fully perfected and his sight towards God can be unclouded. This spiritual clarity is manifested in the actions of the pilgrim who in Eden can look directly at the sun (*Par.* I.54).

The souls who have newly arrived at the Earthly Paradise, having passed through Purgatory, are restored to the prelapsarian state. The soul which has come to Eden has been reborn, wiped clean and restored to its state of pure potential for perfection: pure potential for ethical and ontological *virtù*. This purified potential is significant, being the state in which nature can come to fully reveal God within itself. In an image which overtly recalls the *terra* of Eden as *campagna santa*, in *Paradiso* XIII the only two moments of perfect human creation are described:

> Però se 'l caldo amor la chiara vista
>
> de la prima virtù dispone e segna,
>
> tutta la perfezion quivi s'acquista.
>
> Così fu fatta già la terra degna
>
> di tutta l'animal perfezïone;
>
> così fu fatta la Vergine pregna.   (*Par.* XIII.79-84)

We find another trinity of agents – *caldo amor, chiara vista* and *prima virtù* – coming together to imprint individualised identity upon matter. Only in Adam and Christ is the creative *virtù* of God fully and properly manifested. Only in the Edenic space can such a perfection of disposition be regained by the human souls who arrive in it.

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The Edenic space enacts a reconnection of human and divine. In Matelda's explanation of the rivers of Eden again the physical is revealed to have a grounding in the metaphysical:

> L'acqua che vedi [...]
>
> esce di fontana salda e certa
>
> che tanto dal voler di Dio riprende
>
> quant'ella versa.   (*Purg.* XXVIII.121-26)

As the purged souls pass through the rivers they manifest their physical and spiritual reconnection with the will of God. The role of *virtù* in this is to remove the illusion of difference which sin has created:

> Da questa parte con virtù discende
>
> che toglie altrui memoria del peccato;
>
> da l'altra d'ogne ben fatto la rende.   (*Purg.* XXVIII.127-29)

The *virtù* of Lethe is to restore unity to difference which parallels the action of *virtù* in the universe. As in the rain image of *Paradiso* XXVIII, Dante's image of water captures *virtù* as simultaneously one and many. In the following two chapters it will become apparent that the image of water is frequently used by Dante to express the *virtù*-dynamic, being a forum for interaction and non-interaction which leads to ontological and ethical transformation.

While still in the Earthly Paradise at the summit of Purgatory, the interaction of 'virtù' and 'impregna', alongside the connection of the Primo Mobile and Eden, can also not help but recall images of Incarnation. As the Primo Mobile is the nexus between God and creation, so Christ is the visible 'bridge or union' between God and humankind.[198] In this sense Christ and the Primo Mobile fulfil parallel roles; through the Primo Mobile God transmits his immaterial being into material creation; through Christ that creation – and specifically man – becomes aware of God's immaterial being. Blown by the Primo Mobile, the air of Eden is ready and disposed to be again impregnated by divine *virtù*; and so Christian souls on Earth and in Purgatory are prepared to receive God through having already received Christ. The soul arrived in Eden has returned to the perfect ontological disposition shared by the figures of Adam and Christ. They are ready to demonstrate that 'there is no intrinsic limitation to human perfection: when matter is most suitably disposed to receive the human form, the result is divinity incarnate'.[199] The purged soul has gone through the

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[198] Moevs, p. 34.
[199] Moevs, p. 83.

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purgation process, undertaking the imitation of Christ; it has become like the 'campagna santa' of Eden ready to be 'impregnated' by divine *virtù*, and is now ready to manifest itself as a created being with the potential for divinity.

4. *Virtù* and the Poetry of Manifestation

The Earthly Paradise marks the end point in terms of a soul's change and development; after this awaits the changeless, eternal perfection of Paradise. But before this point is reached in the poem, the ontological significance of *virtù* is apparent not only in the physical and metaphysical cosmos which the poet theoretically constructs, but also in the way the souls are formed in the afterlife environment he himself has constructed. In the intellectual tradition surrounding virtue, there is a distinct emphasis upon the value of temporal human life as the offer of an opportunity for man to fulfil himself. In the Christian context this fulfilment is dependent on the formation and maintenance of a positive relationship with God. Human virtue is perfectly to love God and order all activity towards that end. We also saw, however, that human life itself is founded on an act of virtue – the creative virtue of God. One of our principal considerations is therefore to consider how these two forms of virtue interact. Man and the Universe are created by the divine virtue of God, and in Dante's conception, as we shall further see, it is also this *virtù* which forms the airy bodies of the spirits in the realms of the afterlife. In Dante's conception, *virtù* is creative both in temporal life and the life hereafter. This idea is most overt in the *Purgatorio*, which is itself significant: *Purgatorio*, the realm of perfecting, relies on the dynamic interactions between God and the soul to fulfil its purpose. *Virtù* here is given, demonstrated and fulfilled on both an ethical and an ontological level. It acts as a principle of ontological perfection, providing the soul with a body in which to perfect itself, while at the same time, as we shall see, it informs the punishments those soul-bodies undergo and thus establishes the punishment's connection to the source of being to which the souls are returning by the will of God. If we again think back to the intellectual context, in order to attain towards God (the attainment of which is impossible for unaided human nature), man requires a reordering of his virtue and a consequent elevation of the scope of his action to bring his capacities into relation with his new end aim.[200] *Purgatorio*, as Cogan points out, is marked by the achievement of the Beatitudes which acknowledge the new order of activity which the souls have acquired.[201] I suggest that Dante stages this as occurring through an interaction of *virtù*, not only in terms of the exempla of virtuous actions on the terraces, but as an ontological interaction which brings into being the soul-

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[200] This was particularly evident in Aquinas, *ST* 1a2ae 62 and 63.
[201] Cogan, p. 124.

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bodies in *Purgatorio* and facilitates their purgation and perfection. By a repetition of the 'coming into being' of a soul, Dante further establishes his idea of Purgatory as the offer of a 'new life' with the same challenges and ontological possibilities as temporal existence. As in both *Paradiso* II and *Purgatorio* XXVIII, the instantiation of *virtù* as the learning and development forum of the souls is couched within Incarnation references. Again, man's existence and perfection is read through the action of Christ-Logos and Christ-man. The Incarnation remains significant as the agent through which God's creative *virtù* and his revelation come to be both recognised and understood; as Pelikan suggested earlier, through the Incarnation, God deals with mankind.

Before the central discourse of *Purgatorio* XXV, the role of *virtù* in the formation and perfection of the souls has already been introduced and explored in the poem, again in contexts which link it directly to the Incarnation as a conduit for understanding. Canto III of *Purgatorio* sees the Pilgrim and Virgil at the base of the mountain, seeking out the path by which to ascend.[202] The specific instance of the use of the word *virtù* in this canto is framed by a dialogue concerning the nature of the souls and the relevance of the Incarnation. The fact that Virgil is the principal speaker adds yet further significance to the dialogue. Following an opening in which the narrator emphasises his loving dependence upon Virgil as his guide (4-6) comes a scene which stresses the pilgrim's continuing corporeality as opposed to Virgil's lack of body (16-30). Such scenes are a recurring motif of the early cantos of *Purgatorio*, but it is nevertheless important to ask – why does it also appear here? Attention is drawn specifically not simply to the pilgrim's body but to the absent, dead body of Virgil (25-27). He, like the other airy bodies of the afterlife and furthermore, like the heavens themselves, blocks no light. And it is in the creation of these bodies that *virtù*'s role is central. Virgil tells the pilgrim that,

> A sofferir tormenti, caldi e geli
> simili corpi la Virtù dispone
> che, come fa, non vuol ch'a noi si sveli.   (*Purg.* III.31-33)

Virtù here is the active subject which plays a role in both the re-formation and the reformation of the souls in the afterlife, with the particular scope of disposing them to punishment. The speaker, Virgil, here reveals his own bias, however, only conceiving of the suffering of the souls and unknowing of the resulting joy of their remanifestation which characterises the souls higher up in Purgatory and in Paradise. In the following lines, he carries out a reflection on his own tragic ignorance:

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[202] For readings of *Purgatorio* III see: Carlo Sini, 'L'Antipurgatorio e il mondo capovolto', in *Esperimenti danteschi: Purgatorio*, pp. 41-52; Georges Güntert, 'Canto III', in *Lectura dantis turicensis: Purgatorio*, pp. 43-57.

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> Matto è che spera che nostra ragione
>
> possa trascorrer la infinita via
>
> che tiene una sustanza in tre persone.
>
> State contenti, umana gente, al *quia*;
>
> ché se potuto aveste veder tutto,
>
> mestier non era parturir Maria.   (*Purg.* III.34-39)

The Trinity is by implication the agent behind the *virtù* which disposes the souls, but knowledge of its actions is absolutely impossible without the Incarnation; it is impossible, that is, without the One becoming the many. The mystery which the birth of Christ implies for understanding is one of both accepting the limits of human knowledge while simultaneously transcending them.[203] Virgil, from his limited perspective, cannot conceive and therefore cannot fully express the possibilities which arise from accepting one's limits. While complete knowledge is proper only to God, some knowledge of the workings of the Trinity, and thus of the informing *virtù* which originates with it, is possible for those in a state of conscious incarnation because they have the possibility to see distinct being as an individual instantiation of ontological unity. Thus the emphasis upon the pilgrim's body begins to show its particular relevance here. By contrast, Virgil and the other Limbo dwellers, to whom he later refers, are eternally excluded from understanding the full value of incarnation, failing as they did to recognise themselves as created and thus incarnated in life, failing to seek answers within their own existence; theirs is a misunderstanding of human *virtù*. Christian *virtù*, that which underpins the *Commedia*, seeks its fulfilment not only within the human sphere, but in the positive interaction of man with his Creator. As we have seen, the process of understanding which the pilgrim undergoes in *Paradiso* is primarily the coming to perceive how the many are necessarily grounded in the One and that individuality within that oneness is the responsibility to return to unity. The return to unity is the desire which orders the movement of *virtù* in the universe. By contrast, the Pagans, of whom Virgil is one, are condemned to 'disiar [...] sanza frutto' (*Purg.* III.40). Lombardi considers a significant understanding of *disio* in relation to the feeling of the Limbo dwellers who Virgil represents; their desire is understood 'as mourning, which refers mainly to the regret of something or somebody that does not exist anymore and is lost forever'.[204] The reference to Virgil's absent and dead body remarks his temporal failure to recognise the potential offered by that body and that body's true significance.

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[203] This idea has also been raised by Vittorio Montemaggi in his essay '"La rosa in che il verbo divino carne si fece": Human Bodies and Truth in the Poetic Narrative of the *Commedia*', in *Dante and the Human Body: Eight Essays*, edited by John C. Barnes and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin, Ireland and Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2007), pp. 159-84 (p. 169).

[204] Lombardi, *Syntax of Desire*, p. 163.

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Thus he can only see the *virtù* which forms the souls of the afterlife as disposing to suffering rather than disposing to joy, just as his own dead body reflects the absence of its true vivification in life. Instead for the souls of Purgatory, Dante stages a repetition of their original creation; formed by *virtù*, they are placed within an environment which tests and perfects them, perfectly ordering their activity towards the divine reward which they are guaranteed.

The possibility offered to the purgating souls is one also offered to the pilgrim himself, as suggested by the other dynamic of *virtù* which appears in *Purgatorio* III. When the travellers meet the waiting souls in this area of Purgatory, who are made fearful by the appearance of the pilgrim's shadow, Virgil's reassurance makes reference to the divine force behind the pilgrim's journey. The pilgrim's corporeality is re-emphasised – 'questo è corpo uman che voi vedete' (95) – but his corporeal actions are in dialogue with a divine intention: 'non sanza virtù che da ciel vegna / cerchi di soverchiar questa parete' (98-99). This *virtù da ciel* invites a triple interpretation. The first, which will be considered in more detail in Chapter Five, makes reference to the divine aid which enables the pilgrim's journey. The second perhaps refers to the new order of experience and action to which the pilgrim is being privileged: his human capabilities are being uniquely aided and raised above their natural potential in order to facilitate his journey. But the third recalls the *virtù da ciel* which is at the centre of all human individualised existence. The *virtù*, which disposes the souls in Purgatory, is the same as that which creates human beings in temporal life emphasising that the possibility for salvation, which the pilgrim's journey shows, is the same as the possibility for salvation offered to all humankind in their very state of existence.

While canto III focuses upon *virtù* as that which informs the souls to enable purgation, further on in *Purgatorio* XXIII the term *virtù* is used to signify the active power behind the punishments themselves and as that which links them to divine will.[205] In other words, it is that which directly informs the reordering of their ethical activity towards God, by linking their will to God's.

The pilgrim, now accompanied by Statius and Virgil, finds himself on the terrace of gluttony. He is fascinated, perhaps more than anywhere else in the *Purgatorio*, by how the souls he sees come to look as they do – indeed it is his overt curiosity here which will lead

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[205] For analyses of *Purgatorio* XXIII see: Umberto Bosco, *Canto XXIII del Purgatorio: Lectura dantis scaligera* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1968); Gabriele Muresu, 'Forese e la Gola', *L'Alighieri* 29 (2007), 5-29; Matthew Treherne, 'Liturgical Personhood: Creation, Penitence and Praise in the *Commedia*', in *Dante's 'Commedia': Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), pp. 131-60; Also see Patrick Meredith Gardner, 'Dante and the Suffering Soul'.

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to Statius' explanation in canto XXV. The intense focus upon the physicality of the punishment of the gluttons and the reflection upon the mysterious and wondrous nature of the cause behind it are techniques familiar to us from the earlier consideration of meditative devotional literature. This canto enacts a process by which the reader, through focusing on the physicality of its visions, is drawn into the emotional transformative drama of the scene. The episode's dramatic tension is built up by the delay in response to the pilgrim's initial wonderment over the appearance of the souls. The answer to the question is made urgent by delay first by means of the rhetorical question of the authorial narrator, which is followed immediately by the curiosity of the pilgrim himself:

> Chi crederebbe che l'odor d'un pomo
> sì governasse, generando brama,
> e quel d'un'acqua, non sappiendo como?
> Già era in ammirar che sì li affama,
> per la cagione ancor non manifesta
> di lor magrezza e di lor trista squama.   (*Purg.* XXIII.34-39)

The issue is identified as significant through reactions both within and outside the poem's temporal narrative. Even the appearance of the pilgrim's lamented friend Forese is not enough to drive this question from the pilgrim's mind and he insists on the necessity of an answer before he can turn his mind to other things:

> Però mi dì, per Dio, che sì vi sfoglia;
> non mi far dir mentr'io mi maraviglio,
> ché mal può dir chi è pien d'altra voglia.   (*Purg.* XXIII.58-60).

Enacted in this delay is in fact a sharpening of the will. By withholding the answer while stressing its overwhelming importance, the poet leads his reader into a state of desire. The pilgrim's desire, so focused on the answer, is a right desire, one which accepts no personal distractions in the search for truth. So while the pilgrim acts as the exemplum for the reader's desire, the narrative structure has established that desire itself.

It is only from this state of mind that the answer can be properly revealed and properly understood. In Forese's answer to the pilgrim, the word *virtù* becomes explicit within the canto, forming an essential part of the answer to the question: '"De l'etterno consiglio / cade vertù ne l'acqua e ne la pianta / rimasa dietro, ond'io sì m'assottiglio"' (61-63). *Virtù* is identified as the active agent which thins the souls, bringing about their particular

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punishment. Furthermore, this *virtù* is the agent which carries out a divine plan, coming as it does from the 'etterno consiglio'. Why should it be in this particular sin and punishment, as opposed to any other, that *virtù*'s role is most explicitly mentioned? The answer lies in the manifestation of the punishment and the particular quality of the sin. Kirkpatrick in his commentary to this canto has suggested that '[g]reed obscures the proper outline of our humanity. Penance clarifies what it is to be human and brings the penitent back to that understanding, revealing the general nature of 'man' that is written in our being'.[206] The souls of the gluttonous are so thinned by the action of *virtù* that their essential humanity is revealed in their faces: 'chi nel viso de li uomini legge "omo" / ben avria quivi conosciuta l'emme' (32-33). When we consider that *virtù* is that which makes man distinct as man and simultaneously that *virtù* is that which man fulfils in the fulfilment of his proper nature, then its reference here is vital; greed, in which man loses all proportion of correct desire in relation to himself, the world and God, is overcome by that force which brings about man's initial creation thus restoring him to an original state. This is a state in which he is able to correctly respond to the temptations of temporal life, reorientating the experiences of that life in the light of divine will. While we have seen that in *Purgatorio* III and XXV *virtù* is conceived as that which manifests the souls of the afterlife, disposing them to punishment, here *virtù* is the agent which, acting on a divine plan, restores the souls to an original state of potential in which their essential human nature is revealed. That nature is one which can enact its proper relation to God and the world.

The punishment and the soul's attitude to it on this terrace is also characterised in a distinct and telling way. Even before direct contact is made with Forese, the narrator describes the tears and singing heard on this terrace as 'tal che diletto e doglia parturìe' (12). Further on, the intrinsic connection of joy-pain is reiterated in Forese's self-correction, 'io dico pena, e dovria dir sollazzo' (72). Unlike the unknowing Virgil for whom pain in the afterlife can only ever be hopeless suffering, Forese, as a soul undergoing purgation and indeed near the end of his journey, is aware of the positive outcome of pain because he is aware of the exemplum of Christ. His own pain he can read in the light of a shared experience with Christ, equating as he does his own desire for punishment with 'quella voglia [...] che menò Cristo lieto a dire "Elì", / quando ne liberò con la sua vena' (74-75). Recalling the role of *virtù* in this particular punishment then, we see that in responding to the soul's willing desire to be purged, *virtù* brings the souls actively to an imitation of Christ, making their suffering possible while at the same time uniting it to the divine plan. It acts as the conduit between man's desire and the desire of God, the interactive force which brings one to the other. *Virtù*, revealing the essential human nature

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[206] Kirkpatrick, Commentary to *Purgatorio* XXIII, p. 436.

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of the souls, brings them towards a resemblance and imitation of Christ as it focuses and 'thins' their distracting desires, enabling them to enact the joyful pain which brings them to God.

Patrick Gardner has pointed out, however, that the particular imitation of Christ which the souls here enact is not his suffering but his cry:

> it is not that this voglia led Christ to take up the Cross, but that it led him to speak, to cry out. [...] [I]f Christ did not in fact despair, if he was *lieto* insofar as he was willing and obedient to the last [...] then he did not cry for his own sake, but to be heard. Whatever exactly the cry shows, it was made to show – to manifest something about this suffering to the world. [...] The desire which draws the fasting to the trees is the same desire: to make their suffering manifest.[207]

Thus the particular imitation brought about by *virtù* is for the souls to reveal God in their words and in doing so bear witness to the transformative experience which has brought them to a *likeness* with Christ. In revealing God through the word they are imitating both Christ incarnate and Christ-Logos. As Pelikan has demonstrated: 'As the principle of rationality [Christ] became [...] the principle of speech or discourse [...] so in turn the Logos was the principle of revelation'.[208] The souls' participation in this act of revelation is only made possible by their purgation which in their sin is related directly to the mouth, the organ of speech. Thus their newly perfected desire, which has turned away from temporal sustenance, can now reveal directly the *virtù* of their nature. The *virtù* of human nature comes to be the unclouded expression of God.

Just as this canto calls for emotional engagement on the part of the reader in the tension-building delay enacted at its opening, it also appeals to a more intense form of participation which is significantly caused by aural stimuli. The punishment of the souls which focuses their desire only on God to such an extent that they come to physically participate in Christ, liberates them from the sinful use of the mouth in gluttony and enables the act of praise. As Treherne has suggested, 'through [...] redirection of love and through assimilation to Christ, doxology becomes possible'.[209] Beyond this, however, the effect of the words of praise which the souls speak is itself described as 'incarnational' within the listener. While standing on the terrace at the canto's opening, the pilgrim hears the weeping and singing of the souls. The effect of these sounds is described in relation to

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[207] Gardner, p. 131.
[208] Pelikan, I, 188.
[209] Treherne, p. 149.

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him who hears rather than him who speaks: 'piangere e cantar s'udìe / "Labïa mëa, Domine", per modo / tal che diletto e doglia parturìe' (10-12). The singing and weeping of the souls gives birth to joy and pain in the listener. The linking of joy, pain and birth is a direct recalling of medieval ideas on Incarnation.[210] The effect of the terrace's sounds and the meditative discourse style, therefore, brings about a sharing on the part of the listener in the transformative act of incarnation.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has show that through creation, all created beings participate in the *virtù* of God and have their own *virtù* to fulfil. Through the dynamic of *virtù*, the *Commedia* places human nature within the order of the universe. This order is formed through God's will. The poem casts creation through *virtù* as the offer of the possibility for ontological fulfilment through one's own individualised *virtù*. But creation, in its multiplicity, appears to obscure the unified oneness of its origin. This chapter has considered how Dante shows how multiplicity itself can come to reveal unity if read correctly, and is in fact essential in the revelation of that unity to human understanding. The poet expresses this by exploring the metaphysical dynamic in *created* terms: the perfectly disposed order of the heavens is the macrocosm of the perfectly disposed human being; the fertile flora of Eden manifests the ontologically fulfilled nature of the soul that has arrived there and the state in which creation ceases to be obscuring and instead becomes revelatory. Dante focuses upon the revelatory possibility inherent to human life itself which is initiated by the Incarnation. In *Purgatorio* XXIII, Dante considers how man, cleansed and focused by the acquisition of *virtù*, comes to reveal the nature he shares with Christ. *Virtù*, according to the poet, forms the body in both life and afterlife emphasising that the ontological transformation and revelation of their essential nature which the purgating souls undergo is inherently possible in human life itself. What is required is a reordering of temporal existence in which the body comes to be seen as part of creation which should tend towards God as its source. *Virtù* is that which overcomes sin through the removal of difference, enabling man to see himself as part of an ontological whole. But at the same time, distinct manifested being is essential since material being is the ground of human understanding. Here again, *virtù* is essential, being that which joins with matter to form distinction. Through a consideration of human nature, Dante explores how that nature can reveal within itself the ontological dynamics of the universe in which multiplicity and unity are made simultaneous. *Virtù*, in enabling man to overcome the distraction of distinct being,

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[210] Treherne, p. 147.

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empowers him to fully reveal his ontological nature in an imitation of the revelation of Christ.

Dante's presentation of creative *virtù* emphasises it as an interactive force between God and man, Creator and creature. It is the offer to man of the opportunity for experience and understanding which could ultimately lead him back to God as the source of his existence. By underlining the role of *virtù* throughout human existence and experience, Dante is emphasising the continuous and positive dialogue which goes on between man and God, forming ultimately an idea of created existence as empowered and empowering.

Dante's originality in respect to the conceptual and representational traditions of considering and expressing *virtù*'s role in creation is to bring together the ontological distinction which each individualised being has, for example in the Aristotelian metaphysical tradition, and combine that with a sense of universal order within which man is in an active and dynamic relationship with God. God not only creates through *virtù*, but Dante casts that creation as an opportunity for fulfilment by man, ultimately through an imitation of the perfectly fulfilled human existence of Christ. The representational traditions' emphasis on fertility as a figure for the fulfilment of virtue, is transformed by Dante into the physical settings of his poem's events. While in the *Lignum vitae* the image of the tree was a learning tool, whose 'branches' man ascended through to attain towards Christ, Dante's trees are totally absorbed within the narrative events and yet also reveal the metaphysical and ethical messages of the fertility of *virtù*. The metaphysical, ethical and poetic, in his presentation, are inseparable. The next chapter will turn to consider how Dante envisages how the relationship of man and God is to be acted upon and how it exists at different points in man's journey towards God.

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4. Interactive *Virtù*: Forms and Failures of Human and Divine Interaction in the *Commedia*

1. Introduction

While the previous chapter focused upon how Dante casts *virtù* within the ontological and creative action of God in the universe, and in human existence and redemption in particular, this chapter will focus upon how Dante stages the actions and interactions which positively (or negatively) vivify the connection of God and man, the nexus of which is *virtù*; it will consider how ontological *virtù* is to be activated and demonstrated in ethical action, as well as showing the results of this interaction. The relationship of God and man is at the heart of Dante's narrative of moral and ontological change in the *Commedia*. How the poet presents this relationship through the realms and souls he encounters is the preoccupation of this chapter. The full richness of the poet's treatment of these preoccupations must be looked for not only in the narrative events of the poem but in the fabric of imagery which underlies these events and in the linguistic modes which Dante chooses to adopt. By considering this, we find *virtù*, and the nexus of concepts and images surrounding it, to be a recurring network, the interpretation of which reveals the poet's complex and integrated understanding of *virtù* and the human-divine relationship. As became apparent in the consideration of the conceptual and representational traditions and in the *Commedia* thus far, ontologically speaking, *virtù* is the creative principle of God and the power with which man is endowed by his existence to fulfil and perfect his nature. The ethical result of this ontological basis, also understood through *virtù*, is man's responsibility to fulfil his nature specifically as a created being, and therefore to enact *virtù* as the perfect love of God. This perfect love of God has the consequence of reordering man's relation to and use of his temporal existence. The term *virtù* is not always overt in the episodes this chapter will consider, but they have been selected because they explore these complex interactions at different stages of the soul's development. Furthermore, the episodes not only explore conceptually the idea of human-divine interaction through *virtù* but also manifest the form and results of this interaction in the poetic forms and images they adopt. Montemaggi has suggested that language itself is a significant manifestation of the dynamics which link man to God. Therefore

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any attempt to read the [*Commedia*] as a theological poem [...] must take three things into account: first, the dynamics which [...] define properly orientated relationships between human beings and God; second, the idea of language which, for Dante, is at one with these dynamics; and, third, the way in which Dante consciously presents the *Commedia* as an example or model of such a kind of language.[211]

The *Commedia's* interactive *virtù*-dynamic is manifested not only in how Dante conceptually explores man's relationship to God, but also in the language he himself chooses to express those relationships and in the language forms through which the relationships are expressed in the poem. Words and manifested actions are invested with the active power to transform an individual's ethical and spiritual course.

In Chapter Three my analysis progressed, to a certain extent, backwards, beginning towards the end of *Paradiso*, and concluding in *Purgatorio*. It did so in order to demonstrate the connection made between the basis of creation and distinction in Dante's thought, and presentation of the individualised redemptive experiences of the souls in Purgatory; to shift from the universal to the particular. Instead this chapter will progress along more linear paths since it seeks to trace a changing and developing process which the *Commedia* constructs. The *Commedia's* moral drama begins in despair and damnation, passes through the reaquisition of goodness and hope, and finally lays out a grand tableau of the joyful salvation of man in Paradise. This journey, I will argue, is accompanied by developing forms of interaction between the souls, the temporal world and, most importantly, God, that contribute to the picture of Dantean *virtù* I am building up.

The three realms of Dante's afterlife are characterised by their differing relations to their author, God. Francesca's melancholy line, 'se fosse amico il re de l'universo' (*Inf.* V.91) encapsulates the disjointed relationship between the souls in *Inferno* and God. The loving care which the Creator willingly gives to his creature is forfeited by the creature's own betrayal of its potential. The selfishness which typifies the souls in hell is the signal of their failure; by placing themselves at the centre of their concern, the humility which comes from the recognition of the beneficial hierarchy of creation breaks down and the souls are forever separated from God. The only relationship which can then exist is one of absolute justice on one side, and bitter blindness on the other. While this may be applied to the general state of Hell, to appreciate more fully the importance of the human-divine relationship as the only thing which can give positive value to human action in Dante's

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[211] Vittorio Montemaggi, 'In Unknowability', p. 61.

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conception, I shall consider a somewhat anomalous space within Hell; a place in which the consciousness of failed potential is always present and in which the only cause of that failure can be traced to the lack of man's relationship to God: Limbo. It is precisely the absence of the recognition of the necessary relationship of man to God which damns those in Limbo and invalidates all of their 'good' actions. With his strikingly original portrayal of Limbo, Dante is experimenting with an idea of *virtù*. It is an overtly provocative and difficult passage whose message the pilgrim himself continues to struggle with up to and perhaps beyond the events of the *Commedia*. The poet is experimenting to see what would happen if he transplanted one ethical system into another; what happens if one transplants an ethics of time into one of eternity;[212] an ethics without Christ into an ethics with Christ. It can never be fair, it can only be absolutely clear in its outcome. Limbo is a place of human *virtù* without God and therefore, if the term is understood in the light of the richer Christian, Dantean tradition I am suggesting, of no *virtù* at all.

Instead *Purgatorio* is the realm in which God's action and man's interaction with it are at the heart of the soul's ethical and ontological development. We have already seen in chapter three how *virtù* participates in the reformation of the souls in Purgatory, both giving them airy bodies to perfect and working as an active agent in this perfection. Purgatory is the reassertion of the form which man and God's relationship ought to take. Here this relationship is presented as a work in progress. The poet's preoccupation with teaching his audience, with leading by example towards a better state of being, makes it essential that he presents not only the end but the means to attain that end. To take up an idea we saw in Chapter One, the role of *virtù* within the human-divine relationship is tied up with notions of testing and response. Like temporal life, Purgatory is a place in which the souls are tested in order to perfect themselves; the difference in Purgatory is that the souls always make the right choice and the right response. As typified by the response of Forese, they always see in that testing the ultimately beneficial action of God; they always see 'sollazzo' and not 'pena'.[213] Purgatory is the foundation for the soul's new spiritual life and consciousness and the passage I will focus on in *Purgatorio*, cantos X and XI, is one concerned with how the poet conceives the ethical foundations necessary before man can rebuild his relationship with God. The terrace of pride marks the entrance into Purgatory proper and explores the avenues through which man can start to move towards God. In his reworking of the Lord's Prayer, Dante provides a guide to the currents which underpin the human-divine relationship, and manifests in its words how that relationship can be witnessed and activated. The Lord's Prayer is also closely linked to the lessons of the

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[212] Amilcare Iannucci 'Inferno IV', in *Lectura Dantis Virginiana*, 6 , supplement (1990), 42-54.
[213] *Purgatorio* XXIII.72.

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exempla, which appear on the terrace of pride, and in fact demonstrates the results of those lessons learned.

Finally, in *Paradiso*, the poet presents the human-divine relationship in its perfected form; the souls exist in the perfect awareness of God and in continual openness to divine love. They are continually aware of their place in relation to God and there is no tension, no doubt. This prevailing peace is perhaps the poet's most compelling argument for recognizing the benefits of one's acknowledgement of the creature's place in relation to its Creator. While all of Paradise partakes of the perfect relationship between the soul and God, I will focus on two passages: *Paradiso* X-XII and *Paradiso* XXI. The first of these explores the traditional role of saints as a conduit between human activity and divine blessing, and considers how Dante imagines the ethical and ontological roles of St Francis and St Dominic in revealing the form which the exemplary interaction of God and man ought to take. The saints represent a dual form of interaction, perfectly interacting with and manifesting the plan of their divine maker, and also act as a perfect model of how man should interact with temporal life. Finally I shall consider a particular figuring of interaction in heaven which appears in *Paradiso* XXI. This interaction demonstrates the ultimate fruition of the human-divine relationship in which the soul comes to simultaneously see and reveal the *virtù* behind its existence. Occurring in the sphere of the contemplatives, it makes a further comment on the focus of desire and action away from the world and towards God which enables the fulfilment of the human-divine relationship.

2. The Metaphysical Foundations of Interaction

In our earlier consideration of Christian ideas of virtue, the absolute necessity of God's love for man and man's love for God in man's progression towards salvation became apparent. It is the human subject's relation to God which determines the value of their actions, rather than the actions themselves: as Davis suggested in relation to Augustine's thought, '[an act] has no quality, virtuous or vicious, until we determine the relation of the agent to God'.[214] It becomes vital that the soul acts in such a way that demonstrates its consciousness of its ontological state as created and therefore recognises the hierarchical relationship which connects the creature to its Creator. Actions must then reflect the consciousness of this state of being and be principally marked by humility. As we saw in Chapter One, the process of learning humility is an interactive one between the testing power of God and man's choice of response. Essentially it is a lesson learned through experience.

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[214] Davis, p. 12.

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The question of how the soul comes to a state of recognition and how it learns humility are, both in the Christian context and in the *Commedia* itself, intimately tied up with an understanding of the vital role of Christ. Christ is the figure through whom God interacts with mankind on several different levels. As we saw in Chapter Three, metaphysically speaking, Christ is the *virtù* of God, that through which God creates and endows man and the universe with being. As Christ-Logos, he is also the principle of revelation in the universe. Furthermore, through Christ and his crucifixion the relationship between God and man, which had been disrupted by Adam's sin, is re-established and the way between Heaven and Earth is reopened. As Pelikan explains in summarising eleventh-century debates over the nature of Christ, this is tied closely to the doctrine of the Incarnation and the two natures of Christ: 'Only man was liable for satisfaction, only God was capable of total satisfaction; therefore "it is necessary that a God-man render it"'.[215] Only through the willing sacrifice of man who is also God can the debt of original sin be satisfied and the potential of human nature to come to God be restored. While this is the metaphysical significance of Christ's incarnate life and crucifixion, temporally speaking, Christ is the person through whom God demonstrates the form which the perfected relationship of God and man should take and how man ought to act to fulfil that relationship. Augustine writes in *De Civitate Dei* that God takes on the weakness of man in the Incarnation in order to reveal the potential of human nature: 'suscepit a nobis et tenax divinitatis suae nostrae infirmitatis particeps factus est, ut nos in melius commutati, quod peccatores mortalesque sumus eius inmortalis et iusti participatione amittamus et quod in natura nostra bonum fecit impletum summo bono in eius naturae bonitate servemus' (*DCD* 21.15). Christ's Incarnation has both a salvific and exemplary purpose: to free mankind from the natural chain of original sin by demonstrating the freedom of his will and the potential of his nature.

Most importantly, however, Christ's salvific act of Incarnation is an act of humility. In taking on corruptible flesh and dying for the sake of his own creature, Christ's act is humble and thus humility is the most significant form of *imitatio Christi* that mankind can adopt. Humility was a recurring preoccupation both in the conceptual and the representational traditions. In the latter, Christ's humility became an object for imitation and the mode in which man could approach in likeness to God. It will become apparent that humility is also a consistent preoccupation in how Dante conceives man's interaction with and return towards God.

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[215] Pelikan, III, 142. Pelikan is here quoting Anselm, *Cur Deus homo*, 2.6.

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Christ is both the way man's ultimate end can be achieved and the end itself. Augustine expresses this duality through an image which Dante himself reiterates. Again in *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine describes the action of Christ as follows:

> Deus dei filius, homine adsumpto [...] et fundavit fidem, ut ad homines Deum iter esset homini per hominem Deum. Hic est enim mediator Dei et hominum, homo Christus Iesus. Per hoc enim mediator per quod homo, per hoc et via. Quoniam si inter eum qui tendit et illud quo tendit via media est, spes est perveniendi [...] sola est autem adversus omnes errores via munitissima, ut idem ipse sit Deus et homo. (*DCD* 11.2)

Christ is the way between God and man, both in terms of metaphysical relationship and practical exemplum. In *Paradiso* XXIII, when the pilgrim gets his first distant glimpse of Christ in heaven, Beatrice reiterates the metaphysical action of Christ in the redemption of mankind precisely through the image of the road:

> [...] Quel che ti sobranza
> è virtù da cui nulla si ripara.
> Quivi è la sapienza e la possanza
>   ch'apri le strade tra 'l cielo e la terra,
> onde fu sì lunga disianza.   (*Par.* XXIII.35-39)

Alongside the traditional names of Christ as *sapienza* and *possanza*, is a usage of *virtù* which refers directly to the influence of Christ upon the pilgrim's perception; it is used in specific reference to the overwhelming light which overpowers the pilgrim's sight. This light is the figuring of the direct *virtù* of Christ. Dante is again establishing *virtù* as a name of Christ and this time linking it directly to the interaction which Christ makes between heaven and earth. This is one both of metaphysical opening and communication with human perception.

Recognition and imitation of Christ, therefore, become fundamental ways in which man is called on to interact with God, since Christ-man is the perfect locus of that interaction itself. Christ's *virtù* both manifests the world and sensitises the world to its createdness. In his temporal existence he demonstrates the modes of activity by which man can return to God: humility of soul, revelation of God in the word and a recognition of the created world as something to be valued above all as God's creation.

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3. Failed Interaction

The term 'virtuous pagans' is so frequently and unconsciously applied to the adult souls whom the poet assigns to Limbo, that its validity in relation to a Dantean idea of *virtù* receives little critical attention.[216] It is accurate to the extent which the text itself asserts; Virgil claims that he dwells in Limbo 'con quei che le tre sante / virtù non si vestiro, e sanza vizio / conobber l'altre e seguir tutte quante' (*Purg.* VII.34-36). The debate on *virtù* in relation to the Limbo-pagans has tended to focus upon their possession of the cardinal but not the theological virtues. Furthermore, the shock and novelty provided by Dante's original inclusion of pagans in Limbo at all has claimed much attention and has fed into debates on how the medieval period in general viewed the idea and possibilities of the 'virtuous pagans'.[217] But there has been little real questioning of the *virtù* of the pagans in the context of the *Commedia* itself. In the light of the *Commedia*'s *virtù*-dynamic, which I have been suggesting, the term 'virtuous pagans' can be productively reconsidered.

In condemning those in Limbo, Dante the poet of the *Commedia* asserts that no matter how good a person is in objective, ethical terms, without God they cannot be saved.[218] With the coming of Christ and the redefinition of *virtù* which it necessitates, ethical interaction must take on a new form which is inseparable from a particular ontological basis. 'Goodness' is a state of being in which one has recognised the source of one's 'good' and has tended one's actions and desires towards the ground of one's being. This is not the same thing as to say that humans unaided cannot be 'ethically good' but rather the poet is asserting that what is ultimately good for a human being is to be in a positive, reciprocal relationship with the divine. If this relationship is unacknowledged or unsought after then what is 'good' cannot be so. Dante, the Christian poet, asserts that this relationship can only be most full and perfect through adherence to the Christian faith. Virgil's statement in Limbo in reference to his companions is totally clear: 's'elli hanno mercedi, / non basta, perché non ebber battesmo, / ch'è porta de la fede che tu credi' (*Inf.* IV 34-6). Without the relationship of man and God, the value-giving force behind human action, that action is worthless. Therefore *virtù*, as value-holding action, the gift which God gives to those who love Him, is impossible for those outside of that relationship. But what Virgil does describe

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[216] From the many possible examples of texts which use this term here are a few examples; Amilcare Iannucci's critical essay on Limbo in *Dante's Inferno: The Indiana Critical Edition*, ed. by Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Robert Hollander's commentary to *Inferno* (New York and London: Doubleday, 2000); Cindy L. Vitto, *The Virtuous Pagan in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1989).

[217] For a thorough and perceptive exploration of the problematics of Dante's Limbo and the good pagans, particularly in relation to Aristotelian and Thomistic thought, see Foster's three essays 'The Two Dantes (I) (II) (III)', pp. 156-253.

[218] For scholarly work on *Inferno* IV, see Iannucci '*Inferno* IV'; Luciano Anceschi, '*Inferno* IV', in *Letture dantesche*, ed. Giovanni Getto (Florence: Sansoni, 1962), pp. 59-71; G. Padoan 'Il Limbo dantesco', *Lettere Italiane* XXI, 4 (1969), 369-88.

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as having been possible for the pre-Christians is precisely a form of love for God, an ability to 'adorar debitamente a Dio' (*Inf.* IV.38). It is a positive failure on the part of the Limbo dwellers to not love as they ought to have done. They fail in the movement of the mind and will in the necessary search for the source of one's created being; they fail in active fulfilment rather than potential.

Dante's Limbo is indeed a challenging experiment in trying to come to terms with humanity's autonomous capabilities. Coming as it does so close to the beginning of the pilgrim's journey, the poet confronts head on the insufficiency of Godless humanity. While it is relegated to the eternal hopelessness of Limbo at the opening of the poem, what happens to the good man without God is a recurring preoccupation throughout the *Commedia*. Each reoccurrence adds something to the complexity of Dante's presentation. As we saw in Chapter Three, in *Purgatorio* III Virgil comments on the search for knowledge of the Limbo-dwellers which remains fruitless without their acknowledgement of Incarnation (31-45). In *Purgatorio* VII, Virgil reiterates lack of faith as the cause of his damnation (8). Without this faith to 'infuse' them in such a way that their actions were turned towards God, the virtues which he and his fellows practised were insufficient. Both these episodes bring to light the importance of man's recognition of God as the source of his being for his actions to be endowed with value which makes his fulfilment possible. This potential is inherent to human existence itself. It is not enough for man to do good; his actions must be reunited with the original source of goodness and existence so that the order of his activity can be raised to a value-holding level. This message is ultimately set forth in canto XIX of *Paradiso* in which the pilgrim asks for a final explanation of God's justice in condemning good but Godless humanity only to be responded to with a non-answer; an answer which demands faith, not only on the part of the pilgrim but on the part of the reader. The point can never be resolved because to resolve it would undermine the message that only God can 'know why'. With that in mind, all the poet can then do is to show the ways in which humans can, or can fail to, come into a fruitful relationship with God. By addressing these ideas so early in the poem as Limbo, the poet establishes a field of questions in the mind of the audience which he answers with examples and counter-examples. As we shall come to see, in Limbo, through the combination of idea and image, the poet conceives the results of the failure of the human-divine relationship.

Limbo is represented by the poet as a place of historical, theological, geographical and individual isolation. It lies outside the judgement of Minos, outside of divine justice, identifying it, along with the canto of the *ignavi*, as a place containing those who did not use their temporal life enough to deserve either salvation or damnation. However, while

Limbo stands outside of judgement, it significantly stands within creation; it is on the inside of the gate before which 'non fuor cose create' (*Inf.* III.7). By this positioning in the structure of Hell, a dramatic contrast is made between the faithlessness of the Limbo-dwellers in not acknowledging their created state and the assertion of their createdness as inherent to their existence as humans. In a sense, they are created whether they know it or not and thus can be judged by their relation to that existential state. While isolated from the Christian ethical scheme, they cannot be isolated from the condition of all humanity and are therefore judged by their relation to that standard. The judgement which the poet assigns to the Limbo-dwellers is one overtly based on their ontological state and their non-acknowledgment of it.

Limbo is distinguished physically from the rest of Hell in several important ways. It is a place of calm stillness in sharp contrast to the chaotic *ignavi* on one side and the storm-tossed lustful on the other. Such an anomalous atmosphere necessarily draws attention to itself, highlighting this first instance of the poet's preoccupation with the topic of Godless man. Both pilgrim and reader are shocked out of their expectations of Hell and forced to re-evaluate preconceived standards of salvation and damnation. The pilgrim's moment of realisation when he recognises the famous people he will come to see who are nevertheless damned, demands that we rethink the nature of *valore* for a human being. If the individuals here found in Hell are of *molto valore*, then why are they here? How has the pilgrim previously misunderstood human worth? It is revealing to consider the rhyming words in this instance of *valore*:

> Gran duol mi prese al cor quando lo 'ntesi,
> però che gente di molto valore
> conobbi che 'n quell limbo eran sospesi.
>   'Dimmi, maestro mio, dimmi, segnore,'
> comincia' io per voler esser certo
> di quella fede che vince ogne errore:
>   uscicci mai alcuno, o per suo merto
> o per altrui, che poi fosse beato?'   (*Inf.* IV.43-50)

Up to, and far beyond this point, Virgil is the pilgrim's beloved guide; but he is not infallible from the poet's perspective. The rhyming of *valore-segnore-errore*, draws attention to the interrelation of the three ideas; the *valore* of humanity as understood by the pilgrim's *segnore*, Virgil, has proved itself at this point in Limbo to be *errore*. Instead the pilgrim seeks for the 'fede che vince ogne errore'. His question to Virgil is revealing of

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the underlying idea that human worth, human actions as having a *valore*, depends not upon themselves ('suo merto') but upon the power of Another – 'per altrui' - to give them value. The pilgrim's faith is in fact fulfilled by the unknowing Virgil through reference to the Incarnation, the sacrifice of Christ and the Harrowing of Hell: 'vidi venire un possente, / con segno di vittoria coronato. / Trasseci l'ombra del primo parente' (53-55). The souls of the Hebrew fathers could only be released because of their hope in Christ and through his aid. While the pilgrim can as yet not judge rightly the true *valore* of humanity and remains both impressed and saddened by the condition of those in Limbo, the poet subtly establishes that the *valore* of humanity is based on the recognition and aid of this greater power. The pilgrim has at this point, in a sense, not appreciated fully the significance of Virgil's words 's'elli hanno mercedi, / non basta, perché non ebber battesmo, / ch'è porta della fede che tu credi' (34-36), biased as he is by his attachment to the speaker. He sees the Limbo-dwellers for their historical greatness, imagining them outside of the undeniable Christian context in which he finds them and in which their inadequacy is clear. Much of the dramatic tension of Limbo comes from this 'misalignment'; the pilgrim sees the memory of what these souls were on earth and cannot yet judge them correctly within the greater scheme of divine justice in which these souls failed to play their part in the ontological dialogue. If we instead look through the poet's eyes, his construction of Limbo simultaneously demonstrates respect for and undermines the souls within it. This undermining continues to be carried out through the physical presentation of Limbo.

Limbo is further distinguished from the rest of Hell by its light. As the pilgrim approaches it he sees, 'un foco / ch'emisperio di tenebre vincia' (69), that is, a point at which light and dark meet. Later as he enters the castle he finds himself 'in loco aperto, luminoso e alto' (116). Limbo is unusually light, but it is not securely light. Even before its respective canto ends, the light emanating from it is swamped and the pilgrim comes to a place 'ove non è che luca' (151). Even more explicitly, when Virgil, standing in Purgatory, describes his Limbo home to Sordello it is as a place 'di tenebre solo' (*Purg.* VII.29). In comparison with the true light which Virgil has now seen in Purgatory, he is able to recognise the insufficiency of the light which fills Limbo. Although in an overtly humanistic argument which I do not intend to pursue here, Pompeati makes the valid point that Limbo contains 'una luce che sale dal basso e non scende dal cielo, cioè [...] un lume di ragione umana'.[219] As we shall come to see, in the *Commedia* light is frequently employed as a metaphor for God's grace: that 'unmerited love' which God disperses through creation and which it is creation's responsibility to respond to with answering love. It is moreover, frequently a figure for *virtù*. If we think back to *Paradiso* II, the light of the heavens was a mark of their

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[219] Arturo Pompeati, *Canto IV del Inferno: Lectura dantis scaligera* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1960), p. 18.

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virtù; in *Paradiso* XXX, we will come to see rivers of light which are manifestations of *virtù*. Light then is a mark of the extent to which a being receives and reveals divine *virtù*. With this in mind, the Limbo dwellers are reminiscent of Augustine's philosophers in the *Confessions* who were 'per impiam superbiam recedentes, et deficientes lumine tuo'.[220] The creature's pride in itself separates it from the light of its Creator. The light of Limbo, emanating from the place itself, is the light of human reason without grace and 'la natura umana, se non è illuminata dalla luce della grazia, non può con le sue sole forze raggiungere la perfezione di cui è capace, che consiste nell'unione con Dio'.[221] Limbo's light is a false light, an unsustainable light because it finds its source only in itself, and although giving temporary light to the pilgrim, indeed to 'Everyman', it does not illuminate beyond itself. Limbo's light is a manifestation of ontological limits which man imposes upon himself if he believes himself limitless.

The light of Limbo, furthermore, is one which the poet suggests does not facilitate *true seeing*. On his recounting of the Harrowing of Hell, it is apparent that Virgil did not recognise the figure of Christ for what he really was (46-63). While the patriarchs had enough faith to be worthy of release by Christ himself, Virgil's self-sustained human reason did not and could not reveal truth to him. Limbo's light is only effective in retrospect when viewed after the coming of Christ, by which human reason is given new value and new autonomy. This idea has been already suggested by the poet's rhyming of *valore* earlier in this canto. Virgil's own text, while unable to enlighten himself, is yet able to cast light behind itself, bringing about the conversion of Statius (*Purg.* XXII.67-69).[222] By the coming of Christ into the world in which human nature is reformed and elevated even pre-Christian texts, seen through the lens of the Incarnation, can be read correctly and contain value.

That the Limbo dwellers existed without faith and therefore without the expectation of Christ, is also manifested in the workings of the *contrapasso* in Limbo in which their temporal state is carried to its eschatological outcome: 'sanza speme vivemo in disio' (42). In defining hope in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas describes it as a particular form of desire whose object is good, in the future, and difficult, though not impossible, to acquire (*ST* 1a2ae40,1). Furthermore, hope implies an active movement towards the object of desire. The theological *virtue* hope (as distinct from hope generally) is made a unique form of desire because of the nature of its object: God, the transcendent good of man. As the ultimate object of hope lies so beyond natural powers, so the virtue to get to this object

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[220] Augustine, *Confessions,* 5.4,
[221] Fausto Montanari, 'Limbo', in *ED,* III (1971), pp. 651-54.
[222] See Albert Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 363, on the changing worth of Virgil's text in relation to Statius's and Dante's own texts.

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must act with supernatural aid; a circular process of desire and dependence emerges. Hope is a form of union with God, as it is by this action that man recognises God as the source of the goods promised by faith, activating that faith into a propelling desire for the source of that good: 'Spes autem facit Deo adhaerere prout est nobis principium perfectae bonitatis, inquantam scilicet per spem divino auxilio innitimur ad beatudinem obtinendam' (ST 2a2ae, 17,6). To exist in a state 'sanza speme' and yet 'in disio', therefore, is the ultimate result of the faithlessness of the Limbo dwellers; their lack of recognition of the correct object condemns them to be excluded from the aid of that object in their attainment of itself. They can have no hope because they have made the object of their natural desire as created beings impossible to attain. The 'fruits' of faith and hope are forever denied them (Purg. III.40) and they are instead condemned to fruitless desire.[223] It is precisely the absence of interaction between will and object, the souls and God, which is implied by their punishment of hopelessness.

The unchanging isolation of the state of hopelessness and the failed relationship which condemns the Limbo-dwellers is further developed by the poet in other physical aspects of Limbo. Within the already isolated space of Limbo stands the nobile castello with its seven walls into which the pilgrim is led by the bella scuola. In all of its various interpretations, the castle is a monument to human intellectual and moral achievement.[224] However, the exact identity of the castle is not perhaps so revealing as what Dante does with it: so little. It is an enclosed space, a barrier which includes and excludes but beyond this, Iannucci suggests, '[t]he absence of detail betrays its diminished status'.[225] It is a half-hearted echo of Virgil's Elysium but we thus find in Dante's use of this image a reiteration of the problem of applying a temporal scheme onto eternity; while Virgil's Elysium is a place of passage, Dante's is one of eternity. The walls of the castle 'separate reason from passion and malice, but they also separate reason from revelation and grace'.[226] The closed walls of the castle represent the closed self-sufficiency of the souls within; the seven walls express the regulated order of classical human virtue but they also express its limits and exclusions. Ultimately Dante rejects, not the classical scheme of virtue but instead the absolute solidity and unchangingness of its self-sufficiency.

The isolation of the castle is overtly a separation and it is this separation which diminishes the value of the virtues it represents. The nobile castello stands separated from the rest of Limbo 'difeso intorno d'un bel fiumicello. / Questo passammo come terra dura' (108-9).

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[223] For a useful explanation of the nature of desire-as-loss, see Lombardi pp. 11-13 and p. 163.
[224] This image has been variously interpreted and it is not the object of this analysis to present a new interpretation or repeat an old one. For interpretations of the nobile castello, see Domenico Consoli, 'castello', in ED, I (1970), pp. 864-66; Pompeati, p. 15.
[225] Iannucci, p. 49.
[226] Iannucci, pp. 48-49.

Water, like light, is a figure for grace in Dante and, along with grace, it is a figure for the transmission of *virtù*, as we came to see in the Earthly Paradise. In this case, however, it is a symbol of anti-grace and anti-*virtù*. It isolates the castle and in its hardness becomes a symbol of non-interaction. Iannucci has described the passage of the pilgrim and his companions over the solid stream as a 'failed baptism';[227] it is a figure for the soul's non-engagement with the *virtù* of God. Remembering Aquinas's doctrine of the infused moral virtues, which are God's reward to humanity which has accepted him, the failed baptism is another image of refusal. Walking continually unbaptised over the stream, the souls are constantly reminded of their temporal and now eternal non-engagement. Unlike the waters of Eden which transform those who pass through them restoring them to the original condition of man, 'the river of Limbo shackles those inside the castle to the timebound pattern of their own thought'.[228] Iannucci's comment here emphasises the limitations of the Limbo-dwellers in terms of time and eternity. Their temporal honours and achievements are stripped of value once located within the eternal and ontological context of Christianity. The souls here are able to carry on being what they always were and only when inserted by the poet into the Christian ontological scheme of the *Commedia* does this become a damnation. Only then is their spiritual isolation and therefore ultimate lack of *virtù* revealed; Anceschi describes theirs as 'la situazione di solitudine [...] della solitudine della mente dell'uomo [...] abbandonato a se medesimo'.[229] The Limbo dwellers' non-interaction with God's *virtù*, which is inherent to their own created state, condemns them to a lifeless eternity.

This lifelessness is powerfully manifested in the figures themselves and makes an important comment on their failure of *virtù*. On hearing Virgil's description, the pilgrim forms an idea of who he will see in Limbo. He expects, 'gente di molto valore', and indeed he sees the exalted poets of his imagination and the 'spiriti magni' who sit inside the *castello*. But the only life which these spirits seem to have is that given them by historical reputation; they are only and eternally their past selves. The long list of names which the poet details serves to build up a list of individuals whose only distinguishing features depend on what we as readers already know about them. Within the poem they remain 'unvivified'.

> mi fuor mostrati li spiriti magni,
>
> che del vedere in me stesso m'essalto.
>
> I' vidi Eletra con molti compagni

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[227] Iannucci, p. 50.
[228] Iannucci, p. 50.
[229] Anceschi, pp. 66-67.

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[...]

Vidi Cammilla e la Pantasilea;

[...]

Vidi quel Bruto che cacciò Tarquino,

[...]

vidi 'l maestro di color che sanno...   (*Inf.* IV.119-31)

The incessant repetition of 'vidi' involves the reader in an objective tour of the great figures of human history who sit like statues, unmoving on the 'verde smalto' (118). It is significant to note that these figures are without emotion: 'sembianz' avevan né trista né lieta' (84). We saw in Chapter One the importance of feeling in the development of virtue; it is the testing, trying and reaction of the human will which are the tools with which virtue is built within the individual through man's interaction with the life offered him by God. To be emotionless is therefore to be *unable* to become virtuous. The emotionless inaction of the Limbo-dwellers is another manifestation of their incompleteness, their ontological unfulfilment and their lack of hope as the movement towards God. Kirkpatrick points out that while '[i]n Paradise [...] human *beings* are *being* human – displayed, that is, through their activities', in Hell they stand 'in pseudo-monumental attitudes of self-aggrandizement'.[230] The Limbo-dwellers are what people remember them to have been in life, in fact to see them is something of a 'non-experience' if the figures are detached from their historical reputation; they remain unable to become anything beyond their temporal selves. They are in this sense, totally without *virtù* as the vivified and vivifying principle built up in the *Commedia*, that simultaneous potential for and fulfilment of ontological perfection.

The figures are vivified only in the memory of the reader and not within the text itself; they do not and cannot form an active part of the positive development of the *Commedia* because they are not within the ontological interaction which drives the movement of the poem forward. The Limbo-dwellers act as a kind of anti-exemplum. They are without detail or positive action worthy of emulation, and their eschatological state is overwhelmingly negative. Their place is sustained in Limbo by their earthly reputation and God's acknowledgement of it: 'L'onrata nominanza / che di lor suona sù ne la tua vita, / grazïa acquista in ciel che sì li avanza' (*Inf.* IV 76-78). But the 'grazia' which this obtains is only sufficient to bathe them in a half light surrounded by chaotic darkness. To rely on past reputation is insufficient; at the same time by, in a sense, deadening the lists of

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[230] Robin Kirkpatrick, 'Polemics of Praise: Theology as Text, Narrative, and Rhetoric in Dante's *Commedia*', in *Dante's Commedia, Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), pp. 14-35 (p. 24).

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individuals, the poet is also reflecting on the poetic tradition of those lists themselves. The transformative ontological message of the *Commedia* is new and must therefore develop new forms of communicating that message. The repeated 'vidi' which the poet employs serves to distance the reader from the figures as though observing a sculpture gallery. Although the pilgrim does interact with some of these figures, significantly their words are not compelling enough to be transmitted through the text to the reader.

> Così andammo infino a la lumera,
>
> parlando cose che 'l tacere è bello,
>
> sì com' era 'l parlar colà dov' era.   (*Inf.* IV.103-5)

While the poet's affected silence serves to maintain the elitist mystique of his conversation with the great poets of history, the fact that their words remain unsaid overtly in the *Commedia* is perhaps another example of the two standards at work in the poet's figuring of Limbo. While endowing those in Limbo with intellectual prestige, they are mute within the poem, their voices not suitable for the Christian narrative, and so the Limbo-dwellers remain condemned to eternal silence.

4. Rebuilding Interaction

As we saw in the introduction to this thesis, significant scholarly work has been dedicated to considering the virtues in *Purgatorio*. The virtues are inculcated in the souls through exempla and activity, learning and doing. This process draws both from the Aristotelian model of the acquisition of moral virtue and the tradition of the exempla. My aim in this section is to build from that idea, to consider how Dante figures the interactions behind the soul's development in Purgatory; to consider the nature of *virtù* itself in order to understand how it underpins the exempla and acquisition of the virtues.

Purgatorio is the realm in which the *virtù*-dynamic which links man and God is most evident. The souls are reformed and punished in order to return them to a prelapsarian perfect condition of receptivity. Moreover, in its structural dynamic, by which virtues are exemplified and inculcated and vices are purged, it presents a practical and tangible idea of what it is to be virtuous. This is closely linked to an imitation of Christ. Cantos X and XI are the first to fully utilise this structure of contrasting vice with virtue and describe the first area in which active transformation of the souls takes place. They detail the correction of the foundational sin of pride and, therefore, by correcting the sin from which all others spring, the lessons learned are likewise foundational for all development in

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Purgatory. The correction which occurs here is characterised by a rejoining of man and God at a most fundamental level, focusing on man and God as creature and Creator and establishing how each must interact with the other. *Purgatorio* XI opens with a rewriting of the Lord's Prayer, a rewriting which exposes and establishes the poet's thinking on the nature of the human-divine relationship which is established through Purgatory and *virtù*'s place within it. The very fact that it is a prayer, and moreover a prayer of the proud learning to be humble, brings the theme of that interactive relationship to the fore. Prayer is that by which man acknowledges his God. Dante expands the Lord's Prayer in such a way as to emphasise the lesson of humility which the first terrace of Purgatory seeks to instil.[231]

Before the Prayer, however, canto X provides an important context within which the prayer must be read. Canto X focuses upon the teaching of humility in the exempla which decorate the walls of the terrace, in the difficulty of Dante and Virgil's ascent which makes them aware of their own weakness, and in the hints towards artistic and creative humility in the face of divine creation, which will be taken up in the Pilgrim's conversation with Oderisi later in canto XI. Georges Güntert in his *lectura* of canto X has argued that at this point the poet presents pride and humility through images of hardness and malleability; the hard marble becomes alive under Dante's *willing* gaze, just as the narrow path which led the travellers up to this terrace was presented as a moving, fluid entity.[232] This contrast of hard and soft becomes the manifestation of the *stato d'anima* of the proud and humble:

> Il duro sasso, plasmato dal sommo artista, eccolo diventare morbida e preghevole materia, poiché la 'cera' [...] atta a ricevere il sigillo, è per Dante sinonimo della materia in mano al Creatore e quindi anche dell'umanità ubbidiente, rappresentato per eccellenza dalla vergine che accoglie in sé, con totale dedizione, la parola di Dio.[233]

Güntert's words reiterate the interaction of divine form and created matter which, as we have already seen, is figured by Dante through a *virtù*-dynamic. In analysing the Earthly Paradise it became apparent that the souls arrived there had been remodelled and purged in order to properly receive and reveal the image of the divine. This is described by Dante in *Paradiso* XIII as only having happened in the creations of Adam and Christ where it was

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[231] On *Purgatorio* X and XI see: Treherne; Giuseppe Polimeni, 'La gloria della lingua: considerazione di poetica nello snodo di *Purgatorio* X-XI-XII', in *Esperimenti danteschi: Purgatorio*, pp. 105-33; Georges Güntert, 'Canto X', in *Lectura dantis turicensis: Purgatorio*, pp. 139-55; Karlheinz Stierle, 'Canto XI', in *Lectura dantis turicensis: Purgatorio*, pp. 157-172.

[232] *Purg.* X.37-41; X.7-9.

[233] Güntert, 'Canto X', p. 144.

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precisely *virtù* which he described as having imprinted upon perfect matter. Essentially, it is only through humility, the removal of the self-will, that divine *virtù* can be fully revealed. Much later in *Paradiso* I, Beatrice describes how matter can fail to properly reveal the seal with which it is imprinted:

> perch' a risponder la materia è sorda,
>> così da questo corso si diparte
> talor la creatura, c'ha poder
> di piegar, così pinta, in altra parte.   (*Par.* I.129-132)

It is in the misuse of the will in the bending away from God that the creature can fail to reveal its Creator. In the events of *Purgatorio* X, the images of hard and malleable, fixed and receptive, recur as ways in which Dante conceives of the *stato d'anima* of those engaged or unengaged in the Creator-creature relationship. This openness or malleability to God's informing hand is of especial significance in the exemplum of the Virgin receiving the Annunciation:

> [...] iv'era imaginata quella
> ch'ad aprir l'alto amor volse la chiave;
>> e avea in atto impressa esta favella
> 'Ecce ancilla Deï' propriamente
> come figura in cera si suggella.   (*Purg.* X.40-45)

Through the Virgin's humble acceptance of the will of God, Christ is enabled to become incarnate and salvation can enter the world.[234] Dante's formulation emphasises that it is the interaction of God's *virtù* with the responding love of his creature which brings about the Incarnation. In *Purgatorio* X, the soul arrived there is shown an example of what it itself can achieve in the sacrifice of its own will and the development of humility.

What we see in the souls of the proud who appear at the end of *Purgatorio* X is their reformation by the hand of God. They are literally bent, reformed into the position of humility and thus made potential matter, ready to receive the informing seal of God. The loving willingness of their suffering expressed in prayer encapsulates the reformed, malleable *stato d'anima* by which man can receive God, being harmonised to his will.

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[234] Steven Botterill has explored the presentation of Mary as a living, real exemplum on the terraces of Purgatory and in the *Commedia* as a whole in *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the 'Commedia'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). See especially p. 157.

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The intense suffering of the souls, here tested to the utmost – 'Più non posso' (139) – and the discomfort ('rancura') which this creates in the viewer, is immediately relieved by the tone of canto XI's opening, which emphasises the souls' loving willingness in suffering. We have seen that religious literature of Dante's time was not afraid to focus upon pain to drive home its message, but what perhaps surprises us about Dante's prayer is the subtle joy and willing acceptance which infuses it, thrown into sharp relief by the horror of the closing lines of canto X.

> O Padre nostro, che ne' cieli stai,
>
> non circunscritto, ma per più amore
>
> ch'ai primi effetti di là sù tu hai,
>
>   laudato sia 'l tuo nome e 'l tuo valore
>
> da ogne creatura, com' è degno
>
> di render grazie al tuo dolce vapore.
>
>   Vegna ver' noi la pace del tuo regno,
>
> ché noi ad essa non potem da noi,
>
> s'ella non vien, con tutto nostro ingegno.
>
>   Come del suo voler li angeli tuoi
>
> fan sacrificio a te, cantando *osanna*,
>
> così facciano li uomini de' suoi.
>
>   Dà oggi a noi la cotidiana manna,
>
> sanza la qual per questo aspro diserto
>
> a retro va chi più di gir s'affanna.
>
>   E come noi lo mal ch'avem sofferto
>
> perdoniamo a ciascuno, e tu perdona
>
> benigno, e non guardar lo nostro merto.
>
>   Nostra virtù che di legger s'adona,
>
> non spermentar con l'antico avversaro,
>
> ma libera da lui che sì la sprona.
>
>   Quest' ultima preghiera, segnor caro,
>
> già non si fa per noi, ché non bisogna,
>
> ma per color che dietro a noi restaro.   (*Purg.* XI.1-24)

Expression through prayer is itself a significant statement. In *Purgatorio* VI, Virgil has explained the failure of the prayers of the characters of his *Aeneid*. They were ineffectual 'perché 'l priego da Dio era disgiunto' (42). Instead, here in Purgatory, prayer is reconnected with the true source of generous existence who can give value to the prayer

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itself. Dante's choice of this prayer, the universal prayer which encompasses all others, sets the events of this terrace as foundational, as somehow having a bearing on all to come. It is the prayer which encapsulates the nature of the relationship of God to man, that of parent and child: 'O Padre nostro' – the 'nostro' breaking down the divisions of self and sense of difference which typify the characters of the proud. It is also Christ's prayer, the actual Son of the Father, which is then taught by him to the disciples thereby bringing them into the community of the Church, which is both a temporal organization and a metaphysical state of being. Its significance here is then manifold; those who have now entered Purgatory proper have entered into the body of the Church, thus entering into an official contract between God and man. We find here a most significant shift; pride, the first sin by which Lucifer and Adam separated themselves from God, is overcome by the prayer of Christ, who metaphysically reversed the prideful action of Adam through his humble self-sacrifice and established the community of the Church. The lines between the temporal and metaphysical become blurred and the impact of action upon metaphysical reality is revealed; pride leads to damnation, humility to salvation of all.

The disembodied voice which appears out of nowhere at the opening of the canto, combined with the initial familiarity of the words, has also the effect of drawing the reader into the act of prayer – an action of temporal humility – as if they are reciting along with the words; to read the prayer is to pray and to join in the community united under the common Father. The action of prayer itself expresses the foundational unity of the group: as Treherne rightly points out, '[t]he version of the *Pater Noster* of the penitent proud is not sung by any particular individual; the communal performance of the prayer undermines any residual egotism on their part'.[235] This community in particular expresses its unity by emphasising its shared ontological origin.

From the opening, it is specifically God's act of creation which is praised. At the same time there is a distinct idea of how that creation takes place, which is reminiscent of the Trinitarian interaction of creation we saw in Chapter Three. The only way in which God can in any way be 'located' is by understanding where his love is more greatly focused, which is upon the things he created first (1-3). *Amore*, falling in the rhyme position, is thereby brought by the poet into a central place in his conception of the creative process, being rhymed with the two other terms which express how God creates: *Valore* and *Vapore.* The variously interpreted terms of *valore* and *vapore*, whether distinct characteristics of the members of the Trinity or aspects of God the Father alone, are nevertheless both connected to the notion of creative *virtù*: *Valore,* the power and potency

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[235] Treherne, p. 134.

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of God and *vapore* the effusion of that potency down to creation.[236] And it is specifically as *creation* that the soul must respond with praise: 'laudato sia [...] da ogne creatura'. The word *valore* has already been used by the poet on the terrace of pride. But while the usage here at XI.4 refers to God's *valore*, the earlier usage was to that of the Emperor Trajan: 'Quiv'era storiata l'alta Gloria / del roman principato, il cui valore / mosse Gregorio a la sua gran vittoria' (*Purg.* X.73-75). The *valore*, which Dante here refers to, is Trajan's humility; it is Trajan's act of humility towards the widow which encourages Gregory to pray for his salvation, thus enabling him to be reborn and saved. Dante's hardly casual usage of this precise term in such close proximity, and both times in the rhyme position, cannot help but suggest that the connotations which each evokes ought to be read in dialogue with one another. Thus we might suggest an implication by the poet that man's humility, that by which he recognises himself as a created being, the equal not superior of other created beings around him, is the right and necessary fulfilment of and response to the creative *Valore* of God: that *Valore* which asserts God's power over creation while at the same time demonstrating his generosity in creating. This contrasts with the mistaken *valore* of the self-sufficient souls of Limbo which lacks the foundation of faith and God, and the humility that faith necessitates.

Dante's reworking of the Lord's Prayer is a declaration of the insufficiency of man to attain salvation without God. Again Treherne points out that Dante's 'additions to the biblical version of the Pater Noster [...] emphasize the souls' dependence on God and diminish any sense of their own strength and ability'.[237] The poet expresses this insufficiency on an ontological level by stressing it in relation to the two fundamental aspects of human nature which have already appeared in debates on *virtù*: *ingegno* and *voler*. In Aristotelian virtue ethics (and arguably in Dante's own *Convivio*)[238] the perfection of these two faculties lies within human power alone. However, here in canto XI, any sense of human self-sufficiency is gone; the effort of 'tutto nostro ingegno' (9) is insufficient to achieve the peace of heaven, and rather than flaunting the autonomy of the human will, the souls instead joyfully make sacrifice of it 'cantando *osanna*' (11). If, as Kirkpatrick suggests, 'humility and penitence are exact expressions of our existential condition', then in the recitation of this prayer the souls are actively moving towards a more profound expression of their nature.[239] Therefore to humbly submit the two facets of human nature

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[236] Chiavacci-Leonardi in her commentary establishes both interpretations while favouring that which attributes 'nome' 'valore' and 'vapore' all to the Father as being more consistent with Dante's use of the terms elsewhere. Chiavacci-Leonardi and Singleton both link 'vapore' to Wisdom 7:25, 'Vapor est enim virtutis dei' and Chiavacci-Leonardi and Kirkpatrick identify *vapore* as the effusion which comes down to man, of God's valore. Chiavacci-Leonardi commentary (1991-1997), on *Purgatorio* 11.4, see http://dante.dartmouth.edu/ (accessed 29th April 2012).
[237] Treherne, p. 133.
[238] See Foster, 'The Two Dantes I', pp. 160-61.
[239] Kirkpatrick, 'Polemics', p. 23.

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which are perfected by *virtù* to the source of that *virtù* itself is paradoxically to perfect them by recognising their dependency. To separate their existence from God is to bring the souls into confusion, conflict and division. Thus, the peace of heaven is that which rewards the intellect which has recognised God as its origin; thus, once the human will is submitted to God then peace from desire is the prize.[240]

The recitation of the Lord's Prayer is an instance in which the duality of Dante's text is made overtly visible; it is at once the story of an individual passing through the underworld and meeting the souls within its realms, and a comment on (and advice to?) the 'here' of the temporal life of his readers.[241] It is not until the final terzina of the Prayer that its conscious duality becomes apparent but once it appears it necessarily influences our rereading of the earlier supplications: 'quest'ultima preghiera, segnor caro, /già non si fa per noi, ché non bisogna, / ma per color che dietro a noi restaro' (22-24). We have here a vision of two distinct stages of the same community; the stage of the purgating souls who have already attained security, if not yet peace, and the community of the living on earth who must still pass through the 'aspro diserto' (14). It is the common prayer which links the two communities together. The community of the living is still one which trials and suffering can touch. However, we remember from the writings of Gregory the Great that it is specifically through such trials that God aids in the development of human *virtù*, and it is precisely *virtù* which Dante refers to in this context. The proud souls' final prayer is that 'Nostra virtù che di legger s'adona, / non spermentar con l'antico avversaro, / ma libera da lui che sì la sprona' (19-21). There is a distinct parallel between temporal life and Purgatory, the realm of salvation which exists in time. In this supplication to end the testing of *virtù* which is an inevitable and necessary part of temporal life, Dante is referring to the human ontological state precisely in relation to the way in which the Creator of that state interacts with man in order both to create him and to perfect him. The stability of 'nostra *virtù*' is entirely in the hands of 'Padre nostro', God, and dependent on his will to test it. The currents which underpin human life and existence are brought to the surface in the events of Purgatory; the souls openly recognise God as the source of their own *virtù*, God as its tester and God as its fulfiler. Purgatory as the 'second chance' is a mirror of the ontological and ethical possibilities of real temporal life.

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[240] Dante's inclusion of the 'peace of heaven' again recalls Augustine's connection of virtue and peace. In contrast to the trials of the world, in heaven there will be no conflict and the temporal virtues which maintain and protect the soul during its earthly trials will be rewarded with peace: 'ibi virtutes, non contra ulla vitia vel mala quaecumque certantes, sed habentes victoriae praemium aeternam pacem, quam nullus adversarius inquietet' (*DCD*. 19.10). In the *Confessions* we saw Augustine's internal conflict over whether to renounce his own will and follow God's, the renunciation then leading to freedom, peace and the state of stable virtue: 'et hoc erat totum nolle, quod volebam, et velle, quod volebas. Sed ubi erat tam annoso tempore, et de quo imo altoque secreto evocatum est in momento liberum arbitrium meum, quo subderem cervicem leni iugo tuo, et umeros levi sarcinae tuae' (*Conf.* 9.1.1).
[241] See Singleton, *Journey to Beatrice*, p. 5.

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Purgatorio X and XI reveal the form in which man is called on to interact with God in order to come to ultimate perfection. In developing humility, man comes to see God not only as the source of his existence but as the source of the good potential of his nature: the source of his *virtù*. This recognition must be enacted through language which testifies the nature of this relationship. It is not purely a given, 'mechanical' state of affairs, but rather a relationship of great emotional interaction which must be constantly fluid and active. It is a relationship of parent and child which presents the parent as freely giving of himself and the child as lovingly responding. Through the 'child's' willing acknowledgment of the generosity of his existence, he is led through the experiences of life to develop into a fulfilled individual. Most necessary, however, is his continued remembrance of his ontological state and the constant acknowledgement of that through humility. It is this humility which can then enable man to, in a sense, 'give birth' to Christ within himself, imitating the willing love of the Virgin. So it is that the *virtù* of man (found in the will and intellect) once subjugated or harmonised with the will of God, becomes fully receptive to God's *virtù* which draws the soul up towards Himself.

5. Saints: A Nexus of Interaction

If *Purgatorio* represents man's positive interaction with God at a potential stage, *Paradiso* shows that interaction perfected. It does not present this perfection as totally disconnected from temporal life, however, showing how that perfect interaction can exist through the lives of saints. The biographies of St Francis and St Dominic are among the most extended in the *Commedia* and are significant both in their distinctive content and as feeding and taking meaning from the context which they inhabit. These two biographies identify the forms in which Dante establishes the figures of saints as nexus of interaction. Christian theology of Dante's period, as outlined by Jaroslav Pelikan, emphasised saints as a dual point of metaphysical interaction between man and God and of social communion between believers, the Church and God. Pelikan writes that the communion of the saints was read as having as its metaphysical ground 'the inner nature of God who, as Trinity, was "neither singular nor solitary"'.[242] Saints in communion were a manifestation of the perfect relation of the Trinity, and existed themselves in a special relation to God. As we saw in the hagiographical traditions explored in Chapter Two, saints were also read as practical *exempla* for the lives of Christians. The goodness of the saints demonstrated how other believers could move closer towards the perfection necessary for salvation: 'the saints served [...] as "a mirror and an example, and indeed as a seasoning of human life on

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[242] Pelikan, III, 175. Pelikan is here quoting Baldwin of Ford, *Tractates* 15.

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earth." Their footsteps were to be imitated and followed'.[243] Beyond being a practical exemplum, however, the virtues of the saints were a particular kind of exempla being 'a reflection of the virtues of Christ'.[244] Saints, therefore, manifested both a privileged relationship to God and a privileged form of revealing God in their actions. Because their virtues reflected the virtues of Christ they also, like Christ, overtly revealed the source of their goodness: God. The goodness of the saints revealed not their own personal achievement but rather their God-given perfection; their 'virtues had their origin in God, not in the saints themselves'.[245] To focus on the role of saints then is to make a particular statement about the source of human goodness and what that goodness actually reveals; it reveals not the individual's power but the divine force behind it. By doing so their lives and characters reveal God's hand in human salvation and link human action to a divine providential plan. The saint becomes the site on which that plan for the redemption of mankind is revealed and the means for demonstrating how that divine plan can be fulfilled by the individual. As nexus of interaction, saints reveal the source of human goodness, reveal how that source works for man's salvation, and what the result of a perfected relationship with God in temporal life actually is.

In the *Commedia*'s biographies of Francis and Dominic, Dante, rather than focusing on the many individual acts of goodness which make up the details of traditional hagiographies, emphasises the most overt ways in which the figures of Francis and Dominic revealed God in their actions.[246] The lives of the two saints are cast as acts of God's providence and thus are directly in relation to and in manifestation of the source of their existence. They are cast as having a closer knowledge of the will of God, which was an aspect of the attainment of virtue in the conceptual tradition.[247] The particular acts of the saints are focused upon a rebalancing of man's desire for the world and man's desire for God, demonstrating God as the only true object of desire. The poet describes the result of the two saints' perfect relationship with God as becoming physically manifested in their lives and they are thus transformed into agents of revelation. In such a way they reflect the life of Christ, revealing the otherwise unknowable details of God's plan. Most significantly, the poet expresses the positive influence which the saints have on earth and that by which they manifest their

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[243] Pelikan, III, 175. Pelikan is here drawing from Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter Damian.

[244] Pelikan, III, 176.

[245] Pelikan, III, 177.

[246] On the cantos of the Heaven of the Sun see: Lucia Battaglia Ricci, 'Nel cielo del Sole: *Paradiso* X-XI-XII', *Esperimenti danteschi: Paradiso* ed by by Luca Azzetta, Tommaso Montorfano *et al.* (Genoa and Milan: Marietti, 2010), pp. 113-55. On *Paradiso* XI see: Bruno Nardi 'Il canto di Francesco', *L'Alighieri* 5:2 (1964), 9-20; Erich Auerbach, 'St Francis of Assisi in Dante's *Commedia*', in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 79-98; Luciano Rossi, 'Canto XI', in *Lectura dantis turicensis: Paradiso*, pp. 167-18. ; On *Paradiso* XII see: Alessandro Ghisalberti, 'Canto XII', in *Lecura dantis turicensis: Paradiso*, pp. 181-92; Antonio di Pietro, *Canto XII del Paradiso: Lectura dantis scaligera* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1964).

[247] This was pointed out by G. Scott Davis in relation to Augustine's thought.

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divine purpose in terms of *virtù*. *Virtù*, overtly originating in God, is transmitted through the interactive nexus of the saints' lives and stories. The form in which the poet tells the lives of the two saints is again a careful paralleling of content and form. The metaphysical forces and purposes which underpin the saints' lives and actions are transformed into living allegory, so that the metaphysical becomes conceptually real. At the same time, the images of allegory directly inform the concepts which they express.

The context of the two biographies emphasises the value of the saints' differences by revealing their similarities. The cantos of the sun, which bring together the disparate thinkers of Dante's intellectual heritage and unify them in the dynamic dance, contain at their heart a message that unity can ultimately be found in differences which seek the same end. Dante's construction of this heaven does away with temporal disagreements, setting 'enemies' beside each other and making opposing sides praise one another and criticise themselves. The narrative consciously avoids taking sides, in order to demonstrate that there are many roads by which to reach God. In the figures of Francis and Dominic, Dante emphasises two saints of distinct abilities and experiences who are yet ordained by God to bring about the same end. The praise of each is almost interchangeable 'perch' ad un fine fu l'opere sue' (*Par.* XI.42). In *Paradiso* XI, the end aim of the two saints is characterised by the poet as being to return the Bride-Church to her Bridegroom-Christ. The saints' existence is presented as the direct action of 'La provedenza, che governa il mondo' (XI.28). Their role is specifically the revelation of that plan to human perception since it, unmanifested, transcends human understanding: 'quel consiglio nel qual ogne aspetto / creato è vinto pria che vada al fondo' (XI.29-30). The saints' lives are presented as a physical nexus in which God's otherwise invisible plan is made visible in human life, an echo here of the revelation of the Logos. The actions of the saints are characterised specifically as continuing the plan for salvation which had begun with the crucifixion, as suggested by the way the poet describes the saints' appointed mission:

> però che andasse ver' lo suo diletto
> la sposa di colui ch'ad alte grida
> disposò lei col sangue benedetto,
>   in sé sicura e anche a lui più fida   (*Par.* XI.31-34)

We are reminded that Christ's providential sacrifice is that which underpins the connection of man and God which can bring about man's redemption. This end is the mission of both Francis and Dominic: 'due principi ordinò in suo favore, / che quinci e

quindi le fosser per guida' (35-36). The unified mission of the two saints is reiterated in *Paradiso* XII. 37-45. Here, rather than a recollection of the mystical marriage of Christ and Church, Dante couches his explanation of their mission in the language of battle: 'l'esercito di Cristo', 'riarmar', 'la 'nsegna', 'milizia' (37-41). Within this context, the two saints transform into the noble knights battling to save the endangered bride, an imagery we saw used previously in reference to Francis by Tommaso da Celano: 'a sua sposa soccorse / con due campioni, al cui fare, al cui dire / lo popol disviato si raccorse' (43-45). In this description of the *due campioni*, Dante picks out the particular modes which will become significant in how the saints fulfil their providential roles: *fare* and *dire*. The two saints are unified in their purpose and success and thus 'Degno è che, dov' è l'un, l'altro s'induca / sì che com'elli ad una militaro, / così la gloria loro insieme luca' (XII.34-36). But this unity does not deny the importance of their distinctness. It is perhaps significant that the lines from canto XI, with their emphasis on the bride of Christ and her connection to Christ's suffering, precede Francis's biography and are those aspects of Francis's particular imitation of Christ which are made most important in Dante's retelling of his story; instead those in canto XII emphasise the militant saving of the Church through word and action and precede the account of Dominic while at the same time being his particular attributes.

There are only two instances of the word *virtù* in these cantos but both tellingly reveal the particular role in which Dante is casting the two saints. The usages relate to the influence which each saint has over their surroundings and they way in which they reveal their proper natures. Reading these usages within the two narratives as a whole reveals *virtù* as an underlying dynamic of interaction and revelation, and expresses the ways the saints carry out their works of revelation: through the body and through the word.

In focusing on the three overtly Christical elements of Francis' hagiography – marriage to Lady Poverty, the Stigmata and the image of the rising sun – Dante constructs his figure of the saint in the tradition of the *imitator Christi* and as he who, through his love for Christ, is transformed into the object of that love.[248] Love is central to the Christian religious experience; as Lombardi suggests, by '[p]ositing divinity as Love, Christianity established desire as the very nature of the human experience'.[249] Francis is characterised by Dante as one who has fully given himself over to love as the centre of his faith, even comparing him to the angelic exemplum of love, 'tutto serafico in ardore' (*Par.* XI.37). By focusing upon the tradition of the saint's mystical marriage to Lady Poverty, Dante is both continuing a form of representation associated to the saint and using a real, tangible situation to

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[248] Transformation through love was also a significant feature of Bonaventure's account of Francis in the *Legenda Major*.
[249] Lombardi, p. 13.

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express a metaphysical reality. The saint's mystical and literal marriage to Lady Poverty is the manifestation of how man ought to feel towards the things of this world and those of the next, not only not desiring but *desiring not to have*.[250] The following after of God in the renunciation of the world is a joyful compelling desire. We remember that for Augustine, it is precisely in this following after that *virtù* is attained. The allegory of marital bliss which expresses Francis's joyful turning away from the world, becomes the compelling example by which others are driven to follow God:

> La lor concordia e i lor lieti sembianti,
> amore e maraviglia e dolce sguardo
> facieno esser cagion di pensier santi;
> tanto che 'l venerabile Bernardo
> si scalzò prima, e dietro a tanta pace
> corse e, correndo, li parve esser tardo. (*Par.* XI.76-81)

The exemplum which Francis becomes in Dante's account is not as a moderate, 'saintly' man, but as an ardent lover willing to risk everything and suffer for his beloved. In this Christical marriage, Francis is cast as a successor of Christ not only through 'mystical spirituality' but because he followed what Auerbach describes as a way of life 'resting directly on Scripture, directly practical [...] the imitation of the practical poverty and humility of Christ'.[251] But Francis's poverty is not figured through pain but through joy which reveals the source for which privation is undergone: God as love. Francis's poverty, through the joyful marital images with which Dante surrounds it, is made an object of desire.

It is a bodily, a deeply emotive and sensual form of imitation which distinguishes Francis's particular story and which is relevant to the other Christical traits with which he is associated. In Dante's account, Francis's stigmata are contextualised as bearing witness to his Christological imitation. Dante compresses the events of the saint's life so that in three *terzine* Francis appears as the preacher of Christ and as he who reveals Christ in his own flesh. Word and physical manifestation are picked out as the two principal forms of revelation:

> E poi che per la sete del martiro,
> ne la presenza del Soldan superba
> predicò Cristo e li altri che 'l seguiro,

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[250] Auerbach, 'St Francis', p. 84.
[251] Auerbach, 'St Francis', p. 96.

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> e per trovare a conversione acerba
> troppo la gente e per non stare indarno,
> redissi al frutto de l'italica erba,
>
> nel crudo sasso intra Tevero e Arno
> da Cristo prese l'ultimo sigillo,
> che le sue membra due anni portarno.   (*Par.* XI.100-108)

By his willingness to re-enact the sacrifice of Christ in martyrdom and by his witnessing of Christ in the act of preaching, Francis becomes worthy of a physical imitation of Christ in the receipt of the stigmata. This instance of *sigillo*, referring to the marks made by Christ into Francis' willing flesh as he is stands within the *crudo sasso*, recalls the image of the Annunciation that appeared in *Purgatorio* X, in which, 'quivi intagliato', into the hard rock 'avea in atto impressa esta favella / "Ecce ancilla Deï", propriamente / come figura in cera si suggella' (43-45). In contrast to the proud sultan, Francis's humility makes him worthy to reveal God in his own flesh, just as the humility of the Virgin had made her malleable to God's imprinting hand and able to take into herself the form of God. Francis, in willing, humble subservience and intense love, is transformed into a bodily witness of the Incarnation. Because of his own perfected physical desires he became perfect matter onto which God could imprint and reveal himself. This instance of *sigillo* in canto XI is also, by its proximity, a close echo of the *sigillo* which Francis's mendicant order receives from Pope Innocent: 'regalmente sua dura intenzione / ad Innocenzio aperse, e da lui ebbe / primo sigillo a sua religïone' (XI.91-93). Francis as saint is the joining point between the authority of the Church and the authority of God, ordained by both Church and God as their temporal representative. His significance spans between the metaphysical and the social. He can therefore be a nexus of interaction for the temporal believer.

Francis, as the representative of metaphysical power and of social and spiritual renewal, is identified in the first Christic image to be attached to his biography, Francis as the rising sun.[252] In both the biography of Francis and in that of Dominic, images of natural fertility and renewal are used to express the spiritual fertility the two saints bring to the world. Francis returns from the *unripe* land of the Sultan to the more promising Italian fields. (105). In his figuring as the rising sun he warms all the ground around him and it is thus that his *virtù* is evident and felt:

> Non era ancor molto lontan da l'orto,
> ch'el cominciò a far sentir la terra

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[252] For references on the tradition of the rising sun as a figure for Christ see Auerbach, 'St Francis', p. 86.

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de la sua gran virtute alcun conforto.   (*Par.* XI.55-57)

Francis, like the sun, is the visible manifestation of God's life-giving presence and this is his *virtù*, to remind man of the presence of God. In the analysis of the Earthly Paradise in Chapter Three, images of terrestrial fertility became evident as images of spiritual renewal and natural potential. Perfectly disposed *terra*, that which is free from the distractions of temporal life, can be fully fertile; the human soul which has freed itself from temporal greed can fully receive and reveal the divine *virtù* at the source of its existence. Francis, in his perfectly focused love of God which is figured through love of *not* temporal possessions, himself reveals in the stigmata the sign of God. Through his personal *virtù* and the revelation this brings about, Francis is figured as having a spiritually renewing effect on those around him.

Dante's biography of Dominic places strong emphasis on the saint as being sent into the world by God to complete a particular mission: the revelation of divine truth through preaching the word. While Francis's biography is characterised by loving desire and spiritual fervour, Dominic is presented as a man of great spiritual energy and clarity who, in his actions and words, reveals the hand of God which moves him. That Dominic's very existence and his role as saviour of the Church are instrinsically and inseparably linked in Dante's rendering of the character, is encapsulated near the opening of his biography. It is significantly expressed through a usage of *virtù*: 'come fu creata, fu repleta / sì la sua mente di viva vertute / che, ne la madre, lei fece profeta' (*Par.* XII.58-60). Dominic's *virtute*, his will to reveal God, is made manifest even before his birth through the words of his mother. If we recall that in Dante's scheme *virtù* is that given to the soul at creation by which their individual nature is distinguished and offered the potential for perfection and by which they assume their place in the order of existence, then Dominic's divinely appointed role is evidenced through the particular characteristics and effect of his *virtù*. Just as the fullness of Francis's *virtù* spreads his effect to his surrounding environment, so the repleteness of Dominic's being overflows into his mother's act of speech. The scene of his baptism continues the idea that his nature inspires those around him to reveal his relation to God, to demonstrate the divine hand behind Dominic's creation and his denomination. So his godmother again in a prophetic vision sees his future and 'quinci si mosse spirito a nomarlo / del possessivo di cui era tutto. / Dominico fu detto' (*Par.* XII.68-70). As in Francis's biography, the poet manages to convey the effect of the saint's life on his followers, establishing a direct line between his existence and the positive consequences of it. So at Dominic's baptism we already have a sense of what will result from his life: 'il mirabil frutto / ch'uscir dovea di lui e de le rede' (65-66). Dominic, like

Francis, is presented as the agent of a divine mission, but how they effect their missions is unique; they not only fulfil them but manifest them in their own being. In Dante's biographies of the saints, Dominic and Francis are both marked by God so as to reveal God's hand in their existence and action; just as Francis is marked by the spirit physically, Dominic is marked by the spirit in his name.[253]

Like Francis, Dominic is compared to one of the angelic orders: 'per sapienza in terra fue / di cherubica luce uno splendore' (*Par.* XI.38-39). In his presentation of the Cherubim-like Dominic, according to Battaglia Ricci, Dante uses the particular characteristics of the cherubim as identified by his contemporary theology: 'il nome "cherubino" indica [...] secondo Dionigi, la possibilità che questi angeli hanno di "conoscere" e di "volgere la pupilla verso la divinità" [...] e insieme un inteso zelo'.[254] As he had emphasised Francis's intense desire for 'Lady' poverty through lexical repetition – 'di dì in dì l'amò più forte' (XI.63) – Dante captures the intensity of Dominic's focus upon God in the repetitive rhyme sequence which can only rhyme Christ with Christ. This circular pattern, which allows for no interruption of focus, mimics Dominic's own focused adhesion to Christ:

> Dominic fu detto; e io ne parlo
> sì come di l'agricola che Cristo
> elesse a l'orto suo per aiutarlo.
> Ben parve messo e famigliar di Cristo:
> che 'l primo amor che 'n lui fu manifesto.
> fu al primo consiglio che diè Cristo.   (*Par.* XII.70-75)

Dominic's intense devotion is *not* directed towards the world. Just as Francis loves Lady Poverty, the 'primo amor' of Dominic is Christ's teaching on poverty itself.[255] The way the two saints' love is expressed is again significant; while Francis's is a personified, tangible experience which reiterates the Franciscan message of expression through the physical, Dominic acts through the word, the *consiglio* of Christ, and it is thus that he will himself express the message. This combination of devotion for the non-worldly is a further echo in Dante of a form of Augustinian *virtù*. *Virtù* is to love God intensely and from the intensity of this love man learns to value and use temporal life correctly. In Dominic this is expressed through the intense study which transforms him: 'Non per lo mondo [...] / ma per l'amor de la verace manna / in picciol tempo gran dottor si feo' (82-85). Dominic's wisdom comes from a loving focus upon God as opposed to distraction by the world.

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[253] Ghisalberti, 'Canto XII', p. 190.
[254] Battaglia Ricci, p. 142.
[255] For a discussion on the identity of the 'primo consiglio' referred to here, see Hollander commentary vv. 74-75.

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Lines 70-75 simultaneously capture the form of Dominic's intense devotion in their intensive repetition. They also describe the particular mission he is ordained for and the form in which he will fulfil that mission. Hollander has pointed out that the reference to the farmer who will help Christ in his garden casts Dominic as the counterpoint to Adam and Eve's failure to maintain Eden.[256] Images of nature and fertility run all through Dominic's biography, in which he is cast as their cultivator and protector. In language reminiscent of battle, Dominic founds his order to 'control al monto errante / [...] combatter per lo seme / del qual ti fascian ventiquattro piante' (94-96). These beautiful celestial plants are the opposite of the 'sterpi eretici' which the torrent of Dominic's preaching had washed away in life (99-102). Dominic's role, therefore, is to defend and to nourish the essence of the faith he defends; but, by expressing this through images of nature and fertility, Dante is both using elements of the representational tradition and also appealing to the metaphysical currents which he himself uses these images to represent. Dominic, as the *agricola* of Christ, with Christ, restores mankind to a prelapsarian state. He is able to do so because of the more direct and privileged relationship he has to Christ as his *messo e famigliar*. The particular way in which he will fulfil his mission is suggested by the intertextual reference of line 78, 'Io son venuto a questo' which, as Hollander points out, is a version of Christ's words in Mark 1:38, 'ad hoc enim veni' in which Christ 'announces his intention to preach'.[257] Preaching, the expression through the word as the fulfilment of Dominic's providential mission, is the central aspect of his biography. This begins at its opening when Dominic's role as a preacher is foreshadowed in the overflowing of his *virtù* which makes his mother prophesy. By beginning from *virtù*, Dante is able to capture Dominic's preaching as the fulfilment of his nature and thus emphasise the unique preordained role he is allotted by God, even at the moment of his creation. Remembering that *virtù* designates a being's role in the order of creation, Dante establishes how Dominic's divinely created *virtù* to preach forms parts of God's providential plan to reorder that creation itself.

The extended allegories which underpin the biographies of both Francis and Dominic make these biographies distinct from the others which form the fabric of the *Commedia*. The strangeness of this, especially in relation to the historically tangible figure of Francis, was noted by Auerbach: 'what [Dante] so often did [...] that of fashioning people through their own words and gestures in the most concrete and personal way, he has not done here'.[258] What emerges from the allegorised biographies of Francis and Dominic, rather

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[256] Hollander, commentary to *Paradiso* XII vv. 71-72.
[257] Hollander, commentary on vv. 76-78.
[258] Auerbach, 'St Francis', p. 83.

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than a personal history, is a manifestation of their spiritual purpose. Their allegorised narratives lift them from the individual and historical to what Mazzotta describes as 'the area of meditation between the world of contingency and history and the absolute model of Paradise and Christ-like existence'.[259] Dante sets Francis and Dominic apart by seeking to stress their unique interaction with God in temporal life and thus their unique role as meeting points between God and man for those who come after them. By stressing in both cases their distancing from the world through poverty and lack of worldly care, Dante is establishing a model in which the line between good social behaviour and metaphysical revelation is distinctly blurred. However, the allegories which describe their lives are not distant and abstract but instead are an incarnation of the allegory. In the case of Francis, '[t]he didactic strain of the allegory [...] penetrates our consciousness not as a didactic lesson but as a real happening. As Francis's wife, Poverty exists in concrete reality; but, because Christ was her first husband, her concrete reality becomes part of the great scheme of world history'.[260] In the case of Dominic, he is identified with Christ as the farmer, but this role is shaped around his own particular historical activity of preaching. Real temporal activity and metaphysical, spiritual role are compressed and made indistinguishable. The *virtù* of Francis's ardent love, which expresses itself through Christ-like love of poverty which comforts the world, and the *virtù* of Dominic's ardent wisdom, expressed through the overpowering word, reveal them as nexus of human-divine interaction; points at which God's hand is revealed to be behind human action. They do not appear here as tangible exempla of human goodness but instead demonstrate how human goodness has its origin in God and how that human goodness – literally in the cases of Dominic and Francis – reveals God.

6. Interaction in Paradise: Canto XXI

Many episodes of the *Paradiso* consider the soul's interaction with God in the blessed state and its place within the order of heaven. As Cogan has demonstrated, the placing of the souls in heaven is predicated on the extent of their own capacity for fulfilment in God; this combination of capacity fulfilled in action I am interpreting as part of the *Commedia's* *virtù*-dynamic.[261] The pilgrim's encounter with Peter Damian in the Heaven of Saturn, the last heaven related to a particular planet and quality, gives rise to a presentation of the

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[259] Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert*, p. 111.

[260] Auerbach, 'St Francis', p. 95.

[261] Cogan demonstrated that 'the amount of delight or blessedness a soul experiences depends on the soul's capacity for the activity in which delight resides', p. 158.

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perfected state of interaction between the soul and God as it exists in Paradise.[262] This episode draws together several principal aspects of how heavenly interaction has been staged while centring them around an interaction governed by *virtù*.

When the pilgrim reaches the heaven of Saturn he is told by the soul of Peter Damian that it is charity that designates the soul's position: 'l'alta carità che ci fa serve / pronte al consiglio che 'l mondo governa, / sorteggia qui sì come tu osserve' (*Par.* XXI.70-72). Love is that which adheres to and reveals God's providential plan (73-75) and Peter Damian's appearance to the pilgrim is part of that plan; it is caused by the dynamics of charity which order heaven. In the pilgrim's earlier encounter with Piccarda in the Heaven of the Moon, charity was identified as that which makes the souls willing and disposed to accept their place in the hierarchy: 'la nostra volontà quieta / virtù di carità, che fa volerne / sol quel ch'avemo' (*Par.* III.70-72). While in *Purgatorio* humility governed the interaction of man to God, in *Paradiso* charity is the abiding principle. In the case of the soul of Peter Damian, his particular loving interaction with the divine is figured in language which recalls both the parental imagery of *Purgatorio* XI while emphasising the natural and loving sustaining of man by God:

> Luce divina sopra me s'appunta,
>
> penetrando per questa in ch'io *m'inventro*,
>
> > la cui virtù, col mio veder congiunta,
>
> mi leva sopra me tanto, ch'i' veggio
>
> la somma essenza de la quale è *munta*. (*Par.* XXI.83-7)

Even at the exalted heights of heaven, the interaction of God and the soul is figured in terms of natural generation and preservation, and appeals directly to the issues of capacity and action which underlie *virtù*-dynamics. In describing the interaction, the poet figures divine *virtù* as light and the soul's own capacities as sight; the interaction of the two results in increased power of vision on the part of the soul so that it can see the source of its existence unmediated. Despite the metaphysical grounding of this interaction, the sensuality of the language through which it is expressed is striking. The womb-like (inventro) soul is *penetrated* by and then joined with (congiunta) divine *virtù*. It is then raised above itself to see the source of the divine light, the point from which it is *milked* (munta). This strange interaction of images in which the divine source of light is both lover and mother, casts *virtù* as the informing principle of beatified experience; the result of this union is a soul able to suckle at the source of *virtù*, drawing life itself from it. In a

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[262] On *Paradiso* XXI see: Giuseppe Mazzotta, 'Language and Vision', in *Dante and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 155-71 ; Georges Güntert, 'Canto XXI', in *Lectura dantis turicensis: Paradiso*, pp. 325-39.

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transformation of the parental images of *Purgatorio* XI, *virtù* in heaven changes from the power of the Father to the sustaining love of the Mother. Furthermore, the interaction of capacity and fulfilment becomes directly visible in the soul; the soul's ability to see is revealed in the extent to which it shows light: 'la vista mia, quant'ella è chiara, / la chiarità de la fiamma pareggio' (XXI.89-90). The soul's ability to receive light-*virtù* is directly manifested in its capacity to reveal it. *Virtù* is that which interacts directly with the soul to raise it up to a new level of perception in which it sees the source and sustainer of its existence. This experience is expressed in the most sensual description of union and nourishing.

While the answer to why it is Peter Damian who comes to the pilgrim is, on point of doctrine, impossible to reveal to a created intellect (91-96), the significance of the character of Peter Damian as being the one to reveal the privilged state of vision of the heavenly souls is not so obscure. His soul forms part of the group of ascetic contemplatives who inhabit the heaven of Saturn. His life was therefore one of focused contemplation upon God and away from the things of the world. Mazzotta suggests that 'contemplation [...] has no purpose beyond itself; it cuts through the disguises and illusions [...] and trascends the impatient, restless entanglements of practical life'.[263] Furthermore, as an ascetic, Peter Damian represents those who have trained themselves away from the desires of the world; who have attained what Kirkpatrick describes as 'that vivid identity and clarity of essence that the true ascetic [...] should properly cultivate'.[264] Thus the clarity of essence which Peter Damian achieved in life is remanifested in heaven. But more significantly, the source of its clarity and manifestation is revealed as divine *virtù*. The goodness of Peter's life, just like his state of blessedness, is a direct result of his mutual interaction with God. Dante further draws a parallel between Peter's heavenly state and temporal life by demonstrating the soul's continuing righteous anger over earthly events. As Mazzotta perceptively points out: 'The life of Peter Damian [...] exemplifies and reinforces Dante's sense that contemplation is not merely a self-defining realm of inner concentration attainable by severing one's inextricable ties to history. What is truly deadly in Dante's ethics is the retreat into inaction'.[265] Dante's vision of heaven, however unperceivable to human intellect, is never unrelated to temporal human life. The perfect interaction which Peter describes of himself is accompanied by a description of how he moved towards this state of perfection in life. The interaction of *virtù* as expressed in *Paradiso* XXI is only the perfected version of an interaction that is at the centre of all created being.

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[263] Mazzotta, *Circle of Knowledge*, p. 158.
[264] Robin Kirkpatrick, *Paradiso*, commentary to canto XXI, p. 421.
[265] Mazzotta, *Circle of Knowledge*, p. 165.

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7. Conclusion

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that in the *Commedia*, Dante overtly makes human *virtù* and the positive value of human action dependent on man's relationship to God. This was a very prominent issue within the Christian tradition, particularly evident in the thought of Augustine and Gregory. Dante, however, problematises and explores the issue in relation to different stages of human spiritual development, showing a developing and transforming relationship which recalls the transforming stages of virtue according to Aquinas. But while Aquinas explores this transformation abstractly, Dante stages its happening. The failed relationship of the Limbo dwellers to God is manifested in the images of *Inferno* IV, so that the consequences of that failure become real and tangible. The results of that failed relationship Dante exemplifies in the Limbo figures who exist in perpetual hopeless darkness and isolation. How the relationship between man and God can be rebuilt, both in the traditions and Dante, made the role of human humility paramount. Humility, the 'mother of all virtues' according to Gregory, was the only foundation from which that relationship could be constructed. In *Purgatorio* X and XI, Dante stages a demonstration of how humility can be refound through the purgation of pride. The result of this humility in the souls of Purgatory is the unified act of praising prayer. That the virtues of man are essentially revelations of the goodness of God, as opposed to signs of man's autonomous power, became evident in Dante's depiction of saints Francis and Dominic. Gregory the Great in particular emphasised the absolute dependence of human virtue upon the generous hand of God; because of this, human virtue then becomes a sign of God working through man. In his biographies of Francis and Dominic, Dante transforms this principle, adapting it to the individual lives of the two saints. He emphasises their providential missions and focuses on how they each fulfilled them in their historical lives. Rather than historical detail, however, Dante focuses on those elements which most strongly characterise the saints as being ordained by God and thus revealing God within their actions. Their temporal existence is closely tied to the divine source from which it came. We saw a precedent for this approach in Bonaventure's *Legenda Major*, in which Francis's providential role was emphasised. Dante's biography of the saint, however, is highly focused upon the elements of Christic imitation, going so far as to employ the same imagery of imprinting which he uses to describe the Incarnation of Christ himself. In emphasising the poverty and desire focused upon God of both Francis and Dominic, Dante is suggesting the way in which the fulfilment of human *virtù* is ultimately a revelation of God within man. That God is behind man's blessedness was also evidenced in the figure of Peter Damian who, like the other souls in heaven, revealed the

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extent to which he saw God. Even in Heaven, Dante emphasises that the *virtù* of the blessed is only a reflection of the extent to which they receive God's own *virtù*. In the *Commedia* the soul's movement towards God is constantly vivified and influenced by interactions. *The virtù*-dynamic, which reads ethics as an expression of ontology, means that the ontological interaction of man and God as creature and Creator becomes the guiding principle for the ethical actions which take place in the *Commedia*. Dante presents the results of these positive interactions as bringing about true vivification, spiritual fertility, perfect vision and value-holding action.

The theological and philosophical traditions considered in Chapter One emphasised temporal life as the forum in which human virtue was to be developed, either exclusively within the human sphere, as in the thought of Aristotle, or within a dialogue between man and God as expressed by the Christian authors. In choosing to represent virtue, the writers of the traditions considered in Chapter Two were acknowledging virtue as a principle to be communicated to others for their spiritual benefit. In each of the four episodes I have considered in this chapter, Dante forms a connection between the characters within the narrative and the real temporal world which his readers inhabit. In the case of the Limbo-dwellers, while continuing respect for them in the world maintained their position outside of Hell proper, the poet questioned the contribution they could make to continuing history through his negative portrayal of their situation and their ultimate silence. In Purgatory the souls, in praying to God, were shown as actively working for the benefit of those remaining on earth, forming a connection between temporal and eschatological life. In a sense, Dante's own poem's prayer was endowed with the possibility of helping its readers. Dante established Francis and Dominic as positive exempla for others to follow by building models of this following into his narratives. The saints were emphasised as having had a direct impact on the lives of those around them, which Dante expresses through images of natural and spiritual fertility. The soul of Peter Damian, although at nearly the highest point of Heaven, demonstrates his continuing interest in the temporal world in his criticism of its corruption. By referring to temporal life from the perspective of the afterlife Dante is emphasising the link between the two states. He is casting his text as one which directly aims to influence temporal life but which can do so from a point of special knowledge and objectivity. The ethical interactions which surround the notion of *virtù* in the *Commedia* are thus extended beyond the text's limits and into the reader's own sphere.

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In the final chapter, I will now turn to consider how the ontological and ethical interactions surrounding *virtù*, which have emerged in Chapters Three and Four, are manifested in relation to the individualised experiences of the pilgrim-poet figure.

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5. The Becoming of a Virtuous Man: Dante's Pilgrim-Poet

1. Introduction

Chapters Three and Four have demonstrated how the *Commedia* represents the form and results of ontological and ethical interactions: interactions between man, the created universe and God. By its use of the term, the *Commedia* encourages us to read these interactions as underpinned by a dynamic of *virtù*, in which action is an expression of being and being is transformed by action. This dynamic leads us to read the ethical and the ontological as fundamentally connected in Dante's thought, since *virtù* itself is a being's proper nature perfectly fulfilled in act. Ethical behaviour then comes to be an expression of ontological condition. Good human behaviour, which strikes the right balance between man, the world and God, becomes an expression of good and fulfilled being. This final chapter will turn to consider the personalisation and vivification of the ontological and ethical interactions of *virtù*, which have emerged from Chapters Three and Four, in the central narrative feature of the *Commedia*'s drama: the journey of the pilgrim-poet. This will enable a more specific exploration of how the poet conceives the role of *virtù* within the actual events of a human life. The *Commedia*'s narrative is structured around the moral and spiritual development of its protagonist as he undertakes his journey, which is simultanouesly a literally figured physical journey and an allegorical journey of his ontological and ethical transformation. The *Commedia*'s principal narrative element is then one which focuses directly on the internal development of the individual from a state of weakness and loss to one of fulfilment and union; this transformation is a transformation in and through *virtù* and locates the ethical stance of the *Commedia* firmly within virtue ethics. It also places the *Commedia* within a tradition of representing *virtù* which draws both on the tangible experiences of an exemplary human life and employs allegorical imagery to both convey and construct its message. Using the figure of his pilgrim-self acting within real situations, the poet is able both to build a process of personal reflection into his narrative structure and use his pilgrim-self as a lens through which to reflect on the human condition as a whole, as mankind passes through temporal life and comes to God. The communicative strategies of the *Commedia*, however, also enable the poet to shift constantly between metaphysical and physical development, revealing the ontological currents which underpin the protagonist's ethical progress. *Virtù* is not just the 'truth' behind the allegory of the journey but is evident as an active player in that journey.

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In order both to begin to see the *Commedia*'s place within the tradition of writing on *virtù*, particularly in relation to human life, this chapter will be structured around the same three questions utilised in my discussion of the theological and philosophical traditions in Chapter One: what is *virtù*? How is *virtù* acquired? And what is the result of the attainment of *virtù*? Focusing upon the pilgrim-poet character will enable us to make connections between the greater metaphysical and theological undercurrents concerning *virtù* within the *Commedia*, and their relation to actual human experience; the abstract can become real, tangible and relevant. Significantly, this mode of reading is overtly necessitated by the poem's dramatic form itself. Before turning to the three questions, I will therefore consider some of the implications and possibilities suggested by the embodiment of virtue-ethics which the *Commedia* proposes.

2. The *Commedia*'s Embodied Virtue-Ethic

As became apparent in Chapter One, virtue-ethics is primarily a character based ethics. The goodness or badness of human behaviour is linked to the internal moral state of the subject. This state is the result of 'the moral formation and the development of the character over time'.[266] This progress of development over time is one which the *Commedia* manifests in its central protagonist. Time is evident both in the narrative present, in the glances backwards and forwards into the protagonist's life, and in the interjections of the authorial narrator into the text, who is writing after the event. This structure enables the *Commedia* to show the development both of the pilgrim and of the poet. As Ascoli has suggested, 'the journey of the *personaggio* provides not only the subject matter for the *poeta*, but also the story of how the individual called Dante became capable of writing the *Commedia*'.[267] Dante's becoming as a writer is intrinsically linked to the pilgrim's becoming as a *virtuous* man, since his process of poetic and ethical development go hand in hand. The pilgrim character, in the moral formation he undergoes during the journey, comes to a state of ontological fulfilment and ethical perfection by which he is presented as becoming able to express his experience in the persona of the poet. By writing about his constructed past self, the poet can establish the steps by which he conceives himself – and by extension mankind – as coming to a state of ontological and moral fulfilment, as well as showing what that state of fulfilment might be. The pilgrim is shown at different stages of development, learning, making mistakes and finally becoming both morally sound and ontologically fulfilled: the hallmarks of a state of virtue. The

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[266] Barton, p. 13.
[267] Ascoli, p. 305.

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beginning and end points of the pilgrim's journey locate his development within a framework which, based on ideas which emerged in Chapter One, we can now see as part of the *virtù*-dynamic. At the poem's opening the pilgrim is lost, confused and unable to progress independently, being in a state of doubt, fear and conflicted will. It is only the guidance of Virgil, the intercession of Beatrice and the pilgrim's submission of will that enable the pilgrim to progress. Passing through a journey in which he is shown not only the sins of others but also his own, the pilgrim exemplifies a process of self-reflection and self-confession. Based on this he develops the fixed disposition and clarity of desire which are the attainment of virtue as proposed in elements of the tradition. By the end of his journey, the pilgrim reaches a point of clear vision and a will liberated from sin and harmonised to the will of God. Simultaneously he represents a fulfilled condition of mankind which, in his particular case, is manifested in the ability to express himself.

The tension of the pilgrim's will, which is problematised at the poem's opening and resolved at its end, traces the centrality of the will in notions of virtue as it appeared in Chapter One. Will is at the nexus of ontology, ethics and their simultaneous fulfilment in virtue. Will, as that which empowers and guides human action and its perfection, therefore, becomes central to the perfection of human action. Only a will trained in virtue, which has God as its object, will be consistent in the choice of the ultimate good of human nature and order all activity in relation to this essential desire. In Aquinas's thought, the will is the site of transformation in which man's faculties are elevated by God in order for him to attain towards the divine end beyond his human nature.[268] For Augustine, the will has to be reordered away from desiring the distractions of the world and instead directed only towards God; perfect loving of God is virtue itself.[269] Intrinsic to this is an act of submission of independent will to the supreme will of God. Will then, is a central player in the dynamics of virtue within the tradition, and, as we will come to see, it continues to be central to Dante's portrayal of the pilgrim's development. The narrative structure of the *Commedia*, in which the 'I' is split between a protagonist and poet who appear as one and the same, enables the creation of a dramatic tension between past and present selves. As well as being a tension which adds to the drama of the story, however, it is also the manifestation of the very real ethical tension between memory and current desire which marks the development of the will. As evidenced in Augustine, the memory of past desire is enough to impede the development of the present self, however much that present self may desire to progress. As Wetzel writes, '[o]ur present state of will [...] includes its past

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[268] As we saw in Chapter One. For example: 'Sed si quod bonum immineat homini volendum, quod excedat proportionem volentis, sive quantum ad totam speciem humanam, sicut bonum divinum, quod transcendit limites humanæ naturæ, sive quantum ad individuum, sicut bonum proximi, ibi voluntas indiget virtute. Et ideo huiusmodi virtutes quæ ordinat affectum hominis in Deum vel in proximum, sunt in voluntate sicut in subjecto, ut caritas, justitia et huiusmodi', (*ST.* 1a2æ 56,6).

[269] As appeared in Chapter One, Augustine casts virtue as 'summum amorem dei' (*DME* 15.25).

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states in the form of habit and therefore the discrepancy between our past practices of willing and our present willingness for change can be expressed as volitional paralysis, or our experience being constrained from within'.[270] This conflict of will, which is such a stumbling block on the road to the acquisition of virtue, is dramatically played out through the construction of the *Commedia*'s protagonist, narrator and author as the same individual all appearing in the same moment. His past, present and future desires are placed side by side for comparison and come to dramatically influence his progression.

Not only does the *Commedia*'s focus on character development itself demonstrate a choice to focus on an ethics of virtue, but the portrayal of moral and spiritual dilemma through an individualised character places the poet within a representational tradition. The way an individual's temporal life could be demonstrated as being the forum for acquiring and demonstrating virtue was evident in the thought of Gregory the Great, who validated temporal experience as the period in which man was tested and learned to depend upon God. An individual's response to the events of their life was a mark of the degree to which they had engaged with God in the testing progression as which human life was to be interpreted. Life stories were the means by which ideas of virtue could be communicated in the hagiographical traditions, particularly surrounding St Francis. Human daily activities could be read in the light of their moral and spiritual significance through processes of interpreting allegory or through authorial comment which dictated the significance of texts. Although the poet certainly does not cast the pilgrim as a saintly figure, he emphasises the divine hand behind his journey as well as the pilgrim's flaws, and establishes both the role of the divine in human development and a recognisable exemplum of virtue being learned. In the activites of the pilgrim and in the recreation of the embodied souls, the poem represents mirror images of temporal encounters which are recontextualised to contain within them their eschatological outcome. The poet can draw a clear link between real temporal life and, in consequence, real eternal existence.

The pilgrim undergoes his journey in an overtly embodied form which acts as a connection between the 'real' world of his readers and the imagined realms of the afterlife. This embodiment also dictates both the way the pilgrim apprehends his experiences and the way those experiences come to be represented in the poem. As Ghisalberti suggests, focusing on an embodied figure gives 'la capacità di communicare con gli altri attraverso il corpo'.[271] By using an embodied format, the poem is also accessing a tradition of representing the invisible through the manifested – as the *Commedia* itself points out, in the attributing of hands and feet to God, 'la Scrittura condescende / a vostra facultate'

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[270] Wetzel, pp. 130-35.
[271] Ghisalberti, 'Il pensiero medievale di fronte al corpo', p. 56.

(*Par.* IV.43-44). That the human body can both conceal and reveal the divine hand and metaphysical significance behind it, comes about through the revaluation of human existence made possible by the Incarnation of Christ. In representing the spiritual transformation of the pilgrim through bodily experience Dante is following a tradition; the association of body and spirit is made possible, again as Ghisalberti writes, 'dal rapporto del corpo umano con il corpo di Cristo, che è stato il velo sotto cui Dio si è reso visibile all'uomo'.[272] The human body in the *Commedia* is conceived as both revealing and concealing the metaphysical truth behind it, as became evident in *Paradiso* II. It is also a ground for understanding that truth. Through the Incarnation of Christ, the body is given 'quelle possibilità di una dimensione eterna che era stata un giorno nei piani della creazione divina', as Ernesto Travi writes.[273] In fact, in the medieval Christian tradition, it is overtly through bodily experiences, the experiences of temporal life, that man may return to God because the birth and sacrifice of Christ have revalued that existence.[274]

The focus on an individualised character enables the manifested enacting of a virtue-ethic, but it also makes a particular statement about human existence as that through which the divine can be both perceived and attained. The pilgrim's journey is presented as an episode within his own temporal life – 'Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita' – whose origins begin before the story starts and whose results will extend beyond the story's end. The poet is therefore locating the pilgrim's transformative experience firmly within human life and, by doing so, validating the possibilities offered by that life itself. While the pilgrim's journey through the afterlife is unique, he himself, as a human being with faults and loves, is not, and his experiences are therefore part of the experiences of the human condition as a whole. The way that *virtù* is manifested within the pilgrim's experience then becomes an allegory for how it functions within all human life. The pilgrim's own experiences are only the more overt manifestation of how the divine works in the salvation of all mankind. The pilgrim's experiences also demonstrate how that divine can be approached both emotionally and intellectually. The visions, emotions, dialogues and interactions of the pilgrim's journey become exempla of how man moves towards God.

Having established the possible significances and potentials of the *Commedia*'s focus upon an embodied protagonist as the centre of ethical and ontological transformation, we can

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[272] Ghisalberti, 'Il pensiero medievale di fronte al corpo', p. 60.

[273] Travi, p. 107.

[274] Ghisalberti: 'Il riscatto, la riabilitazione viene sancita da un intervento salvifico di Dio: una nuova creazione di Cristo immette nella storia un nuovo uomo, il cui corpo non è concepito secondo concupiscenza. Il concepimento di Cristo rinnova il concepimento umano, facendo riassurgere il corpo dell'uomo a nuovi vertici di pienezza e di intergrità. Il corpo umano di Cristo è il punto di partenza per riscattare la *regio dissimilitudinis* e ripristinare quella regione della similitudine che diventa l'aspirazione di ogni credente in Cristo' ('Il pensiero medievale di fronte al corpo', p. 60).

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turn to address how Dante constructs *virtù* in relation to his pilgrim-self's experiences. Dante locates his pilgrim's experiences within the *virtù*-dynamic as a whole, manifesting it in the interactions which the pilgrim goes through. By doing so, he can explore more generally the place of the individual and his role within those dynamics.

3. What is *virtù*?

Virtù is an ontological and ethical nexus. Ontologically speaking it is the perfect expression of being in action. Ethically speaking it is those actions which best express and fulfil an entity's essential nature. In relation to man, that nature must be understood fundamentally as created and therefore virtuous action is that which acknowledges that createdness. To be virtuous is to love the source of one's creation and manifest that love in one's relation to the world. From this more general understanding of *virtù* in Dante's universe, we now move closer to questioning the nature of human *virtù* and what it actually entails. In the poem's many moments of theoretical explication, two in particular stand out as relevant to understanding the nature of human *virtù* as presented in the *Commedia*: *Purgatorio* XVII and XVIII, and *Paradiso* I. Both discourses focus on love and its relation to the end aim of human desire, and the power human beings have to control and direct their love. In the light of the Augustinian tradition which equates virtue with perfect love of God, these two discourses can emerge as central to the *virtù*-dynamic.

Virgil's discourse of *Purgatorio* XVII and XVIII arises from the pilgrim's question over the vice of the terrace on which the two travellers find themselves.[275] The explanation of the vice of sloth, a vice of insufficient love, gives rise to an explanation of the nature of love itself. Love is at the source of every action, both human and divine; in man, love is the product of both good and bad action: 'amor sementa in voi d'ogne virtute / e d'ogne operazion che merta pena' (XVII.104-105). *Virtute* here implies actions which merit rewards, in opposition to condemnable actions. So love is the source of both good action (virtute) and bad. Love well directed has been previously identified by Virgil as that 'nel primo ben diretto' (XVII.97). Furthermore, love focused on the 'primo ben' orders the love of secondary things (XVII.98). In essence, the love which Virgil is here describing is the source of *virtù*. Human *virtù* is made dependent upon, even equated with, love directed towards the 'primo ben'. However, in canto XVIII, Virgil adds a further aspect to human

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[275] On *Purgatorio* XVII and XVIII see: Mira Mocan, 'Amore, libero arbitrio e fantasia: Canti XVI-XVII-XVIII', in *Esperimenti danteschi: Purgatorio*, pp. 147-74; Georges Güntert 'Canto XVII' and 'Canto XVIII', in *Lectura dantis turicensis: Purgatorio*, pp. 261-74 and pp. 275-85; Kenelm Foster, 'The Human Spirit in Action', *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society* 88 (1970), 17-29.

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virtù. Virgil first describes love as the instinctive 'bending towards' an object of desire (XVIII.26) and as the producer of active motion. This Virgil describes in relation to all nature. But the pilgrim requires an explanation of the human condition and how love can relate to merit (XVIII.43-45). As became apparent in the analysis of *Paradiso* II, in the union of form and matter which makes up every substance, *virtù* describes an entity's specific nature which is only demonstrated in act, and this idea is iterated here also: 'Ogne forma sustanzïal [...] specifica vertute ha in sé colletta / la qual sanza operar non è sentita' (49-52). The particular *virtù* of human nature is 'la virtù che consiglia' (62) which manifests itself in the choosing of the correct objects of love, directing all love according to 'la prima voglia' (59). The power to freely choose love is cast as the essential nature of man which is demonstrated in the choice of the *first good.* Only towards the end of Virgil's discourse does he identify human *virtù* specifically as free will. Significantly, however, this is not his term but instead one he 'borrows' from Beatrice: 'La nobile virtù Beatrice intende / per lo libero arbitrio' (73-74). It will soon become clear that Beatrice has privileged knowledge of the nature of human *virtù* which springs from the access she has to the 'primo ben' and the ontological and theological order to which it relates; this is something Virgil only apprehends in the abstract.

Virgil's discourse is central for understanding what the *Commedia* conceives human *virtù* to be. Like the *virtù* of any created thing, human *virtù* is the defining aspect of its nature, as well as the most perfect form of its potential activity. Furthermore, man's *virtù* places man within a universal order; the fulfilment of *virtù* is man's correct interaction with that order. Virgil casts human *virtù* specifically within the order of love in the universe which is essentially an ontological order. Love misdirected is an upsetting of that order, in which creation turns against its Creator: 'quando al mal si torce, o con più cura, / o con men che non dee corre nel bene, / contra 'l fattore adovra sua fattura' (XVII.100-02). Human *virtù* which, like all individualised natures, is given in creation, is the facility to choose to fulfil one's place within the ontological order of love in the universe; man is able to choose to love the 'primo ben' and order his activites according to this love. Human *virtù* is made part of a dynamic of love which begins to recall Augustinian virtue as perfect love of God. The choice to love God then becomes the perfect expression of human nature.

However, despite its clarity and general validity, Virgil's discourse is openly incomplete, turning, as it does at the end, to Beatrice to ultimately complete the picture. Virgil expresses the peculiarity of human *virtù* only within a natural order of desire as expressed by his examples and comparisons. The movement of love in humans is hardly distinguished from the natural movement of fire which moves itself upwards (XVIII.28-30)

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or from the desire of bees to make honey (XVIII.58-60). Missing from Virgil's discourse is the acknowledged orientating figure of God and the active role God plays in drawing man's love towards himself. While identifying love as the source of both human and divine action, he is unable to represent the role of divine love. He cannot communicate the relationship between man as creature and God as Creator from which he is eternally excluded. Virgil's is an overtly rational discourse, as Kirkpatrick says, 'rejecting all confusing appeals to emotion so as to clarify the mind of his pupil, yet implicitly acknowledging that his own experience of truth remains in the negative, as a merely formulaic understanding'.[276] Virgil provides a conceptual foundation for the pilgrim but his discourse is unvivified. Emotion is not necessarily distracting but is instead transformative in the right context. The lack of transformation and vivification of Virgil's speech is perhaps played out in the pilgrim's immediate response; despite having listened to a discourse on the motivating movement of love and free will, the pilgrim afterwards 'stava com' om che sonnolento vana' (XVIII.87). Essentially, Virgil's discourse is abstracted from the pilgrim's own experience and while it has clarified his mind it has not transformed his will. We might recall here the construction of Dominican sermons; the *virtù* which the pilgrim has begun to acquire here is clarity of understanding, a beginning to see the way forward, but what is lacking is personal involvement or emotional energy.

Virgil's discourse focuses on the nature of natural love, and human *virtù* appears as that by which humans can freely choose to love a particular object. This *virtù* is fulfilled when free will is used to direct love towards the *primo ben*. At the end of *Paradiso* I, Beatrice gives a discourse which, I suggest, is a completion of that given by Virgil.[277] While Virgil's discourse considers the love which moves entities by looking into their specific natures – their identity originates from within – instead Beatrice sees entities, mankind included, as part of a universal order directed towards a specific end which is also the origin of that order itself. Within her discourse, *virtù* is that which brings man towards his end through the workings of divine providence. Beatrice, like Virgil, explains the forces of movement between an entity and its object of desire. But instead of Virgil's earth-bound stance, Beatrice begins with the universal order. It is within this order that entities move: 'Ne l'ordine ch'io dico sono accline / tutte nature, per diverse sorti' (*Par.* I.109-110). The recontextualisation of natural desire within an overarching order establishes a more defined purpose and aim to that desire. The aim lies particularly in a return to origins; entities move 'più al principio loro e men vicine' (111). As in *Paradiso* II, individualised creation is figured as elements of a greater whole, a 'gran mar de l'essere' (113), in which

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[276] Kirkpatrick, commentary on *Purgatorio* XVIII, p. 403.
[277] On *Paradiso* I see: Robert Hollander, 'Il Prologo alla terza cantica', in *Esperimenti danteschi: Paradiso*, pp. 3-25; Selene Sarteschi, 'Canto I', in *Lectura dantis turicensis: Paradiso*, pp. 13-34.

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entities have distinct roles and aims but are ultimately ontologically united. The particular motions of entities are then governed by their ontological place within the hierarchy of being, but all share in the 'istinto' to return to their source (114). Beatrice then makes the important shift from considering the instinct of all beings to focusing on that of beings with 'intelletto e amore' (120). In a total recontextualisation of an image used by Aristotle, this instinct is figured as an 'arco', the power of which compels a loving and knowing entity to its allotted place (119).[278] It is within this image that *virtù* becomes evident:

> La provedenza, che cotanto assetta,
>
> del suo lume fa 'l ciel sempre qüïeto
>
> nel qual si volge quel c'ha maggior fretta;
>
> e ora lì, come a sito decreto,
>
> cen porta la virtù di quella corda
>
> che ciò che scocca drizza in segno lieto.   (*Par.* I.121-26)

Beatrice iterates here an idea which, as we have seen, becomes even more evident in *Paradiso* II. At the top of the created universe is an interaction between the Empyrean and the Primo Mobile. In *Paradiso* I the Empyrean appears as the end point of the instinctual motion of the universe; it is the place to which all desires aim. The Empyrean's very existence, however, is made part of a providential plan and consequently the order of creation itself, whose elements all instinctively desire to return to their source, also forms part of that plan. Within this it is the 'virtù di quella corda' which fulfils a being's instinctive desire by returning it to its origin. *Virtù* is no longer only the power to choose what to love but it is the power to carry one to the ultimate object of one's love.

Human love has come to be contextualised within the movements of the universe and the divine providential plan. Although the return towards the origin is both a natural instinct and providentially allotted, this is no guarantee of that return and Beatrice's description of the potential failure, as we will come to see, resonates strongly with the pilgrim's own experiences. Despite 'l'intenzion de l'arte' (128), a perfect disposition of form is not guaranteed due to the unresponsiveness of matter (129). As we saw both in the episode of the Earthly Paradise and the narrative of St Francis, Dante establishes the importance of perfectly prepared 'ground' in which the divine can be revealed and this relies on a clarity of desire only for God. Instead, creatures with free will are capable of turning away from this perfect object so that 'l'impeto primo / l'atterra torto da falso piacere' (134-135),

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[278] We saw in Chapter One that Aristotle uses the image of archers aiming at a target also to express the active movement of man towards their Supreme Good in *NE* I.ii.2. This image also become a commonplace of scholastic /philosophy theology. See for example Aquinas *Summa contra gentiles* 3.24.2049.

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thereby making themselves imperfect. It will become apparent in the pilgrim's own process of developing *virtù* that the clarification and focusing of his desires is essential before he can be properly fulfilled.

Beatrice's discourse is significantly contextualised by the pilgrim's new situation and his questions arising from it. The pilgrim is unable to understand how he has so swiftly ascended above the earth. Beatrice's response demonstrates how his own ascent is only a manifestation of the natural ascent of all creation freed from the distractions of temporal desire. In fact, 'Maraviglia sarebbe in te se, privo / d'impedimento, giù ti fossi assiso' (139-140). Even before Beatrice's explanation, the authorial narrator interjects with an explanation of the pilgrim's ascent into the heavens: 'amor che 'l ciel governi, / tu 'l sai, che col tuo lume me levasti' (*Par.* I.74-75). The pilgrim is raised up by the love which orders the universe, just as he raises himself up through his own perfected, natural love. In both the conceptual tradition and within the *Commedia* itself, we have already begun to see the centrality of a loving relationship between man and God to man's ontological and ethical development. Without the basis of that relationship man cannot progress. Love, we remember, is a movement of the will and is therefore directly relevant to action. The loving relationship of man and God is also, however, that which gives value to human action. Virgil's discourse posits love as the centre of all praise or blameworthy action but beyond this Augustine considered the relationship which that love manifests as the source of value for human action. Praise or blame is not just dependent on love for a right or wrong object but on that love being part of a greater relationship.

The relationships through which the pilgrim learns about love are therefore themselves significant. Both Virgil and Beatrice are cast in roles of authority to which the pilgrim willingly submits. The pilgrim's address to Virgil at the opening of *Purgatorio* XVIII is, in fact, marked by great emotional impetus. As 'Maestro', Virgil has the knowledge to enliven the pilgrim's mind; as 'dolce padre caro' he has the emotional relationship to the pilgrim which means that his words have impact. Virgil's words, however, impel the pilgrim towards intellectual enlightenment rather than emotional change. However, by submitting his knowledge and will to that of another, the pilgrim is enacting the necessary steps of intellectual and willful submission to a loving figure of authority which mankind must enact in coming to God. In *Paradiso* I, Beatrice is cast as a 'madre' correcting the mistakes of a delirious son (101). The combination of authority and tenderness which the mother-figure suggests, as well as the more intimate knowledge of the pilgrim's particular problems, enable Beatrice's words to be both enlightening and motivating. This is suggested by the pilgrim's response to them in *Paradiso* II, in which he is impelled

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upwards, enacting directly the movement of the empowered arrow Beatrice has just described, which shoots towards its target (*Par.* II.19-26).

In both *Purgatorio* XVII and XVIII, human *virtù* is considered in relation to man's movement towards the object of his desires. Virgil's explanation equates human love with other natural forms of love and can only conceive of love as a one-way process. Human *virtù* is then the autonomous power to choose to follow the correct object of human love or not. Virgil's *virtù* is the free, rational choice of love. It is in the freedom of choice that the value of human *virtù* is found. Virgil reveals to the pilgrim 'Quanto ragion qui vede' (*Purg.* XVIII.46) and his idea of *virtù* recalls much of the virtue of classical philosophy with its emphasis on intrinsic nature, self-fulfilment in action, and freedom of choice as the source of value. This idea is not dismissed within Dante's text but it is presented as incomplete. Virgil himself acknowledges that for complete understanding 'da indi là t'aspetta / pur a Beatrice, ch'è opera di fede' (*Purg.* XVIII.47-48). Beatrice's discourse of *Paradiso* I, as well as its context, goes some way further to answering the pilgrim's questions both on the nature of love and the reason behind his own ascent. The two are, in fact, fundamentally connected. The pilgrim ascends both because he chooses to love and because his ascent is aided by the source of love itself. Beatrice's explanation does not deny free will as the essence of human *virtù* but considers what that liberated will enables humanity to do. *Virtù* in her discourse is the power which returns man to his origins; human *virtù* is not only to choose to return but to be empowered to return by the source of existence itself. By existing one is empowered and this empowerment forms part of the providential plan of the universe. Human *virtù* fails when it turns away from this plan and becomes distracted by the transient attractions of the world; it succeeds when it recognises the source of its existence and *virtù* as being outside of itself, and interacts with that source.

4. How is *virtù* acquired?

How the *Commedia* conceives the acquisition of *virtù* process is expressed most readily through the pilgrim's own journey and in the 'how' and 'why' of its taking place. The nature of the pilgrim's failings, which necessitate his journey, are vitally linked to the *virtù*-dynamic. Human *virtù* depends on freedom of will and clarity of understanding to be able to be fulfilled; a will unable to perceive the correct object of its desires will naturally desire other objects and so lose itself in sin. But if human *virtù* is a liberated state of will with a clear view of its end aim, how can this state be arrived at? As we shall come to see, the freeing of human will and the reforming of its interaction with the ultimate object of its desires is a dynamic played out within the pilgrim's own story.

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The place to begin to answer these questions is the beginning of the pilgrim's journey. Despite the hope promised by the appearance of Virgil in the first canto of *Inferno*, in the second canto the pilgrim is assailed with doubts.[279] These doubts he expresses in a request to Virgil to 'guarda[re] la mia virtù s' ell' è possente' (*Inf.* II.11). The meaning of 'mia virtù' is not yet clear, but what follows suggests that what is in doubt here is a correct state of will in the pilgrim. This is one of those points where the conflict of will earlier described by Wetzel becomes apparent. The pilgrim is caught between past fears, new desires and present insecurities. While wanting to go ahead on the journey, he at the same time does not want and 'disvuol ciò che volle' (37). The state which Wetzel described as 'volitional paralysis' and which the pilgrim's situation here echoes, recalls the tension of overcoming sin as it appeared in Augustine's thought. Sin is the state in which the soul has misapprehended the correct object of its desire and has put itself in thrall to that object, relinquishing the ability to 'self-determine'. While an object may be recognised as unworthy, this recognition alone does not guarantee freedom from desiring it. According to both Augustine and Gregory the Great this is a situation from which man cannot escape unaided. The *Commedia's* drama plays out this conflict and manifests the aid the pilgrim requires in the figures of Virgil and Beatrice. Only by submission of his own will to that of his two guides and through the redirection of his desires towards a correct object can the pilgrim begin his journey. In relation to his will this is marked by a joining of his own will with that of Virgil: 'un sol volere è d'ambedue' (139). In submitting his will to that of Virgil the pilgrim is freed from his self-doubt and empowered to begin his journey proper. But in order for the pilgrim to reapprehend the correct object of desire, a vision of Beatrice is needed.

Freedom of will, we have begun to see, is integral to the *Commedia's* presentation of human *virtù*. That this is the expression of a distinctly human characteristic is suggested by a significant comparison which Virgil makes. On seeing the pilgrim's fear, Virgil upbraids him with the charge of being like a beast shying at a shadow (47-48).[280] This undercurrent, which begins in this canto but which will not be resolved until much later, is the implied failure of the pilgrim in terms of the human condition which is demonstrated by his weakness and indecision of will. The misapprehension of signs is a fault which accompanies both the pilgrim as an individual and the pilgrim as representative of the human condition.

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[279] On *Inferno* II see: Charles Singleton, 'Virgil Recognises Beatrice', *Annual Report of the Dante Society with Accompanying Paper*, 74 (1956), 29-38; Rachel Jacoff, 'The Tears of Beatrice: *Inferno* II', *Annual Report of the Dante Society with Accompanying Paper*, 100 (1982), 1-12.

[280] This perhaps recalls the beast simile used to describe man's forfeiting of his humanity, which appears in Dante's 'Doglia mi reca' as we saw in Chapter Two.

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So far the undercurrents of the will which mark *Inferno* II have been described, but the canto says much more about how *virtù* can be attained and it is important to consider how the pilgrim's conflicted will is overcome. The pilgrim is unable to save himself without the intercession of Beatrice. Her portrayal within Virgil's narrative recalls the figure of the beloved in the poetry of the *Stilnovo*, who stands as the incarnated mediator between the heavenly goal and the human way, and she appears overtly as the channeller of the metaphysical forces which appeared in *Paradiso* I:

> Io son Beatrice che ti faccio andare;
> vegno del loco ove tornar disio;
> amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare.   (*Inf.* II.70-72)

These lines manifest the motions of love which were worked out in the ordering of the universe. Beatrice's desire to return to the Paradise from which she has come is emblematic of the desire of all creation to return to its source. But her movement down into Hell is also a movement caused by love, the outpouring of the source which draws creation back to itself. This is love as the producer of both movement and speech which moves others. While these are the forces which underpin Beatrice's appearance, her physical reality is equally vital. Hers is a personal intercession for 'amico mio' (61). The combination of the metaphysical and the real in Beatrice is a further iteration of the Christic analogy of Beatrice in the pilgrim's journey. She, like Christ, 'opens the way between Heaven and Earth' for the pilgrim, revealing to him the motions by which he can return there in both their temporal and metaphysical forms. This analogy is captured in Virgil's address to her as 'donna di virtù' (*Inf.* II.76). Like the *virtù* which overcomes the pilgrim in *Paradiso* XXIII and which he is told opened the way between Heaven and Earth, Beatrice here in *Inferno* II is cast in a similar role as the lady 'sola per cui / l'umana spezie eccede ogne contento / di quel ciel c'ha minor li cerchi sui' (*Inf.* II.76-78). By her tangible reality in the pilgrim's memory and by the reassertion of that memory through Virgil's account of her descent into Hell, Beatrice activates the reconnection of the pilgrim's *virtù* with the heavenly *virtù* to which he must return. The third and final appearance of the term *virtù* in this canto expresses the results of this interaction. Having heard Virgil's account of the coming of the 'donna di virtù' for his sake, the *virtù* of the pilgrim, which was in doubt at the canto's opening, is reinvigorated:

> Quali fioretti dal notturno gelo
> chinati e chiusi, poi che 'l sol li 'mbianca,

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> si drizzan tutti aperti in loro stelo:
>
> tal mi fec' io di mia virtude stanca   (*Inf.* II.127-30)

We find again a reiteration of the representational tradition which figures the strengthening of *virtù* in terms of natural growth. The images stress the dependence of one element on another as well as the revelatory overtones of the rising sun. As in the image of St Francis as the rising sun whose *virtù* fertilises the earth around him, so the story of Beatrice reinvigorates the pilgrim's *virtù* like the sun reinvigorates the flower. The sun too is the visible manifestation of the metaphysical life-giving of Creator to creature. The metaphor expresses the interaction of *virtù* between Creator and creature which is a metaphysical holding in existence and a tangibly expressed relationship. Both this metaphor and the event which precede it stress the dependence of the pilgrim upon the external aid brought to him. Without first the help of Virgil then the help of Beatrice, the pilgrim would be unable to progress. His dependence upon his two guides becomes a microcosm of the dependence of all humanity upon God for liberation from sin and fulfilment of their existence.

The ability of Beatrice to manifest the interaction of Creator and creature for the pilgrim, however, is dependent upon the traces she leaves of herself for him to follow, and what emerges as his sin is his failure to follow those traces. This failure is characterised as a more essential failure of his human nature. As became apparent in *Paradiso* I, a being with free will can fail to love the ultimate good of its being by dragging itself earthwards in pursuit of 'falso piacere'. When the pilgrim comes face to face with Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise this is precisely the charge she lays at his door.[281] As the pilgrim's *donna di virtù*, the love of Beatrice would lead to love of the ultimate good: 'Per entro i mie' disiri, / che ti menavano ad amar lo Bene / di là dal qual non è a che s'aspiri' (*Purg.* XXXI.22-24). Instead, following Beatrice's death, the pilgrim 'volse i passi suoi per via non vera, / imagini di ben seguendo false' (*Purg.* XXX.130-131). Loving Beatrice represents loving the eternal, stable and real as opposed to 'le presenti cose / col lor falso piacer' (*Purg.* XXXI.34-35) as the pilgrim later describes his wayward desires. Beatrice is a way towards rather than an end in herself, but a way towards which is absolutely necessary in the engagement of the human desire and comprehension of the pilgrim. In his encounter with Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise the pilgrim undergoes a shift in the way he reads and feels towards the invisible.

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[281] On the meeting of the pilgrim and Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise see: Nicola Fosca, 'Dante e Beatrice nell'Eden', *L'Alighieri* 33 (2009), 45-63; Eugenio Chiarini, *Il canto XXX del Purgatorio: Lectura dantis scaligera* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1965); Antonio Stäuble, 'Canto XXX', in *Lectura dantis turicensis: Purgatorio*, pp. 463-72; Corrado Bologna, 'Il ritorno di Beatrice: *Purgatorio* XXX-XXXI', *Esperimenti danteschi: Purgatorio*, pp. 295-317; Francesco Mazzoni, *Il canto XXXI del Pugatorio: Lectura dantis scaligera* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1965).

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In light of the considerations of the Earthly Paradise made in Chapter Three of this thesis, the lessons which the pilgrim learns here on the proper value of material creation situate his personal development within the development of the human condition as a whole. I argued in Chapter Three that Dante presents the Earthly Paradise as a place freed from meteorological disturbance and that this freedom in the natural surroundings was paralleled by a freedom from temporal distractions of the souls who had come there. Here this state is further echoed in the internal development of the pilgrim, who in his confession to Beatrice is criticised for being distracted by temporal desires before being freed from the memory of those desires. His newly established, virtuous condition is part of the virtuous human condition which Eden represents as a whole. As we saw in the earlier analysis of *Purgatorio* XXVIII, the Earthly Paradise is created directly by 'il Sommo Ben' and is also the natural, material place which most reveals that creative hand. In recalling Virgil's earlier explanation of human *virtù* as 'nel primo ben diretto', it becomes hardly surprising that it is within this context that the pilgrim's wayward vision and thus his wayward *virtù* can begin to be restored.

A consistently important dynamic in the relationship of Beatrice and Dante is that of sight, beginning with his first sight of her in the account of the *Vita nuova*, the reassertion of her power over him in the vision at that text's end, the displaced sight of her in Virgil's account in *Inferno* II, and finally the renewed sight of her in the Earthly Paradise. What is striking in this final instance is that the pilgrim here comprehends Beatrice not in terms of her physical appearance but in terms of the emotional and spiritual effect she has upon himself:

> sanza de li occhi aver più conoscenza,
>
> per occulta virtù che da lei mosse
>
> d'antico amor sentì la gran potenza.   (*Purg.* XXX.37-39)

The pilgrim's eyes, which have misled him into desiring false pleasures, are rendered unnecessary in the recognition of what is truly good. The love and *virtù* which Beatrice manifested in life are revealed as not tied to temporal existence but instead as taking part in a universal and eternal dynamic by which man returns to God. The temporal physicality of Beatrice was, however, a necessary indicator and mode of communication between the ultimate good she represented and the understanding and desires of the human pilgrim. By orientating those desires towards herself as an object immediately connected to God, those desires could be correctly directed through her towards God. The pilgrim's failure

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had been to read her temporal existence as an end in itself. In the traditions considered in Chapter One, and particularly in the thought of Plato, Augustine and Gregory, we saw the notion that virtue focuses the desires away from the temporal towards the eternal. Dante is staging a similar process here with respect to Beatrice and the pilgrim. Through desiring Beatrice, who focuses the pilgrim's will and leads from the temporal to the eternal, the pilgrim is attaining *virtù*.

Dante's dependence on Beatrice is itself a manifestation of the necessary dependence of any soul on a higher power to attain its object, that power itself; man reaches God through God himself as Christ. The staging of the necessary interaction of Dante and Beatrice, however, is a sign of the importance the poet gives to human relationships in the attainment of God. As Montemaggi suggests, 'what man can and ought to do and most perfectly will do in heaven, is to participate in the love that God is. And for Dante, human beings may participate, may be the love which God is through their relationships with one another'.[282] Through the staging of his relationship with Beatrice, the poet is suggesting the steps through which the human object of one's love may lead to the ultimate transcendent object. Furthermore, within the staging of his personal relationship, he is at the same time reflecting the universal relationship between mankind and Christ. Beatrice, the unifier of Dante's desires, acts as Christ acts for humanity, providing the focalising bridge across which man returns to God.[283]

While these are the metaphysical forces, changes of character and interactions through which the pilgrim and by extension mankind come to attain *virtù*, the form of the *Commedia* itself adds a further important aspect to how the poem presents *virtù* as being attained. The poem stages the pilgrim's real interactions with Beatrice as being central to his development of *virtù* and in this way validates human experience as the forum in which *virtù* can and must be acquired. The pilgrim's whole journey demonstrates the importance of lived experience. In *Purgatorio* XXX, Beatrice states that the pilgrim

> [t]anto giù cadde che tutti argomenti
> a la salute sua eran già corti,
> fuor che mostrarli le perdute genti   (*Purg.* XXX.136-138)

These lines add a further aspect to the realigning of the pilgrim's sight which we have already seen as a dynamic within his relationship with Beatrice. But it is further tempting

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[282] Montemaggi, 'In Unknowability as Love', p. 62.
[283] In Chapter One we saw that for Augustine, Christ was the unifier of man's desires. See *Conf.* 10.29.40 and 11.29.30.

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to read that the representational form which the poet here aligns himself with is the manifested, experiential representations of Franciscan literature in which moral change takes place through active engagement. Abstractions ('argomenti') are revealed as insufficient to effect real change, ineffectual as they are in the reshaping of the will which takes place in *virtù*. Instead, it has become apparent at various points in the analysis so far (especially *Inferno* II and *Paradiso* I and II), that at significant moments of learning, the pilgrim is somehow physically and emotionally involved in the process itself. The pilgrim is presented as learning by living through experiences, meeting people, seeing happenings, in short, engaging in the interactions which make up human life. These interactions are paralleled, however, by explanations of their signficance, a narrative feature which appeared in the hagiographical traditions considered in Chapter Two. The lived emotional and physical experiences of the pilgrim are interpreted for his benefit.

It is not only that the pilgrim learns when he experiences himself but also when he hears about the lived experiences of others. Throughout the text moments of reaction to various narratives are staged, which demonstrate the pilgrim learning how to respond and provide models for reader response in general. While, for example, in the *Meditationes vitae Christi* the reader was told how to respond, in the *Commedia* they are shown how to respond. So in the ultimately disastrous narrative of Francesca da Rimini, the pilgrim is overcome with guilt and grief and rendered 'come corpo morto' (*Inf.* V.142); instead when Virgil describes the salvific intercession of Beatrice for his sake, the pilgrim is vivified and filled with the desire to begin his journey of transformation. The *Commedia*'s form validates itself as a tool for moral and spiritual development. The pilgrim's seeing and interpreting is mirrored by the seeing and interpreting of the reader; the pilgrim's reactions to stories and his interactions with individuals become models for the reactions and interactions of the audience both in relation to the text they are reading and the lives they are living. They too are 'mostrato le perduti gente' in order to reveal to them their own flaws, while they are also shown the spirits of the blessed to reveal their own potentials.

5. What is the result of the attainment of *virtù*?

If I have successfully established the pilgrim's journey as one underpinned by the *virtù*-dynamic, then the result of *virtù* attained must be that which the pilgrim attains at the end of his journey: the vision of God. But before this ultimate vision is achieved, *virtù* is fulfilled in the pilgrim in different preliminary steps which enable him to reach this vision itself. Human *virtù*, we have come to see in the *Commedia*, is freedom of the will in loving

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the best object of its desires. This is necessarily tied to a correct seeing of and relationship to that object, and furthermore is dependent on the aid of that object itself. The result of *virtù* is both a fulfilled relationship with that object and a state of personal fulfilment of nature. The pilgrim's own journey is marked at significant points by increasing liberty, increasing vision and increasing personal powers, all of which are expressed through *virtù*.

As became apparent in *Inferno* II, the principal problem which affected the pilgrim at the opening of his journey was a conflicted will, still bound by the memory of sin. Through the intercessions of Virgil and Beatrice his will is liberated from these ties. That liberation is one of the principal aims of the pilgrim's journey is suggested by Virgil's words to Cato in his explanation of the pilgrim's unexpected presence in Purgatory: 'libertà va cercando' (*Purg.* I.71). Through the visions and experiences of Purgatory, this is what the pilgrim seeks and ultimately achieves and this achievement is acknowledged by Virgil's final words to him: 'Non aspettar mio dir più né mio cenno: / libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio' (*Purg.* XXVII.139-140). That the liberation of the will is what marks the final stage of Virgil's tutelage of the pilgrim, is consistent with how the poet has constructed Virgil's idea of human *virtù*. Having a correct *virtù che consiglia*, which could correctly guide human action, marked the limit of Virgil's understanding of *virtù* and love in *Purgatorio* XVIII. Now his pupil has achieved this and Virgil can finally advise him to follow the dictates of his will: 'fallo fora non fare a suo senno' (*Purg.* XXVII.141). Virgil's acknowledgement of the pilgrim's success is in keeping with the character's own understanding of the potentials and limits of human nature. Virgil describes the pilgrim as now self-reliant – 'io te sovra te corono e mitrio' (142) – and independent. However, this is only a stage on the pilgrim's development. In fact what follows in his encounter with Beatrice is an undermining of the pilgrim's new found autnomy and self-security in his confession to Beatrice. The liberty which Virgil describes is not of the same nature as the liberty which the pilgrim finally achieves. This liberty is again dictated by his relationship to Beatrice. In the pilgrim's final hymn of praise to Beatrice in *Paradiso* XXXI, liberty is no longer what he possesses himself but what he could not have achieved without Beatrice: 'Tu m'hai di servo tratto a libertate' (*Par.* XXXI.85). The liberty which the pilgrim finally achieves is the renunciation of autonomous power, it is the recognition of not being alone in the movement towards God. The human will alone cannot free itself from sin, but neither is it abandoned by its maker. Liberty is thus a simultaneous freeing from sin and freeing from solitude.

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The pilgrim's final address to Beatrice is his statement of this realisation; that her generous action is the source of his salvation. His ability to see this is part of the results of his attainment of *virtù*. Despite the immense physical distance between them, the pilgrim can see Beatrice more clearly than ever: 'süa effige / non discendëa a me per mezzo mista' (*Par.* XXXI.77-78).[284] This is significantly a moment of recognition, in which the pilgrim sees not only the physical Beatrice more clearly, but the metaphysical attributes which have underpinned their interaction:

> di tante cose quant' i' ho vedute,
> dal tuo podere e da la tua bontate
> riconosco la grazia e la virtute.   (*Par.* XXXI.82-84)

Through his interactions with Beatrice, the pilgrim has learned to see beyond creation to understand the forces which hold that creation in existence and together; furthermore she has acted as a channel for the interpretation of the invisible to enable the pilgrim to correctly read the things he has seen so that they become revelatory. The following of Beatrice through focusing his desire upon her has been a movement from slavery to liberty, which recalls the Augustinian movement from the multiple desires of the flesh to the unified desires of the spirit as described by Bochet: 'L'une, par la multiplicité de ses objets, est source de dispersion; l'autre au contraire unifie, car Dieu est un. La première captive, enchaîne dans la tyrannie de l'habitude; la seconde, à l'inverse, libère'.[285] Just as his coronation by Virgil marks the liberation of the pilgrim's rational knots, Beatrice, by presenting a simultaneously humanly compelling and incarnationally revealing object of desire, liberates the pilgrim from the misleading desires of the world and leads him to the freeing desire for God.

Seeing and vision are presented as one of the most overt results of the pilgrim's attainment of *virtù*. This is both in relation to his physical powers of sight and the furthering of his powers to perceive the invisible nature of things. One of the central currents of thought on virtue in the theological tradition and in the *Commedia* has been virtue's role in leading human kind to a correct perception of the nature of the created universe and its relation to its Creator. Virtue, having its focus beyond the material world, orders human desire not to individualised material objects but to the supreme object which underpins them all. Once in a state of virtue, man is no longer fatally distracted by creation but instead reads it as coming from God and can thus properly interact with it.

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[284] On the pilgrim's sojourn at the top of Paradise and on the changes in his guides from Beatrice to St Bernard see Steven Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition*.
[285] Isabelle Bochet, *St Augustin et le desir de Dieu* (Paris: Etudes augustiniennes, 1982) p. 388-89.

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Although the term *virtù* itself is not present, this state is encapsulated in the pilgrim in canto X of *Paradiso*. As the pilgrim under Beatrice's guidance is called to 'ringrazia[r] il Sol de li angeli' (53) which has empowered his ascent and vision, he is called to enact the correct interaction between man and God: an interaction of praise. The freedom of the pilgrim's will, aided by Beatrice, enables him to turn willingly and intensely to the act of praise: 'Cor mortal non fu mai sì digesto / a divozione e a rendersi a Dio' (55-56). What follows is a condensed staging of the pilgrim's successfully learned reading of the universe in which multiplicity is entirely revelatory of unity:

> [...] sì tutto 'l mio amore in lui si mise,
> che Bëatrice eclissò ne l'oblio.
>
> > Non le dispiacque, ma sì se ne rise,
> che lo splendor de li occhi suoi ridenti
> mia mente unita in più cose divise.   (*Par.* X.59-63)

It is not precisely a vision of God which the pilgrim has here but rather an experience of the intensity of love through which one sees God unmediated. The truly mediating object of love, Beatrice, remains untroubled by her own disappearance as this disappearance means that the lover is seeing her in her real state – at once distinct and totally one with God. By the end of the passage the pilgrim's mind has itself consciously become multiplicity in unity. The destructive splitting of desires is here resolved and there is no danger when all divided things in the apprehension remain whole. The pilgrim's reaction to Beatrice's laughter and smiling eyes iterates the state to which he has now come; the unity of his mind, focused in love upon God, can be split into many objects of interest and desire and yet remain whole. This state of volitional and intellectual unity recalls the state described by Augustine in the *Confessions* in which the mind, loving God, is brought to a state of perfect unity.[286] This is linked to the possibilities for love and perception offered by the incarnate Christ, through whom man passes from the many to the One.[287] That Beatrice is the locus through which the pilgrim comes to perceive this interaction of multiplicity and unity represented by the incarnate Christ, has already been suggested in the text in *Purgatorio* XXXI. As Beatrice stands gazing at the Gryphon and the pilgrim stands gazing into her eyes, he can see:

> Come in lo specchio il sol, non altrimenti
> la doppia fiera dentro vi raggiava
> or con altri, or con altri reggimenti.   (*Purg.* XXXI.121-23)

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[286] Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.29.40.
[287] Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.29.39.

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Looking through Beatrice, the pilgrim can come to perceive and experience (as he will do in *Paradiso* X), the simultaneous unity and multiplicity of the universe and come to see how it is revealed in the figure of the incarnate Christ.[288]

The structure of the *Commedia*'s narrative, focusing as it does on the development of the pilgrim, stresses the active interaction of the human individual in their process of moving towards a vision of God. That the individual is simultaneously the active, responsible subject in his own redemption while at the same time is necessarily reliant on aid from his (mediated) Creator, is one of the principal aspects of the *Commedia*'s *virtù*-dynamic and thus its ethical stance. The participation of man in his own redemption is central to the poem's message and this participation we have seen as significant at various points: in *Inferno* II, where it is the pilgrim's personal memories which draw him into the journey; in the confession of his own errors which the pilgrim makes in *Purgatorio* XXX and XXXI; in *Paradiso* II in which the pilgrim's own body becomes the ground for understanding the universe. And so it is not surprising that in the movement towards the final vision of God in cantos XXX and XXXI of *Paradiso*, the pilgrim is an active subject, interacting with the possibilities offered to him. The physical interactions which the narrative describes manifest the metaphysical interactions which we have seen consistently in relation to *virtù*.

The ability of the pilgrim to see has already been linked to the poet's usage of the term *virtù* in *Paradiso* I, in which the pilgrim can gaze upon the sun, being in the place created for humankind in which 'Molto è licito [...] a le nostre virtù' (*Par.* I.55-56). On entering the Empyrean, however, the pilgrim is again blinded by a 'luce viva' (*Par.* XXX.49) and is thus confronted, as so often happens in the *Paradiso*, with something beyond his own natural capacities to apprehend.[289] A veil is drawn between the pilgrim's senses and the truth of the objects he is unable to physically see. It is only when Beatrice reveals to him the interaction which has taken place that his sight returns. This interaction is one which recalls the making ready of created matter to receive the imprinting of the divine:

> Sempre l'amor che queta questo cielo
> accoglie in sé con sì fatta salute,
> per far disposto a sua fiamma il candelo. (*Par.* XXX.52-54)

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[288] In reading the Gryphon as a Christic figure I am following the commentary to this passage of Durling and Martinez, who advocate this reading as opposed to the Gryphon as a political allegory.

[289] On *Paradiso* XXX see: Prudence Shaw, 'Paradise XXX', in *Cambridge Readings in Dante's 'Comedy'*, ed. by Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 191-213; J.A. Scott, 'Paradise XXX', in *Dante commentaries: Eight Studies of the 'Divine Comedy'*, ed. by David Nolan (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1977), pp. 159-80.

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What Beatrice can reveal to the pilgrim are the interactions of love which underpin the universe. In light of this revelation the pilgrim becomes able to see and becomes aware of having gone beyond himself: 'io compresi / me sormontar di sopr' a mia virtute' (56-57). The pilgrim's increased *virtù* is in response to the 'amor che queta questo cielo' (52). Thus we find manifested and distilled the interaction which must take place for man to rise to God; the outpouring of love on the part of the Creator and the ontological rising up of the creature. This ontological ascension is only possible, however, through the active intervention of the Creator himself.

The progress of the pilgrim's vision continues to be a process of interaction of love and will. The pilgrim's liberated will now impels him towards the ultimate object, towards the *disio* which is both within him and is the object itself: 'L'alto disio che mo t'infiamma e urge, / d'aver notizia di ciò che tu vei' (*Par*. XXX.70-71). Desire is both that which moves the pilgrim from within – Virgil's natural love – and that which inflames him and draws him from without – the universally ordered love of Beatrice. The pilgrim is at a state in which these two loves are perfectly harmonised. That this is a natural and essential state of the human soul is suggested by the metaphor the poet here employs to suggest the eagerness of the pilgrim:

> Non è fantin che sì subito rua
> col viso verso il latte, se si svegli
> molto tardato da l'usanza sua,
> come fec'io, per far migliori spegli
> ancor de li occhi, chinandomi a l'onda
> che si deriva perché vi s'immegli   (*Par*. XXX.82-87)

The pilgrim in his state of *virtù* is figured as the child who instinctively recognises the source of its life-giving sustenance. His turning to drink from the river of light before him is at once an instinct and a choice; it is the point at which his ethical and his ontological states have finally harmonised. On entering the Empyrean his *virtù* had been increased by the love that greeted him; now his *virtù* will be increased because of his own loving and desiring state of mind and freed will. The pilgrim's compelling desire to apprehend this realm of God will enable him to have access to it. His openness and willingness to receive are, in fact, what make him able to receive – as was 'theoretically' established by Beatrice in the previous canto (XXIX.64) – just as the *willingness* of his gaze in *Purgatorio* X transformed the hard stone into a substance malleable and receptive to the form of God.

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Now his willingness allows for his own self-transformation. The poet appeals to the naturalness of the transformative interaction – needing and giving through love – through the tender simile of the nursing infant. The infant, soul unformed and desire unclouded, can most instinctively recognise the source of its sustaining existence and be in turn nourished and fulfilled by it.

This fulfilled and essential state of human *virtù* enables the pilgrim to have a direct vision of the nature of Paradise which reveals to him, moreover, the nature of creation itself. The text figures this through the pilgrim's active participation in that creation. As became apparent in the analysis of *Inferno* IV and *Purgatorio* XXVIII, water is an important 'carrier' of *virtù* in the *Commedia*'s images, and (non) interaction with it is a mark of the soul's interaction with God. Furthermore, as Patrick Boyde points out, in the tradition, God's 'first creative act is compared to the overflowing or outpouring of the spring; and thus the universe may be imagined as a river "proceeding out of the throne of God"'.[290] The pilgrim's drinking from the river, therefore, becomes a sign of the interaction of human and divine *virtù* both in his individualised case and as a figure for the interaction of mankind in creation as a whole. I have argued that the *virtù*-dynamic of the *Commedia*, and thus the poem's ethical stance, is concerned with orientating humankind within creation by fulfiling the potentials of human nature. Drinking from the river enables the pilgrim to see the Creator himself and thus to come to a state of volitional peace:

> Luce è la sù che visibile face
>
> lo creatore a quella creatura
>
> che solo in lui vedere ha la sua pace.　　　　(*Par.* XXX.100-02)

Through the pilgrim's eyes the result of *virtù* is both experienced and revealed. Only in the vision of God, the 'primo ben' of human existence, can human desire be quieted and the peace promised by attaining *virtù* be found.

But the structure of the *Commedia*, in which the protagonist is both the pilgrim and the poet, means that the result of *virtù* extends both within and beyond the poem's narrative, essentially passing between the two. As has been suggested, the *Commedia* makes the poet's ability to write dependent on the pilgrim's transformative experiences. While *virtù* is what empowers the pilgrim to see, it is also cast as that which empowers the poet to write. The relationship of dependency of creature and Creator for moral and ontological fulfilment is also present; the poet cannot write without divine aid figured as *virtù*. In the

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[290] Patrick Boyde, *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 215.

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Paradiso there are three appeals to *virtù* to aid in the poet's task of describing the holy realm and each introduces a different stage in what might be considered the poet's creativity. The first, in *Paradiso* I, forms part of the poet's appeal to Apollo to make him 'del tuo valor sì fatto vaso' (13). The *vaso* here recalls Paul as the 'Vas d'elezion' to which the pilgrim compared himself – and found himself wanting – in *Inferno* II. Instead, now the experienced poet can successfully call on divine aid, being a worthy vessel to receive it. *Virtù*, in the poet's appeal to Apollo, is personfied, making it the god himself, while simultaneously being that through which the poet can write:

> O divina virtù, se mi ti presti
> tanto che l'ombra del beato regno
> segnata nel mio capo io manifesti   (*Par.* I.22-24).

The reflexive verbs both personify *virtù* and make it that which the poet himself must possess in order to express himself. Again *virtù* is both the state of fulfilment and the correct action itself by which that fulfilment is achieved. The second instance in which *virtù* is tied to the poet's abilities comes in *Paradiso* XXII, again in an extra-narrative address on the part of the poet this time to the stars of Gemini:

> O gloriose stelle, o lume pregno
> di gran virtù, dal qual io riconosco
> tutto, qual che si sia, il mio ingegno   (*Par.* XXII.112-14)

In appealing to the stars which presided over his own birth, the poet is situating the fulfilment of his abilities in relation to their potential at his own creation. Here the cosmic interactions of *Paradiso* II are particularised in the case of the poet. To write is a fulfilment of his own particular ontological nature, the ethical enactment of his particular *virtù*. Again, however, this enactment is made dependent upon a further relationship. As in the pilgrim's address to Beatrice, which recognises his dependence upon her, here the poet acknowledges a similar dependency, only this time on the generator of his particular individuality. The final appeal to *virtù* to aid the poet's expression appears significantly in *Paradiso* XXX and is closely linked to, and arises directly out of, the experiences of the pilgrim at that moment, bringing the poet and pilgrim very closely together. While the two previous addresses have been to pagan Apollo and the constellation of Gemini, this final appeal is directly to God himself; at this stage of the pilgrim's vision there can be no more intermediaries:

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> O isplendor di Dio, per cu' io vidi
>
> l'alto trïunfo del regno verace,
>
> dammi virtù a dir com'ïo il vidi!   (*Par.* XXX.97-99)

These lines appear immediately before those quoted above in which the light of heaven reveals the Creator to his creature (100-02). In order for the poet to enact a recreation of this vision in his poem, the divine light and creativity of God in the form of *virtù* become necessary since both the experience and the expression go beyond human natural capabilities. These three instances trace a shift in the poem towards a changing source of human creativity and thus of human *virtù*. The first appeal to Apollo echoes the continuing influence of the classical past upon the poet's creativity; he writes in the light of that past. The second appeal to the stars of Gemini enacts a recognition of the lessons learned by the pilgrim in *Paradiso* II on the source of differentiation and individualised powers in the universe. The poet's power's are not autonomous but are instead part of a cosmic order within which he is fulfiling himself. But the final appeal marks the final stage of the pilgrim-poet's development. Just as the pilgrim can now see things unmediated and recognise directly the source of his existence, so the poet can acknowledge the origin of his own creative *virtù*, as playing a part within the *virtù* at the basis of all creation.

6. Dante-pilgrim: Representative of the Human Condition

The *Commedia* not only considers *virtù* in relation to the pilgrim's individualised self, but constructs that self as a representative of humanity in its fallen condition. It does this by an underlying current of comparison and identification between the pilgrim and Adam. In *Purgatorio* XXX, in Beatrice's criticism of the pilgrim's sin, and in *Paradiso* VII, when the creation of Adam is described, both figures are characterised as having misused their God-given potential. In the pilgrim's case, Beatrice describes how not only the heavens but the 'grazie divine' had disposed the pilgrim to the best possible state:

> questi fu tal ne la sua vita nova,
>
> virtualmente, ch'ogne abito destro
>
> fatto avrebbe in lui mirabil prova.   (*Purg.* XXX.115-117)

The pilgrim has been endowed with both a perfect natural disposition and, in the events of his *Vita nuova* with Beatrice, had received the beneficial guidance of divine grace. His sin is therefore even more terrible, arising as it does from self-will working against divine aid. He actively turns away from Beatrice – 'si tolse a me e diessi altrui' (*Purg.* XXX.126) – and

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progresses along the wrong path: 'volse i passi suoi per via non vera' (130). The pilgrim's sin is within the *virtù che consiglia*, which has been established as central to human nature in their pursuit of the good. A similar misuse of natural potential and the human *virtù* of free will is also attributed to Adam. His creation was even more perfect than that of the pilgrim since he was 'al suo fattore unita' (*Par.* VII.35) and his creation was fundamentally good: 'qual fu creata fu sincera e buona' (36). In his creation, which was directly linked to and revealing of God, Adam was a moment of perfect creation. But his sin is described in the same terms as that of the pilgrim; he too self-wills to turn from God along the wrong path: 'per se stessa fu ella sbandita / di paradiso, però che si torse / da via di verità e da sua vita' (VII.37-39). The echoes in imagery of the *via di verità* and the misuse of human *vita*, form an identification between the two figures. This identification is intensified in a consideration of the root of their sin. We have already seen that a misuse and misguidance of will is at the centre of the pilgrim's failings. Similarly, the cause of Adam's sin involves a misuse of will:

> Per non sofferire a la virtù che vole
>
> freno a sua prode, quell'uom che non nacque,
>
> dannando sé, dannò tutta sua prole.　　　　　　　(*Par.* VII.25-27)

To will is an essential aspect of human nature – it is a *virtù* – but to control that will through the 'virtù che consiglia' is what gives value to human action. In not accepting controls of the will, in not submitting his own will to a higher purpose, Adam sins. The submission of the will, frequently figured in *Purgatorio* in terms of reining in, is the lesson learned by the pilgrim throughout his journey. Adam and the pilgrim's fault lies in freely chosen self-alienation, which stems from an unwillingness to form part of a hierarchy of being and instead to see the self and its desires as paramount. This alienation is a corruption of the ontological order into which they were created and a refusal of all the benefits of that order. Adam saw God and turned away from him, just as the pilgrim saw Beatrice and turned away from her. The pilgrim's fault cannot be realigned until his arrival in the Earthly Paradise in which the restoration of his original, sinless nature can be achieved. This further forms a connection between the pilgrim and Adam; it was for Adam, 'l'uom buono e a bene' (*Purg.* XXVIII.92), that Eden was created. That the pilgrim's restoration takes place here connects his newly achieved state with that of prelapsarian Adam and thus identifies his new state as one most intimately connected with God. He has passed through the self-created alienation from God to which sinning had brought him. In entering Eden he can become again 'al suo fattore unita'.

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That the pilgrim's redeemed state is a reassertion of his natural potential and linked to the natural potential of all humanity established by Adam, becomes apparent in the pilgrim's eventual meeting with Adam himself, which is marked by an emphasis on the connection of their essential natures as created, potential beings. Adam is identified through his ontological placing within the hierarchy of creation, which he himself has now properly recognised – he is not autonomous but is instead a part of creation: 'Dentro da quei rai / vagheggia il suo fattor l'anima prima / che la prima virtù creasse mai' (*Par.* XXVI.82-84). The simile which immediately follows this reaches beyond the narrative action to connect the metaphysical and imaginary undercurrents which have traced the pilgrim's own development:

> Come la fronda che flette la cima
> nel transito del vento, e poi si leva
> per la propria virtù che la soblima,
>   fec' io in tanto in quant' ella diceva,
> stupendo, e poi mi rifece sicuro
> un disio di parlare ond' io ardeva.
>   E comincia: 'O pomo [...]'   (*Par.* XXVI.85-91)

Adam and the pilgrim are metaphorically made participants in the natural processes of the world. We find at the bases of those processes *virtù*, that which ties the natures of Creator and creature together in acts of becoming and self becoming. The meeting with Adam places the pilgrim simultaneously in his most basic and most fulfilled place as a human being within the ontological hierarchy.

In light of the progress of the pilgrim which has been traced in this chapter, it is perhaps hardly surprising that the interaction of *virtù* between Adam and the pilgrim is related by the poet directly to speech. Ascoli has noted that 'the phrase "la propria virtù", suggesting the act of specific [...] individual will by which Dante raises himself up to communicate with his first parent [...] resonate[s] deliberately with the naming of the creator God as "la prima virtù" only three lines earlier'.[291] The creation of man and the perfection of *virtù* in man are thus both dictated by the word; the creation of man and man's own speech become the expression of perfect being.

7. Conclusion

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[291] Ascoli, note 153.

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Through the figure of the pilgrim, the poet Dante proposes an example of the steps by which man can come to God. In focusing on himself as the subject of development, engaging in a kind of self-confession, Dante's narrative is perhaps reminiscent of the *Confessions* of Augustine with their personal history and self analysis. But the *Commedia*'s presentation of the pilgrim is taking part in a wider conceptual and representational tradition. The transformations of the pilgrim act as a kind of exemplum which we the readers watch and participate in, as in the traditions of hagiography and devotional literature. But the transformation experience which the *Commedia* traces is intimately bound up the way the *stilnovo* conceived the experience of romantic love. The pilgrim's own historical life is the forum in which he learns. By contextualising the experience the pilgrim undergoes in the narrative within his own real life, the *Commedia* validates the possibilities offered by human life itself. For the pilgrim, the result of a life fulfilled through *virtù* is the expression of his experiences; for the human condition which the pilgrim represents, the fulfilment of human *virtù* is the expression of man's relationship to God.

The poet constructs the development of *virtù* at different stages in relation to his pilgrim figure's needs and abilities. Reminiscent of the Aristotelian tradition, human *virtù* under Virgil is rational free choice springing from an ordered and enlightened reason and will. It is the freedom of choice which gives human action value. Human *virtù* under Beatrice, however, is the reconnection of man to the source of his existence through mutual love. This love empowers man to return to his origin. Beatrice's understanding of *virtù* is much closer to the Augustinian tradition of virtue as the perfect love of God. This tradition also influences how the *Commedia* presents *virtù* as being acquired. The *Commedia* places conflict of will as central to the pilgrim's temporal failings, as well as being the centre of his positive transformation. The redirection of his will through the combined actions of Virgil and Beatrice enables the pilgrim to move towards God. However, the *Commedia* sees the development of the will in direct relation to the intellectual, emotional and indeed, romantic experience of the pilgrim. In his experience of human love lies the impetus for his transformation. In the two aspects of human *virtù*, which Virgil and Beatrice present to the pilgrim, it becomes evident that the *Commedia* does not cast one as replacing the other, but rather human *virtù* are free will is recontextualised to work within a new theological order: human *virtù* is therefore involved in a process of transformation. Perhaps the principal comment which the poem establishes about human *virtù* is its non-isolation. Just as the pilgrim in his progress does not and could not continue his journey alone, so the humanity, which the pilgrim represents, is likewise aided in its movement towards salvation. *Virtù* becomes that which reconnects human powers (*virtù*) with the divine

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power (*virtù*) which actively draws man back to itself. Within this interaction, the individual is both responsible and dependent; responsible for the choices he makes but dependent upon God for the offer of those choices.

By telling the story of an individual man, Dante is able to make tangible and personal the cosmological, metaphysical and theological dynamics which his poem explores. The pilgrim himself becomes the conceptual link for understanding the divine mysteries to which he is made party. The human love story of the *Commedia*, in which man can search for and meet again his dead beloved, is a translucent veil for the metaphysical love story between God and his creation which underpins the poem. But it is an absolutely necessary veil. The *Commedia* casts human relations, with their joys, dangers and suffering, as the way towards the fulfilment of man's being. By dramatising these relations in the light of the eternal, Dante is providing a forum in which human life itself can be understood and revalued.

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Conclusion

In *Paradiso* XXIV-XXVI, the pilgrim stands in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars; he is there examined on the nature of the three theological virtues by the saints Peter, James and John.[292] This is one of the *Commedia*'s many moments of doctrinal clarity and naturally draws the attention of those looking for details of the poet's presentation of virtue. My aim here, at the conclusion of my thesis, is not to give an exhaustive analysis of this passage but instead to focus on four elements which draw together issues of the *virtù*-dynamic which have become evident in this thesis. As in so much of the poem, it is in the episode's dramatic form and action, as much as its doctrinal content, that the *virtù*-dynamic becomes apparent. That the virtues are revealed and discussed as part of a dramatic episode is a reiteration of how *virtù* appears in the *Commedia* as a whole: as a vivified factor in human existence. By turning at this point to this central episode, following my analysis of the far-reaching *virtù*-dynamic, we can come to see this dynamic at work

Virtù in the *Commedia* has become evident as an ethics of character and its nature is primarily to be understood through human experience. This appears again in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars episode through the figures of the pilgrim's three examiners. One of this particular episode's more striking features is its examination format, in which the pilgrim is questioned by three saints, each of whom is associated personally with the theological *virtù* which the pilgrim is called upon to explicate. In this way the pilgrim's theoretical explications are paralleled by the presence of an exemplum figure of that *virtù*; his explications are to be read through the personified figure of *virtù* to whom he is speaking. *Virtù*, therefore, appears both explained in the pilgrim's words and exemplified in the saints' characters and actions. This is a parallel example of the representational form, in which each element is read in relation to the other, that was exemplified in Giotto's work of the Arena Chapel. Furthermore, as in the case of saints Francis and Dominic as we saw in Chapter Four, the use of a saint to exemplify a *virtù* is also making a particular statement about the nature of human goodness. A saint's *virtù* more overtly reveals God as the source from which it comes, and a saint's *virtù* can be read as a more explicit imitation of the *virtù* of Christ.

Virtù in the *Commedia*, we have come to see, is the fulfilment and perfection of an individual's being through the action proper to them. This is reiterated in the figures of

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[292] For readings of these cantos see: Antonio Gagliardi, 'Sulle tracce del pipistrello', in *Esperimenti danteschi: Paradiso*, pp. 214-46; Francesco Zambon, 'La scrittura d'amore', in *Esperimenti danteschi: Paradiso*, pp. 247-84.

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Peter, James and John who are not simply useful examiners but living examples of those who have transformed *virtù* into action. Peter is the living example of faith in action, exemplified in his act of faith, walking on water (XXIV.39). Through his faith he is entrusted by Christ with the keys of heaven; he himself is sufficiently 'substantive' of faith to guide others towards the same path. Similarly, James is cast as an emblem of hope which inspires others, drawing them to his shrine in Galicia (XXV.18). The poem further emphasises James as a manifestation of hope in an appeal to the tradition of James as the figure for hope,[293] an echo of the representational tradition of personifying *virtù*:

> fa risonar la spene in questa altezza:
> tu sai, che tante fiate la figuri,
> quante Iesù ai tre fé più carezza.   (*Par.* XXV.31-33)

James' hope – his *virtù* – accompanies him to martyrdom and, as that which empowered him to complete that martydom, it is an object of love: 'L'amore ond'io avvampo / ancor ver' la virtù che mi seguette / infin la palma e a l'uscir del campo' (XXV.82-84). Hope is the *virtù* which brings James to God and thus his loving of hope appears emblematic of the active movement by which man moves towards his salvation. Finally John is the exemplum of love, which love makes him worthy to take on the responsibility of Christ in loving his mother, the Virgin Mary (XXV.112-14). His love, in a sense, transforms him into the Virgin's son. In the figures of the three saints the *virtù*, which the pilgrim is called on to describe, is vivified and its results are made evident. Faith, exemplified by Peter, enables one to actively follow Christ in his miracles; Hope, as it did for James, empowers one to face death for the sake of Christ in the sure expectation of new life; and, as it did for John, love transforms the lover into the manifestation of Christ. *Virtù* is essential, real, transformative and salvific.

The second element of this episode I would like to pick out is how it presents the learning of *virtù*. Most importantly, the episode focuses on the reading of texts as a valid source for learning *virtù*. In each of his explications of faith, hope and love, the pilgrim asserts texts – specifically philosophical texts and the Old and New Testaments – as the source of his knowledge. So for example, in *Paradiso* XXIV, the pilgrim explains his faith as having its origin in 'La larga ploia / de lo Spirito Santo, ch'è diffusa / in su le vecchie e 'n su le nuove cuoia' (91-93). He makes similar statements in XXV.73-78 and XXVI.25-27. In the latter, texts are cast as not simply informing the reader about the nature of *virtù*, but preparing them for future, experiential understanding. The explanation of coming to love, which the

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[293] See Robert Hollander's commentary on these lines for a fuller exploration and bibliography on this idea.

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pilgrim gives, is an explanation of his own approach to God as we have seen it unfold in the *Commedia*: 'Per filosofici argomenti / e per autorità che quinci scende / cotale amor convien che in me si 'mprenti' (XXVI.25-27). This approach is made through both philosophical and theological paths along which the pilgrim was guided by both Virgil and Beatrice. Significantly these paths are envisioned as a preparation to receive something more and this reception is figured in terms of imprinting. This should recall to our mind images of stamping and imprinting that have gone before and have been especially pertinent to questions of *virtù* in the *Commedia*: Francis perfectly preparing himself through love of poverty to receive the imprint of God's love, the stigmata (*Par.* XI.107); Christ and Adam as the result of the imprinting of divine *virtù* upon perfectly disposed matter (*Par.* XIII.79-81). Here the poem is asserting that the preparation for a similar imprinting can be found through the study of philosophy and the study of scripture.

Exactly how and why texts can be a source of *virtù* is suggested in the pilgrim's expression of faith. In his response to Peter's question on the nature of faith, the pilgrim gives the Pauline description of faith as 'sustanza di cose sperate / e argomenti de le non parventi' (XXIV.64-65). The pilgrim then elucidates his answer in which he describes faith in relation to the heavenly reality he himself is now witnessing but which on earth is impossible to see: 'Le profonde cose / che mi largiscon qui la lor parvenza, / a li occhi di là giù son sì ascose' (70-72). Faith is the 'substantiating' on earth of the invisible things of heaven. Later, Peter describes faith as 'Questa cara gioia / sopra la quale ogne virtù si fonda' (89-90). The substantiating of the invisible, which is faith, is cast as the basis for all *virtù*. But since humans cannot know without sensory input, the invisible faith must be substantiated in text and act. These are the elements which the pilgrim identifies as the foundation of his own faith: the words of the Old and New Testaments and 'l'opere' which followed from them (XXIV.100-01). The pilgrim's own declaration then becomes, in a sense, a further manifestion of faith in words and act. He is called on to '[farsi] *manifesto*: / fede che è?' (52-53: my italics). Furthermore, this is what the poet is aiming to do in his poem. In substantiating the invisible in his presentation of heaven, the poet is re-enacting a process of faith which manifests itself in words and deeds. He is, I suggest, asserting his own poem as a manifestation of faith and therefore as a foundation for the development of *virtù*. That the poem itself must become a source of *virtù* is further iterated within the narrative dialogue when the pilgrim is directly charged with bringing hope to others:

> Poi che per grazia vuol che tu t'affronti
> lo nostro Imperador, anzi la morte
> [...]

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sì che, veduto il ver di questa corte,

la spene, che là giù bene innamora,

in te e in altrui di ciò conforte.   (*Par.* XXV.43-45)

That text could bring about active learning and active emotional transformation was a significant feature of the devotional literature considered in Chapter Two, in which to read about events was to take part in them and, potentially, be transformed by them. Dante appears to be casting his own *Commedia* as a text capable of engaging the emotions and intellect while revealing the invisible divine truth and as such, providing a basis for the development of *virtù*.

The third significant element of the episode returns us to the personal story of the pilgrim and the lessons he has learned about love. At the appearance of the soul of John at the end of canto XXV, the pilgrim attempts to see the actual body of the soul which he believes to be there. He is, however, blinded in this fruitless attempt. Frightened by his blindness, the pilgrim is quickly comforted by John: 'fa ragione che sia / la vista in te smarrita e non defunta' (XXVI.8-9). While sight is denied the pilgrim, he must, however, speak. John tells him to 'dì ove s'appunta / l'anima tua' (7-8). The pilgrim must explain love without sight, without a vision of its object. Enacted in this examination is the process which the pilgrim has learned throughout his experiences in the *Commedia*: that the true object of his desire, which can bring about the fulfilment of his being, is invisible. In this he is enacting the nature of Charity itself; Charity which has God as its object but which is also the manifestation of a mutual relationship between God and man. In the pilgrim's humble renunciation of his powers and his sightless declaration of the source of his love, he is enacting the lessons which he has learned throughout his journey:

[...] Al suo piacere e tosto e tardo

vegna remedio a li occhi, che fuor porte

quand' ella entrò col foco ond' io sempr' ardo.

   Lo ben che fa contenta questa corte,

Alfa e O è di quanta scrittura

mi legge Amore o lievemente o forte.   (*Par.* XXVI.13-18)

The pilgrim's powers are fully and willingly submitted to those of another, in this case, Beatrice. He no longer needs to see to recognise God as the source of love. Significantly, again, Beatrice becomes the locus of seeing and not seeing: she controls the pilgrim's vision. This is expressed through *virtù*: 'la donna che per questa dia / region ti conduce, ha

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ne lo sguardo / la virtù ch'ebbe la man d'Anania' (10-12). Beatrice's individual *virtù*, the fulfilment of her being, has been to reveal the invisible to the pilgrim through his love for her. Now, as in *Paradiso* X, she, as the object of his love, is eclipsed in his love for God.

In the pilgrim's declaration of how he has come to recognise the source of love, the focus returns to the basic elements through which the *Commedia* presents man as coming to see God:

> [...] Tutti quei morsi
> che posson far lo cor volgere a Dio,
> a la mia caritate con concorsi:
>   ché l'essere del mondo e l'esser mio,
> la morte ch'el sostenne perch' io viva,
> e quel che spera ogne fedel com' io,
>   con la predetta conoscenza viva   (*Par.* XXVI.55-61)

It is through creation, man's existence within it and the revelation of Christ that man's love is refined and focused towards love of God. Through these elements is man's love, as we have seen in the case of the pilgrim, redirected to the straight path: 'tratto m'hanno del mar de l'amor torto, / e del dritto m'han posto a la riva' (XXVI.62-63). Creation, and man's place within it, is the forum in which he comes to recognise the source of his existence and to love that source. This is only possible, however, in the light of Christ's sacrifice.

The final point I would like to make in relation to the episode of the Heaven of the Fixed Stars is to add something to the *virtù*-dynamic which links the pilgrim and the poet. When the soul of Peter first appears, Beatrice points out that the souls in heaven have no need of hearing the pilgrim speak 'perché 'l viso hai quivi / dov' ogne cosa dipinta si vede' (XXIV.41-42). And yet the examination scenes provide the opportunity for the pilgrim to speak, indeed they highlight his words which are not necessary for the understanding of the narrative's characters, but are nevertheless spoken. They are, at one level, as we have seen, a manifestation of faith. They are spoken for the sake of us the readers, becoming the manifestation in spoken act of the invisible truth. But furthermore, the point of the pilgrim's declarations is an act of praise; in being called on to declare faith, he is called on to 'glorïarla' (44). This becomes the fulfilment of the pilgrim-poet's *virtù* and the purpose of his individual existence: to express himself in an act of praise.

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This thesis began by examining different notions of the idea of virtue, beginning with the classical past, passing through early and medieval Christian thinkers and then turning to the devotional, literary and artistic production of the thirteenth century. It then turned to a consideration of Dante's *Commedia* in light of the issues raised in the first two chapters. In progressing from the intellectual and representational context to Dante's work itself, it became apparent that notions of virtue, its nature and its role in human life transform, depending on the context and purpose of a text. In order to highlight Dante's own place in relation to these traditions, I will give a brief comparative overview of the issues this thesis has brought to light. In considering the question – what is virtue? – the answer both outside of and within the *Commedia* itself has been dictated by the intellectual and theological context. Classical virtue, as an ordering of the self, its reason and its emotions, also appeared as a significant element in the *Commedia*'s own ideas on human *virtù* during the pilgrim's early development under the guidance of Virgil. The exercise of free will, both in Aristotle and in the *Commedia*, was an important value-giving factor to human action, and thus human virtue became based on human responsibility. In the thought of Augustine, Gregory and Aquinas, however, notions of virtue were entirely recontextualised. Although virtue continued to be seen as the perfection of the self, the very notion of what it meant for the self to be perfect was reorientated in light of the Christian faith. In this light, human virtue, the act by which humans could fulfil their nature, was in perfectly loving God. Love, as a central element in the idea of virtue, becomes absolutely essential to the *Commedia*'s own presentation of *virtù*. While free will is not negated, the responsibility of man becomes to use this free will to love God perfectly. Because the *Commedia* puts such a strong emphasis on love, then the whole dynamic of how man can attain to *virtù* is transformed, as is the way this attainment comes to be conceived.

The ethics of *virtù* in the *Commedia* is reminiscent not only of Aristotelian moral virtue, but of the tradition of virtue exemplified in Chapter One in the work of Augustine and Gregory the Great. In this tradition, human virtue forms part of a hierarchy of existence and it finds its fulfilment in loving submission to the generous source of its existence, God. The *Commedia*'s ethics, the lessons it teaches about behaviour, are predominantly focused on the ordering of desire in relation to desire for God as the ultimate Good of man's nature. The particular virtues which order this relationship, humility and charity, are at the heart of the *Commedia*'s ethical message. In focusing upon these issues in particular, the *Commedia* emerges as a work with strong echoes of the Franciscan thought, forms of expression and ideas of *virtù*, which were so evident in the culture from which the poem emerged. Furthermore, in emphasising love, vivified experience and self-transformation

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as the elements through which man moves towards God, the *Commedia* focuses strongly upon the role of the Incarnation and the life of Christ as the ground through which man can come to see and achieve union with God.

In the thought of both Plato and Aristotle the forum of virtue's development was human society and interaction, even though in Plato's notion the form of virtue itself was beyond the human sphere. This was also the forum for the development of virtue in the thought of Augustine, Gregory the Great and Aquinas, although this forum was recontextualised: the human temporal world had entered into relationship with the divine. The development of human virtue became dependent on God's interaction with man. In terms of the practical acquisition of virtue, the representational traditions conceived it as being learned in different ways. Dominican sermons, exemplified in those of Giordano da Pisa, taught virtue through the lessons of rational thought, teaching the habits of self-control through the clarifying of the intellect. Instead Franciscan devotional literature, such as the *Meditationes vitae Christi* or the *Lignum Vitae*, used the emotions and senses to communicate to their audience and transform their will by making them participate emotionally in the events of the story. It has become apparent that the *Commedia* employs both of these approaches. Through its explanatory dialogues the pilgrim, and by consequence the reader, come to a point of intellectual clarity; in its drama, its pathos and its joy the *Commedia* engages the sense and emotions and employs them to bring about direct transformation in the text's protagonist and audience.

All the texts from the conceptual and representational traditions, to some degree or another, employ the use of personified exempla to communicate their notion of virtue. For Augustine, this was his own self in his act of conversion in the *Confessions*; in Gregory the Great it was the biblical figure of Job; the *Meditationes vitae Christi* focused upon the events of Christ's life, making them a thing of present and immediate experience for the reader; in Iacopone's *Laude* and in the allegories of virtue in the Arena chapel, individual virtues themselves were given human characteristics so that the abstract principle they represent could be physically communicated. The *Commedia*, in the personified exempla it gives of virtue, employs all of these methods and goes beyond them. The lives of holy figures are a principal element of the *Commedia*'s exempla: the acts of the Virgin on the terraces of Purgatory; the lives of saints; and the actions of the many people from Dante's own history who both failed and succeeded in the achievement of salvation. But the *Commedia*'s most intimate and original form of exemplum is found in the figure of the pilgrim-poet. While the precedent for self-analysis is found in Augustine, through the development of his pilgrim-self, Dante conceives the steps by which he sees man coming

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to God. Passing through the classical education of his early life, which leads him to self-control and freedom from sin, he imagines himself as empowered by the experiences of his early love which connects him directly to God. His process of acquiring *virtù* through the aid of others becomes a microcosm of how man can come to God: through the loves of one's life. In showing his pilgrim-self development, Dante is making a further claim for the perfection he personally achieves in the writing of the *Commedia* itself. The text becomes the expression of his *virtù* and in doing so casts itself as a tool for the education of others.

The *Commedia* presents the attainment of *virtù* as occurring through participation in human life in the light of divine revelation. Lessons of *virtù* are to be found in observing the experiences of others and engaging in experiences oneself. Real exempla, which reveal not only their own *virtù* but the source from which they have it, come to demonstrate the potentials of human existence. In the *Commedia*, man's existence, which finds both its origin and its highest expression in *virtù*, is emphasised as not isolated; instead man is shown within an ontological and ethical relationship with the universe and with God. Human goodness is a component part of the well-ordered universe.

The pilgrim's own development of *virtù* is set by Dante against a backdrop of cosmic and natural *virtù*. The conceptual and representational traditions employed images of natural growth and fertility in describing virtue in different ways. Virtue as spiritually fruitful was an image which appeared in the *Meditationes vitae Christi*; it was explicitly figured as such in the *Lignum vitae* in which the ascension of the tree and the consumptiom of the fruits was an allegory for the acquisition of virtues modelled on Christ. The *Commedia* also recalls images of spiritual fertility in relation to *virtù*, particularly in the biographies of saints Francis and Dominic. But the text also couples this tradition of imagining virtue in terms of spiritual fertility with an interest in describing the metaphysics which underpin the universe. Trees and fruit, as well as stars and light, become the manifestations of fulfilled *virtù*, but these images are underpinned by a metaphysical discourse in which *virtù* is given a central role. As was suggested in the introduction, *virtù* is a concept caught between metaphysical power and physical manifestation: between being and doing. The *Commedia* reveals the metaphysical forces behind the traditional images of spiritual fertility and in so doing emphasises one of the text's central points: that creation is always and fundamentally connected to its Creator, and it is this connection which enables man's perfection and salvation. Through considering *virtù*, we can see that Dante establishes an underlying unity to created existence, of which human beings are a vital part. By expressing *virtù* through recurring imagery of plants, water and cosmic elements, as well as its role in the specific formation of man, the *Commedia* builds up a network of ideas in

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which the individual is connected to the whole. Joined by the common element of having *virtù* and therefore having a role dictated by their nature, man is placed within creation. Creation then becomes the forum for coming to see the source of creation and thus the source of man's own *virtù*. *Virtù* in the *Commedia*, in its most basic sense, is the perfection of an entity's power in the act proper to it. *Virtù* applies both to all elements of creation – including and especially man – and to God. What my analysis has shown is how intensely the *Commedia* focuses upon the nature, process and results of that perfecting, and in doing so places *virtù* at a nexus of human and divine communication.

In the theological thought of Augustine, in the devotional texts of the Franciscans, in the sermons of the Dominican tradition and finally in the *Commedia* itself, Christ is the manifestation of this fundamental communication. Augustine identifies Christ as the unifier of desire who returns the many to the One. Both the *Meditationes vitae Christi* and the sermons of Giordano da Pisa emphasised imitation of Christ as the way to return to God. The *Commedia* establishes Christ as a linking point between God and man. The incarnate Christ – the incarnation of the *virtù* of God – is the conceptual bridge by which man can move from the physical to the invisible. Christ, as the active agent in creation, makes the forum in which man can act and come to see God in all existence. And finally, the virtuous actions of the temporal Christ, in their love and humility, demonstrate the ethical steps man must take to return to God.

I believe my work has opened up avenues for further scholarship in several important areas of Dante studies. Firstly, it provides grounds for a new consideration of Dantean ethics. In considering *virtù*, it has become clear that the *Commedia* proposes an essential link between God and man, and thus makes ethics primarily a theological expression. While scholarship has tended to look towards Aristotle for an understanding of Dantean ethics, my work suggests that Dante is working within a much more varied tradition which should be considered further. Secondly, I believe there is much scope for continuing work on poetry as an expression of ethics.[294] The *Commedia*, in its intertextuality, draws on many sources for its ethical models, but it is also employing the communication methods of those sources to put across its points. Exactly how its communication styles relate to its ethical models and the particularities of its poetic forms provides much opportunity for development.

The second area to which my work contributes and opens up future avenues of discussion, is the consideration of Dante's political preoccupations. Looking at specific

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[294] This branch of study, as became apparent in the introduction, has already received significant contribution from Claire Honess.

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political and communal virtues in Dante provides scope for thought, but perhaps more interesting would be a consideration of how much Dante's political messages are bound up with his ideas about the fulfilment of the individual self and ideas of human goodness. Dante's treatment of *virtù* suggests the importance he gives to individual responsibility and individual fulfilment over and above the fulfilment of a political community. This could lead to a questioning of the extent to which the *Commedia* is advocating real temporal political change or whether the change it envisages is only conceived as possible in the afterlife. The individual relationship between man and God, which the *virtù*-dynamic establishes could, however, be extended to consider Dante's presentation of the communities of the afterlife as being similarly dependent on a divine dispensation for success. Subsequently, the connection between temporal political communities, the community of the faithful and the metaphysical community in God could be explored.[295] From this could be developed an idea of communal fulfilment, and further, how this fulfilment could be understood as having a metaphysical component.

The third area of Dante studies within which I believe my work could be developed further, is that of Dantean theology. In considering the representative forms in which *virtù* is expressed in Dante's contemporary context followed by my consideration of how these influences might appear in the *Commedia* itself, I hope I have expanded the scope for understanding how other theological questions might have been present in medieval culture more broadly and, therefore, how they might come to find an expression in a creative text. Contemporary explorations of Dante's theology have focused upon the theological interaction of man, God and the created universe.[296] I think my own work could contribute to further understanding the modes in which these interactions were literally enacted in medieval religious practice, how these interactions might figure in the *Commedia* and how they contribute to the didactic aims of the text. In light of the emphasis which I believe the poem places on experiential learning and active engagement through text, I think a further consideration of the didactic communication methods employed by Franciscan devotional literature in relation to the *Commedia*'s own communication strategies could prove very fruitful. While contemporary studies on Dante's relation to Franciscanism have had a historical emphasis I think there is scope for further comparative work focused upon literary and stylistic connections.[297] As mentioned above, my work has also brought to light a different emphasis in the *Commedia*'s ethics and in many respects its ethics – focused upon humility and a renunciation of worldly desires –

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[295] A consideration of this has already been begun by Christian Moevs in his essay, 'The Metaphysical Basis of Dante's Politics', in *Le culture di Dante: studi in onore di Robert Hollander: atti del quarto Seminario dantesco internazionale, University of Notre Dame, IN USA, 25-27 settembre 2003* (Florence: F. Cesati 2004).
[296] See the work of Montemaggi and Treherne.
[297] For a historical reading of this relationship see Nick Haveley, *Dante and the Franciscans: Poverty and Papacy in the 'Commedia'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

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has strong echoes with Franciscan thought. Further study of this connection might yield a richer understanding of Dantean ethics and the poet's relation to the Franciscan tradition as a whole.

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