DANTE AND THE SUFFERING SOUL

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The shade-bodies of Dante’s Commedia are an interpretative crux. The poet recognizes a common problem of Patristic and medieval eschatology: how can separated souls in Purgatory and Hell suffer from corporeal fire prior to the Resurrection? Most literary visions of the afterlife ignore such difficulties, silently granting pseudo-embodiment to the departed; but Dante, employing similar aerial bodies, directly questions their nature. Yet his account has been widely misunderstood, either as a philosophically-deficient claim that such bodies could allow sensation, or as theologically-facetious legerdemain in service of poetic license.

I argue that Dante’s explanation of the shades (primarily in Purgatorio xxv) is a coherent justification of the possible union of separated souls to aerial bodies: not a formal union allowing for sensation, but a virtual one allowing for manifestation—which is precisely parallel to angelic appearances. The primary consequence of this reading is that the narrative of the Commedia, in its basic infrastructure, is meant as truly possible according to Dante’s philosophical and theological commitments—provided that the suffering souls encountered by the pilgrim not be understood as capable of sensing their apparent torments, but as capable of manifesting their intellectual torment physically. In this respect the literal sense of the poem is neither a patently impossible fabula nor an historia, but
an *argumentum*, an argument for the possibility and fittingness of embodiment in the afterlife. To claim that separated souls might truly manifest themselves through bodies is not merely the presupposition of a fictional vision but a prefiguring of the Resurrection for which even the blessed yearn.

In the first chapter, I examine signal theological treatments of this problem prior to Dante: those of Origen, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Eriugena, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, and Siger of Brabant. In the second, I interpret *Purgatorio* xxv in depth and in extended poetic and philosophical context. In the third, I consider objections to my thesis and its implications for several interpretative debates.
For Kate, this and everything

ch’io feci riguardando ne’ belli occhi

onde a pigliarmi fece Amor la corda
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INTRODUCTION

At a hurried pace in the fading afternoon, anxious to climb before the nightfall which brings enforced rest to the Mountain of Purgatory, Dante and his guiding poets—for now both Virgil and Statius lead his way—ascend one by one along the narrow stairs between the Terraces of Gluttony and Lust. Constricted thus in both time and space, still the pilgrim Dante lets his mind linger back upon a question, of the sort of which Virgil has patiently answered many, at moments of pause or transition. His anxious desire to know is checked by his timidity at interrupting their purposeful gait, and he compares his almost comical open-mouthed hesitation with the wavering of the baby stork on the edge of the nest which it dares not leave. Indeed his question, once Virgil’s prompting brings it forth, is simple and child-like: he has just seen among the Gluttons many shades emaciated beyond recognition, but now he recalls that their flesh which needed food is long buried, and asks, “Come si può far magro / là dove l’uopo di nodrir non tocca?”

As some scholars have observed, and perhaps many readers have felt, this question comes a bit late if it is to be asked at all; and it is rather surprising that it should be asked at all. Through all the myriad dungeons of Hell and the crowded slopes of Purgatory, the pilgrim has witnessed a monstrous and colossal array of shades afflicted with all manner of corporeal torments and burdens, having all the

apparent reality of living, earthly bodies, save that they do not perish utterly; and if the reader had at first nurtured any hesitation over the physical reality of these afflictions or the actual visibility of disembodied souls, surely this doubt was suspended long ago, else the narrative could hardly have been borne. And no wonder: what serious explanation could possibly have been expected for the logistical possibility of what, at least to most modern readers (and to some of Dante’s contemporaries, as well), is patently a fiction in its literal sense? One might as well expect George Orwell to have the pig Napoleon digress somewhere in *Animal Farm*, using the latest scientific terminology, on the biological possibility of barnyard animals speaking English.

Nevertheless, here in the twenty-fifth canto of the second canticle, Dante undermines the reader’s presumed concession and asks himself for proof of these shades, and how they have all along displayed to him their torments. Now some delays in explanation were understandable; to have learned of the structures of Hell and Purgatory at their respective outsets would have been less effective than to hear them applied *in medias res* to visions already seen—for then they are not dry configurations but longed-for regularizations of chaotic experience. Still, by any such general narrative measure it would seem that an explanation of the ubiquitous shade-bodies is long overdue; so many incredible torments have been seen to this point, which would equally call the consistency of these bodies into question, that the pilgrim’s particular amazement at the emaciated former gluttons and the subsequent doctrinal explanation must smack of poetic exigence—it had to be put somewhere. As to the content of the explanation, surely it is as much a part of the poet’s art as the invention and illustration of the torments themselves—daring

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the reader to blink, just as Dante does earlier in the *Commedia* concerning his novel concoction of the evidently fictional monster Geryon.3 Surely such claims are meant to raise the stakes of the bluff, intensify the narrative verisimilitude, or perhaps instigate a reflection on the nature of poetry—but not to argue that, in the clear light of day, these things are really and literally so.

And yet: what poet was ever more insistent than Dante on his duty to explain his own devices,4 or more dependent upon careful structural placement for contextual significance?5 If at first glance this explanation of the shade-bodies could just as well have come anywhere else, a regard for Dante’s method throughout the poem of conveying meaning as much through arrangement as through address ought to demand further consideration; perhaps, for him, it could not have come anywhere but here, and its context may help to elucidate its content. As to that content, assimilation of this passage to the daring address to the reader at the

3“Sempre a quel ver c’ha faccia di menzogna / de’ l’uom chiuder le labbra fin ch’el puote, / però che sanza colpa fa vergogna; // ma qui tacer nel posso; e per le note / di questa comedia, / lettor, ti giuro, / s’el non sien de lunga grazia vòte, // ch’I’ vidi per quell’ aere grosso e scuro / venir notando una figura in suso, / maravigliosa ad ogne cor sicuro” (*Inf.* xvi.124–36).

4See *Vita nuova*, in *Opere minori*, ed. Giorgio Bárberi Squarotti *et al.*, vol. 1 (Torino: Editrice Torinese, 1983), xxv, 123–27, in which Dante is at pains to ensure that his personification of Love not be understood “sì come fosse sustanza corporale,” and concludes: “però che grande vergogna sarebbe a colui che rimasse cose sotto vesta di figura o di colore rettorico, e poscia, domandato, non sapesse demudare le sue parole da cotale vesta, in guisa che avessero verace intendimento.” Of course, much of that work and nearly all of the *Convivio* consist of Dante’s efforts to put this admonition into practice. The matter becomes more complicated for the *Commedia*, in which apparent interpretative instructions are integrated into the poem itself, and therefore possibly problematized; this will be considered further in Chapter 3.

5To take just one element of the strategy in Dante’s poetry: in at least some other cases in the *Commedia*, it seems clear that significant didactic discourses are no less appropriated to particular places in the structure of the afterworld than are the souls themselves, and indeed an understanding of their content is affected by their position. For example, in *Inferno* xi: a pause in narrative action allows Virgil to explain the overall structure of Hell; this location might seem at random, until one realizes that the circle in which Virgil stops is the one category that he leaves entirely out of his reckoning, and which Dantists have had the greatest difficulty fitting into the moral scheme of Hell: the Heretics. However this juxtaposition is to be explained, it could scarcely be unintentional or meaningless.
appearance of Geryon will not suffice. In the latter case, the poem’s claim for
the reality of the monster is entirely self-referential: Dante swears “per le note di
questa commedia”—i.e., he makes the reality of this “figura” no more or less true
than that of the poem as a whole, which is conducive to the above-mentioned
interpretation of ironic bluff or removal of the question from historical reality to
poetics. But Statius does something more: his argument depends upon a philo-
sophical (and perhaps theological) account of human nature, whose terms and
claims are subject to verification and explanation quite independently of—and as
the prerequisite for—any further understanding of the passage as internal to a
self-conscious fiction or at most a plausible improvisation in space left open by
Dante’s theological contemporaries and sources. To put it more bluntly: it must
first be shown how Dante, given his philosophical commitments here and else-
where, could plausibly have thought that this argument actually goes somewhere,
even as a bluff. If by all rights he ought to have considered the conclusion of
Statius’s discourse to be simply and patently mistaken, then he could hardly have
thought it conducive to plausibility or verisimilitude, even if many of his readers
might accept it so, and even if ultimately he did not intend the narrative to be
accepted as literally true. And that is the problem: the predominant way of un-
derstanding the ultimate answer of the discourse gives it a meaning which Dante
ought to have thought obviously erroneous or at least useless in its context.

And thus aside from questions of placement, and regardless of subsequent
metaliterary interpretation, some enlightenment is still to be desired for the co-
herence of the explanation itself—the literal meaning of Statius’s discourse and
the extent to which it answers the pilgrim’s question—which has continued to
trouble those readers who seek a more than superficial understanding of it, in the
context of late medieval thought. One might go so far as to say that no one has yet provided a consistent interpretation of the entire discourse.⁶

⁶Of course, many commentators have provided insights on the canto well beyond the failure to resolve this particular problem; some of these insights, and the ways in which they have made the present argument possible, will be indicated further in Chapter 2.

The single most common feature of scholarly treatments of this discourse is the assumption that Statius presents his argument as an explanation of the souls’ suffering through reactivated sensitive powers. This all-encompassing group may be subdivided according to the reaction this assumption elicits when it collides with the latter part of the discourse (and this division is derived in part from Zygmunt Barański, cited infra): that passage may be quickly glossed over in a philosophical approach, as if not at all problematic, or if its difficulty be admitted, it may be isolated from the rest of the discourse and attributed to poetic license; it may be integrated more coherently into a poetic approach, but at the price of doctrinal precision; or it may be held to resolve this particular problem; some of these insights, and the ways in which they have made the second part of the discourse must be separated from the first; this line had already been taken by Giuseppe Citanna, Fernando Figurelli, and Giorgio Padoan. See: Citanna, “Il Canto XXV,” in Lecturae et altri studi danteschi, ed. Rudy Abardo, 1990 (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1990); “Sull’origine dell’anima umana,” in Dante e la cultura medievale, ed. Paolo Mazzantini, 207–24 (Roma: Laterza, 1983); and “L’origine dell’anima umana secondo Dante,” in Studi di filosofia medievale, 3–61 (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1960). Etienne Gilson, Patrick Boyde, and Manuele Gragnolati follow generally in this line, each offering some modifications to Nardi’s polemic but also accepting the conclusion of a sensing shade-body without much explanation of how that could cohere with the foregoing embryology, regardless of its classification as Albertian or Thomistic, favoring plurality of forms or unicity. See: Gilson, “Dante’s Notion of a Shade,” Mediaeval Studies 29 (1967): 124–142; “Qu’est-ce qu’une ombre?,” in Dante et Béatrice: Études dantesques, 23–45 (Paris: J. Vrin, 1974); Boyde, Dante Philomityes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 271–81; Gragnolati, Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 67–77. Boyde especially hints at the excuse of poetic license and indicates that second part of the discourse must be separated from the first; this line had already been taken by Giuseppe Citanna, Fernando Figurelli, and Giorgio Padoan. See: Citanna, “Il Canto XXV,” in Lecturae et altri studi danteschi, ed. Rudy Abardo, 1990 (Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 1971); Figurelli, “Il Canto XXV del ‘Purgatorio’,” in Nuove letture dantesche, vol. 5, 33–68 (Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 1972); Padoan, “Il canto XXV del ‘Purgatorio’,” in Purgatorio: letture degli anni 1976–’79, 577–600 (Roma: Bonacci, 1981).
According to the common reading, after Virgil the pagan philosopher-poet gives over, Statius the Christian theologian-poet gives a rational justification—according to a roughly Aristotelian embryology which highlights the character of the formative power within the human soul—of the possibility for a soul separated from its earthly body of flesh and blood to generate a new body, real but now formed from the surrounding air in the locale of punishment or purgation assigned to it: a body to which the soul is united so as to be again capable of sensation, as


Finally and most recently, Anna Maria Chiaviacci Leonardi, Marc Cogan, and Zygmunt Barański all resist cordonning off the intended plausibility of the discourse as poetic—and yet in each case the incoherence of Statius’s argument as interpreted remains. See: Chiaviacci Leonardi, ed., *Commedia,* by Dante Alighieri, 3 vols. (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1994), 2727–33; Cogan, *The Design in the Wax: The Structure of the Divine Comedy and Its Meaning* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 126–47; Barański, “Canto xxv,” in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis,* ed. Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone, vol. 2: *Purgatorio,* 389–406 (Firenze: Franco Cesati, 2001). Cogan in a way comes closest to the interpretation to be given in *fna,* allowing to a certain extent that the shades are not a means of sensation, and yet he tries to recover the activity of sensitive appetites in the interim. Barański best correlates some of the contributions of the second group of commentators without neglecting the philosophical difficulties which exercised the first, taking the entire discourse as meant seriously and integratively—an earnest theological argument which, if valid, expands the poetic claims of the *Commedia* precisely through its doctrine.

If valid: all that is lacking in this presentation is a credible explanation for how Dante could seriously have thought that Statius’s conclusion is valid, not simply as having slight correspondences with something like aerial bodies found here and there in tradition (and often in contexts which only accentuate the discord with Aristotelian psychology), but as integrating whatever sources may lie behind it into an argument which is coherent just as it stands and in its entirety. Such an explanation quite simply requires, as will be argued in Chapter 2, the abandonment of the universal assumption that Statius justifies interim sensation at all. Thus the present work may be seen as an effort to give a fuller justification for the conclusions of the third group.
well as visible; and thus he justifies the possibility of the vision and the torments within that vision which constitute the poem to this point. Nevertheless, it is also commonly thought that the crucial part of the explanation—wherein Statius finally addresses the actual formation of the shade-bodies and the supposed nexus between this slight but material substance and the wholly immaterial soul—is not justified by its premises; it is something of a non sequitur. Most likely it draws more on the poetic example of Virgil’s underworld in *Aeneid* vi (or other visionary precursors) than on any logical argument; it may have the semblence of philosophical plausibility, but in the end it is simply a matter of poetic license: in order to present a fictional vision, one must invent something to see, and Dante simply goes one step further by inventing a fictional explanation of his own fabulous creations.

It should be apparent why this typical account is at least disappointing: if this is the case—if the justification of the shade-bodies is ultimately the narrative requirements of a fictional poem—then one was better off at the start of the canto: poetic fiction is precisely the assumption which many a reader would have brought to this point, the suspended disbelief which the pilgrim’s question so surprisingly cuts down. What purpose is served by making the show of a carefully reasoned explanation, if in the end it must fall back upon the same excuse?

If Statius’s discourse is commonly read as having such an unsatisfactory conclusion, this is in large part because the question of the suffering of the separated soul engendered such difficulty for later medieval theology and philosophy in general; and so it is perhaps to be expected that Dante’s apparent attempt to address the problem directly and answer it definitively should prove an interpretative crux.

In effect, the problem was (like so many others) a matter of seemingly conflicting authorities. An aspiring theologian commenting on the fourth book of the
*Sentences* of Peter Lombard would receive two teachings as authoritative (even if they had not been a matter of solemn dogmatic declaration): first, that the separated soul goes to its reward or punishment directly after death; second, that those souls which go to punishment are tormented by corporeal fire.\(^7\)

That the soul should somehow suffer in a separated state was not itself problematic, since it was agreed that the primary and most devastating penalty of the reprobate is the *poena damni*, that is, the eternal removal from the *visio Dei* which is the fulfillment of all man’s desire and whose absence is therefore the cause of keenest torment.\(^8\) The second teaching, however, based essentially on the authority of Saints Augustine and Gregory the Great, proved more difficult: these Fathers of the Church interpreted certain Scriptural passages, along with other evidence, as asserting that the reprobate and the purging suffer from fire: not fire as a metaphor for the torment of the same *poena damni*, but real and corporeal fire. This fire would inflict suffering on the bodies of the damned—presumably through normal caelefaction—after the Resurrection, a suffering which later theology refers to as the *poena sensus*, quite distinct from the purely intellectual *poena damni*; but the same real, material fire was said to be somehow the means for the punishment of separate, immaterial souls, as well as of the fallen angels, who were ever bodiless. Thus in complement to the *poena sensus* to come there is a present

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\(^7\)The first of these teachings was thrown into relief by the renewed focus on the interim state of Purgatory, leading up to the dogmatic declaration of that state at the Council of Lyons in 1274. A condition of purgative suffering which by definition pertains to souls only prior to the Last Judgment, and therefore prior to the Resurrection of the Body, must in some way cause the soul alone to suffer, not the reconstituted man. This teaching was not needed to establish that disembodied souls are tormented, since this was traditionally asserted of the damned awaiting the Resurrection as well; but the assertion of an interim purgative state makes bodiless suffering all the more certain: recourse to any sort of dormition between personal death and the general Resurrection, even if it had been orthodox, could not have accounted for Purgatory.

\(^8\)In the case of the Poor Souls in Purgatory, it could be said that temporary separation from the Beatific Vision constitutes purgative suffering which prepares the soul for the eventual fulfillment of its desire.
poena ignis being suffered even now, yet without any bodies for the fire to burn.

The difficulty of reconciling these two teachings was evident to Augustine and Gregory; but it was even more keen for late thirteenth-century theologians who, unlike the Fathers, confronted consistently the possible conflicts between traditional Catholic doctrine and the physical and metaphysical works of Aristotle, recently recovered. The precision given by the Scholastic appropriation of the full Aristotelian corpus to definitions of the soul in its separated state, and the powers it could and could not have without being united to the body, made it all the more problematic to assert that such a substance could in any way suffer by means of a body.

Most theologians were in agreement that this could not occur secundum naturam, but only by divine dispensation; they varied in the extent to which they considered this a question which allowed for any philosophical investigation—that is, how it could be argued that such divinely-ordained suffering from corporeal fire is not impossible per se according to philosophy (which often meant, according to the Philosopher). Certainly, according to the general opinion, human reason could not show the strict necessity of a corporeal torment for incorporeal souls; but most admitted to some degree that its possibility could be demonstrated—i.e., that arguments to the contrary could be defeated. Some, especially Saints Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, further thought that reason could show the fittingness of such punishment—i.e., could make an argumentum convenientiae for it.

The defense of a poena ignis corporealis held sway for the most part in Catholic theology until the twentieth century, despite the fact that the doctrine had never
been dogmatically declared; since then it has fallen into oblivion. 9 The formula of an “eternal fire,” because of its clear Scriptural warrant, has consistently remained part of Catholic teaching to the present day, but the interpretation of that fire is now more commonly omitted or made explicitly metaphorical. 10 Of course, the historical and theological reasons for this go well beyond any question of the strength of the Scholastic arguments, and well beyond the scope of the present work. Suffice it to say that in the current status quaestionis—insofar as the question of the poena ignis is of any interest at all, which may be saying too much—

9 A comprehensive historical summary of Catholic teaching on the nature of the hell-fire, as well as a conclusion that the reality of the fire (which the author distinguishes somewhat from the question of its materiality) is dogmatically certain for the Church, is given by Albert Michel, “Feu de l'enfer,” in Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, ed. A. Vacant, E. Mangenot, and E. Amann, vol. 5/2, 2196-2239 (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1924). “Dans la question de la réalité du feu de l'enfer—par opposition au feu metaphorique—le magistère ordinaire de l'Église s’est très certainement affirmé, par l’organe des Pères et des théologiens, et s’est prononcé en faveur de la réalité” (2218). Detailed considerations of the problem and defenses of the traditional doctrine (with some variation) are also given by: C. Guthberlet, “Die poena sensus,” Katholik 2 (1901): 305–16, 385–401; Franz Schmid, Quaestiones selectae ex theologia dogmatica (Paderborn, 1891). The latter goes rather farther than any of the Patristic or Scholastic claims to be considered infra: “Dicere debemus: Daemones per operationem omnipotentiae divinae ignem aut efficaciam ignis aut adustionem ignis experimuntur atque sentiunt” (223).

10 The most recent Catechism gives a careful wording which just possibly implies a real distinction between the fire and the poena damnit, saying nothing of the nature of the fire. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd edition (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), 1936, 270: “The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, ‘eternal fire.’ The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God.” A prominent example of an explicitly metaphorical interpretation—mainly of the purgatorial fire, but applying in principle to the hell-fire as well—heartening back to Origen (and avowedly so) is Joseph Ratzinger, Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life, vol. 9 of Dogmatic Theology, trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 229–30: “Does not the real Christianizing of the early Jewish notion of a purging fire lie precisely in the insight that the purification involved does not happen through some thing, but through the transforming power of the Lord himself, whose burning flame cuts free our closed-off heart...? Surely these terms must refer, not to something external to man, but to the man of little faith’s heartfelt submission to the fire of the Lord which will draw him out of himself into that purity which befits those who are God’s... A person’s entry into the realm of manifest reality is an entry into his definitive destiny and thus an immersion in eschatological fire.”

And so this remains a meaningful problem: caricatures aside, the Doctors of the Church whose authority lay behind the rejection of a metaphorical interpretation of the fire were clearly no thralls to thoroughgoing literalism in their exegesis; nor were the Scholastic theologians who confirmed the Patristic teaching on this matter altogether unwilling to contradict such authority in other questions. Why, then, did they choose the manifestly more difficult interpretation? How can the \textit{convenientia} of a corporeal fire be made at least comprehensible to the modern mind (without a hasty condescension towards the medieval mind), even if it has long since ceased to be persuasive?

On this point, an understanding of how Dante transforms the question of the suffering of the separated soul into a larger question of the fittingness and purpose of corporeality in the afterlife can bear some fruit—but only once one has understood just how that transformation is effected, especially in Statius’s discourse. Thus these two approaches ought to be mutually illuminating: the discursive theological treatments of the question can bring out its difficulties and mitigate against a too-facile reading of Dante, and a careful reading of Dante can illustrate associations of that question which are obscured in the Scholastic arguments, or would be too weak for certain demonstration but are forceful as an argument for fittingness.

In short, then, the present work is an examination of this problem of the suffering of the separated soul, as it was addressed by certain medieval Christian
theologians, as a means to a better understanding of what Dante claims for the shade-bodies of the dead in the *Commedia*. From this perspective one can see how the poet’s engagement with this point of friction between Aristotelian anthropo-
ylogy and Christian eschatology is no fanciful poetic escape from the problem, but a philosophically coherent defense of the possibility of separated souls manifesting themselves physically. If taken in earnest, this discourse also forms part of a larger defense of the legitimate role of poetic vision within *doctrina*, such that testimony of visions of the afterlife might to some extent be complementary to the discursive theological accounts of the state of souls after death, not merely a popular or credulous tradition belonging to a separate sphere of Christian belief—and this connection recovers a crucial aspect of the Patristic sources on the *poena ignis* which was left behind in the Scholastic debate.

The first chapter will begin with an examination of those Patristic sources already mentioned, Augustine and Gregory, insofar as they considered the status of the separated soul and the fire said to torment it; in addition, the position of Origen on the question will be presented, though it is but rarely cited by the Scholastics, for the sake of comprehending the primary alternative: Origen was exemplary of the metaphorical understanding of the *poena ignis* in contrast to which a literal understanding won out for the dominant theological tradition of the medieval Christian West. With this foundation, the way in which several late medieval thinkers inherited and sought to resolve the problem will be examined. Those schoolmen will be considered whose thought is regarded as most significant for Dante, to judge in part by his populating of the Circle of the Sun in *Paradiso*, and in part by the efforts of Dantists to establish the poet’s major philosophical and theological influences: Saints Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Thomas
Aquinas, and Siger of Brabant. Obviously, this group is not meant to be exhaustive of the thinkers whose works might conceivably have influenced Dante’s thinking in this regard, and in general this examination is not intended to be a search for the poet’s specific textual sources—an important but also limited and in some ways dangerous enterprise—but rather as an attempt to understand in some detail and context the terms and available options of an argument which has too often been summarily dismissed as strained or improbable. That is, this chapter seeks to examine a debate of which Dante was evidently aware in at least general terms, and to discover whether the solutions offered—by those thinkers exemplary of the range of ways in which apparent conflicts between Christian dogmas and bedrock Aristotelian teachings could be addressed—might shed some light on a crucial passage which has generally been regarded as first adhering strictly to Aristotelian anthropology and then blatantly violating it.

The second chapter will make a close examination of this passage—that is, Statius’s discourse in *Purgatorio* xxv—as to its literal sense. This will entail first a preliminary consideration of its placement, on the superficial level of narrative plausibility, and then its immediate and extended context as anticipatory of or problematic for the eventual answer. A number of common assumptions will be questioned regarding what precisely the pilgrim Dante is asking about the shades, what he already does and does not know about them, and why Virgil is regarded as unable fully to answer the question. Following these specifications the discourse itself will be examined, and it will be argued that the current consensus among Dantists has missed or misrepresented certain crucial aspects of Statius’s argument, especially regarding its relationship to Thomistic account of human generation. Correspondence between Statius’s arguments and Beatrice’s two dis-
courses on creation in *Paradiso* will be also be considered: what Beatrice says of God's mediate and immediate production of creatures will have great importance for a full understanding of what Statius seeks to communicate. Finally, it will be argued that the very conclusion of his discourse is more ambiguous than has typically been realized, and does not say what it *prima facie* appears to say about the sensitive powers of the separated soul; once one has understood the real question that the pilgrim asked, however, it becomes evident that Statius's argument can only be understood coherently and as a whole if it is a justification not of the shades' capacity for sensation but their availability to sensation—i.e., their manifestation to the living. This is the real argument of the discourse—which is made clearer with reference to Scholastic accounts of the bodies used in angelic appearance.

The third chapter will address possible objections to this reading, concerning the narrative coherence of the *Commedia* as a whole, and apply it to critical disputes over the allegory of the poem. The claim that all the shades of the lower two realms are produced for the sake of being seen will be compared with Beatrice's explicit assertion in *Paradiso* IV that the blessed are given visible form in the heavenly spheres precisely for the benefit of the pilgrim and according to the example of Scripture. If the suffering shades do not in fact sense, then their knowledge of singulars, and of course their suffering, must be accounted for otherwise; it will be argued that the *Commedia*’s literal narrative can indeed be understood in terms of the sensible manifestation of knowledge not gained through the senses and torment not suffered through the senses, and that in fact there is throughout the poem a consistent and gradual reevaluation of the apparent sensory faculties of shades which reveals fully only in Paradise what the nature and
purpose of these bodies has been all along. These considerations will naturally touch upon recent debates over what kind of allegory, if any, Dante claims for the *Commedia*; it will be argued that the question of the status of the literal sense of the poem goes astray when it is made into a dilemma between fiction and Scripture, and that the most important category is neither *historia* nor *fabula*, but *argumentum*. This will also be the ground for a reconsideration of the treatment of Virgil in *Purgatorio*, and in particular how his authority fails on the subject of the shade-bodies. In this context the shades have particular importance for the poetic act insofar as they are claimed to be real bodies and justified as such: thus opens the possibility of a particular poetic *argumentum*, which does not seek to cast off the sensible images which are its necessary material, but offers signs whose very literal reality is part of their signification. In a vision of the bodiless afterworld, the strange interim existence of human life separated from the matter which is natural to it, such an *argumentum* is only possible under the assumption that God can in condescension and in fittingness to the living human condition grant bodies to that state—temporary bodies to the souls themselves and truly physical substances by which they are tormented—so that even in their damnation the reprobate can serve as a means for the salvation of others, simply by being seen. Moreover, only insofar as shade-bodies are argued in earnest to be really corporeal manifestations can they be signs of the Resurrection of the Body for which the souls long.
CHAPTER 1

FUNDAMENTA

1.1 Patristic sources

The problem of an additional source of suffering beyond the *poena damnii* in the interim period for souls existing without earthly bodies was relatively clear and distinct for Scholastic theologians and for Dante, but its framing in that era cannot be adequately understood without some examination of the Patristic sources which would come to be definitive for the later medieval debate. As the very possibility of such a problem depends upon other eschatological determinations which were by no means crystallized in early Christian speculation—the distinction and significant difference of the interim period from the state of human beings consequent upon the Last Judgment and the Resurrection of the Body, and the comparability of punishment in that interim to the ultimate penalties for the reprobate—its genesis in Patristic thought is gradual and less than uniform; but by that very fact it also reveals more clearly the tensions lying behind choices of controlling Scriptural texts and their interpretations which are *faits accomplis* for most Western theologians after Gregory the Great.1 Thus with regard to the

1As will be seen, the crucial proof-text for the punishment of incorporeal substances by a corporeal fire is Matthew 25:41, wherein Jesus warns that at the day of judgement he will say to those on his left hand, “discedite a me maledicti in ignem aeternum, qui paratus est diabolo et angelis eius.” Certainly this wording makes a metaphorical understanding of the fire (as simply emphasizing the degree of the soul’s intellectual torment) more difficult: the separation
term *poena ignis*—a neologism to be used as a matter of convenience for the question at hand, coined to distinguish this pain both from the spiritual *poena damnii* (which is all but universally admitted as the primary punishment of sin, whether or not distinctions are drawn between the interim state and the eschaton or between damnation and purgation) and from the physical *poena sensus*² (which is most properly applied only to a penalty through sensation, and thus is generally admitted in the West as affecting the damned in Hell through their resurrected bodies)—it should be noted that such a usage anticipates a later crystallization, but will not ignore earlier doubt over the very legitimacy of such distinctions.

The following cursory examination is intended mainly to consider in broader from God (*dixit dixit a me*) which causes the *poena damnii* is distinguished from the terminus of separation (*in ignem aeternam*), and the latter is spoken of as if a reality independent of the objects of its torment (*paratus est*)—just as the Kingdom of Heaven has been prepared for the blessed since before their very existence: “venite benedicti Patris mei, possidete paratum vobis regnum a constitutione mundi” (34). Cf. Michel, *Feu de l’enfer*, 2198. Nonetheless, the passage of itself does not entirely exclude a metaphorical reading, which is apparent in the further efforts of various theologians to argue that it would be unfitting or deceptive for Scripture to speak of an immaterial torment in this way (i.e., it would be contrary to the most natural reading, not simply and evidently prohibited). Thus it is worth noting the curious absence or insignificance, in all of the accounts to be considered *mfma*, of an earlier passage in the same Gospel which would seem to be much more definitive on the reality, and indeed the corporeality of the fire: Matthew 13.37–42, in which Jesus explains to the disciples his own parable of the tares sown among good seed, drawing a correspondence between each of the major elements of the parable and its true meaning. “Qui seminat bonum semen est Filius hominis; ager autem est mundus; bonum vero semen hii sunt filii regni; zizania autem filii sunt nequam; inimicus autem qui seminavit ea est diabolum; messis vero consummatio saeculi est; messiores autem angeli sunt. Sicut ergo colliguntur zizania et igni conburuntur, sic erit in consummatione saeculi: mittet Filius hominis angelos suos, et colligent de regno eius omnia scandala, et eos qui faciunt iniquitatem; et mittent eos in caminum ignis, ibi erit etus et stridor dentium.” To what does the *ignis* of the parable correspond, into which the tares will be thrown? *Caminus ignis*: sometimes a fire is just a fire. Here a metaphorical interpretation is quite excluded, as the proper interpretation is given within the text itself by the highest authority. Cf. Michel, *Feu de l’enfer*, 2198. Hence it remains puzzling (to this reader, at least) that this passage did not feature more prominently in the debate.

²The question of suffering from corporeal fire in the separated state has at times been categorized as part of the *poena sensus*—understanding the term to mean simply suffering from a body in any way; but this rather strains the natural sense, and at any rate *poena ignis* better indicates what is distinctive to the problem at hand and can cover all of the various accounts, since all make reference to fire.
context those authorities determined to be of primary importance for the question by Peter Lombard and who were clearly significant figures in Dante’s thought: Saints Augustine and Gregory the Great. Thus while all the main features of the debate will be considered, it will be far from a comprehensive compendium of Patristic teachings; nor is such a survey needed, so much as a renewed understanding of why Church Fathers quite amenable to a metaphorical interpretation of Scripture in various contexts refused that interpretation for the fire of the afterlife.3

1.1.1 Origen

To begin with an exception: the Patristic theologians of the Alexandrian school did not, for the most part, come to be auctoritates in the eschatological tradition inherited by late medieval theologians in the West; on the relatively few occasions in which the most influential figure of that school, Origen, is mentioned in this regard in Scholastic works, it is usually in opprobrium.4 This should come as no

3 An extensive survey of Patristic, Scholastic, and modern Catholic explanations of the poena ignis prior to the 20th century is provided by Michel, “Feu de l’enfer,” passim. An addendum to Michel’s account is provided by Flasch, “Die Seele im Feuer,” who shows that Dietrich of Freiburg should be counted along with John Scottus Ercingena as medieval proponents of the metaphorical understanding of the fire, and moreover argues that Siger of Brabant’s position is more original and successfully critical of St. Thomas Aquinas than had previously been credited (see n. 208 infra).

4 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Quaestiones disputatae De potentia, in Quaestiones disputatae, ed. P. Bazzi, vol. 2 (Torino/Roma: Marietti, 1965), 26.1, 1.482: “Quidam...dixerunt, omnia quae dicuntur in Scripturis de poenis corporalibus damnatorum, intelligenda esse metaphorice...Et huiusmodi opinionis videtur fuisse Origenes, et Algazel. Sed quia resurrectionem credentes non solum credimus futuram esse poenam spirituum, sed corporum...” Thomas limits his claim to Origen’s seeming opinion (videtur), which is restrained given the strong indication of a metaphorical understanding of the fire (as will be seen) in the likely source of De principiis 11.10; on the other hand, the phrase following the attribution might be taken as an indication that error concerning the poena ignis follows upon error concerning the Resurrection (“But we, because we believe in the Resurrection...”). Possibly mitigating against such an intimation (towards Origen’s at least; it might be intended for Alczael) is Thomas’s incorporation of excerpts from Origen’s scriptural commentaries affirming the Resurrection in the Catena aurea (in Mt. 22.3, etc.), which is roughly contemporaneous with the disputed question De potentia—see Jean-Pierre Torrell, Saint Thomas Aquinas, 2 vols., trans. Robert Royal, revised edition (Washington DC:
surprise, of course, since most of Origen’s work was not directly available to the Latin West; and moreover, certain of his teachings on the last things were already combated by Jerome, Justinian, and Augustine *inter alios*, and dogmatically rejected by the Council of Chalcedon—if indeed such teachings were truly Origen’s, rather than developments by his followers or caricatures by his critics.

Therein lies a controverted point for the modern reader: the very imperfect survival of Origen’s own texts, along with modern claims of bowdlerization or other misrepresentation on the part of his translators and the other indirect conduits for his thought (especially Rufinus, who transmitted the *Περὶ ἀρχῶν* to the Latin West as the *De principiis* and is thought to have excluded or emended potentially objectionable passages), make his authentic teaching something of an open question. It is, for example, now a familiar claim that some of Origen’s Patristic critics who purport to represent his eschatology—and could therefore be important sources for it, given that Origen’s own treatises on the Resurrection have been lost—either wilfully distorted or else badly failed to understand it, especially with regard to the ultimate permanence of corporeality.5 Even in the case

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5 Until recently it was common to give credence to these critical accounts, given their possibly greater access to Origen’s own writings; cf., e.g., Henry Chadwick, “Origen, Celsus, and the Resurrection of the Body,” *Harvard Theological Review* 41/2 (1948): 83–102, 102: “In any attempt to reconstruct Origen’s theology of the resurrection full weight must be given to our primary authorities, Methodius and Jerome.” Nonetheless even Chadwick finds certain critiques unfounded: “But it must remain more than doubtful whether he ever in fact committed himself to the suggestion that in the resurrection we shall be spheres” (102). And other critics have found ground for deeper skepticism; see, e.g., Brian Daley: “The accusation of Jerome and other ancient critics that Origen denied a bodily resurrection altogether is, as far as Origen’s own writings show, a misrepresentation;” indeed both critics and admirers grasped only “superficial features” of his “radically spiritual, internalized reinterpretation” of the eschaton. “Eschatology in the Early Church Fathers,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls, 91–109 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 98; *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 61. This portrayal would seem to discount the ancient critics’ capacity to evaluate and pass judgment on an account which from their perspective only appears to escape error by abusing certain relevant terms: that is, if Jerome was aware that Origen claimed a bodily resurrection, but thought that the Alexandrian
of an authentic teaching of Origen which came to be regarded as heterodox—such as the preexistence of souls—the same could be said of other Fathers who spoke speculatively before a canonical determination had been made, and so it has been suggested that Origen’s critics unfairly singled him out for condemnation according to later standards.\textsuperscript{6}

But for the present investigation it is of little concern whether and to what degree Origen himself held a certain position on the \textit{poena ignis},\textsuperscript{7} or whether any of his teachings deserved condemnation. The purpose here is rather to consider a path not taken for medieval Catholic theology on the question of interim had in fact so distanced the subject of resurrection from the qualities which (in Jerome’s view) necessarily belong to a human body properly so-called, it may be not a misrepresentation but simply a considered judgment with understood premises for him to say that Origen in truth denied a bodily resurrection. In short, a criticism which faults Origen’s eschatology precisely for being too entirely “spiritual” and “internalized” cannot simply be dismissed as missing the internal and spiritual point. Still, misrepresentation or superficiality is a comparatively mild way of putting the matter; another recent argument gives less credit to the intelligence and goodwill of Origen’s contemporary critics—see P. Tzamalikos, \textit{Origen: Philosophy of History \& Eschatology} (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 324–25: “Therefore, of Jerome’s claims about Origen, only his testimony that corporeality will finally come to an end expresses the latter’s genuine thought,” but not intentionally, for Origen ‘regards this as a mystical truth, which needs ‘listeners who have a mind able to apprehend the truth plainly’. Certainly Jerome was not one of them, to say the least.” Augustine was yet worse: his summary of Origen’s eschatology in the \textit{De haeresibus} is a “tendentious [sic] paraphrase” and his malignancy is thought to stem from “the typical psychological detest towards one from whom a certain expropriation takes place, given that Origen is the source of what is styled ‘Augustine’s theory of time,’ which actually never existed on its own merits... Augustine’s strictures on Origen then should be read as an invidious hurling rather than a considered scholarly asseveration” (238–39).

\textsuperscript{6}Cf. Tzamalikos, \textit{Origen: Philosophy of History \& Eschatology}, 23: “The question is whether the Church, which teaches compassion and forgiveness, can accept what she regards as inconvenient conjectures of Origen’s to be perhaps errors of a pioneer, not claims of a heretic. For he at many points speaks tentatively, bringing forth questions for meditation by his audience, being neither settled doctrines, nor dogmatic assertions. The doctrine of pre-existence of souls, to cite an instance, was considered in the Church as late as the during the fifth century. Hence, it would be unfair to condemn Origen on this point, which the Church had not settled down during his lifetime.”

\textsuperscript{7}And at any rate, on the question of the corporeality of the penal fire the evidence of \textit{De principiis}—the most important work for the late medieval influence of allegedly Origenist thought, regardless of its fidelity—is fairly well in accord with Origen’s extant Greek texts, as will be seen.
suffering—a position incidentally regarded as Origenist, but regardless, a Christian eschatological picture dramatically different from what would become the consensus, and against which that latter view was asserted and distinguished: as Thomas summarized the proponents of this view, “dixerunt, omnia quae dicuntur in Scripturis de poenis corporalibus damnatorum, intelligenda esse metaphorice.”

Considering this option is valuable as a propaedeutic to the Scholastic auctori-tates, as it illuminates how the very question of the corporeality of the interim period of the afterlife depends upon other eschatological and metaphysical presuppositions, and is tied to considerations of the final resurrection or anastasis even as it directly concerns only the state prior to the parousia.

In summary, Origen’s reading of the Scriptural fire of punishment is entirely spiritual or metaphorical—in keeping with his consistent objections to a literal or material reading of Scriptural passages relating to the eschaton, whether referring to the punishment of the unjust or the Resurrection of the Body. Thus while it can be said that, in a certain sense, Origen would assert that there is a fire which is the interim cause of torment for separated souls, the terms of that assertion have quite different meanings with respect to his thought than they would take on in consideration of the poena ignis among the Western Fathers and consequently the Scholastic theologians. For the latter, as will be seen, the application of punishment by means of fire in the interim period is such a difficult question because interim torment is understood in comparison to the following state of simple poena sensus, consequent upon the Last Judgment, which consists in the everlasting torment by corporeal fire of an embodied person; in that perspective, the problem of an interim poena ignis takes on the aspect of removing from this

\[\text{\textsuperscript{8}}\text{See n. 4 supm.}\]
final situation only the corporeality of the suffering individuals, *ceteris paribus*, and asking whether the very same or a similar torment is possible—what powers the incorporeal soul possesses, how the fire might then have any effect, whether that effect might be purgative for some, and so forth. Whereas for Origen, the points of contrast are quite different: the souls of the departed may be separated from their earthly bodies but they are not incorporeal in the fullest sense, and there is little question of their capacities in that state; the fire can indeed torment on an interim basis and as purgation, but not necessarily as the counterpart to an eternal and punitive but otherwise identical fire (it is generally agreed, though debate on the point continues, that Origen regarded all torment in the afterlife as belonging to the interim prior to the true *anastasis* and as eventually effective in the purgation of all sinful persons, human or angelic); and finally, there is scarcely any doubt that this word “fire” (πῦρ) should be understood throughout as indicating metaphorically an immaterial power or effect.⁹

This is not to say that his vision of the afterlife is altogether immaterial. In fact, for Origen only God can be said to be utterly incorporeal, and in that sense some kind of body belongs to every creature simply by definition, as the

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⁹Origen does retain a more distinct notion of a certain interim stage of the afterlife, i.e., that era prior to the coming of Christ in which Hades and the Bosom of Abraham (as indicated by Christ’s parable of Lazarus and the *dives*) are the places of repose for all the dead, even the just, before Christ’s descent. While Hades is consistently represented as a place (below the earth), there is (in contrast to the Gehenna of the New Testament) no mention of any fire there; or if there is a fire purging those who (in the new dispensation) may be in Hades awaiting union with God (Origen is somewhat ambiguous on the role of Hades after Christ’s resurrection), that fire is God himself. Gehenna, on the other hand, is the fire of the soul’s self-accusation. At least, this is how Henri Crouzel has distinguished the two realms: see “L’Hadès et la Géhenne selon Origène,” *Gregorianum* 59 (1978): 291–329, esp. 295–98, 304. Regardless, the eternal fire of Gehenna is no less immaterial: “Le feu éternel est différent de notre feu matériel, car le feu matériel s’éteint, celui-là ne s’éteint pas. Il est invisible et brûle des réalités invisibles. Éternel est opposé à temporel comme invisible à visible. Mais il y a une analogie entre ces deux feux: la souffrance des hommes qui meurent par le feu donne une idée de ce que peut faire souffrir ce feu-là” (317).
prerequisite vessel for anything not existing *per se* but receiving existence by participation. On the other hand, this notion of universal corporeality does not quite address the particular question of the restoration of the dimensionate and naturally corruptible physicality which characterizes the earthly body; and furthermore, at certain points Origen seems to indicate that in the final restoration effected by Christ, when God will be “all in all,” corporeality does indeed pass away altogether—not insofar as individual persons thereafter exist as separated substances, but insofar as all individual hypostases will be unified and restored to their original state as one with the divine being which is necessarily incorporeal. Clearly, if this is truly Origen’s teaching on the ultimate meaning of resurrection, its standing with respect to later Catholic theology will depend only secondarily upon arguments over the corporeality of interim torment or the resurrected body (as these are usually understood), and primarily on the coherence of the claim that creatures continue to exist through a metamorphosis into the divine essence (and whether that claim depends on their prior existence as one with that essence—whatever the sense of this unity may be). That is to say, in this respect the

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11By some accounts, this is a chief point upon which Jerome misrepresented Origen; see Tzamalikos, *Origen: Philosophy of History & Eschatology*, 325: “For [Jerome] was not able to comprehend that Origen refers not to any incorporeal world, but to God’s wisdom herself. He did not grasp that the end of things will be incorporeal, not because there will be any ‘change’ of the form in which the world exists, but because the entire resurrected ‘body’ of Christ will ‘enter’ into the divine being, thus restored to its original status as creatures which ‘embroider’ the body of Wisdom. This ‘body’ will be (as it was in the beginning) the body of the Wisdom of God, not a ‘world’. Creatures will continue to be creatures on account of their creaturliness, yet they will be the originally created ‘holy stones’, not any kind of incorporeal personal spirits. It is not the case of creatures *per impossibile* changing ontological status (which is creaturliness); rather, it is the case of a metamorphosis of nature, which overcomes the state of fall and becomes divine again.”

12In its originally divine state of existence, corporeality did not enter into the definition of mankind, simply because corporeality did not yet exist; see James Edward Cheek, *Eschatology and Redemption in the Theology of Origen* (Ph. D. diss.), Madison, New Jersey: Drew University, 1962, 146. “While there are instances in which Origen makes use of the common Greek tripartite
core of Origen’s eschatological vision differs from the Western Patristic consensus on metaphysical presuppositions prior to the questions of whether an immaterial soul may bear some punitive relation to material fire or will receive again the very material body to which it was united in life.

At other points, however, Origen does address these topics in more traditional terms, somewhat independent of any further claims of universal corporeality or deification, and it is on these bases that his alleged doctrine on the particular questions at hand can be called spiritualizing, to an extent which the Church would reject; though there is considerable ambiguity even in this limited context.

In one fragment, for example, not directly from an authentic work but belonging to Methodius’s *De resurrectione* which paraphrases Origen’s doctrine in the course of a polemic against it, the Alexandrian is said to have taught that souls in the interim period before the Resurrection have a certain pseudo-body, taking as evidence Christ’s parable of Lazarus and the *dives*:

καὶ τάχα τὸ τής ψυχῆς ᾑμα τῇ ἀπαλλαγῇ σχῆμα, ὁμοιοειδὲς δὲν τῷ παχεὶ
kai táka τo τής ψυχής ἀμα τῇ ἀπαλλαγῇ σχήμα, ὁμοιοειδὲς δὲν τῷ παχεὶ
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conception of man as being constituted of ‘body’ (σῶμα), ‘soul’ (ψυχή), and ‘spirit’ (πνεῦμα), these terms and their various connotations and interrelationships do not accurately express Origen’s understanding of man as he was created. For this, there is another triad by which ‘originally created’ man must be designated: ‘mind’ (νοῦς), ‘rationality’ (λογικός), and ‘spirit’ or ‘holiness’ (πνεῦμα). When Origen speaks of man being ‘body-soul-spirit,’ he has in mind man as he is in this world, that is, man as a ‘fallen creature’ in contrast to man’s ‘original creation,’ or the ‘outward’ as contrasted with the ‘inward’ man, or the ‘terrestrial’ in contrast with the ‘heavenly’ man. Man originally and man subsequently (in the consummation) is a creature for whom the terms ‘mind-rationality-spirit’ denote his true essence or nature.”

And in a more limited case—but also in a directly authentic work, the long polemic *Contra Celsum*—he reports Plato’s suggestion that the apparitions reputedly seen about tombs may indeed be souls of the deceased made visible by new forms: “τὰ μὲν οὖν γινόμενα περὶ ψυχῆς τεθνηκότων φαντάσµατα ἀπό τῶν ὑποκειµένων γίνεται, τοῦ κατὰ τὴν ύφεστηκυ‹αν ἐν τῷ καλουµένῳ αὐγοειδὲ σώµατι ψυχής.” ¹⁴ But such a vehicle (δχήµα) ¹⁵ or light-body (αὐγοειδὲς σώµα) appears to play no further role in Origen’s eschatological writing, and it is certainly not indicative of a general tendency to interpret Scriptural passages concerning the afterlife in a material sense, or to grant credence to popular accounts of visions of the dead.

When Origen considers the judgment and punishment of the world to come—even in the *De principiis*—he gives little consideration to a literal reading of the fire spoken of in Scripture, but always refers it back to the spiritual torment of the soul. The Scriptural passage which would prove most critical for Augustine and Gregory the Great is Matthew 25.41, in which Jesus describes how at the Last Judgment the Son of Man will divide mankind and say to the sinners on his left hand, “discedite a me maledicti in ignem aeternum qui paratus est diabolo et angelis eius.” But Origen understands the “ignem aeternum” quite differently, glossing it with Isaiah 50.11, “Ambulate in lumine ignis vestri et in flamma quam accendistis vobismet ipsis.” Accordingly he argues that the fire said to be prepared for sinners is not one for all or even preexisting, but is generated uniquely for each sinner—“ unususque peccatorum flammam sibi ipse proprii ignis accendat” ¹⁶—and is fueled by his sins, which are the “igna et faenum et stipula” that Paul

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¹⁵ Methodius, *De resurrectione*, 3.18, 414.

says will be purged by fire, in another passage of significance for doctrines of both
Purgatory and the *poena ignis*, 1 Corinthians 3.12: “ipse autem salvus erit sic
tamen quasi per ignem.”17 This is like an explosion of the guilt of accumulated
sin: “competenti tempore omnis illa malorum congregatio effuerescit ad supplicium
atque inflammatur ad poenas,”18 and Origen compares it to the way in which
“flammis amoris exuritur anima uel zeli aut luiris ignibus maceratur.”19 In fact,
and most importantly, all of the corporeal imagery which Scripture uses for the
suffering of sinners should be thus interpreted:

Si qui ergo ex otio de omni scriptura congreget omnes languorum com-
memorationes, quae in comminatione peccatoribus uelut corporearum
aegritudinum appellationibus memoratur, inueniet quod animarum uel
uittia uel supplicia per haecfiguraliter indicentur:20

This is evidently the passage to which Thomas refers,21 and it is certainly a fair
characterization of Origen’s exegetical method, not only here in the *De principiis*
but in works unknown to the Scholastics but more indisputably representative of
his own thought.22

17Note that this passage conflicts with Crouzel’s reading that the purging fire of First Corinthi-
ans is God himself, while that of Gehenna (clearly the fire in question for Matthew 25) is equal
to or the cause of psychological torment, the self-accusation of conscience. The distinction could
certain to Origen’s authentic thought, if the above passage from *De principiis* has been adul-
terated; but it is not evident why Rufinus would be motivated to do so in this case, given that
the incorporeality of the fire is readily affirmed, and moreover that aligning the eternal fire of
Matthew 25 with the purgative fire of i Corinthians 3 actually lends more credence to the notion
that Origen teaches only medicinal punishment.

18*De principiis*, II.10, 384.

19*De principiis*, II.10, 384.

20*De principiis*, II.10, 388.

21See n. [supra].

22A possible exception within *De principiis* is Origen’s interpretation of the “outer darkness,”
another phrase favored by Scripture in referring to the punishment of the afterlife: he allows
that it may refer to something physical insofar as in the Resurrection of the Body, the unjust
“obscurs et atris post resurrectionem corporibus induantur;” but this notion is subordinate to the
primary and more certain meaning of these *tenebrae*, i.e., how those “qui profundae ignorantiae
In *Contra Celsum*, for example, the same reading of the Pauline epistle, and thereby of the penal fire, is confirmed. Arguing against Celsus’s attempt to render belief in the final conflagration absurd by referring to God as the Great Cook who will roast everyone except for the chosen people, Origen does not explicitly say that the fire is incorporeal, but in all other respects seeks to answer the defamation by explaining that the true Christian doctrine concerns the immaterial purification of sin, and is well explained with reference to First Corinthians:

καίοντος μὲν καὶ οὔ κατακαίοντος τοὺς μὴ ἔχοντας υλὴν δεοµένην ἀναλούσθαι υπ’ ἐκείνου τοῦ πυρῶς, καίοντος δὲ καὶ κατακαίοντος τοὺς ἐν τῇ διὰ τῶν πράξεων καὶ λόγων καὶ νοημάτων τροπικῶς λεγοµένη υἱὸκοινοῦ ἡ ἐν ζύλιναι, χόρτον ἢ καλάµην’ οἰκοδοµήσαντας.

Paul’s words concerning “wood, hay, and stubble” built on a foundation are quite obviously said τροπικῶς for an immaterial construction, that is, for the accumulation of impurity resulting from sin—“διὰ τὸ ἀναµεµφύθαι οἷονεὶ φαύλην χυτὴν υλὴν τῇ ἀντὶ κακίας”—and the expected corollary is that the fire, as well, is said metaphorically. This exegesis is confirmed explicitly elsewhere in the *Contra Celsum*, where the argument does not touch directly on the materiality of punishment, but the passage under interpretation is the same:

Εἰ μὲν οὖν ἔχει δεῖξαι ἄλλως νενοῆσθαι ταῦτα τῷ ἀνγράψαντι, καὶ σωματικῶς διότα τῆς παραστῆσαι ἑποίκοδοµίατα τῷ φαῦλο ἡ ἐν ζύλιναι ἢ χόρτον ἢ καλάµην’, δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τὸ πῦρ ὑλικὸν καὶ αἰσθητόν νοηθῆσεται· εἰ δ’ ἀντικρος τροπολογεῖται ταῦτα τῷ φαῦλον ἔργα, λεγοµένα εἶναι ἡ ἐν ζύλιναι ἢ χόρτον ἢ καλάµην’, πῶς οὐκ αὐτόθεν προσπηπτεῖ, ποδαπὸν πῦρ παραλαμβάνεται,

tenebris inmersi extra omne rationis et intelligentiae lumen effecti sunt” (11.10.7, 392).

23 At least, the same metaphorical understanding of the fire which purges in the interim period is confirmed; it is not certain here whether this is to be distinguished from the fire of Gehenna, in contradiction to *De principiis*.

24 *Contra Celsum*, v.15, 50.

25 *Contra Celsum*, v.15, 50–52.
If ξύλα, χόρτος, and καλάμη are clearly said metaphorically, why would one suppose that Paul intends πῦρ literally? One might say it is a question of poetic consistency: if Paul offers the image of chaff laid on stone to bring before the reader’s mind a conception of the condition of his soul consequent upon his clinging to Christ or otherwise, it seems a dullness to regress upon that movement of the mind as regards the character of the saving fire which burns that chaff away.

In short, then, for Origen the poena ignis is not really other than the poena damni, the self-reproach of conscience and the frustration of one’s ultimate desire; the fire which would be for later theologians the key indication of a distinct poena sensus is made simply the figure of the immaterial torment already presumed. Fire is the image used by Scripture to convey the consuming intellectual torment of the knowledge of one’s guilt, when all is laid bare. Thus it is an invisible fire,

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26 Contra Celsum, iv.13, 214.

27 Crouzel observes this, but adds that in some Scriptural commentary Origen allows for the separate suffering of the bodies of the damned: “Ce qu’Origène entend par feu de la Géhenne c’est ce que les théologiens appellent la peine du dam. Mais il mentionne aussi les souffrances des damnés ressuscités dans leur corps.” “L’Hadès et la Géhenne selon Origène,” 317, n. 161. The primary passage in question—commenting on Romans 8.23, “et ipsi intra nos gemimus adop- tionem filiorum expectantes redemptionem corporis nostrī”—does indeed make such mention, but only (as with regard to the treatment of the “outer darkness” in De principiis) as a possible secondary interpretation in addition to a primary and metaphorical one, and without any specification of the character of the fire itself: “Quod autem dixit, ‘redemptionem corporis nostrī,’ ego arbitrōr quod totius Ecclesiae indicet corpus, sicut et alīī dicit: ‘Vos autem estis corpus Christi, et membra ex parte.’ Omne ergo corpus Ecclesiae redimendum sperat Apostolus, nec putat posse quae perfecta sunt dari singulis quibusque membris, nisi universum corpus in unum fuerit congregatum. Potebit autem et sic intelligi, ut redemptionem corporis nostri dicat illam quae in resurrectione futura est, cum non solum animae, sed et corpora venient ‘ante tribunal Christi, ut reportet uniusque propria corporis prout gessit,’ et secundum illud quod dictum est: ‘Timete magis eum qui potest et corpus et animam perdere in gehennam.’ Et ideo dolen- dum uniciique est in hoc saeculo et gemendum, ne forte per malos actus et praesentis vitae negligentiam non mereatur redemptionem corporis sui consequi; sed inveniat eum ista sententia quae corpus et animam gehennae ignibus damnat.” Commentariorum in epistolam B. Pauli ad Romanos, Patrologia Graeca no. 14 (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1862), 1116D–17B.
“burning the invisible parts of our natures.”

It may be (if the De principiis is put aside) that the fire of First Corinthians 3 is to be distinguished from that of Matthew 25 as the purging of the interim period from the eternal torment of the (resurrected) damned, and that on at least one occasion Origen gives passing mention to the notion that in the latter case both soul and body are afflicted.

But for neither stage, before the Last Judgment or after, does Origen find any cause to read Scripture so literally as to understand a material fire.

Likewise, while Origen certainly argues for the Resurrection of the Body according to his own understanding of the phrase, the question becomes more difficult if one asks to what extent what is raised is the same as what has fallen (and thus truly called resurrected) and to what extent the nature of the raised body is at all like that of the earthly (and thus truly called a body). Furthermore, as has been noted, there is a very different question of whether this body belongs to the final fulfillment of man’s hope, his true eschaton, or is only an intermediate stage.

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28 See Daley, The Hope of the Early Church, 55. The phrasing here might seem more to treat the fire as an external principle, but regardless, the basically metaphorical understanding remains the same—pace Jacques Le Goff, The Birth of Purgatory, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), who follows G. Anrich in interpreting Origen’s position as a claim that the fire is not metaphorical and yet not material: “What is involved is a purificatory fire, which, though immaterial, is not merely a metaphor: it is real but spiritual, subtle” (55). This distinction is difficult to understand: even if ignis is understood to refer to something real and distinct, if this thing is incorporeal, it would seem that such a thing is called ‘fire’ metaphorically; this is to be distinguished from a corporeal fire which in some way induces or is used to induce a spiritual effect, of which Origen gives no indication, and to which Le Goff contrasts Origen’s position. Michel also argues in this way: the question of whether the fire is real, understood as opposed to metaphorical, is distinct from whether it is corporeal—at least theoretically (whereas in practice the proponents of real fire usually mean it to be corporeal); see “Feu de l’enfer,” 2196. Certainly, if by ‘fire’ is to be understood some spiritual entity which is the cause of a torment distinct from the poena damni, then that fire would be real but spiritual; but this would also be a metaphorical predication of the term, it seems.

29 Cf. Daley, “Eschatology in the Early Church Fathers,” 97–98: “Although Origen seems, in many passages, to take seriously the traditional expectation of the punishments held out for unrepentant sinners, he suggests in other places that scripture’s images of punishment are best understood in an internal or psychological sense and takes them—as Clement did—to have a purgative or pedagogical purpose.”
on the way towards ever more complete immateriality.

On the one hand, certain passages in the *De principiis* (more so than in any other work, which perhaps improves the possibility of emendation by Rufinus) suggest that Origen shares some of the concerns of early Western theologians in preserving this doctrine—such as those of St. Irenaeus, who was emphatic on the point that if the risen body is not truly flesh and blood, all Christian faith is in vain—30 and his teaching may be compatible with what would become the dominant view: that the very material body which perished must be restored. Origen observes that only what has fallen can rise again, and therefore resurrection is only comprehensible with respect to the very same bodies which once lived:

Quid est quo d mortuum est, nonne corpus? Corporis ergo resurrectio fiet... Si certum est quia corporibus nobis utendum sit, et corpora ea, quae ceciderunt, resurgere praedicantur (non enim proprae resurgere dicitur nisi id, quod ante ceciderit), nulli dubium est idcirco ea resurgere, ut his iterum ex resurrectione induamur... Nam et si resurgunt corpora, sine dubio ad indumentum nostri resurgent, et si necesse est nos esse in corporibus (sicut certe necesse est), non in alisi quam in nostris corporibus esse debemus.31

What is more, in at least one passage of *De principiis* it is indicated that the resurrected body will be in some sense a reconstitution of the very corporeal fragments which have corrupted and been scattered; the body in life or in death is always contained by an *insita ratio* which perdures and which at the command of God can recollect the same body from the earth:


31 *De principiis*, 11.10, 374.
Ita namque etiam nostra corpora uelut granum cadere in terram putanda sint; quibus insita ratio ea, quae substantiam continet corporalem, quamuis emortuam fuerint corpora et corrupta atque dispersa, uerbo tamen dei ratio illa ipsa, quae semper in substantia corporis salua est, erigat ea de terra et restituat ac reparet, sicut ea uirtus, quae inest in grano frumenti, post corruptionem eius ac mortem reparat ac restituit granum in culmi corpus et spicae.\textsuperscript{32}

On the other hand, even in the \textit{De principiis}—and more definitively in extant Greek works—the nature of the resurrected body is said to be entirely different from that of the earthly body, and the principle of continuity—the \textit{insita ratio} or \textit{εδος} which is the basis for the sameness of the body throughout life and is thus the pattern or principle of the spiritual body of the Resurrection—seems to have no dependence on the particular body as such, but is more a subdivision of the immaterial part of man’s nature. In the \textit{De principiis}, the spiritual body is said to be drawn from the animal body, so as to be dependent on it in a certain, seminal way, but not as quantitative: “Ex animali namque corpore ipsa uirtus resurrectionis et gratia spiritale corpus educit, cum id ab indignitate transmutat ad gloriam.”\textsuperscript{33} Moreover, resurrected bodies will be more like celestial bodies than terrestrial, as Origen interprets the Apostle’s words, “alia caro uolucrum, alia piscium; et corpora caelestia et corpora terrestria” (1 Cor. 15.39–40):

Secundum istam ergo consequentiam caelestium corporum ostendunt nobis differentias gloriae eorum qui resurgunt, et si ullo genere conati fuerint secundum caelestium corporum differentias aliquam ex cogitare rationem, quaeremus ab eis, ut etiam secundum terrenorum corporum comparationem differentias resurrectionis adsignent.\textsuperscript{34}

In other works such as the \textit{Contra Celsum} and Scriptural commentaries Origen

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{De principiis}, ii.3, 382.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{De principiis}, ii.10, 376.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{De principiis}, ii.10, 378.
goes further, to show what has been called "contempt for materialist conceptions" of the Resurrection,\textsuperscript{35} rejecting more explicitly the notion of reconstitution.

What is clear and present throughout is that the continuity and identity of the person is in no way dependent on the body as a certain quantity of material. Objectors to the doctrine of the Resurrection such as Celsus regard it as not just beyond nature but absurd and contemptible to think that the corruptible body should return from the earth and live again as the same person, a "hope of worms" not even attractive or decent as a natural impossibility—and therefore unfitting to attribute to the power of God, whose omnipotence does not extend to base things against his own nature. Origen defies the objection, of course, but not so directly as to affirm the very hope which Celsus ridicules; indeed he agrees with him in rejecting an allegedly facile recourse to God's omnipotence in defending the resurrection of the very same flesh, and contends instead that the Christian doctrine is in fact that the body which dies shall be the seed of a new body, and which can be made in the same form because of the incorruptible εἰδὸς. But insofar as this principle—the insita ratio of De principiis—itself never falls, and its perdurance is the pattern after which a new body is made, the fallen body itself seems to have little importance and the very meaning of 'resurrection' is obscured.

A Greek fragment preserved from Methodius's \textit{De resurrectione} gives the most robust explanation for why Origen regards the body as simply incapable of preserving or perhaps even contributing to identity:

\begin{quote}
Βούλεται τοίνυν ὁ Ὀριγένης τὴν μὲν αὐτὴν σάρκα μὴ ἀποκαθίστασθαι τῇ ψυχῇ...τὴν δὲ ποιὰν ἑκάστου μορφήν, κατὰ τὸ εἰδὸς τὸ τὴν σάρκα καὶ νόν χαρακτηρίζον, ἐν ἐτέσῳ πνευματικῷ ἐντετυπωμένην ἀναστήσεσθαι
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{35}Daley, \textit{The Hope of the Early Church}, 51.
Certainly, it cannot be said that Origen treats the body as evil: “τὸ γὰρ κύριως μιαρὸν ἀπὸ κακὶας τοιοτῶν ἐστι· φύσις δὲ σώµατος οὐ µιαρά· οὐ γὰρ ἡ φύσις σώµατος ἐστι, τὸ φευνητικὸν τὰς µιαρότητος ἔχει τὴν κακίαν.” 37 But just because it is material, and thus always changing even in this life, the body in itself cannot be a principle of identity (and thus necessary for the resurrection of the very same person) but is always dependent for its identity on the principle it has from the soul—or perhaps, by some readings, only on account of the soul itself. 38

As has been seen, these notions of earthly materiality and human identity do not in any way lessen the importance of the Resurrection (as he understands it) for Origen’s thought, nor does it mean that for him the resurrected life is simply incorporeal (with the same caveat for that term). 39 It does mean that

36 De resurrectione, iii.2, 391.
37 Contra Celsum, iii.42, 100.
38 Cf.: Daley, The Hope of the Early Church, 53: “The key to his explanation is his insistence—also borrowed from Stoic science—that the body, of itself, is like a ‘river’, constantly in flux…its matter is never the same for two days in a row. Despite this fluidity of matter, individuals do remain the same—not only in their interior life or soul (ψυχή) but also in the unique form (εἴδος), imposed by the soul, that shapes and integrates the material body…the soul always forms itself a body suited to its physical environment;” Chadwick, “Origen, Celsus, and the Resurrection of the Body,” 86: “Origen begins from the basic fact that the nature of σῶμα is impermanent; it is in a continual state of change and transformation, caused by the food which is eaten, absorbed by the body, and turned into tissue…When we say the body will rise again, what body do we mean?…The body is always being changed by the food eaten…For though hard and indigestible food is passed out of the stomach, the easily digestible food is formed into flesh, because it is absorbed by the contiguous veins which carry the blood.” The latter few sentences are Chadwick’s paraphrase, as the argument in question is preserved only in the old Slavonic version of Methodius’ De resurrectione, translated into German in the edition of that text already cited. Chadwick argues: “There can be no doubt that the words which Methodius has here put into the mouth of Aglaophon represent very closely Origen’s own statement” (87), because of the correspondence of two passages in De oratione (6.1, 27.8).

39 Cf. Tzamalikos, Origen: Philosophy of History & Eschatology, 18: “Rejecting the notion of
the framework within which Origen finds this doctrine, and that of an interim or eternal punishment by fire, coherent, is one which wholly rejects the transference of what man in this life knows as corporeality to what corporeality will be in the life to come.

1.1.2 St. Augustine

As the teaching of the Bishop of Hippo was deeply formative for medieval Latin theology in so many matters, it is no surprise that his considerations of the *poena ignis* did much to determine Scholastic debate on the question; this particular case is a microcosm of how Augustine’s overall eschatological vision helped to turn the theological consensus in the West away from an Origenist understanding of the interim and resurrected states. It did so notwithstanding some inconsistency concerning the corporeality of Hell and its torments—which Augustine ultimately affirms in later works such as *De civitate Dei* and the *Retractiones*—and his dependence upon a theory of vision which would prove difficult to accommodate to Aristotle.

Unlike Origen, Augustine sharply distinguishes the interim, bodiless period from man’s true eschaton at the Resurrection. It may be that his thought on an exclusively interim and purgative state is only inchoate and vague compared to later definitions of Purgatory; but regardless, for him there is no doubt that prior to the Resurrection of the Body, all souls—though they have already been the soul surviving without a body, Origen virtually denied the idea of resurrected bodies living in a discarnate form: he defended the resurrection *in a body*; although this is understood to be a body of a different quality, still this is a definitely *material* body. On this point he conveniently adopted the Stoic tenet of universal materiality. The salient point though is that, *pace* [sic] Paul, he made resurrection the central theme of his thought, indeed of all Christian doctrine: if there is no resurrection, there is no Christian faith and all Biblical history is void of any meaning at all. No one after Paul made so strenuously the Cross and Resurrection the pivotal point designating[sic] all history from start to finish.”
preliminarily judged at death, and are already in pain or in bliss—are in wait-
ing. When at the Last Judgment all time is lifted into eternity, their bodies—the
very same matter as was theirs in life, followed in all its particulate dispersal by
Divine Providence—will also rise; this will not be merely one stage in a contin-
uining progression of divinization or an adornment of beatitude already complete,
but “the one genuinely eschatological event” which is also “the distinctive faith of
Christians”\textsuperscript{40} as it is part of faith in the Resurrection of Christ:

Sed in ipsa carne fides resurrectionis eius saluos facit atque justifi-
cat... Ideoque meritum fidei nostrae resurrectio corporis domini est.
Nam mortuam esse illam carnem in cruce passionis etiam inimici eius
credunt, sed resurrectisse non credunt. Quod firmissime nos credentes
tamquam de petrae soliditate contemmur, unde certa spe adoptionem
exspectamus redemptionem corporis nostri quia hoc in membris Christi
speramus quae nos ipsi sumus quod perfectum esse in ipso tamquam
in capite nostro fidei sanitate cognoscimus.\textsuperscript{41}

In the end, Christian hope does not consist solely or even primarily in becoming
more spiritual or intellectual, in a union with God understood as assimilation or
conformity to the most spiritual element in man; rather, Christians hope simply
to be “conformed to the image of the Son” who is both spiritual Word and flesh:

Et in hac quippe similis erimus deo sed tantummodo filio quia solus in
trinitate corpus accepit in quo mortuus resurrexit atque id ad superna
peruexit. Nam dicitur etiam ista imago filii dei in qua sicut ille immor-
tale corpus habebimus conformes facti in hac parte non patris imaginis
aut spiritus sancti sed tantummodo filii quia de hoc solo legitur et fide
sanissima accipitur: \textit{Verbum caro factum est}.\textsuperscript{42}

Only then will man be entirely fulfilled. As the General Resurrection entails

\textsuperscript{40}Daley, \textit{The Hope of the Early Church}, 141.

\textsuperscript{41}De Trinitate libri XV, ed. W. J. Mountian, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina nos. 50–50A
(Turnhout: Brepols, 1968), ii.1.7, 119.

\textsuperscript{42}De Trinitate, xiv.18, 455–56.
conformity to Christ’s Resurrection, if the latter is truly corporeal (as the Gospels repeatedly emphasize), the rising again of a true body and the same body as lived before, then the same must be true of the former. As the change at the Resurrection is so decisive, its effect on the pain or bliss of the reprobate or elect is dramatic; even though all are judged immediately and go at once to the joys of Heaven or the torments of Hell, after reunion with their bodies these prior conditions will seem to have been dreams by comparison with the reward or punishment of the whole man:


Veniet autem retributionis dies, ubi corporibus redditis, totus homo recipiat quod meretur... Sicut enim plurimum distat inter laetitias miserieae somnium et vigilantium; ita multum interest inter tormenta vel gaudia mortuorum et resurgentium... alia est animarum sine ulla corporibus requies, alia cum corporibus caelestibus claritas et felicitas Angelorum... ipsaque corpora in quibus indigna tormenta permanent, eis digna in ornamenta vertentur.

43 See discussion infra of the Enchiridion, and cf. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, 143: “Just as the gospel accounts stress the corporeality of Jesus’ risen body, and its identity with the body in which he preached and underwent death, so Augustine is at pains to oppose any interpretation of the Christian hope that would turn to allegory the promise that our bodies will rise again;” and Margaret R. Miles, *Augustine on the Body* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1979), 110–25.


46 *Sermones*, Patrologia Latina no. 38 (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1845), 280.5, 1283. The same sermon gives a certain possible indication of the corporeality of the hell-fire, but the matter is not considered directly: “Ubi et illius divitis membra quae quondam temporali purpura decorabantur, aeterno igne torreantur... quamvis etiam nunc ille guttam ex digito pauperis apud inferos sitiatur”
Indeed Augustine here goes farther than most medieval theologians following in his wake in restricting the joy of the blessed until that time when they can be complete and completely conformed to Christ.

The exact condition of souls in the interim period, and the nature of their torments if suffering, are much less certain and consistent in Augustine’s teaching than the nature of the Resurrection. Yet his insistence on the corporeality of the true eschaton appears to have had a kind of retroactive influence for him on the initially more debatable questions concerning the interim, drawing his teaching—from uncertainty in *De Genesi ad litteram* through the *Enchiridion* to its most strongly-put in *De civitate Dei*—towards a moderately corporeal vision of the separated state.

In the twelfth and final book of *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine leaves the direct exegesis of the text of Genesis which comprised the preceding eleven books in order to examine a New Testament text which he might otherwise be accused of evading: Paul’s vision of the third heaven, recorded in Second Corinthians 12.47 The connection, as later becomes evident, is the Apostle’s claim to have seen *paradisum* in his rapture: how is this related to the Paradise of Adam found in Genesis? In coming to terms with Paul’s brief and reticent report, Augustine takes the opportunity to expound more fully his theory of vision, which proves crucial to his speculation on the experience of the separated soul.

The crux of the Pauline passage is his expression of doubt as to how he ascended—“sive in corpore sive extra corpus nescio” (12.3)—which implies that he does not know how he perceived, even while he is certain of what he saw—the

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47 *De Genesi ad litteram libri* xi.1, ed. Joseph Zycha, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum no. 28/1 (Prague/Wien/Leipzig: F. Tempsky/G. Freytag, 1894), xi.1, 379.
third heaven, paradise, and not merely a symbol thereof. It seems that Paul’s
doubt cannot satisfactorily be explained unless one introduces the distinction be-
tween bodies and the similitudes of bodies:

Si ergo sciebat spiritualia per corpus, corporalia extra corpus uideri
omnino non posse, cur non per ea ipsa, quae uidit, quomodo etiam
potuerit uidere, discreuit? Si enim certus erat illa esse spiritualia, cur
non consequenter extra corpus ea se uidisse certus nihilominus erat?
Si autem corporalia esse nouerat, nonnisi per corpus uideri potuisse
cur non etiam nouerat? Unde ergo dubitat, utrum in corpore an extra
corpus ea uiderit, nisi forte ita etiam dubitat, utrum illa corpora an
similitudines corporum fuerint? 48

In further resolving this dilemma by means of explaining similitudines corpor-
orum more fully, Augustine relies upon a three-fold scheme of human vision. This
theory may well be operative in his treatments of perception elsewhere, but as an
account of vision as such (rather than of the objects or causes of perception) it is
most fully treated here, especially with regard to the crucial middle level of vision
which will pertain to similitudines or imagines of bodies. 49

An object may be said to be seen per corpus or propre (which would cor-
respond to the two horns of the dilemma posed above concerning the Pauline
text, neither of which is acceptable—seeing bodies by means of one’s body, or
seeing spiritual things directly without any bodies), or further imaginaliter. In
explicating this division Augustine uses the example of the directive to love one’s
neighbor:

Ecce in hoc uno praecepto cum legitur: diliges proximum tuum tam-

48 De Genesi, xi.3, 382–83.

not limited to one of the five senses but takes the part for the whole: “Augustine’s discussion of
bodily sight is not restricted to those sensations annexed to the bodily eyes...in effect, he uses
‘bodily sight’ as a general term for bodily sensation” (317).
Vision said to be “per oculos”—the physical or literal meaning of sight—and that which is “per contuitum mentis”—seeing in the sense of understanding, perceiving intellectually without any images—are relatively straightforward uses of the term; but vision “per spiritus hominis” is the real advantage of this scheme for the present context.

This may be called spiritual vision: the power of the mind to make an image of a corporeal thing, a phantasm which is not itself corporeal but a *similitudo corporis*. These similitudes can be taken from an immediate act of the first level of vision—that is, they may be images of things physically proximate to the subject, currently seen according to the literal sense—but they may also be introduced in other ways: from memory, which stores images already seen; and in dreams and visions, wherein they may derive from memory in a less deliberate way, or be introduced from without through the ministration of angels (good or wicked) who can in a mysterious way commingle with the minds of men. In such cases, then, a man may believe to be physically present what in fact is not, though he may also be aware that he is asleep. Augustine cites the examples of his own dreams, the reports of the visions of others, and the testimony of Scripture: Ezekiel’s sight of the field full of the bones of the dead; Isaiah’s of the Seraphim with burning coal; Peter’s vision in Acts of the animals lowered down from Heaven; and John’s many visions in the Apocalypse.⁵¹

What is gained from this testimony is that the falseness of an image—insofar

⁵⁰ *De Genesi*, xii.6, 386–87.

as its presence is taken to imply a physical presence—does not falsify its effect: Peter mistook the animals as real, but afterwards interpreted the vision rightly.\textsuperscript{52} Of course, the interpretation takes precedence over the vision itself, and rightly so, as interpretation is the act of a higher power (mind) than that of re-presenting a received image (spirit)—thus Nebuchadnezzar saw the writing on the wall but Daniel understood it, and only the latter was prophetic.\textsuperscript{53} Interpretation, however, still depends upon the vision as its matter; and while this second level of vision offers the greatest possibility of deception (as it touches nothing external, physically or intellectually, but works internally), that very fallibility gives it instructive power through higher administration, as it can make phantasms the vehicle for visions which are false in the sense of representing physical space, but truer than the vision of physical objects in the sense of what they teach.\textsuperscript{54} If for any of these visions it were to be supposed that the prophets or Apostles were unsure if they were in the body or out of it, this would entail that they were also unsure whether they had seen bodies indeed or only the similitudes thereof; the same should hold true for Paul.

Now, this does not entirely resolve the problem of Paul's doubt; even granted this middle level of similitudes, it would seem that the Apostle ought to have said as well that he cannot say whether he saw \textit{paradisum} or its likeness, if he was aware of images in his visions (and thus hesitated only between the first and second kinds of vision). Thus in the end, Augustine resolves the problem by offering a quite different and less troublesome reading of Paul's doubt, suggesting that the Apostle saw with the third, intellectual level of vision, and only doubted—since

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{De Genesi}, Xii.32, 427.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{De Genesi}, Xii.11, 393–94.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{De Genesi}, Xii.14, 398–401; 22, 412–24.
he was wholly without his senses—whether his body was merely dormant or dead indeed. Still, the explication of spiritual vision which the exegesis of Paul's *raptus* necessitated bears more fruit in the discussion of the separated soul which follows in the same book.

Augustine gives three options for the destination of the separated soul, corresponding to the levels of vision:

> Si autem quaeritur, cum anima de corpore exierit, utrum ad aliqua loca corporalia feratur, an ad incorporalia corporalibus similia, an uero nec ad ipsa sed ad illud, quod et corporibus et similitudinibus corporum est excellentius, cito quidem responderim ad corporalia loca eam uel non ferri nisi cum aliquo corpore uel non localiter ferri.\(^{55}\)

Supposing that the soul does not receive another body in the interim period, Augustine favors the *situs* corresponding to the second level of vision, that of *similitudines corporum* (though here he hints for the first time that the blessed may be in a more spiritual place—i.e., not merely will they have joys rather than pains, but the former will be *spiritalia* while the latter may be *similitudines corporum*).

He bases this supposition, once again, on the evidence of those who have had visions of the afterlife, seeing what appeared to be bodies, rather than intellectual vision: “ad spiritalia uero pre meritis fertur aut ad loca poenalia similia corporibus, qualia saepe demonstrata sunt his, qui rapti sunt a corporis sensibus et mortuis similes iacerunt et infernas poenas uiderunt.”\(^{56}\) Moreover, the subjects of these visions or dreams are conscious of images of their own respective bodies, present like the bodies of others: thus they may see themselves move amongst the dead, and “talia similitudinibus sensuum experiri”—for similitudes of bodes, similitudes

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\(^{55}\) *De Genesi*, X:132, 426.

\(^{56}\) *De Genesi*, X:132, 426.
of the senses are appropriate. Again the testimony of Scripture and the experience of Augustine and those who have related dreams to him is crucial in establishing the point:

Tamen [animam] habere posse similitudinem corporis et corporalium omnino membrorum quisquis negat potest negare animam esse, quae in somnis uidet uel ambulare se uel sedere uel hac atque illac gressu aut etiam uolatu ferri ac referri, quod siue quadam similitudine corporis non fit.57

Here he also repeats the admonition that such images, as the instruments of punishment or of blessedness, can be false in se without falsifying that pain or joy: “sunt tamen et uera laetitia est et uera molestia facta de substantia spirituali.”58

It is in this sense that spiritualis is to be understood when Augustine concludes, “est ergo prorsus inferorum substantia, sed eam spiritalem arbitror esse, non corporalem”59—this means not that it is at the opposite extreme from corporalis but that it belongs to the intermediate mode of images. While this may be a lesser corporeality than Augustine will argue for in later works, it is still quite distinct from a purely intellectual poena damni, being a poena ignis in its own right and meant in part to confirm certain visions of the afterlife as true in a more than metaphorical sense.

All the same, it should be noted that Augustine’s discussion has ranged beyond the interim period and doubted the corporeality of Hell altogether (even after the Resurrection)—though he is careful to speak merely in speculative terms (arbitror). For example, if Hell is said to be under the earth, this may be a fitting locution because the damned sinned by love of lowly things, and are thus

57 De Genesi, X11,33, 428.
58 De Genesi, X11,32, 427.
59 De Genesi, X11,32, 427.
congruently punished by similitudes of the same:

Sub terris dicuntur inferi vel creduntur, quia congruentur in spiritu per illas corporalium rerum similitudines sic demonstratur, ut, quoniam defunctorum animae inferis dignae carnis amore peccarent, hoc eis per illas corporum similitudines exhibeatur, quod ipsi carnis mortuæ solet, ut sub terra recondatur.⁶⁰

Later in his Retractiones, Augustine will implicitly confirm the ambiguity of the above remark—that Hell is “said to be” under the earth—by seeing the need to correct it with a clear affirmation of corporeality: “in duodecimo de infernis magis mihi uideor docere debuisse, quod sub terris sunt, quam rationem reddere, cur sub terra, terra cum esse credantur siue dicantur, quasi non ita sit.”⁶¹

As has been noted, Augustine here as elsewhere assuredly affirms the literal Resurrection of the Body;⁶² by his own principle of commensurability between the situs of the dead and their own state, one might expect either that a more corporeal place is prepared for after the Last Judgment, or that the resurrected body is not really corporeal; nonetheless, here in De Genesi ad litteram he at most asserts that there will be all three kinds of vision (all perfected) in blessedness. But regardless, even as he supposes Hell to be spiritual, he contrasts this sharply with the supposition that it is simply a metaphor indicating no distinct reality, a poetic fiction:

Nec audiendi sunt, qui adfirmant inferos in hac uita explicari nec esse

⁶⁰ De Genesi, X¹.33, 428.

⁶¹ Retractionum libri duo, ed. Pius Knöll, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum no. 36 (Wien/Leipzig: F. Tempsky/G. Freytag), ii.50, 160.

⁶² De Genesi, X¹.7, 389: “Nam et corpus, quod futurum est in resurrectione sanctorum, spiritale appellat apostolus, ubi ait: seminatur corpus animale, surget corpus spiritale, eo quod miris modis ad omnes facilitatem et incorruptionem spiritui subdatur et sine ulla indigentia corporaliun alimentorum solo uiuificetur spiritu, non quod incorpoream substantiam sit habiturum; neque enim et hoc corpus, quale nunc habemus, animae habet substantiam et hoc est quod anima, quia dictum est animale.”

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Even here, moreover, Augustine regards punishment through at least the semblances of bodies to be not merely possible, but also fitting—the subjugation to corporeal being which is practiced by sin in the body, fixed and extended in the afterlife.

The possible utility of the faculty which is responsible in this life for generating images or reproducing them from memory—in short, the imagination—for explaining the state of the soul separated from the body in various aspects—especially the reality of its torments—had already been thoroughly developed by Porphyry under the name of pneuma:

Pour expliquer la description homérique des punitions post mortem infligées à certains héros, Porphyre explique que de telles punitions, bien que réelles, s’effectuent par le biais de l’imagination:

Φαντασίας γὰρ λαμβάνειν τῶν δειῶν ὃσα ἐν τῷ Βίῳ δεδράκασι καὶ κολάζεσθαι, τῆς ἁμαρτίας παρεστώσης αὐτοῖς κατὰ λογισµὸν καὶ τιµωρούσης διὰ τῶν ἀφωρισμένων ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις κολάζεσων.64

Much like Augustine’s spiritual vision, the pneuma is intermediate between the corporeal or sensible part of man and the intellectual, and it proved for Porphyry the key to the whole complex of problems surrounding the separated state:

C’est ce caractère d’intermédiaire, et lui seul, qui permet à cette notion de remplir ses différentes fonctions dans le cadre de la philosophie de Porphyre: expliquer l’interaction d’entités aussi différentes que l’esprit et le corps; expliquer la possibilité pour une entité incorporelle d’être

63 De Genesi, XI, 33, 428.

It has recently been argued that Augustine derived the spiritual vision of *De Genesi ad litteram* xii from just this Porphyrian concept; regardless of source, the comparison illustrates the power of the concept as well as its complete dependence on the metaphysically-intermediate status of the *pneuma* (or faculty of spiritual vision), a gradation between soul and body.

This dependence would make Augustine’s early solution to the problem of the *poena ignis* difficult for Scholastic theologians: spiritual vision *qua* imagination might be made agreeable to a certain extent with an Aristotelian psychology, understood as a mainly semantic difference (weakening, of course, the sense of *spiritualis*); but insofar as the power of spiritual vision for explaining the separated state depends upon an intermediate grade of faculty which would allow the images of physical things to exist without any sense organs—in short, to treat such images as not themselves physical—it would prove more troublesome. Of course, this conflict has been well-noted with regard to Augustine’s theory of sensation in general; the limited problem of the *poena ignis* is in this sense not such a special case for Augustine as it would be for other theologians, because he—at least in *De Genesi ad litteram* xii—has a similar problem to explain in all sensation, even that of earthly life: how can a physical substance ever affect a spiritual one, even with a body intervening? The solution of introducing a distinct, third level of

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65 Chase, “Prophyrre et Augustin,” 245.

66 This is the main contention of Chase, “Prophyrre et Augustin,” passim.
vision is not universal in Augustine’s thought, but that fundamental question is; and the possibility of a poena ignis distinct from the poena damni—that is, of a pain which is of real fire insofar as it is not simply intellectual and insofar as the as the sensory images may be identical to those produced from fire in this life—is thus allowed only because of the potential separability of the higher stages of perception from the body and its processes even in this life.

In his wide-ranging summary of Christian belief which comprises the Enchiridion, Augustine has much less to say on the state of souls in the interim before bodily resurrection, as is perhaps to be expected from a hand-book summarizing the “fundamentum fidei,” i.e. “quid credendum sit” necessarily, rather than what is a matter of speculation—which he had often indicated to be the manner of his observations in De Genesi ad litteram. Still, his brief comments there merit consideration.

Where the interim period is considered in the Enchiridion, Augustine is more concerned with the effectiveness of what he calls “ignem quemdam purgatorium,” the purging fire, than with the corporeality of that fire or of the souls themselves.\textsuperscript{67} First Corinthians, in which Paul speaks of the fire which will purge “ligna et faenum et stipula,” features prominently, and Augustine—here bearing some resemblance to Origen—speaks of this fire mainly as a metaphor for the anguish of the soul insofar as it is separated from the goods it loved overmuch in earthly life: “saluus est quidem, sic tamen quasi per ignem, quia urit eum dolor rerum quas dilexerat amissarum.”\textsuperscript{68} The fire is implicitly regarded as a metaphor, and no reason is given to think otherwise, to posit a material fire.

\textsuperscript{67} Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide et spe et caritate, ed. E. Evans, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina no. \textit{46} (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969), xviii.69, 78.

\textsuperscript{68} Enchiridion, xviii.68, 87.
On the other hand, with regard to the resurrected body and the final and eternal state of man, there is in the *Enchiridion* a decidedly more pronounced emphasis on corporeality, as compared to *De Genesi ad litteram* (though no real shift in doctrine). No Christian can doubt that every man born will be resurrected in the flesh,⁶⁹ nor is this a metaphorical flesh or a body in some sense quite other than that of earth; it will be freed from corruption and deformity, and this is what Paul intends when he says that it will “rise a spiritual body”—not that it will be assimilated to the soul or constituted of a different element (nor could it be “spiritual” in the sense of the interim body of *De Genesi ad litteram*):

Resurgo igitur sanctorum corpora sine ullo uitio, sine ulla deformitate, sine ulla corruptione... Propter quod et spiritualia dicta sunt, cum procul dubio corpora sint futura, non spiritus.⁷⁰

Augustine also considers the particular constitution of this flesh, asserting that, in order to be properly the same flesh that died, it will be constituted from the same material which it possessed in life, wheresoever this material has relocated and of whatever other substances it has been made a part. God has counted each of our hairs, and will not lose count when they are scattered to the wind:

Non autem perit deo terrena materies de qua mortalium creatur caro; sed in quemlibet puluerum cineremque soluatur, in quoslibet halitus aurasque diffugiat, in quacunque aliorum corporum substantiam uel in ipsa elementa uertatur, in quorumcumque animalium etiam hominum cibum cedat carnemque mutetur, illi animae humanae puncto temporis redit quae illam primitus, ut homo fieret cresceret uiueret, animuit.⁷¹

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⁶⁹ *Enchiridion*, XXIII.84, 95: “resurrectam tamen carnem omnium quicumque nati sunt hominum atque nascentur, et mortui sunt atque morientur, nillo modo dubitare debet christianus.”

⁷⁰ *Enchiridion*, XXIII.91, 98.

⁷¹ *Enchiridion*, XXIII.88, 96–97.
This assertion of material continuity between the earthly and resurrected bodies—Augustine uses the simile of a statue which is broken and then reconstituted—lies in contrast to Origen’s εἴδος, that pseudo-formal element which provides continuity of the characteristics of a particular body, but is ultimately a principle in the soul (or a soul-like principle presiding over the body but no material part of it), in which case from the point of death onwards the soul and εἴδος alone are required for identical reconstitution. For Origen, this is sufficient to ensure that the same man is resurrected; Augustine here takes it for granted that for this particular man to be resurrected, his same flesh must be reunited with his soul, and furthermore that only material continuity—i.e., the presence of the same matter as was contained under the determinate dimensions of the earthly body—makes a body to be the same.

An important reason for supporting such continuity is the exemplar of Christ’s Resurrection. Christ’s resurrected body, though it had strange qualities—the ability to pass through walls, for example—was called flesh (carn), and the same must be asserted of all other resurrected bodies to come, even if they will have such wondrous qualities and will therefore be called spiritual: “Quantum autem attinet ad substantiam, etiam tunc caro erit; propter quod et post resurrectionem corpus Christi caro appellata est.”72 As there was no doubt that Christ’s resurrected body was the very same material which had been laid down—for the tomb was empty, and the wounds remained—Augustine firmly denies that the mere accidents of passing time and disintegration could prevent the General Resurrection from conforming to its archetype. Thus while the Enchiridion on its own could be taken to support an Origenist reading of the poena ignis (a reading which De Genesi ad

72 Enchiridion, xxiii.91, 98.
litteram would still contradict), the foundation is laid for further consideration of that fire, influenced by the certain materiality of the Resurrection to come, which is seen positively as a conformation to Christ.

In this light can be understood Augustine’s last and fullest treatment of the state of souls after death in De civitate Dei XXI and XXII, where he confirms the emphasis on the corporeality of the resurrected body of the Enchiridion, but furthermore revises his opinions of De Genesi ad litteram and affirms the corporeality of the hell-fire as well, including—to some degree—in the interim state.

Book XXII again posits the resurrected body as the reconstruction of the material components of the earthly body, and addresses at length various problems which arise from that contention (a few of which were already mentioned in the Enchiridion): since the bodies of the blessed ought fittingly to be without deformity or imperfection, with what are deficiencies repaired? If other material can constitute a part of the glorified body without detriment to the identity of the individual, why is the original material necessary at all? And for that matter, which original material will be used, since the human body is constantly incorporating new material into its mass throughout its life—how can any particular instance, or any compilation of elements from any number of instances, more properly belong to a man than any other? Finally, in the most outré objection, what of the case of cannibalism, whereby the same material belongs in progression to two different bodies?73 Without delving into the details of his solutions, let it suffice to observe

73 De civitate Dei, ed. Bernard Dombart and Alphonse Kalb, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina nos. 47-48 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1960), xxii.1-8, 759-71. Of course, the same problem would arise in innumerable cases in which the material of a human body, dissolved and translated into various other substances, may eventually become the food of other men, as Hamlet observed: “A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, / and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm... Nothing, but to show you how a king may / go a progress through the guts of a beggar.” Cannibalism is simply the extreme case which puts the problem into relief. It may be tempting to dismiss such objections simply because of their grotesque quality or to regard
that they show Augustine to be firmly committed to physical reconstitution as the only meaningful reading of what resurrection entails, and thus he does not adduce the above arguments in order to show the absurdity of such a reading, but rather takes them quite seriously and seeks to answer them point for point.

In addition, he must answer the objection that a normal, physical body, in the case of the damned, could not withstand eternal torment; thus it seems that either body or torment must be immaterial if they are to coexist forever. Here the physicality of the Resurrection is shown to imply the physicality of the *situs* of the afterlife, completing a syllogism based on a premise which was latent in the arguments of the *De Genesi ad litteram*: the surroundings of one present in the afterlife (either as a permanent resident or a visitor in dreams or visions) are commensurate in physicality with the viewer himself (bodies are seen with the body, similitudes with a similitude of the body in the spirit, and intelligibles with the mind separated from the body); but in the end all men will have a physical body in the afterlife; therefore their *situs* will be physical. This argument is not made in so many words in *De civitate Dei*, but it may reasonably be regarded as a cause for the change in position from the tentative claim of *De Genesi ad litteram* that the substance of Hell is spiritual, not physical—a claim which took root in a consideration of the separated soul’s experience of infernal or purgative

the whole problem as absurd on that account; such appears to be the reaction of Henri Irénée Marrou and Anne-Marie La Bonnardière, “Le dogme de la résurrection des corps et la théologie des valeurs humaines selon l’enseignement de saint Augustin,” *Revue des Études augustiniennes* 12 (1966): 111–116, 116: “Beaucoup de ces objections nous paraissent aujourd’hui naïves ou captieuses: quel sort attend les foetus avortés? Et les enfants: quelle taille revêtiront-ils?… Enfin difficulté majeure comment ressusciteront les malheureux dont le corps a été mangé, assimilé, par des anthropophages? Chez les plus doctes, l’objection se faisait plus philosophique: chaque élément,—terre, eau, air, feu—ayant dans l’univers la place que lui impose son poids, comment notre corps, terrestre, pourrait-il être élevé au ciel?” As a matter of fact, however, these naïve objections maintain more relevance for modern debates over the possibility of personal identity through the Resurrection of the Body than does the physical doctrine of the natural spheres of the elements.
punishment in the interim, and was not in that earlier text contrasted with the possible quality of the infernal fire after the Resurrection which would afflict true bodies.

Another and more explicit reason for the shift lies in the expanded range of Scriptural references which in *De civitate Dei* Augustine takes to be controlling for the discussion. In *De Genesi ad litteram*, Paul’s vision of the third heaven is of course the key text; in the *Enchiridion* the Apostle again takes precedence, in II Corinthians’s description of the fire which will test the works of all. In *De civitate Dei*, however, two passages of Matthew’s Gospel come to prominence: the first is from Chapter 9, in which Christ warns that it is better to lose hand, foot, or eye, than to be cast whole into Gehenna, where “vermis eorum non morietur et ignis eorum non extinguetur.” This itself is taken from Isaiah, whose pronouncement, Augustine observes, Christ commends “vehementius” by three-fold repetition.

Is there any reason, though, that this fire and worm should not be understood metaphorically, as was the purging fire of II Corinthians? Augustine recognizes that some claim both to be metaphors for the *dolor animae* (the same term he himself used to explain the fire in the *Enchiridion*) but responds: “ego tamen facilius est ut ad corpus dicam utrumque pertinere quam neutrum.”74 This is so for two reasons: first, the intellectual pain of the soul eternally separated from God in Hell—the *poena damni*—is easily assumed, once one realizes that God is man’s end and Hell the eternal separation from him; a repeated emphasis on the fire and the worm would seem unnecessary as a warning, unless it should convey something theretofore unknown (and perhaps unknowable without revelation), namely that a *poena sensus* awaits those who will already and evidently, by virtue of their

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74 *De civitate Dei*, XX.9. 774.
separation from God, experience dolor animae. Perhaps more significant, though, is the glossing of Isaiah and Matthew by way of Ecclesiasticus 7.19, which speaks of “vindicta carnis impii ignis et vermis.” Why, Augustine asks, would “carnis” be mentioned but to show that these pertain to the body? Thus while he is willing to allow the speculation that only the fire is corporeal (and the worm metaphorical), at the least that former must not be consigned to metaphor: “nullo modo illa corpora talia futura esse credamus, ut nullis ab igne afficiantur doloribus.”

This leads to another objection, the first occasion thus far considered in which the possibility of interaction between corporeal torment and spiritual sufferer is directly questioned. According to Matthew 25—which only now comes to prominence in Augustine’s treatment of the poena ignis—there is one fire which torments not only the sinful men but demons as well: “discedite a me maledicti in ignem aeternum qui paratus est diabolo et angelis eius.” This might seem to be a strong reason for interpreting the fire metaphorically as the poena damnii which can as easily apply to all intellectual beings; but Augustine recognizes also that this passage speaks explicitly of the time of the Last Judgment, and therefore the “maledicti” among men who are sent into the eternal fire will be the resurrected reprobate, who go to that fire embodied. Again the principle of commensurability comes into play: while it is certainly possible that the poena damnii of those who again have bodies could be referred to through the metaphor of fire, it would seem unfitting and perhaps even misleading for Scripture to speak so when there will in fact be real bodies capable of suffering from corporeal fire. If it is most fitting to understand this fire as physical, and if it has indeed been “prepared for the devil and his angels” according to Christ’s own word, then it must be possible for

\[75\text{ De civitate Dei, XXI.9, 775.}\]
corporeal fire to be the means of punishment even for pure spirits.

The question naturally follows, “quomodo in eo [igne] erit etiam poena spiritum malignorum?” Augustine’s response depends upon a comparison with the bond between a man’s body and soul:

Cur enim non dicamus, quamuis miris, tamen ueris modis etiam spiritus incorporeos posse poena corporalis ignis affligi, si spiritus hominum, etiam ipsi profecto incorporei, et nunc potuerunt includi corporalibus membris et tunc poterunt corporum suorum uinclulis insolubiliter alligari?

Of course, there must be a difference, such that the spirits are not bound to the fire so as to animate it, as a soul does a body:

Adhaerebunt ergo...spiritus daemones, licet incorporei corporeis ignibus cruciandi, non ut ignes ipsi, quibus adhaerebunt, eorum iunctura inspirentur et animalia fiant, quae constet spiritu et corpore, sed, ut dixi, miris et ineffabilibus modis adhaerendo, accipientes ex ignibus poenam, non dantes ignibus uitam.

Certainly these passages do not quite explain the difficulty involved in the supposed interaction between spirit and body, and in fact the comparison to the earthly union between man’s soul and flesh seems to invite more problems than it solves, in characterizing the body as a prison. Be that as it may, Augustine’s overriding argument is clearly opposed to any sort of Manicheanism since it depends in the first place on the assertion that the true, physical body belongs in blessedness. He speculates further that the demons might take on pseudo-bodies, through the compression and humidification of air, through which they might feel: ‘nisi quia sunt quaedam sua etiam daemonibus corpora, sicut doctis hominibus

76 De civitate Dei, xx1.10, 775.
77 De civitate Dei, xx1.10, 776.
78 De civitate Dei, xx1.10, 776.
uisum est, ex isto aere crasso atque humido, cuius impulsus uento flante sentitur;”
still, their suffering from corporeal fire is not contingent upon this supposition.\textsuperscript{79}
What is essential to his argument is that the spirits must be bound by divine
power to the fire, a union which is hard to understand—“miris et ineffabilibus
modis”—but which is clearly not impossible, according to the example of human
nature, in which an intellectual soul is bound to a body (in a different manner, to
be sure). Perhaps more importantly for future debates, his characterization of this
union—avoiding as it must any language suggesting that the fire has a calefactive
action on spirits, a clear impossibility—implies that the binding itself is a kind
of imprisonment (even at the price of dualist language regarding human nature):
“adhaerendo, accipientes ex ignibus poenam.”

Is it then to be understood that the separated souls of men in the interim will
also suffer from a corporeal fire? If the suffering of demons be granted, nothing
seems to prevent it; and yet Augustine is surprisingly ambiguous: after the above
consideration of demons (put in terms of spirits in general) he cites the example
of the 	extit{dives} who in Christ’s parable begs Lazarus for succor from his torment—
“crucior in hac flamma”—even though he is “ubi tamen erant sine corporibus an-
imae.”\textsuperscript{80} In context this example seems likely to lead towards the confirmation
that a soul may suffer from real fire; yet Augustine proceeds to comment on the
episode: “sic ergo incorporalis et illa flamma qua exarsit et illa guttula quam
poposcit, qualia sunt etiam uisa dorrentium siue in ecstasi carmentium res in-
corporales, habentes tamen similitudinem corporum,” and the “homo cum spiritu,

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{De civitate Dei}, xx1.10, 776: “Cruciabit corpora damnatorum, aut et hominum et dae-
monum, solida hominum, aeria daemonum, aut tantum hominum cum spiritibus, daemones
autem spiritus sine corporibus haerentes sumendo poenam, non impertiendo uitam corporalibus
ignis.”

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{De civitate Dei}, xx1.10, 776; cf. Lc. 16.24.
non corpore” sees a similitude of his own body.\textsuperscript{81} Thus the argument of \textit{De Genesi ad litteram} seems to be confirmed in all its essentials, even when Augustine at first appeared to bypass the need for the second level of vision in explaining the interim period. The ambiguity, however, applies only to that interim; the fire of torment that is to come after the Resurrection will certainly be corporeal: “\textit{At uero gehenna illa, quod etiam stagnum ignis et sulphuris dictum est, corporeus ignis erit et cruciabit corpora damnatorum.}”\textsuperscript{82}

The shift in Augustine’s position thus seems to derive from the following forces: an expansion of Scriptural reference which glosses Paul with Isaiah, Matthew, and Ecclesiasticus, and in fact gives these precedence; the consideration of the suffering of demons as well as of men, prompted by Matthew 25, which provides a kind of \textit{a fortiori} case in the fallen angels; and a more thoroughgoing argument for the Resurrection of the Body, which resists a metaphorical reading of the relevant Scriptural passages and therefore influences, through commensurability, the sort of punishment such substances may be said to experience.

As for the interim period in particular, though, Augustine gives little by way of \textit{per se} reasons why it should be fitting for a separated soul as such to suffer from corporeal fire; he allows for the possibility in principle, but without definitively leaving behind his earlier speculation that, for a soul which can have at best a similitude of the body, the similitude of fire may be most appropriate. Still there is indication that this torment may involve corporeal fire, and this derives from the influence of the post-Resurrection period, such that the fire which beyond doubt will be corporeal then—and which will somehow be the means for the torment of fallen angels—might well be presumed to be the same fire as exists now.

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{De civitate Dei}, XXI.10, 776.

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{De civitate Dei}, XXI.10, 776.
1.1.3 St. Gregory the Great

Pope Gregory I would prove to be the other crucial authority, along with Augustine, for Scholastic arguments concerning the *poena ignis*. And while his treatment of the question is less systematic than that of the Bishop of Hippo—consisting mainly of *ad hoc* digressions related to *exempla* in his *Dialogues*—it is also less ambiguous in its assertion that the penal fire referred to in Scripture is to be understood literally.

Nonetheless this Gregorian teaching is not unproblematic in the view of modern criticism; precisely because the author of the *Dialogues* appears to be so credulous and literalistic towards the accounts of miraculous visions of the otherworld which he reports, this aspect of the work has frequently been subject to shame or excuse. A century ago commentators would voice astonishment at the contrast between this credulity and the Pope’s keen intellect and spiritual understanding in other works, blaming him for bequeathing to the Middle Ages an uncritical, indeed vulgarly physical representation of the afterlife; more recent scholarship prefers to apologize for him, by appeal to his cultural context or pedagogical purpose.

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83 See, e.g., F. Homes Dudden, *Gregory the Great: His Place in History and Thought*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Grenn, and Co., 1905), 1:356: “Let me... call attention to the strange combination of shrewdness and superstition which characterized the mind of Gregory. It is certainly astonishing that the clear-headed man who managed the Papal estates and governed the Church with such admirable skill, should have contributed to the propagation of these wild tales of demons and wizards and haunted houses, of souls made visible, of rivers obedient to written orders, of corpses that scream and walk. And yet such was the fact.” The significance and extent attributed to this propagation can scarcely be exaggerated—see Henry H. Howorth, *Saint Gregory the Great* (London: John Murray, 1912), 257: “Gregory’s attitude caused a great revolution in the beliefs of the Church... he created a new world of strange demons and angelic beings and a very material hell and heaven, the one full of horrors and the other of naïve poetry, which under the shadow of his name overflowed into every pulpit and every sermon, and eventually formed the largest part of the popular Christianity of the Western Church.”

84 See Joan M. Peterson, *The Dialogues of Gregory the Great in Their Late Antique Cultural Background* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984).

85 See Claude Dagens, *Saint Grégoire le Grand: Culture et expérience chrétiennes* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1977): the realism of the *Dialogues* is “la raison pour laquelle les dé-
or even by denial of his authorship of the *Dialogues*.  

Not so the Scholastic commentators, who for the most part understood Gregory’s *sententiae* on the *poena ignis* to be just as theologically dogmatic as Augustine’s, and as a matter of fact more certain. Bonaventure would even go so far as to say that the traditional determination of a corporeal fire depends more or less entirely on this one man’s authority—which nonetheless suffices. Thus a consideration of the context of this Gregorian teaching may shed some light on the Scholastic inheritance of the question.

In the *Dialogues* Gregory’s main task, as indicated by the full title usually given to the work, is to relate contemporary examples of the “miraculis patrum italicorum” for the benefit of the faithful, and in the narrative frame of the work to answer the doubts of his interlocutor, deacon Peter. According to that frame, the Pope has grown melancholy from reflecting on how the worldly demands of

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87 *Commentaria in iv libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*, vols. 1–4 of *Opera omnia* (Quaracchi: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1882–89), iv.44.2.2.1: “quamvis ad hanc quaestionem videatur temerariam respondere, quia Scriptura eam non determinat, nec doctor praecipuus Augustinus explicat...tamen satis possimus pro certo habere per doctores posteriores, utpote per beatum Gregorium.”

his office have drawn him away from the cloistered life he previously enjoyed, in
which he could give himself to contemplation. This bittersweet remembrance is
sharpened by the thought of contemporary ascetics who have exemplified the life
he so misses;\textsuperscript{89} but Peter is less sanguine about the holiness to be found in Italy.\textsuperscript{90}
Good men there may be, but not such as have been marked by signs or miracles,
as the great ascetics are.\textsuperscript{91} In response, Gregory takes it upon himself to provide
a great array of recent and frequently miraculous \textit{exempla}, known either from his
own experience or by hearsay (the latter being admissible on the grounds that it
was good enough for Mark and Luke in their Gospels),\textsuperscript{92} and from which salutary
instruction may be taken. Thus these anecdotes are to serve a dual pedagogical
purpose: first, they provide moral lessons, as \textit{exempla} are obviously meant to do;
second, they are also part of an historical argument, at least according to the
frame of the work—they are meant as Gregory’s evidence to Peter that miracles
do indeed happen in their time.\textsuperscript{93} Peter agrees to the project and even gives
explicit support to a pedagogical method relying upon the narration of anecdotes:

\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Dialogi}, i.Prol., 14: “Nonnumquam uero ad augmentum mei doloris adiungitur, quod quo-
rundam uita, qui praesens saeculum tota mente reliquerunt, mihi ad memoriam reducatur.”

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Dialogi}, i.Prol., 14: “Non ualde in Italia aliquorum uitam uirtutibus fulsisse cognoui.”

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Dialogi}, i.Prol., 14: “Et quidem bonos uiros in hac terra fuisse non dubito, signa tamen
atque uirtutes aut ab eis nequaquam factas existimo.”

\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Dialogi}, i.Prol., 16.

\textsuperscript{93} While this narrative frame may not be intended to represent an actual conversation with
a deacon Peter, it certainly does represent the kind of requests which occasioned Gregory’s
writing of the \textit{Dialogues}—i.e., those asking for reports of the saints and miracles of Italy—as
demonstrated by an earlier Gregorian letter requesting information for the book: \textit{Registrum
epistularum libri xiv}, 2 vols., ed. Dag Norberg, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina nos. 140–
140A (Turnhout: Brepols), Ep.iii.39, 1.195: “Fratres mei, qui mecum familiariter uiant, omni
modo me compellunt aliqua de miraculis patrum, quae in Italia facta auduimus, sub breuitate
scribere.” On this basis the editor of the \textit{Dialogues} can claim: “Il ne fait pas de doute que Grégoire
a écrit les Dialogues pour répondre à un appel de ses familiers, avides de récits merveilleux ur
des saints italiens.” Adalbert de Vogüé, “Introduction,” in Gregorius Magnus, \textit{Dialogues}, vol. 1,

58
“In expositione quippe qualiter inuenienda atque tenenda sit uirtus cognoscitur, in narratione vero signorum cognoscimus inuenta ac retenta qualiter declaratur.”

Nonetheless, the *Dialogues* will teach *in expositione* as well as *in narratione*, and nowhere more so than in Book IV, which is devoted to the life of the soul after the death of the body. At the close of Book III, the story of Redemptus’s vision of the martyr Juticus gives Peter occasion to note that many people even within the Church doubt the immortality of the soul:

Quam multis intra sanctae ecclesiae gremium constitutos de uita animae post mortem carnis perpendo dubitare. Quaeso ut debeas, uel quae ex ratione suppetant, uel si qua animarum exempla animo occurrunt, pro multorum aedificatione dicere, ut hii qui suspicantur discant cum carne animam non finiri.

In response, Gregory proposes to devote the following book to demonstrating “quod anima post carnem uiuat.”

The representation of the state of the separated soul is, therefore, not merely the narrative presupposition of the anecdotes of the fourth and final book, a possibly fictional vehicle for moral messages; it is part of the book’s dogmatic content. The first lesson to be drawn from miraculous visions of the afterlife is that there is such an afterlife—contrary to what is claimed by “multis intra sanctae ecclesiae gremium.” Moreover, Peter expressly asks for reasons (“ex ratione”) supporting this doctrine, in addition to miraculous evidence (“exempla”); and indeed, Book IV has by far a greater proportion of doctrinal passages to anecdotes than any of the previous three. Such is the context in which the *poena ignis* comes to be

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94 *Dialogi*, 1. Prol., 16.
95 *Dialogi*, 111. 38, 432.
96 *Dialogi*, 111. 38, 432.
examined, which undercuts any suggestion that the eschatological claims of Book iv are not to be taken literally, according to Gregory’s intention.98

It should first be noted that Gregory gives an explicit and straightforward argument for the immediate punishment of the iniquitous, i.e., a punishment which as prior to bodily resurrection is suffered by the soul alone. If the souls of the blessed are even now in Heaven, then it is only fitting—according to the equality of retribution expected of divine justice—that the reprobate should suffer from the moment of death, rather than awaiting the Last Judgment in suspense:

Si esse sanctorum animas in caelo sacri eloquii satisfactione credidisti, oportet ut per omnia esse credas et iniquorum animas in inferno, quia ex retributione aeternae iustitiae, ex qua iam iusti gloriatur, necesse est per omnia ut et inusti crucientur. Nam sicut electos beatitudine baetificat ita credi necesse est quod a die exitus sui ignis reprobus exurat.99

Thus it is not only the question of a purging fire (although this is also an explicit consideration later in Book iv) which prompts the discussion of corporeality; nor is there any doubt that what is said here of the hell-fire is meant to apply to suffering in the bodiless interim period, not merely after the General Resurrection.

Peter, admitting the fittingness of coterminous reward and punishment, still feels that “humana aestimatio non habet peccatorum animas ante iudicium posse cruciari;” when Gregory affirms that justice requires them to burn, the deacon asks, “Et qua ratione credendum est quia rem incorpoream tenere ignis corporeus

98Such is at least the implicit presumption of many commentators; an explicit argument is made by M. McC. Gatch, “The Fourth Dialogue of Gregory the Great: Some Problems of Interpretation,” in Studia Patristica, ed. F. L. Cross, vol. 10, 77–83, Texte und Untersuchungen no. 107 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1970), who seeks to explain away the literal meaning of Book iv through the context of Gregory’s views on the contemplative life and the proximity of the eschaton.

99Dialogi, iv.27, 98.
It should be noted that the corporeality of the tormenting fire is in fact taken for granted; there is no suggestion of a metaphorical understanding of the fire, only debate as to how a material fire is capable of tormenting souls. By the term *ex ratione*, along with *humana aestimatio*, it seems clear that Peter is looking for rational arguments in defense of these teachings, beyond reliance on Scripture. Thus the Pope’s self-appointed task is to supply arguments which demonstrate how such torment is not contrary to reason.

Gregory indeed does not appeal to Scripture at first, but to the same analogy to the union of soul and body that Augustine employed: as the soul is held (“tenetur”) in the body in this life, so it may be bound to fire in the next. The difficulty with this analogy is not hard to see, and at once Peter expresses it in an objection: “in vivente quolibet idcirco incorporeus spiritus tenetur in corpore, quia uiuificat corpus.”

Given that the separated soul surely does not vivify the fire, what other sort of union is possible whereby a spirit can be held by a body? The Pope’s response is more of a play on words than a definition of a different kind of union, and continues to keep close company with Augustine: “si incorporeus spiritus, Petre, in hoc teneri potest quod uiuificat, quare non poenaliter et ibi teneatur ubi mortificatur?” Once again it may be noted that the claim of such a union, without further explanation or precision of the analogy involved, has the potential to cast a dualistic pall on the earthly union of soul and body: if the arbitrary and external binding of the soul to fire is simply comparable to man’s natural state, that latter state may seem equally arbitrary—at least until it may be demonstrated how exactly the union of soul and body is so different from the

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100 *Dialogi*, iv. 28, 100.
101 *Dialogi*, iv. 30, 100.
102 *Dialogi*, iv. 30, 100.
way in which a soul may be bound to any other physical space or object as to be substantial, natural, and vivifying, yet not so different as to vitiate the analogy between the two unions.

Gregory does not, however, rest his case with this analogy, but proceeds to a further consideration—one which will prove both significant and troubling for Scholastic accounts. Having accepted without argument that there can be no contact as such between the corporeal and incorporeal, Gregory suggests that the soul may be bound and suffer by seeing itself tormented by the fire: "teneri autem per ignem spiritum dicimus, ut in tormento ignis sit uidendo atque sentiendo." The fire cannot burn it, but as the soul sees itself to be burned, so in fact it burns in its mind—"ignem namque eo ipso patitur quo uidet, et quia concremari se aspicit crematur"—and is thus tortured within itself by an "incorporea flamma," yet nonetheless "per ignem corporeum."

This remarkable response may well owe much to Augustine; Gregory does not speak of similitudines, but these would seem to be a necessary component of the situation he describes: the soul has an image of itself (presumably, an image of the body it formerly possessed) being burned by the actually present fire, and therefore so great an anguish is received in the mind as would follow were the image taken from corporeal sensation. (Falseness of the image does not falsify the affectation of the soul, as Augustine said.) It is this falseness, however, which will be of concern to later commentators: if these souls are made to see images of their own bodies which no longer have any material correspondent, it would seem

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103 Dialogi, iv.30, 100.
104 Dialogi, iv.30, 100.
105 Gregory also cites the example of the dives and Lazarus as supportive of his argument for corporeal fire, thus distancing himself in at least this respect from Augustine's ambiguous reading of that Gospel passage in De civitate Dei.
that for the entire interim period and for all damned or purging souls—not just in exceptional cases—divine justice works by deception. Moreover, this simply calls back into question the necessity or usefulness of material fire, whose presence appears to be superfluous, if a false image must be introduced to the soul anyway.

In the end, Peter’s doubts are only truly assuaged when Gregory brings Scriptural authority to bear on the question: the Pope’s appeal to Matthew 25 decides the argument, but does not add much to his preceding efforts at rational explanation of the possibility of such torment. Just as in Augustine’s exegesis of this crucial gospel passage, Gregory’s reading depends upon a presumption that the fire which is said to torment sinners after the Last Judgment—and therefore with their resurrected bodies—must be a corporeal fire. This presumption may imply an unstated argument for fittingness, in terms similar to those given by Augustine: since in this passage Christ is clearly referring to re-embodied persons, capable of sensation, it would have been misleading for him to refer to a tormenting fire without intending the sort of fire commensurate to the torment of bodies. Once the corporeality of the ignis aeternus has been taken for granted, Gregory is able to supply a now-familiar argument a fortiori: if this undoubtedly corporeal fire has been “prepared for the devil and his angels,” then wholly separate beings can suffer from it; if so, then surely man’s sometime-separate soul can as well. This spells the end of Peter’s objections and of the main discursive treatment of the problem in the Dialogues, but leaves somewhat unanswered the question of how and to what extent reason may investigate the suffering of the separated soul.106

106 While Gregory only directly addresses the question of the interim poena ignis in his Dialogi, he does confirm elsewhere the corporeality of the ignis gehennae as applied to the reprobate after the Resurrection—see, e.g., Moralia in Iob, ed. Marc Adriaen, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina nos. 143A-B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979–85), xv.29, in which he glosses Job 20.26 ("deuorabit eum ignis qui non succenditur") as referring to that fire which, though it requires no fuel to burn perpetually, is yet corporeal, and "omnes reprobi, quia ex anima simul et carne..."
Elsewhere in Book IV of the Dialogues, however, one may discern a different kind of explanation of the corporeality granted to the interim state—not merely a single, penal fire, but all of the physical images by which both the separated souls and their torments are seen by the living. Such visions, of course, comprise a substantial portion of the narrative of this book, and the Pope’s comments upon them typically do not form any part of a systematic argument about the nature of the interim period, but rather draw from them a moral message for the instruction of the faithful. On the other hand, it must be remembered that according to the frame of the work as a whole, and the controlling question for Book IV in particular, these visions serve as evidence in themselves, i.e., as historical rather than as moral—they are adduced to demonstrate to Peter (or to Gregory’s fratres who requested the work) that miracles are indeed granted to their present age and land, and to refute those skeptics who even within the flock of the Church deny the immortality of the soul.

Likewise, in light of the discursive treatment of the corporeality of the interim fire, the very fact that the miraculous visions of suffering souls have a pedagogical purpose is not just the presupposition of or justification for the stories told in Book IV; the reason why these visions occur is part of the book’s doctrinal content. That is to say: alone, the anecdotes in which separated souls or their torments appear to the living through apparent images might well be interpreted as obviously fictitious, fables to whose invention Gregory would readily admit as

peccauerunt, illic in anima pariter et carne cruciantur” (769–70). In light of the teaching of the Dialogi, this phrase might be extended to present a simple reason for the fittingness—rather than merely the possibility—of corporeal suffering (infernal or purgative) at any stage of the afterlife, insofar as the same sin or vice is punished or purged before the Resurrection, and as the above principle of symmetry requires that the person who sinned should suffer as a whole, it might be said that whatever manner in which the separated soul can be made to suffer as if still in the body will help to fulfill the requirements of justice.
a pedagogical means, justified by the power of false stories of material occurrences to convey to his readers a true and spiritual message. But Gregory does not leave this path of interpretation open (much as it has appealed to some commentators). In the first place, because of his assertion that at least one, universal means of interim torment—the fire of Gehenna which acts even now—is corporeal in truth, there is no a priori reason to think that the report of a vision of a soul suffering from an apparently material body cannot be meant to have some historical truth. Moreover, Gregory in fact preempts any such interpretation (which would subordinate the literal truth of the visions to the author’s pedagogical purpose) by himself subordinating them to God’s pedagogy, in whose power it lies to teach not merely by stories, but by the production of bodies to be seen, allowing truly corporeal visions to the living.

Shortly after his discursive treatment of the poena ignis, for example, Gregory relates the vision of a certain Reparatus who saw Hell while hovering near death; the tale he brought back is the basis of instruction for others:

Qui uidelicit Reparatus, ductus ad loca poenarum, dum uidit, rediit, narravit et obiit, aperte monstratur quia nobis illa, non sibi uiderit, quibus dum ad huc concessum est vivere, licet etiam a malis operibus emendare.¹⁰⁷

Reparatus saw a pyre prepared for one Tiburtius, and Gregory qualifies how that image of fire is to be understood:

Rogum uero construi Reparatus uidit, non quod apud infernum ligna ardeant ut ignis fiat, sed narraturus haec uientibus illa de incendio prauorum uidit, ex quibus nutriti apud uientes corporeus ignis solut, ut per haec adsueta audientes discerent, quid de insuetis timere debuissent.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Dialogi, iv.32, 108.
¹⁰⁸ Dialogi, iv.32, 108.
On its own, this qualification would seem to indicate that the fire tormenting the deceased ought indeed to be understood metaphorically, as the vision of the pyre is here contrasted with “corporeus ignis” and explicitly subjugated to its immaterial analogue, the spiritual anguish of the soul. Independent of the specific images seen by Reparatus, however, it has already been established that there is a single, corporeal fire of torment; in this context, the emphasis of Gregory’s comments is not so much the falseness of the material aspect of the pyre, as it is the purpose for which the image is provided: repeatedly he indicates how this journey to Hell—“ductus ad loca poenarum”—was granted for the sake of the living, so that they might “a malis operibus emendare.” Indeed, the analogical understanding of the story is the goal of the Pope’s moral instruction; but Reparatus was given the vision in truth—he really saw images of some kind—just so that he could tell the story: “dum uidit, rediit, narravit et obiit;” “Reparatus uidit... narraturus haec uientibus.”

One may object: there is no need to suppose any extramental, material truth to this vision at all, but rather Gregory’s explanation indicates a simpler and less controversial understanding—Reparatus truly had a vision of a pyre (and thus the tale is not the invention of the author, nor the invented narration of a wholly spiritual vision), yet this and all other supposed visions of the otherworld have no implication for the corporeality of that state, but are merely images introduced directly into the sensitive powers of the one having the vision, as in a dream. Such an explanation, however, cannot account for the immediately-following anecdote in *Dialogues* iv, in which a city official from Valeria dies after a nefarious crime. From his grave, flames are seen to rise, which not only consume his buried bones

109 *Dialogi*, iv.32, 108.
but cause the earth to cave in around his tomb. Of the vision of this fire—
immediately available to many of the living, and thus more simply explained by a
truly extramental body than by sourceless phantasms introduced simultaneously
to the powers of several different men, and moreover having physical consequences
for its undoubtedly corporeal surroundings in the grave—Gregory says:

Quod uidelicet omnipotens Deus faciens, ostendit quod eius anima in
occulto pertulit, cuius etiam corpus ante humanos oculos flamma con-
sumpsit. Qua in re nobis quoque haec audientibus exemplum formidi-
nis dare dignatus est, quatenus ex hac consideratione collegamus, quid
anima uiuens ac sentiens pro reatu suo patiatur.  

Once again, in itself this indication of the purpose of the vision—the understand-
ing that the living ought to take from it—could well be understood as a denial
of the corporeality of what was, apparently, seen, without entirely denying the
truth of the images; but its context, immediate and remote, forces the reader to
choose between denying the truth of the vision and accepting it as an extraman-
tal, corporeal occurrence—as a miracle. Either the consumption of the remains of
the Valerian official by a visible fire is a fiction, a story made up by Gregory or
received by him having been invented by another, or else it is indeed an account
of a physical wonder worked by God.

In another case, Peter asks of Gregory the location of Hell, and while the Pope
notes that he can only speak with probability on this question, he confirms the
common opinion that in accordance with the etymology of *infernum*, it is below
the Earth; he does not for a moment entertain the notion that Hell is a state
without physical location.

110 *Dialogi*, iv.33, 110–11.

111 *Dialogi*, iv.42, 126: "Hac de re temere definire non audeo... Sed tamen hoc animum pulsat,
quia si idcirco infernum dicimus quia inferius iacet, quod terra ad caelum est, hoc esse inferus
debet ad terram."

67
Finally, there is a last exemplum worthy of mention because it bears perhaps the sharpest contrast between Gregory’s apparent invitation of a metaphorical interpretation, with his stark insistence upon the materiality of Hell. A widow on her deathbed, Eumorphius, foresees the death of her neighbor Stephanus in these terms: “ecce nautis parata est ut ad Siciliam duci debeamus.”\(^\text{112}\) The accuracy of the prediction is soon revealed, but Peter questions the particulars of the vision: why a ship, and why Sicily? As to the ship, Gregory responds:

Anima vehiculo non eget, sed mirum non est si adhuc homini in corpore posito illud apparuit, quod per corpus adsueuerat uidere, ut per hoc daretur intelligi, quo eius anima spiritualiter duci potuisset.\(^\text{113}\)

Surely many readers would then presume: as the soul needs no vehicle, neither is it led to any material place—finally, Gregory shows that he is not so naïve as he seemed, and by assuring that the soul is said to be led only “spiritualiter,” he intends that in fact it is carried into a new immaterial state.\(^\text{114}\) But then Gregory accounts for the role of Sicily in the vision:

Quod uero se ad Siciliam duci testatus est, quid sentiri alius potest, nisi quod prae ceteris locis in eius terrae insulis eructante igne tormentorum ollae patuerunt? Quae, ut solent narrare qui nouerunt, laxatis cotidie sinibus excrescent, ut mundi termino propinquante, quanto certum est illuc amplius exurendos collegi, tanto et eadem tormentorum loca amplius uideantur aperi.\(^\text{115}\)

Not only is Hell a place (“tormentorum loca”) and its fire corporeal, but that very fire can be seen by anyone as it occasionally bursts forth from the volcanoes around

\(^{112}\) _Dialogi_, iv.36, 120.

\(^{113}\) _Dialogi_, iv.36, 122.

\(^{114}\) See, e.g., the reading of Gatch, “The Fourth Dialogue,” 81, who cites this example as proof that Gregory “admits at least once that the truth conveyed by visions is often metaphorical,” to the exclusion of literal truth: “The language of dreams and visions is something other than the language of descriptions of physical reality and must be treated as such.”

\(^{115}\) _Dialogi_, iv.36, 122.
Sicily. This fire is allowed to intrude upon the world of the living because these are
the latter days ("mundi termino propinquante"), in which the earthly world and the
otherworld are drawing closer to one another; thus it is not to be wondered at that
so many in this time have visions of the hereafter, as is noted later: "Nam quantum
praesens saeculum propinquat ad finem, tantum futurum saeculum ipsa iam quasi
propinquitate tangitur et signis manifestoribus aperitur." Nevertheless, the
Sicilian windows into Hell would not be open but for divine dispensation, and this
is granted for a now-familiar reason:

Quod omnipotens Deus ad correctionem uiuentium in hoc mundo uolu-
it ostendi, ut mentes infidelium, quae inferni tormenta esse non cre-
dunt, tormentorum loca uideant, quae audita credere recusant.\textsuperscript{117}

Once this dilemma has been made plain—the choice between fables of a vis-
ible afterlife having only metaphorical truth, and truly material torments which
can teach spiritual truth because they really are seen—there is no doubt about
which of the two Gregory ultimately claims, however much he may insist on a
metaphorical understanding of certain details in certain visions. Therein lies the
explanation of how the stories of the \textit{Dialogues} have fared in recent criticism, and
why that account was authoritative for the Scholastic interpretation of the \textit{poena
ignis}. The Pope preserves the scandalous materiality of the visions of infernal
and purgatorial torment he reports in three ways: first and most importantly, by
insisting on the corporeal instrument of the true \textit{poena ignis}, which would remain
an insurmountable obstacle to a wholly spiritualizing reading even if the \textit{exempla}
could be disposed of; second, by including \textit{exempla} the particular details of which
tend against a reading of true but internal vision, since they demand or make

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Dialogi}, iv.42, 154.
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Dialogi}, iv.36, 122.
most probable the presence of true bodies, not merely phantasms; and third, by earnestly and repeatedly insisting that the visions are provided by God for the sake of the living who see them, which preempts a reading of intentional fiction on Gregory’s part.

Visions of the otherworld, in other words, are indeed given to the living for their edification; but this is not an admission that the bodies described in the report of such a vision are to be understood metaphorically, or were at most introduced to the mind of the seer without the presence of a new body external to the senses. Rather, this pedagogical purpose is an explanation for God’s granting truly corporeal bodies to separated souls, and using such bodies as a means of their torment—quite apart from questions of the possibility and justice of such a means. While these bodies may seem superfluous to the punishment of the souls, they are not meaningless for the accessibility of that punishment to the living who may be edified by knowledge of it. By seeing the torments of those souls already being punished, the living recipient of such a vision—or his listeners when his story is told, and so become all the readers of the Dialogues—learn to fear them and amend their ways when the mere assertion of such punishment is in many cases insufficiently powerful: “plene ratio non valet, exempla suadeant.”

Of course, this goes no further in establishing rationally how the soul might suffer by means of a bodily fire; but it does give a new argument for the fittingness of bodies in the separated state. Gregory’s treatment of the penal fire is remarkable in part for its blend of different kinds of argumentation, and his innovations even where he seems to be following Augustine closely. His credulity towards accounts of souls with visible bodies suffering from visible torments, and his attribution of these appearances to the power of God, in the context of an unambiguous assertion
of corporeal fire, in fact amplifies Augustine’s own recourse to testimony of dreams and visions by the living as positive evidence for the character of interim suffering. Gregory raises the stakes of that recourse, so to speak, by explicitly incorporating the very fact of such visions into his arguments for the immortality of the soul and the manner of its suffering, and explaining the divine provision of visible bodies as a concession to the human mode of knowing: “Ex rerum, Patre, imaginibus pensamus merita causarum.”118

1.2 Scholastic accounts

When, near the end of his massive compilation of the *sententiae* of the Fathers on all things theological, Peter Lombard takes up the question at hand almost 600 years later, he brings to bear on the matter of suffering in the interim afterlife some of the Patristic teachings considered above. In his presentation and in the consensus of commentators on the *Sentences* it soon becomes clear that by this time the essential step made hesitantly by Augustine and definitively by Gregory has become normative: the hell-fire referred to by Scripture is real and corporeal, and there is no longer any question of interpreting the crucial text of Matthew 25 as a metaphor for the *poena damnii*—the main problem is simply how to reconcile this fact with the nature of the separated soul. The problem thus depends on a further consensus that an interim period, in which reward and punishment begin immediately after death, must be clearly distinguished from the true eschaton following the Resurrection of the Body and the Last Judgment.

This is not to say that such teachings were wholly unchallenged in the Middle Ages after Gregory. The Origenist option regarding the nature of torment

118 *Dialogi*, iv.28, 136.
had been taken up with full force by John Scottus Eriugena, the ninth-century philosopher-theologian and translator of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus. That association, however, might only have increased opprobrium against this understanding of the *poena ignis* for later theologians (insofar as they may have been aware of the Irishman’s teaching), as it was bound up with other eschatological speculations—primarily in his greatest work, the *Periphyseon*—which derived in large part from those of Origen and which departed more entirely and definitively against orthodox teaching on the last things, not only because the orthodox position had been more certainly established by this time, but also insofar as they took the Alexandrian’s paradigm of progressive spiritualization to a further extreme. Hence Eriugena merits a brief consideration despite his lack of influence on the Scholastic debate, as he demonstrates the further development of the major alternative against which the now-traditional teaching can be better understood.

It will be recalled that Origen’s teaching does not merely insist upon a metaphorical understanding of the fire itself but greatly reduces the significance of distinguishing an interim, bodiless period by viewing all corporeal existence as interim and preparatory to reunification with God in the end of history; so Eriugena’s understanding of all torment of the afterworld as the immaterial self-accusation of conscience is part of a thoroughly spiritualized eschatology centered on the “a-temporal paradigm of *exitus* and *reitus*.” He does recognize a distinct interim state to a certain extent; the parable of Lazarus and the *divus* shows him that souls without bodies can petition for a lessening of their torment:

Ex hoc enim loco datur intelligi non solum adhuc uiuentes in carne, uerum etiam spoliatas carne animas auxilium sanctorum petere posse,

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Yet all such pains are psychological; if the hell-fire involves a material basis it is only because separation from beloved material goods causes the burning self-torment of a corrupt will:

Quid patitur diues ille in inferno? Nonne splendidarum epularum, quibus in hac uita uescabatur, egestatem?... Haec exempla de pravis malarum uoluntatum motibus, quos in semet ipsis uitorum torquet iustissima uindicta diversarumque libidinum cicatrices, sufficiunt. Vn-usquisque enim impie uientium ipsa uitorum libidine, qua in carne exarsit, ueluti quadam flamma inextinguibili torquentur.¹²¹

This is not because of any difficulty peculiar to the interim stage—indeed, if anything it would have been more difficult for Eriugena to admit a corporeal fire after the Last Judgment, because at that point neither a corporeal fire nor Hell will exist, nor will any bodies whatsoever remain:

Et haec est ratio quae nullum locum sensibilem et corporalem in natura rerum inferno permittit uanasque opiniones eorum destruit, qui infernum uel sub terris uel terrarum in gremio fallacibus suis cogitationibus autumant, ignorantes quod ipsa terra, subter quam uel intra quam infernum constituunt, penitus sit peritura... Ac per hoc nullus locus intra sensibilem corporalemque creaturam inferno datur, neque aeterno igni in quo impii ardebunt, neque uermibus nunquam moriturus.¹²²

Thus, as for Origen but to a greater degree, the question of a corporeal poena

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¹²⁰ Periphyseon v, ed. Édouard A. Jeammeau, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis no. 165 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), v, 977B, 163. See McGinn, “Eriugena Confronts the End,” 26: “The parable of Lazarus... and other witnesses in Periphyseon to Eriugena’s belief in purgatorial suffrage... show that the Irishman believed that the distinction between the general return of all humans and the special return of the elect was to remain fluid until the Final Judgment.”

¹²¹ Periphyseon v, 937A-B, 108.

¹²² Periphyseon v, 971A, 155. To some extent this definitive de-materialization of Hell may have been a later development for Eriugena, but even so his earlier work points in that direction; see Gustavo A. Piemonte, “Some Distinctive Theses of Eriugena’s Eschatology in his Exegesis of the Gospel according to St. Matthew,” in History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and His Time, ed. James McEvoy and Michael Dunne, 227–42 (Leuven: University Press, 2002), 235.
_ignis_ is swallowed up in the dissolution of all corporeality. There is, for Eriugena, a bodily resurrection, but this is not the completion of a man’s return to God, being only an intermediate stage in a journey comprised of five moments altogether:

Prima igitur humanae naturae reuersio est quando corpus soluitur et in quattuor elementa sensibilis mundi, ex quibus compositum est, reuocatur. Secunda in resurrectione implectitur, quando unusquisque summ proprium corpus ex communione quattuor elementorum recipiet. Tertia, quando corpus in spiritum mutabitur. Quarta, quando spiritus et, ut apertius dicam, tota hominis natura in primordiales causas reuertur, quae sunt semper et incommutabiliter in deo. Quinta, quando ipsa natura cum suis causis mouebitur in deum, sicut aer mouetur in lucem. Erit enim deus omnia in omnibus, quando nihil erit nisi solus deus.123

And if it might be thought that at least the second stage taken alone would correspond to the Resurrection as literally understood by such as Irenaeus and Augustine—involving all the difficulties of material flux, dispersion, and participation in multiple bodies which exercised the latter in _De civitate Dei_, and allowing at least for the duration of that stage a localized Hell with corporeal torment—quite to the contrary, Eriugena is embarrassed by the materialist interpretations of the afterlife by certain Fathers,124 and the most he can do is to excuse them on pedagogical grounds (just as much more recent commentators have been embarrassed at dialogues produced by a man otherwise so spiritual as Gregory):

Sed dum talia in libris sanctorum patrum lego, stupefactus haesito, maximoque horrore concussus titubo. Et dum infra me cogito cur

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124 The following quotation is from the words of the *alumnus*, the constant interlocutor with the more authoritative *nutritor* of the *Periphyseon*; perhaps this may mollify the critique somewhat, but it is without doubt consonant with Eriugena’s own opinion on the question as indicated throughout the work.
spiritualissimi uiri, ultra omnes opiniones localium temporaliumque
cognitionum ascendentes totumque sensibilem mundum uiutute con-
templationis superantes, huiusmodi suis scriptis commendauenter post-
eritatique tradiderunt, facilius ducor existimare non aliam ob causam
ad haec excogitanda et scribenda attractos fuisse, nisi ut saltem uel
sic terrenis carnalibusque cogitationibus deditos simplicisque fidei rudi-
mentis nutritos ad spiritualia cogitanda subleuarent. 125

If Augustine did not perform the proper exegesis of Scripture—which requires
understanding how material images “ad spiritualia cogitanda subleuarent”—then
his own words will have to be spiritualized in the same way; the interpretative
ascent is simply removed by one degree.

Eriugena’s departure from the Gregorian interpretation of poena ignis would
find little company in later medieval thought, and his entire spiritualization of the
eschaton through the eventual identification of all things with God even less; 126 yet
there remained some question of the nature of the interim period itself—whether
in fact souls without bodies go at once to eternal retribution, as opposed to a time
of waiting which would withhold the true moment of judgment and subsequent
participation in Heaven or Hell for all individuals until the General Judgment—
which was active to a certain extent at least into the 14th century, when Pope
John XXII taught that blessed souls do not enjoy the Beatific Vision immediately
after death, only to have his teaching reversed soon afterwards by Benedict XII.

Naturally, changing circumstances outside of theological debates may also have
affected the terms of the question. Since Gregory’s time—and certainly owing
more than a little to his influence—the popular tradition of literary accounts of the

126 Although one might also say that Eriugena’s approach, like Origen’s, does indeed take certain
eschatological passages literally—preeminently the phrase “God will be all in all”—and interpret
most others metaphorically, within a complex metaphysical account, in order to accommodate
that singular moment of literalism.
otherworld had given greater emphasis to the state of the separated soul, as part of a growing general fascination with the purgatorial state or realm. However much was at stake for the theologians trying to account for the logical possibility of the poena ignis, such apparent contradiction as the notion involved at first glance was no obstacle whatsoever to the practical tenacity and expansion of popular ideas of torment in the afterlife.127 Little of such popular accounts made its way into the Scholastic theological discussions, at least explicitly; but it was nevertheless a pressing matter in that latter context as well. Alongside this literary development came the crystallization of the theological doctrine of Purgatory, which would be formally decreed in 1274, but had clearly reached a mature form well before this point. It was thus beyond doubt that there was a purgation of sin which would be effected entirely without the body of earth; based on Patristic authority, there was likewise no doubt that this purgation involved a corporeal fire.

These are some indications of how the Scholastics received the problem; what they brought to it was of course the natural philosophy of Aristotle. In such a context they would have to emphasize further that this arrangement must be miraculous and struggle to see how it is not logically impossible; for those considering the soul to be the form of the body, the analogy between the soul's union to the fire and that to its natural body would be the more difficult. Finally, through

127As LeGoff suggests in The Birth of Purgatory, 6, “the question whether the [separated] soul is corporeal or incorporeal seems not to have posed a problem for the development of Purgatory or its forerunners”—the soul was silently “endowed with materiality sui generis.” See also, in the context of the Scholastic considerations of the problem, Flasch, “Die Seele im Feuer,” 108. “Mir geht es aber nicht darum, auf diesem Widerspruch zu insistieren. Im Rückblick gesehen, zeigt es sich vielfach, daß Einzelpersonen wie ganze Kulturen elastischer mit Widersprüchen umgehen, als es einer bloß logischen Beurteilung einleuchten kann. Sie entwickeln ein eigentümliches Desinteresse an logischer Kohärenz, vor allem, wenn es um ihren Fortbestand geht.” But the question should not be prejudged: it may be true that many an idea philosophically untenable has had a long shelf-life in common conversation, yet there may also be in popular sentiment some intuition of the availability of a rigorous resolution not yet evident.
the very dispute of the role of Aristotle in the university, they were more explicit than the Fathers in distinguishing to what extent certain theological dogmas dependent on Scripture could be supported by reason alone.

1.2.1 Peter Lombard

The Lombard himself is, as one might expect, notable for this question not from his own unique analysis but in his selection and arrangement of sources, framing the question for later Masters. Varying slightly from the usual progress of the Patristic treatments, he places first the case of the suffering of demons—perhaps recognizing the admission, implicit in Augustine and Gregory, that this case has actually more explicit Scriptural support than that of separated human souls:

Quaeri etiam solet an daemones corporali igne ardeant. Ad quod Augustinus respondens ait: ‘Cur non dicamus, quamvis miris, veris tamen modis, etiam spiritus incorporeos posse poena corporalis ignis affligi, si spiritus hominum, etiam ipsi incorporei, et nunc potuerunt includi corporalibus membris, et tunc poterunt corporum suorum vinculis insolubiliter alligari?’ ‘Gehenna illa, quae stagnum ignis et sulphuris dicta est, corporeus ignis erit, et cruciabit damnatorum corpora, hominum vel daemonum, sed solida hominum, aëria daemonum. Unus enim utrisque ignis erit, ut Veritas ait.’

Augustine’s hesitation over the corporeality of Hell in De Genesi ad litteram is glossed over, favoring the judgment of De civitate Dei, and included is his claim—in context, he only posits it as a possible explanation—that demons may have aerial bodies; the latter would find little support among the Scholastics. Again, the corporeality of the hell-fire is simply presumed, and while prospective Masters

will bring up this matter in the course of dividing the Lombard’s text into questions and articles, the answer has already been given.

Following this, the Lombard turns to the case of separated soul in the interim:

Cum autem constet animas igne materiali in corporibus cruciandas, quaeri solet an interim, ante resumptionem corporum, animae defunctorum reproborum materiali igne crementur.

De hoc Iulianus, Toletanae Ecclesiae episcopus, Gregorii dicta secutus ita scripsit: ‘Si viventis hominis incorporeus spiritus tenetur in corporre, cur non post mortem etiam corporeo igne teneatur? Teneri autem per ignem spiritum dicimus, ut in tormento ignis sit videndo atque sentiendo...’ Praecipue cum humanum animam corporis similitudinem habere doceat Augustinus, ita inquiens: ‘Profiteri animam habere posse similitudinem corporis et corporalium omnino membrorum, quisquis renuit, potest negare animam esse quae in somnis videt vel ambulare se vel sedere...Hoc sine quadam similitudine corporis non fit. Proinde, si hanc similitudinem etiam apud inferos gerit non corporalem, se corpori similem, ita etiam in locis videtur esse non corporalibus, sed corporalium similibus, sive in requie, sive in doloribus.’

With the introduction of Gregory’s teaching here, the analogy with man’s union of soul and body is reemphasized, and the argument introduced that the soul may suffer from the fire by seeing it. Finally, the ambiguity of Augustine’s position is now more apparent; while just above he was taken to defend the corporeality of the fire of Matthew 25, his argument here implies that the mere similitude of fire would be more appropriate.

There is also a notable absence from the Lombard’s selections, which is at least indicative of (if not partly responsible for) the limits which are set on the Scholastic discussion. Both Augustine and Gregory took contemporary accounts of visions of the afterlife quite seriously and in support of a literal understanding.

129 Sententiae, iv.44.7, 2.20-21. The Lombard also registers the opinion of Cassian that the souls have not merely similitudes of sensible things, but the senses themselves; this proposition will be generally rejected.
of the *poena ignis*: such torments have truly been seen, and therefore they cannot be mere metaphors; moreover, it is through such physical reality that God has made use of these torments for the edification of the living. Certainly, the basic logical and physical problem of the possibility of suffering through corporeal fire can be distinguished from the question of manifestation; but where these Fathers had seen a natural connection between the two which might lend probability or fittingness to the former and more difficult question, the Scholastics isolated it almost entirely.

1.2.2 St. Albert the Great

In his commentary on the *Sentences* Albert the Great takes up the question of corporeal fire with reluctance, insofar as he expresses hesitation at numerous points concerning whether this matter is susceptible of any useful investigations, philosophical or theological. He remarks several times—at the beginning of various articles—that little can be said on such matters, beyond giving assent to the authorities in the *Littera*. While such assent may be expected, it is unusual that it should be accompanied by such explicit misgivings. Concerning the incorruptibility of the bodies of the damned, Albert would prefer not to dispute at all, but feels he must say something:

> Conservans autem damnatorum corpora, est justitia Dei in poenis; et haec credenda sunt potius, quam discutienda. Ne tamen omnino nihil videamur dicere, scendendum quod... ¹³⁰

As to whether these bodies suffer from fire through any natural action, he immediately claims that only a special revelation could reveal the answer, and yet

defends his own reasoning:

Sine praejudicio dicendum, quod veritatem hujus quaestiones nemenem puto scire, nisi cui Deus revelaverit, sicut in sequenti capituluo dicitur ex verbis Augustini. Sine praejudicio tam en dico, quod actione animae tantum patiantur...\footnote{\textit{In Sent.}, iv.44.36 resp., 591.}

That incorporeal demons may suffer from corporeal fire is not only a matter of faith, but is scarcely intelligible: "Absque dubitate corporeus ignis cruciat daemones: quod fide teineo: quamvis non plenarie sit intelligibile..."\footnote{\textit{In Sent.}, iv.44.37 resp., 593.} In fact, reason has nothing whatsoever to say about the corporeality of the hell-fire:

Dicendum, quod in ista quaestione ultra dicta Sanctorum nihil est dicendum: quia ratio nihil omnino facit hic, sed in toto standum est dictis illorum qui revelationem a Spiritu sancto acceperunt.\footnote{\textit{In Sent.}, iv.44.38 resp., 594.}

These references to the \textit{verba Sanctorum} and special revelation by the Spirit help to indicate why Albert resists examination of the question more than many another article of faith (or conclusion derived therefrom) which is ultimately inaccessible to reason and depends upon revelation: while such questions form an enormous part of the theologian’s work, the question of bodily hell-fire is simply left undetermined by Scripture—appeal to passages such as Matthew 25 would be begging the question, since what is at stake is whether that use of \textit{ignis} is metaphorical. Only the testimony of the Fathers—their decision to take that fire literally—determines the question. Without that decision, Albert implies, human reasoning (whether philosophical or theological, based on experiential or Scriptural data) could come to no determination whatsoever on the matter, which in turn implies that he recognizes no persuasive arguments for either the fittingness

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{131} In Sent., iv.44.36 resp., 591.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{132} In Sent., iv.44.37 resp., 593.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{133} In Sent., iv.44.38 resp., 594.}
of bodily fire or its better accord with Scripture.\textsuperscript{134}

One might wonder, if it is unprofitable to examine the question, why Albert nevertheless continues each time to address the topic of the article and elaborate on the plausibility of one or another interpretation. Objections notwithstanding, he proceeds to follow the usual course for a Scholastic theologian arguing for an article of faith though the via negativa: he adduces reasonable arguments to demonstrate how the verdict of Scripture and of the verba Sanctorum is not impossible or contrary to reason, even though he feels that “reason has nothing at all to do here.” When he takes up the matter again in later works, his reluctance towards the question seems tempered, and he invokes a broader range of explanations for the possibility of torment which is effected somehow through bodily fire. On the whole, however, he is unwilling to take up the more ambitious elements in the accounts of Augustine and Gregory, limiting himself to asserting the non-impossibility of the accepted scheme, with little remark on its fittingness.

Throughout all these articles,\textsuperscript{135} Albert’s primary negative claim is that however the fire affects the damned or purging, it is not \textit{qua} natural agent: in no way

\textsuperscript{134}Flasch reads Albert’s reluctance as a stronger dismissal of the relevance of physical and philosophical knowledge for the question, nearly to the point of attributing to him fideism or a definite teaching of double truth: “Man kann von Feuer in zweifacher Weise reden, entweder als Physiker, dann betrachtet man es als Naturelement, oder als Theologe, dann betrachtet man es als Instrument göttlicher Vergeltung an Sündern. Albert will die beiden Diskursarten auseinanderhalten: was zu glauben ist, will er im Glauben festhalten, im übrigen treibt er Physik... Daß Philosophen zum körperlichen Höllenfeuer nichts einfällt, nichts einfallen darf und nichts einzufallen braucht, ‘quasi sint duae contrariae veritates,’ dies wird zwanzig Jahre später der Bischof von Paris den Artisten vorwerfen. Zumindest was unseren Einzelfall, die Seele im Feuer, angeht, war es Albert, der diese Möglichkeit historisch begründet hat” (“Die Seele im Feuer,” 114–115). This seems an exaggeration; Albert does not so far consider how the physical nature of fire makes it apt to its instrumental use by divine power as does Thomas, but he does pursue the question within his initial qualifications, and does so in terms of denying the impossibility of a poena ignis corporealis according to Aristotelian physics—the objections to it fail. This effort would be superfluous if the physical consideration of fire were simply irrelevant to belief in the poena ignis.

\textsuperscript{135}In addition to the Sentences commentary, the question is treated in De resurrectione, and the short reportationes of disputed questions, De xv problematibus and Problema determinata.
can it burn there as we know it to burn here. For incorporeal sufferers, this may seem obvious—it was assumed without argument by Augustine and Gregory—but now the particular reasons why an Aristotelian physics cannot admit that the corporeal thus affects the incorporeal are brought to the fore: every agent must be in some way stronger than the recipient of its action, but every soul is more powerful than any body;\textsuperscript{136} the soul stands to the body as mover to thing moved, and no mover can in such a way be moved by what it moves;\textsuperscript{137} every action is through contact, and there can be no contact, or common matter, between body and spirit;\textsuperscript{138} and every action must be between contraries in some respect, but the soul as immaterial has no contrary.\textsuperscript{139} While all of the above are objections seeking to establish the contrary of what Albert eventually asserts, in each case he admits the argument as such: if, indeed, it is supposed that the fire acts as a natural agent, all of these points have force against the possibility of that action affecting an incorporeal substance.

If the fire cannot act in this case \textit{qua} natural agent, it must affect a spirit as the instrument of divine justice. Though the fire cannot move the soul by nature, nothing prevents the First Mover from miraculously conferring upon it the power to act upon the soul.\textsuperscript{140} In this case, of course, the power and nobility of the agent—now God, rather than the fire—is infinitely greater than those of

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\textsuperscript{136} & In Sent., iv.44.35.obj. 1, 589–90; De resurrectione, vol. 26 of Opera omnia, ed. Wilhelm Kübel (Münster i. W.: Aschendorff, 1958), II.10.2.obj. 4, 290. \\
\textsuperscript{137} & In Sent., iv.44.35.obj. 2, 590. \\
\textsuperscript{138} & In Sent., iv.44.37.obj. 1–3, 592; De resurrectione, II.10.2.obj. 3, 290. \\
\textsuperscript{139} & In Sent., iv.44.37.obj. 5, 593. \\
\textsuperscript{140} & De xv problematibus, vol. 17/1 of Opera omnia, ed. Bernard Geyer (Münster i. W.: Aschendorff, 1975), 8, 41: “Quid ergo prohibet igneum corporeum a primo motore vim accipere, inquantum est instrumentum eius, quod agat in animam animali et non corporale actione vel passione?”
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any created spirit, and so these objections are resolved.

One must still demonstrate, however, that this use of fire as an instrument does not involve a simple contradiction in terms. Thus Albert must establish that the fire used as the instrument of divine justice cannot: have the soul as the material which it burns; cause any calefaction in the soul at all; or be the contrary of the soul or any part of the soul. Any of these would, as the objections pointed out, require a material substrate—a corporeality in the separated soul. But he uses the objections to point the way to solutions which work by analogy to the corporeal: the fire—acting incorporeally by the power of God—has the sins of the soul, not the soul itself, as its fuel; rather than introducing calor in the soul it causes it to be adusta, to burn with regret, as one might say; and its contrary is simply whatever is contrary to divine justice—again, the sins of the soul.\textsuperscript{141}

But at this point, it is not clear how corporeal fire is truly involved in the punishment of the soul at all. It seems that in fact it is only the justice of God which affects the soul, with a spiritual tristitia, having as its material cause the sins of the soul; in such phrasing this account grows closer to that of Origen, whereby the fire of punishment is the soul’s own recognition of its sins, made possible by the power of God—that is, the fire is nearly if not completely elided with the poena damnii. Certainly, this is not Albert’s explicit claim; he means to recognize a distinct penalty indicated by the Scriptural fire. Yet his account puts this penalty in terms scarcely distinguishable from the intellectual and primary punishment. To call material fire an instrument in such an arrangement is opaque: as the entire torment is explicable without it, must it not simply stand by?

\textsuperscript{141} In Sent., iv.44.37.\textsuperscript{ad 5–6, 593: "est contrarietas hic ad ignem secundum quod est instrumentum justitiae Dei: quia sic sicum contrarium est justitiae divinae contrarium"; "anima] non sit calida, sed potius adusta per ignem, prout est instrumentum justitiae vindicantis in poenis: quia cum caliditas forma sit corporalis, non potest intelligi."}
In order to make corporeal fire more truly an instrument—and to follow the example set explicitly by Augustine and Gregory—Albert must introduce the middle ground of vision. It is not merely that by divine fiat the soul should suffer in some unspecified way from the fire, but in particular that the fire should be seen by the soul, and, according to Gregory’s dictum, “hoc est spiritibus in igne ardere, quod est ignem videre.”

But in what does this vision consist? Why does sight present less of a problem than the sense of touch? As Albert asserts, when separated from the body, any power of the soul which was the act of any part of the body cannot remain either in act or in being. These powers are not obliterated, it is true, insofar as they have their root in a single substance which has an immaterial and eternal operation: thus they are preserved in radice by virtue of being the lower powers of an ultimately rational soul. Nonetheless there can be no question of their operating in the bodiless interim, no possibility of sensation as such, since sensation was in the sense-organ: sight is in the eye.

That there can be no corporeal vision without a physical eye was clear to Augustine as well, and so he took spiritual vision, the level of phantasms between the eye and the intellect, as the space into which the interim state could be fit, the closest thing in human activity to a bridge between the corporeal and the incorporeal: images of objects as they exist in the mind, neither truly corporeal—they take up no space—nor incorporeal—they are yet pictures of bodies, having particular qualities quite distinct from the intellectual vision which sees by means of no images and has no picture for, say, love.

142 In Sent., iv.44.43, sol., 600-1.
Albert is certainly aware of Augustine's middle level of vision, but does not avail himself of it to make sense of the present question, and with obvious reason. The Bishop of Hippo's theory of sensation is "just a little bit contrary to the words of Aristotle." Aristotelian physics and psychology simply will not allow for a so-called spiritual vision—that is, phantasms presenting to the mind a similitude of a physical object—which could operate without the body and therefore without the senses themselves, whether by memory or through angelic mediation. The *phantasmikon*, the power of the soul which derives phantasms from the senses, is not called "sense" as properly as are the five senses themselves, but it is still a power of the sensitive soul; when an image is recalled from memory—the similitude of a seen object—this image is still seen in the senses themselves. As in the case of dreams—as well as prophetic visions which consist of images—recollection from memory is either the initial sensation lingering in the common sense (*sensus communis*) of the initial sensation, or if it is truly reintroduced, still it is an operation of the sensitive soul, which then acts in an order reversed from that of typical sensation: the *phantasmikon*, rather than deriving a phantasm from the senses, draws it from memory. A strong experiential confirmation that memory belongs to the sensitive soul is the evidence that animals have memory: thus this activity cannot require a power beyond that of the souls of animals. In short,

143 In *Sent.*, iv.44.35.ad cont. 1–3, 590–91: "Tamen secundum, quod licet ista solutio sit secundum Augustinum, est tamen aliquantulum contra dicta Aristotelis: quia ipse non vult, quod apprehendere sit agere, sed potius pati: et secundum eum addendum est, quod motus qui fit per corpus, materialiter se habet ad animam, et non ut agens." In this case Albert sidesteps the conflict by holding that the Augustinian solution to the article is valid on the whole even from the Aristotelian perspective. Yet it is clear that the Augustinian distinction of three quite separate levels of vision, which can be as it were in operation independently (especially in the case of spiritual vision perceiving phantasms or similitudes without the activity or even the presence of the sense themselves), is unacceptable for Albert as an Aristotelian on sensation.

144 See *De memoria et reminiscencia*, vol. 9 of *Opera omnia*, ed. Auguste Borgnet (Münster i. W.: Aschendorff, 1890), i.3, 101–3.
according to the Aristotelian scheme, even memories and dreams are the acts of physical organs, and therefore, in the state of separation from the body, they can at best be mute, remaining only in radice.

All that then remains for the vision of a separated soul is the intellectual—the vision which is understanding—and so Albert must assert, in glossing Gregory’s dictum that to see the fire is to be tormented by it, “dicendum, quod istud meo judicio intelligitur de visione intellectuali cum praesentia rei in qua videns teneatur.”

Thus even the similitude of fire plays no part in the soul’s experience; to say that it sees the fire is to say that it knows, as a fact, that it is bound to the place of a material fire, which it can in no way sense. But how can the knowledge of fire be a torment, since the intellect takes no pain from extremes, but rather delights in more knowledge? One must distinguish the speculative and practical intellects: the former, indeed, can take no pain from knowledge, but the latter can, insofar as it understands something as an obstacle to a desired course of action: such is the fire which, as instrument, binds the soul. Yet how can an incorporeal substance be bound to any place at all? Albert is content, in one of the briefest articles of his commentary (about 50 words), to say without further explanation that a spirit can be held in a place diffinitive; he refers to the authority of John Damascene in asserting that “non corporaliter in loco contineri potest spiritus, sed potius diffinitive.”

In another work, he elaborates somewhat further:

Alio modo definitivum continetur aliquid in loco, scilicet quando aliquid est, ubi est operatio eius vel passio, quae terminatur ad corpus, et sic spiritualis substantia est in loco, in quo operatur supra corporeum vel

\[145\text{ In Sent., iv.44.40.sol., 598; cf. also De resurrectione, ii.10.5.sol.: “hoc est poenam trahere ab ignibus quod est ignem videre. Et concedendum est, quod intelligit de visione per intellectum.”} \]

\[146\text{ In Sent., iv.44.42.sol., 599.} \]
patitur a corpore.\textsuperscript{147}

He does not elaborate on what, in the case of the suffering separated soul, that action or passion may be.

Of course, if Albert were to say that the passion is suffering from the fire, then he would have drawn his argument into a circle. The soul can suffer from corporeal fire by seeing it; “seeing it” means knowing itself to be bound to that place; “being bound to that place” means suffering from the fire. The controlling principle, beyond such explanations, remains divine power miraculously using fire as an instrument, and so failure to deepen one’s understanding of the process does not threaten the primary assertion that it does take place. Perhaps this potential circularity helps to explain Albert’s hesitation to pursue the problem at all: he knew that there was nowhere to go.

Moreover, for Albert the difficulty extends beyond the interim period. He asserts that even after the Resurrection, the hell-fire torments through the action of the soul, and not by nature—in other words, in a manner similar to how it affects the separated soul. Here again, he registers his constraint as a commentator to say something about what should simply be believed, not discussed.\textsuperscript{148} Nonetheless, he reasons that since the natural action of fire is to consume, an eternal fire must either consume its fuel—and the resurrected bodies shall ever endure—or else it must torment not by contact but through the “intentio animae,” the affection of the soul which is the proximate cause of pain, miraculously effected without the usual, original cause of sensation. True, the body has a role: as has been noted, even imaginative sensation takes place in the senses, and so the presence

\textsuperscript{147} De resurrectione, iii.5. ad 1, 313.

\textsuperscript{148} See n. 130 supra.
of the body would allow at least for the introduction of images without physical contact, similar to the case of reminiscence. But yet again, the role of the corporeal fire itself in punishment is called into question, as an objection in the *Sentences* commentary notes: “cum actio animae aequaliter fiat presente re et absente, non oporteret ibi ignem esse ubi patiuntur, sed sufficeret ignis imaginatio;” moreover, by this understanding the damned “non in veritate paterentur, sed phantastice solum, quod est absonum, quia hoc generaret haeresin.”\(^{149}\)

Albert admits the force of the objections, and concludes that indeed the fire must be present, indeed touching, so as to change the organs of sense, and yet somehow still a spiritual agent, thus not consuming the substance. At this point he feels nearly reduced to positing an impossibility: “Et hoc qualiter sit, possimus imaginari per simile: sicut si ponamus per impossibile separari modo actionem animae in qualitatibus tactus ab actione naturae.”\(^{150}\)

This passage is found in the *Sentences* commentary; in other treatments of the question Albert retreats from this account and focuses on the intellectual vision of fire as the sole means of torment. His remaining explanation for the need for the physical presence of the fire is semantic—the fire is intellectually understood, but only the understanding of something proximate is called vision: “Similiter distinguendum est inter intelligere simpliciter et inter intelligere per modum visionis; intelligere per modum visionis rei praesentis tantum est.”\(^{151}\) More generally, outside of the *Sentences* commentary Albert abandons the argument for any *passio* endured from or by the fire other than through the *actio animae*, resulting from the use of the fire as an *instrumentum divinae justitiae* so as to give

\(^{149}\) *In Sent.*, iv.44.36.obj. 2–3, 591.

\(^{150}\) *In Sent.*, iv.44.36.sol., 591.

\(^{151}\) *De resurrectione*, ii.10.5 sol., 295.
it an incorporeal force. A term which comes to prominence in *De resurrectione* is *nocivus*; in a still somewhat circular description, the soul, even when possessed of a resurrected body, suffers from the fire solely by perceiving it as *nocivus*, even though it is of course not so by nature.²⁵²

In the end, Albert leaves unresolved the question of why it should make any difference to post a corporeal fire, even as he never wavers on the judgment that it is so, and is duty-bound to give what explanation he can. Even after the Resurrection, the fire has no role to play just as fire, and its proximity is only explained through the *ad hoc* semantics of intellectual vision. He is almost dismissive of certain of the Fathers’ suggestions: Augustine’s supposition of aerial bodies for demons, and both his and Gregory’s speculation that the separated soul might have a likeness of a body, are quickly rejected—with the observation that they could not really have meant such things seriously.²⁵³ Albert also notably ignores—though it could not have been more prominent in the *sententiae*—the analogy which both Fathers made between the union of body and soul and the

²⁵² *De resurrectione*, i.i.5, 295: “Qui apprehendit rem in ratione conveniendi et nocivi, et iste potest conducere poenam, si apprehendat nocivum ut imminens.”

²⁵³ See *In Sent.*, iv.44.37 ad 6, 593; and iv.44.41 sol., 599: “Augustinus in veritate istud non asserit: quia dubie dictum est, et magis appearat absurdum et falsum quam verum...” Per intentionem autem in potentia quae *imaginaria* vocatur, anima sensibilis habet figuram corporis quando imaginantur corpora, sicut dicit in Littera: et ita intelligitur Littera: figurae enim omnium quantorum in formali sive imaginaria describuntur.” While there is support in the text of Augustine for claiming that the *similitudines corporum* are phantasms in the mind, not anything outwardly visible, Albert’s explanation cannot in fact explain the *Littera*; as he notes, *imaginaria* or *similitudines* or *figurae* of bodies are had in the *anima sensibilis*, and when the soul is separated from the body its sensitive powers are without being or operation; thus the separated soul can have no such images. Albert also avoids confronting Gregory’s supposition of a figure given to the soul which is unavoidably physical, as being given precisely so as to be visible to the living. He does have this to say, as the very conclusion of his treatment of the problem, concerning unnamed innovators who would attribute an image, senses, and memory of physical things to the separated soul: “Nota tamen, quod quidam volunt novam philosophiam inducere, quod anima exuta videt et audit et imagintur, et secum defert imaginationes corporis quas recipit in corpore: quod qualiter probant, non oportet dicere, quia potius derisio est, quam sententia veritatis” (*In Sent.*, iv.44.43 ad fin., 601).
binding of the soul by fire. If there is an exception, that is, if there is a respect in which Albert gives some indication of the fittingness of corporeal fire as a means of punishment, it is in the course of his observations that nothing prevents the nobler soul from being submitted to the less noble fire, when it has freely submitted itself through sin; this recalls the Augustinian argument that it is fitting for a soul which sinned by living according to the flesh to be submitted to a body in reparation.\footnote{De resurrectione, II.10.2.ad 4, 291: “sed propter defectum aliquem boni naturae inductum in corporo nihil prohibit incorporatum ordinari sub corporo. Et talis defectus est peccatum... anima enim ex libertate arbitrii submittit se culpae, cui submissa de necessitate iustitiae subditur poenae.”} Beyond this, he is disinclined to speculate, finding that reason largely fails here; it is irresponsible poets, or philosophers acting as poets, who have tried to sing “philosophical songs” about the afterlife, which are better called fables:

Dicunt... quod anima separata post mortem non patitur ab igne corporeo. Sed hoc nullo modo est philosophicum, cum tamen a Socrate in fine libri, qui Phaedon appellantur, infernalia distincta sunt loca poenarum et fluvii infernales et loca bonorum interlucentibus gemmis adornata. Quem modum etiam imitatus est Isaac in Libro de diffinitionibus et multi poetarum etiam talia loca cantaverunt cantu philosophico, qui fabula vocatur.\footnote{De xv problematibus, 8, 40.} 

1.2.3 St. Bonaventure

In comparison to Albert, Bonaventure’s treatment of the fire of the afterlife is at once more placid and less probing. While he indicates briefly the difficulty involved in investigating such a question, his reservations are not forceful, and are quite amenable to pursuing the topic rationally.\footnote{In Sent., IV.44.2.2.1.concl., 926: “quamvis ad hanc quaestionem videatur temerarium respondere, quia Scriptura eam non determinat, nec doctor praecipuus Augustinus explicat... tamen... ”} In the course of this pursuit,
Bonaventure finds an acceptable solution—or at least, a manner of speaking about
the situation—which is stable over the various (though few) works in which he
addresses the question; but if his doctrine seems thus surer and more consistent
than Albert’s, this is at least in part because he does not investigate as thoroughly
the difficulties which an Aristotelian theory of sensation and memory brings to
the question of the suffering of separated souls.

On the other hand, Bonaventure is by no means merely a parrot for the aucto-
ritates introduced by the Lombard. He is notably frank in assessing Augustine’s
inconsistency and ambiguity on the corporeality of the hell-fire (especially in the
interim state), and recognizes that the traditional doctrine thus rests mainly upon
the authority of Gregory the Great. 157 Moreover, he goes beyond an affirmation
of Gregory’s authority to frequent emphasis of both the reasonableness and ap-
propriateness of an incorporeal soul receiving torment from corporeal fire.

His first task is to establish the possibility of such torment, and this explanation
is most fully developed in his Sentences commentary. The fundamenta for his
argument are familiar; Matthew 25 is of first importance. This passage is used to
refute the opinion—attributed to Algazel—that the soul can suffer only through
privation, i.e., by beatitudinis carentia; Bonaventure takes it as a mark of Christian
faith to attest to an additional pain per afflictivi praesentiam, for which no other
support is needed beyond the text of Matthew. 158 Still, the intellect desires more:
it wants reasons to be persuaded of what is accepted according to Scripture. 159

157 See n. supra.
158 In Sent., iv.44.2.3 concl., 933: “Et ideo dicit fides christianana, quod spiritus separati cru-
ciantur non tantum per summi Boni absentiam, sed etiam per afflictivi praesentiam. Ad quod
credendum sufficit auctoritas Veritatis, Matthei vigesimo quinto: Ita male dicti in ignem aetern-
um etc.”
159 In Sent., iv.44.2.3 concl., 933: “Sed intelligentia magis requirit, quomodo istud posse

satis possimus pro certo habere per doctores posteriores.”
Now in this context “ratione persuaderi” can hardly mean the conviction of certain demonstrative arguments; still, it has for Bonaventure a stronger meaning than the answering of objections. For he observes that other scholars seek to solve the problem this way, simply by claiming that all objections refer to the natural state and action of fire, while the hell-fire has an entirely different power, divinely given and thus capable of harming a spirit without further explanation—“per quam est divinae iustitiae instrumentum,” as Albert so often said. Bonaventure responds: “Sed ista positio adhuc non satisfacit intellectui. Non enim quaerimus hic, quid divina iustitia possit, sed qualiter hoc quod facit, naturae consonum sit.” Moreover, the response through instrumentum gives no indication of why fire should be a more appropriate instrument than any other body. Bonaventure does, of course, admit that the intervention of divine power must have a part in the explanation of what is clearly supra naturam, but he strives to balance this with reasons secundum ordinem naturae, showing how divina justitia uses the natural powers of the soul and fire in a consonant way for this supernatural punishment.

Such was Augustine’s explanation in De Genesi ad litteram XII, regarding the soul’s “spiritual vision” of fire; but this Bonaventure firmly rejects—for reasons apparently different than Albert’s. First, an explanation making analogy to dreams and depending upon images in the second level of vision profits nothing for an understanding of the poena of the fallen angels, who in their perception lack any imagines corporum to begin with. Second, because Augustine’s imagines are not in fact derived from the senses, they are false—even if a fire should indeed be

\[160\text{In Sent., IV.44.2.3 concl., 933.}\]
\[161\text{In Sent., IV.44.2.3 concl., 933: Amplius, si ignis agit per virtutem sibi datam, quare magis deputatur huic actioni quam terra?}\]
present, since in this case its presence would be irrelevant to the *imaginæ*—and Bonaventure simply asserts that this is unacceptable, presumably in part because deception is unfitting for the final operation of justice: “credimus *etiam*, quod poena illa infernalis sit veram *ignis actionem*, non per phantasticum imaginatum.”

This “true action” of the fire is to affect the cognition of the soul (“*ignis immutet cognitionem animæ*”), insofar as the soul “percipiat actionem et calorem *ignis*”; while in the body this comes through the *immutatio sensus*, because the soul moves itself when it experiences *dolor* (as Augustine said), this mutation can take place without the senses, and yet not be false or beyond the natural powers of either soul or fire.

What is indeed beyond those powers is that this perception should cause torment; and thus *per ordinem divinae justitiae*, two things are accomplished: the soul is bound to the fire as in a prison, and furthermore—in an addition peculiar to Bonaventure—the fire must be made repugnant and horrific to the soul, as it would not be by nature. Neither of these, Bonaventure is careful to point out, would run *contra ordinem naturae*, since it is evident from this life that a soul may fear what it need not, and that it may be bound to a body whether it will or no.

One might object: does not the fire still cause suffering through deception—or rather, the divine power deceives in order to cause torment—if the soul should fear what it ought not to fear? This, however, is not intellectual deception, since the fire is truly present, and the vision by which the soul sees it is true perception.

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162 *In Sent.*, IV.44.2.3.2, 934.

163 *In Sent.*, IV.44.2.3.2, 934.

164 *In Sent.*, IV.44.2.3.2 concl., 934: “Et quamvis sit illud *divinae iustitiae*, hoc non est *contra ordinem naturae*, sive spiritum *trepidare* quod trepidandum non est, sive spiritum *alligari* corpori.”
But the soul does not see the fire by having phantasms or similitudines which generate the same effect as fire acting through the body; it perceives the fire’s presence and does not take punishment from this perception directly as such, but from the horror of knowing itself to be bound to the fire, and furthermore, from the fire having been made horrible to it by divine power—though what this may mean, as something distinct from the horror legationis, is unclear.\(^{165}\) This latter horror is, again, different from intellectual deception, even though the soul fears what is inferior to it, because it is a continuation of the willful subjugation to the inferior which constitutes sin—a kind of deception, no doubt, but a self-deception freely chosen.

In fact, Bonaventure frequently emphasizes the subjugation of the sinful soul to its inferior (any body), making it a crucial element for the question—not in order to establish the possibility of the poena ignis, but rather its fittingness. With regard to the purgative fire, this subjugation is said to be done “recta ordinatione,” because in sinning the soul willfully subjugates itself:

\[
\text{Quae rebus corporalibus se subiecerat libidinose, utpote per conversionem ad bonum commutabile, justificatur per materialia et corporalia Sacramenta: ergo pari ratione post hanc vitam purgari debet per afflictiva corporalia.}^{166}
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The purgation is effectively or formally spiritual—just as after the Resurrection, the poena sensus is in a way ancillary to the primary penalty.\(^{167}\) Yet it is

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\(^{165}\) At one place, though, Bonaventure seems to revert to the Augustinian terminology of a “spiritual similitude;” but this seems to indicate only cognition put in terms of vision, not a phantasm. \textit{In Sent., iv, 44.2.3. ad 1–3, 934:} “hic autem est passio animalis, qua quidem generatur similitudo spiritualis in passo.” Note also that he distinguishes between the cognition of speculation and that of experience, which seems to recall Albert’s distinction of the practical intellect as the suffering subject: “cognitio non speculationis tantum, sed potius experimentiae” (934).

\(^{166}\) \textit{In Sent., iv, 21.1.2.2 in cont. 2, 553–54.}

\(^{167}\) \textit{In Sent., iv, 21.1.2.2 ad 2, 555: “effective sive formaliter est per quid spirituale, scilicet per}
just for the soul to be subjugated as well: "sed tamen, quia anima peccavit cum carne et peccando carnem sibi praeposuit, et ita corpus praeposuit spiritui; divina iustitia decrevit, etiam in purgatione rei corporali ipsam subiicere."\(^{168}\)

There are two distinct principles here: one, that the agent of sin was body as well as soul, and this tends more to a consideration of the necessity for just retribution; the other, that the action of sin was a subjugation, and here the punishment through a parallel subjugation seems not to be necessary, yet justly ordered. It would not be fitting for the soul actually to be made the material of the fire—this indeed would be *contra naturam*—nor will Bonaventure admit that sin itself is the material of the fire, as sin is simply a disposition of the soul. But it is just and fitting for God to bind the soul to the fire, that it may take horror from this imprisonment, the soul acting on itself and suffering from itself.\(^{169}\)

One may again note the dependence on Augustine's explanation of suffering, which divides the *passio* into two stages, the first of some body acting upon the human body, and the second of the soul witnessing—as if at a distance—that action and in effect tormenting itself. Furthermore, the above passages indicate an ambiguity in Bonaventure's position—at times he emphasizes the need for a *timor* given to the soul that it should abhor the fire; here, it seems that the very binding of the soul to the fire is sufficient to cause that horror.

Discussing the same topic in the *Brevisloquium*, Bonaventure gives almost no consideration to explaining the possibility of the *poena ignis* (and, it should be

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\(^{168}\) *In Sent.*, iv.21.1.2.2.ad 2, 555.

\(^{169}\) *In Sent.*, iv.44.2.3.2.ad 4–5, 935: "per causationem ignis anima habet necessarium occasionem agendi in se et patiendi a se... Salva natura animae, Deus ipsam igni *alliget* et alligando incarcerat, incarcerando horrorem sui carceris immittat, ac per hoc ipsa anima ad praesentiam carceris vero dolore et molestia se aflagiat."
noted, this may also be more appropriate to what is explicitly a brief and summary exposition of Christian doctrine, not an exhaustion of all possible objections) but focuses fixedly on the justice of the subjugation of a spirit which debased its own nobility to an inferior substance. Here, he separates sharply the pains of Purgatory from those of Hell, treating only the former as antecedents of the final judgment, and the latter as consequentes; in both cases, however, it is clear that the fire is afflictive of spirits and thus may operate in the interim period. For the souls in Purgatory, the subjugation is justly done and befits divine order:

Spiritus, qui, contempto bono aeterno et summo, se subiecit infimo, iuste debet inferioribus subiici, ut ab eis suscipiat poenam... hinc est, quod ordo divinae iustitiae exigit, ut spiritus ab igne materiali habeat puniri; ut, sicut secundum ordinem naturae anima unitur corpore, ut influat vitam, sic uniatur igni materiali secundum ordinem iustitiae ut punibile punienti, a quo suscipiat poenam.\textsuperscript{170}

One may note here Bonaventure’s recourse to the Gregorian analogy between giving life to the earthly body and receiving death from the bodily hell-fire, despite its possible complications.

Regarding the Last Judgment and its consequences, Bonaventure first indicates the necessity of the return of the body for the sake of justice, since man earned his eternal reward in the body:

Quoniam ergo iustitia necessario requirit, ut homo, qui meruit vel demeruit non in anima solum nec in corpore solum, sed in anima simul et corpore, puniatur vel praemietur in utroque.\textsuperscript{171}

While not referring explicitly to the interim period, this recalls the observation regarding Purgatory in his Sentences commentary which gave (albeit brief) mention

\textsuperscript{170} Breviloquium, vol. 5 of Opera omnia (Quaracchi: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1891), 7, 2, 282.

\textsuperscript{171} Breviloquium, 7, 5, 286.
to the justice of using corporeal penalties for man who sins in the body, but did not pursue this point—presumably because this creates a difficulty for the Purgatorial interim period, wherein a man is supposedly made wholly fit for Heaven, yet without that body which, here in the context of the Last Judgment, is indicated to be a necessary partner in punishment because it is a part of the meriting or demeriting individual.

Moreover, the action of the fire upon that resurrected body will undoubtedly be through the senses, even as it burns spirits in a different way:

Affligitur autem eodem igne corporali, qui concremabit et affliget spiritus et etiam corpora... Huiusmodi autem afflictioni ignis coniuncta erit afflictio secundum omnes sensus.\textsuperscript{172}

There is no doubt that—contrary to Albert, who was reluctant to posit a true \textit{poena sensus} even after the Resurrection—Bonaventure distinguishes this as a separate penalty, and indicates that the fire operates in the way of normal sensation, in addition to afflicting the soul through the means already indicated for the interim period: “Cum enim rei, quam \textit{horret} per timorem divinitus immisum et quam \textit{sentit} per vim naturalis sensus, sit inseparabiliter alligatus.”\textsuperscript{173}

Here the importance of the symmetry in subjugating the sinner to inferior things is such that Bonaventure describes it, not merely as fitting and just, but necessary: “Necesse est etiam, quod ibi exponatur affligendus \textit{infimae naturae}, ac per hoc non a substantia spirituali patiatur, sed a \textit{corporali et infima}.”\textsuperscript{174} At once, though, he returns to a phrasing used previously which indicates fittingness more than necessity:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{172} \textit{Breviloquium}, 7.6, 287.
\item \textsuperscript{173} \textit{Breviloquium}, 7.6, 288.
\item \textsuperscript{174} \textit{Breviloquium}, 7.6, 288.
\end{itemize}
Et quoniam spiritus, qui per naturam praeponitur corpori et in corpus habet influere et ipsum movere, dignitatem naturae per culpam pervertit et se subicit quodam modo vilitati et nihilati peccati; hinc est, quod secundum ordinem justitiae debet ordinari, ut tam peccator spiritus quam homo igni corporeo alligetur, non ut in illum influat vitam, sed ut divino decreto suscipiat poenam.\(^{175}\)

In the *Sentences* commentary Bonaventure says of the eternity of punishment that it concords with reason in two ways, that of necessity—by which divine justice requires the punishment of evildoers and could not do otherwise (lest it be less than perfect justice)—and that of congruity—according to which the beauty of the universe is increased by symmetry between the reward of the good and the punishment of the damned, but which does not provide the basis of demonstration. According to this reasoning, the placement of Hell in the depths of the earth would seem to belong to congruity rather than to necessity, yet here in the *Breviloquium* it is called necessary. It may reasonably be suggested here that Bonaventure is here using “necessa est” without distinguishing between strict necessity and congruity as he did in the *Sentences* commentary; furthermore, this may reflect a more general elision between fittingness and necessity in his thought.

Bonaventure’s treatment of the problem of the *poena ignis* has both its weakness and its strength in its avoidance of the problems which so troubled Albert in holding up the assertion of torment by corporeal fire in the interim period to the light of Aristotelian physics. He does not dissect as rigorously as did Albert the nature of the separated soul—the powers it does and does not have, and especially in what sense it may have something called “vision”—or how the resurrected body may burn eternally without being consumed. This is not, of course, because

\(^{175}\) *Breviloquium*, 7.6, 288. It should be noted that in the same section of the *Breviloquium* Bonaventure says “necesse est” also of the position of Hell, that it should be in the lowest depths (“in profundissimum infernum”) so as to be farthest from the state of glory (“maxime a statu gloriae longinquum”) (288).
Bonaventure was ignorant of the Aristotelian physical corpus or rejected it out of hand; nor does he accept uncritically all that Augustine has to say on the matter. But it is not his concern to subject the substantially Augustinian explanation to the critique of an anthropology which was at best ambiguous on the possibility of the soul existing in a separated state and knew nothing of its experience in the afterlife. In broadest terms, he reproduces the same solution as did Albert, and as did the Scholastics in general: the separated soul is tormented by corporeal fire through a divine power binding it to the fire; knowing the presence of the fire, and unable to remove itself thence, it suffers. Bonaventure’s addition of an abhorrence of the fire given divinely to the soul, so that it should suffer not simply from its binding but from a terror driving it whither it cannot go, is an innovation which does not really solve the possible circularity of Albert’s argument, nor establish any more firmly that the soul is truly suffering from or by the fire, rather than from divine power in the (seemingly irrelevant) presence of a corporeal flame.

The relative strength of his explanation lies in its regard for the fittingness of the punishment, which still would not answer any of the Aristotelian physicist’s objections, but grants a positive side to the question which was almost entirely lacking for Albert. Punishment by corporeal fire, from the very moment of death, is no longer simply a burden placed on the theologian by the weight of authority which strains a dialectic in justifying its possibility; it is so appropriate, so symmetrical to the nature of sin itself, and thus so manifestly in accordance with just retribution, that it is practically necessary by that fact, even if its possibility has not been satisfactorily accounted for. So long as the clearly impossible has been ruled out—i.e., that the soul itself should somehow be a subject of calefaction or should have ordinary sensation without being united to the body—it is not
necessary, or perhaps simply not fruitful, to delve further into the details of its awareness of the fire or of its binding localization, in comparison with the consideration of the perfect justice which is displayed by the fact that such subjugation does indeed take place.

1.2.4 St. Thomas Aquinas

The sheer quantity of the writings of Thomas Aquinas often provide the reader with many treatments of the same question in different contexts, and the matter of the interim poena ignis is no exception.\textsuperscript{176} In none of these cases does he show any reservation as to the possibility of investigating the question,\textsuperscript{177} indicating that he does not see himself as speaking merely probabiliter concerning the poena ignis. He is furthermore comparatively inclusive in his use of authorities, pointing out the inconsistencies in the texts of Augustine and Gregory but in the end finding somewhere within them affirmations of the right answer, taking what he sees to be the helpful elements in several insufficient explanations in order to arrive at his own conclusion.

Like Albert and Bonaventure, Thomas must limit the ways in which the separated soul might experience a poena ignis according to the demands of the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{176}It features as the explicit quaestio, article, or quaestincula in three systematic works, two disputed questions, and two quodlibetal questions. The question is naturally not to be found in the \textit{Summa theologiae} proper, as according to the overall arrangement it would have been treated near the end of the incomplete \textit{Tertia pars}; Thomas's treatment from the \textit{Sentences} commentary is reproduced in the \textit{Supplementum}. The time between the writing of the earliest and latest texts is about a decade, and throughout all of them Thomas's teaching on the question remains largely consistent, with a few changes in emphasis.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{177}In fact, he does not even give the sort of brief caveat which precedes his treatment of the location of Purgatory (to the effect that Scripture says nothing determinate on the question, and sufficient reasons cannot be found definitively to defend one side or the other; yet there is a probable answer which better conforms to the teachings of the saints). See \textit{Scriptum super libros Sententiarum}, 4 vols., ed. Pierre Mandonnet and Maris F. Moos (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929-1947), iv.21.1.1, 1049.}
Aristotelian account of sensation, to the extent of rejecting—or at least strongly qualifying—certain of the explanations offered by Augustine and Gregory. Thomas repeatedly emphasizes why the separated soul cannot have even the similitudes of corporeal vision, as if in a dream: phantasms recalled in a dream, no less than those taken from active corporeal vision, are in the organic body; hence even if the body is in one way dormant during dreams, it is required for them. It is a misconception to regard sensation as having two separable elements, one the reception of an image through the sense organs, and the other the consideration of those images in the intellect, independent of those organs. Corporeal similitudes are still in their way corporeal, and the proportionate object of the immaterial intellect is only the intelligible species abstracted from the image. Furthermore, as all intelligibles are perfections of the intellect, never its contrary, they cannot cause dolor, only delight.

Thus none of the sensitive powers can remain in the separated soul—at least, not in act, since such activity is precisely the act of a physical organ. How, then, could such powers be reconstituted when the resurrected body is united to the soul? Thomas’s solution is similar to Albert’s: since these powers are part of a single incorruptible soul, and not a separate, subtended soul, they are not (so to speak) eliminated without a trace at the separation of the body, since the same soul of which they were a part endures. But because they had the whole composite as their subject, they depended upon the soul as their originating principle, since the form is the principle of the properties of the composite.178 Thomas will not
permit any medium to be placed between body and soul which would allow powers of the composite to remain in a secondary way, any ‘seeds’ of their activity other than the soul itself (be they ‘spiritual’ or ‘similitudinous’, as the Augustine of De Genesi as litteram would have it, or ‘originales potentiae’, as attributed to some unnamed quidam, or the powers ‘intrinsecos’ attributed to Plato in the Sentences commentary).\textsuperscript{179} This has to do with the strictness of Thomas’s understanding of hylomorphism:\textsuperscript{180} to treat soul and body as two component entities which can be moved about as parts and separated or mediated by any sort of go-between is to abuse the very terms form and matter. If the soul is substantial form, then it is precisely as form that it is immediately the origin of the properties and powers belonging to the composite:

\begin{quote}
Anima enim per suam essentiam, non mediantibus aliquibus aliis potentissis, est origo illarum potentiarum quae sunt actus organorum; sicut et forma quaelibet ex hoc ipso quod per essentiam suam materiam informat, est origo proprietatum quae compositum naturaliter consequuntur.\textsuperscript{181}
\end{quote}

There can no more be some kind of sensitive power without the body than there can be a rolling of a ball without the ball.

Yet there is in the soul, of course, a power that is not of the composite—intellect—and thus the soul does not corrupt. As it perdures, then, it maintains whatever it had with respect to the powers of the composite: namely, the ability

\textsuperscript{179}These are to be distinguished from the soul as the originating principles of the powers; according to this reported view, the powers themselves, in their ‘original’ form, remain in the soul alone.

\textsuperscript{180}For a background of the varied Scholastic understandings of form and matter in the human composite, see: Richard C. Dales, The Problem of the Rational Soul in the Thirteenth Century (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995); Anton C. Pegis, St. Thomas and the Problem of the Soul in the Thirteenth Century (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1934).

\textsuperscript{181}In Sent., iv.44.3.3.1.sol., 1107.
of again originating the same kind of powers, should it be reunited to the body.\footnote{In Sent., IV.44.3.1 sol., 1107: "In anima enim separata manet efficacia influendi hujusmodi potentias, si corpori uniatur."}

Putting this in terms of the powers themselves, Thomas says that they remain in the soul, not in being or in act, but \textit{in radice, radicaliter}, or—as he puts it in the \textit{Summa theologicae—in virtute}, i.e. virtually, with apparently the same import.\footnote{Summa theologicae, vols. 4–12 of Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis Xiii P. M. edita (Roma: Commissio Leonina, 1888–1906), I.77.8.co., 249: "Unde, corrupto coniuncto, non manent hujusmodi potentiae actu; sed virtute tantum manent in anima, sicut in principio vel radice."}

Nor is it possible, as others have suggested, for some other body—aerial, for example, or any substance other than human flesh—to be joined to the soul so as to allow it to exercise the sensitive powers prior to the Resurrection. Simply because the soul does indeed have independent existence does not mean that it is indifferent to its proper matter just insofar as it can be the actualization of body—which includes all sensitive powers. The first actuality of an organized body potentially having life cannot be relocated to other kinds of bodies—certainly not bodies which are uniform and have no potential for life. Either the soul is the source of life and sensation for human flesh and bones, or for nothing at all.

Whence it remains that, with all possibility of corporeal images removed from the separated soul, the only awareness it can have of the fire is what Thomas calls apprehension, to distinguish it from sight (although once he has clarified that this is the only way in which a spirit may be said to ‘see,’ he is willing to apply the term \textit{videre} to this apprehension). Now intellectual sight cannot, as has been noted, cause suffering \textit{per se}, but is rather the perfection of the seer. However, \textit{passio} can be variously understood—primarily through the reception of a contrary, but by analogy also from a contrariety which is not received, as is especially the case for the will: man suffers when his willful desire is frustrated, quite in addition to any
suffering through the reception of contrary forms which might be the cause of that frustration and cause passio through the senses. In fact, man suffers more greatly from the contrary of his will than from any corporeal cause, as this is his highest appetitive power, and thus there is the greatest frustration from its contrary.

Thus, if the soul were to perceive the infernal fire as something contrary to its will, and therefore harmful, it would truly suffer—and thus some have suggested that the fire simply “apprehenditur ut nocivus,” as Thomas summarizes Gregory the Great’s argument in the Dialogues that “ignem eo ipso patitur anima quo videt.”\textsuperscript{184} But this argument on its own is insufficient, for if it is not shown how in fact the fire truly is nocivus animae, then the soul is simply deceived, and this is unacceptable for two reasons: first, it seems rather unlikely that the demons (who, it must be remembered, suffer from the same fire and according to the same ratio as the separated souls, as Matthew 25 is generally understood) could be fooled into thinking that fire is capable of harming them, especially Lucifer, the greatest created intellect; and second, this would not solve the problem, since it was asked how the soul suffers ab igne corporeo, and in the case of deception, there is no instrumentality of the fire and thus the preposition ab is rendered meaningless. Thus the question restat: can the fire truly harm the soul or not, secundum veritatem rei?\textsuperscript{185}

By its nature, of course, fire cannot affect an incorporeal being; so how can the veritas rei be nocivus? Some suggest—and here Thomas is likely referring to Albert—that it is enough to say that the fire is used ut instrumentum divinae justitiae, and thus it has the power of the agent in addition to its natural proper-

\textsuperscript{184}In Sent., iv.44.3.3.sol., 1109.

\textsuperscript{185}Quaestiones disputatae de anima, vol. 24/1 of Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis xiii P. M. edita (Roma: Commissio Leonina, 1996), 21.co., 179.
ties. For Albert this was essentially all that could be said on the question. Like Bonaventure, however, Thomas regards such an answer as insufficient, because to call something an instrument implies more than the attribution to it of any given power which the agent using it can impart. The instrument itself restricts its use by its own nature—that is, it can be moved into action of which it is by itself incapable, but that action must still befit its natural properties. A hammer, for instance, does not move on its own, but only in the hand of a moving agent; it does not by that fact take on the power to affect any given object in any given way of which the agent is capable, but only in the way of a relatively hard and blunt implement. Or, to take an example which Thomas employs and which is much closer to this instance of divine instrumentation: the Sacraments make use of physical objects to cause spiritual effects. Now, nothing prevents God from designating any object whatsoever as the proper material of a Sacrament. But as it is, he chose to employ only fitting instruments—that is, to make use of natural properties such that the material substance is truly an instrument and not merely an accompaniment—even while it is his action that ultimately effects the change: water, because by its natural properties it cleanses, is the fitting material for the Sacrament of Baptism whereby the stain of original sin is washed away. Whence, if fire is to be used as an instrumentum nocivum animae, it must have a natural action or property according to which its instrumental action on the soul is connatural, and such that the second action (or property) is effected through the exercise or power of the first:

Omne instrumentum in id circa quod instrumentaliter operatur, habet propriam actionem sibi connaturalem, et non solum actionem secundum quam agit in virtute principalis agentis; immo exercendo primam actionem oportet quod efficiat hanc secundam; sicut aqua lavando corpus in baptismo sanctificat animam, et sera secando lignum perducit
ad formam domus. Unde opertet dare igni aliquam actionem in animam quae sit ei connaturalis ad hoc quod sit instrumentum divinae justitiae peccata vindicantis.\textsuperscript{186}

Now a body cannot naturally affect or have any bearing on a spirit unless united to it in some way. The comparison made by Augustine et al. to the union of the human body with the soul is misleading, because the soul can hardly be united to fire as its form; it can, however, be united “sicut movens mobili, vel sicut locatum loco.”\textsuperscript{187}

Both Albert and Bonaventure made somewhat similar claims about the union of soul and fire; Thomas spells out the principle most clearly: spirits cannot be in a place circumscriptively, but they can occupy a place \textit{per contactum virtutis}, as when an angel moves a body so as to be visible to men, and may therefore be said to be in this or that place rather than in any other—that place is where its power is operative.\textsuperscript{188} This is also exclusive: an angel moving or otherwise having a connection of virtue with a body is thereby located definitively there and nowhere else.\textsuperscript{189} Thus a substance which is not by nature limited to any one place can for a time be so limited, in a certain sense. But if any separated substance can in this way be in a place temporarily and in accord with its own will, then through the instrumental use of that bodily place by divine power it can be held there against its will, so as to be unable to exercise its power elsewhere. This being the only way in which a body can affect a separate substance, it must be the means by which fire punishes the soul: “per modum alligationis cuiusdam.”\textsuperscript{190}

\textsuperscript{186} \textit{In Sent.}, iv. 44.3.3.3. sol., 1109.

\textsuperscript{187} \textit{In Sent.}, iv. 44.3.3.3. sol., 1109.

\textsuperscript{188} See \textit{Summa theologiae}, i. 52.1, 20.

\textsuperscript{189} See \textit{Summa theologiae}, i. 52.2, 25.

\textsuperscript{190} \textit{Summa contra Gentiles}, vols. 13–15 of \textit{Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M.}
The quality of fire, then, by which it has a natural relation to all spirits and thus through which it may fitly be used as an instrument against them, is simply that which it shares with all other bodies: it is circumscribed in place; it has extension and therefore limits; it is here and not there, so that by the enforced union to it a spirit may in a certain way be here and not there. Fire is the instrument particularly privileged in Scripture's attestation of punishment because, while it is no better suited for binding than any other body, it is preeminent as a cause of poena sensus in this life, and will fulfill that role as well after the Resurrection.

Thus Thomas incorporates elements from several preceding answers—"oportet ergo omnes praedictos modos in unum colligere, ut perfecte videntur quomodo animae ab igne corporeo patiatur"—to arrive at a poena alligationis;\textsuperscript{191} and by this he recuperates somewhat the authority of Augustine and especially Gregory on the question: while at moments they made claims which do not hold up, they also assert or imply that the very binding of the soul to the fire is a means of punishment.

In his later treatments of the question, Thomas adds an anecdotal exemplum in order to reaffirm the claim that the virtue or influence of a spirit may be bound to an arbitrary body: the example of necromancers, whom Thomas claims to be able to bind demons to rings or other objects, such that they become cursed and carry the influence of the demon with them.\textsuperscript{192} This example was clearly of significance for the question in Thomas's mind, since after the point at which this phenomenon either came to his attention or was first associated with the problem at hand, he never fails to bring it to bear on the question, even in the extremely

\textit{edita} (Roma: Commissio Leonina, 1918–30), iv.90, 281.

\textsuperscript{191} In Sent., iv.44.3.3.3 sol., 1110.

\textsuperscript{192} See, e.g., \textit{Summa contra Gentiles}, iv.90, 281.
short *quodlibeta* which omit or condense into a few phrases all his argumentation concerning vision, instrumentation, and location.\(^{193}\)

Thus far it has been shown how Thomas established the possibility of interim *poena ignis*; this explanation also included a certain element of fittingness, insofar as the instrumental use of fire was regarded in terms of its fit use (although one may note that in this case the limitation is in a way necessary, because it is so broad: any body, but only a body, can be the instrument of locating a spirit here or there).

Thomas is also concerned to point out the moral fittingness of the *poena ignis*, joining his voice to the now-common chorus in saying that it befits the punishment of sin—characterized as the inordinate pursuit of corporeal goods and therefore the subjugation of the soul to them—to be an enforcement of that same subjugation in a more literal way. It may be observed that given Thomas’s strict limitation of the *poena ignis* to the *poena alligationis*, this particular argument for fittingness takes on greater force: because it is precisely and only as a body that the fire is able to affect the soul (and not in any way as a particular agent of material torment somehow perceived as burning the soul) it is fitting and just as a punishment for precisely the same reason, albeit a general one. It punishes just insofar as it is a particularly limited kind of being, and the fittingness of the punishment is its correspondence to one’s self-subjugation to any limited good in the place of God. Thomas also adds an additional precision: it is not merely the metaphorical subjugation of sin which makes the *poena sensus* fitting and just, but the very nature of any willed action as moving towards some intended good. Negation as such cannot be desired or willed; every thing is desired under the aspect of a

\(^{193}\)See *Quaestiones de quolibet*, vols. 25/1–2 of *Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. edita* (Roma: Commissio Leonina, 1996), III.10.1.resp., 281.
good, no matter how disordered the self-presentation of that goodness may be. Thus every sin is twofold. It is a rejection of God as highest good, and to this corresponds the poena dammi. But it is also a turning towards some lesser good, and to this corresponds the poena sensus.\footnote{See, e.g., Summa contra Gentiles, iv.90, 282: “poena enim sensus respondet culpae quantum ad conversionem inordinatam ad commutabile bonum, sicut poena damni respondet culpae quantum ad aversionem ab incommutabili bono.”}

And finally, it should not be forgotten that in the very origin of the question of the poena ignis there was an argument that was more of fittingness than of necessity: on the basis of Matthew 25, the fire which torments the devil and his angels ought to be corporeal because it is the same fire that torments men after the Resurrection, and therefore as embodied; and, Thomas says, “corpora vero puniri non possunt nisi corporali poena.”\footnote{Quaestiones disputatae de veritate, vol. 22 of Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis Xiii P. M. edita (Roma: Commissio Leonina, 1975), 261 resp., 748. A possible inconsistency in Thomas’s treatment of the poena sensus should be noted. In his Sentences commentary, he seems to hesitate between the claim that this torment is through the normal manner of calefaction by fire, i.e. contact, and the argument of Albert that (in order to explain how this process does not corrupt the body and may therefore continue eternally) there is even in this case no bodily contact, but rather—again through the instrumentation of divine power—the introduction of the torment which in some way would be felt through the regenerated sensitive powers of the soul directly, without the medium of the actual calefaction of flesh causing these sensations. Thomas only allows this as a possibility in the Sentences—and it may easily be seen that such a claim would at least weaken the fittingness argument in respect of Matthew 25, which was foundational for the whole subsequent discussion of the poena ignis. If it is not in the normal bodily way that the fire torments resurrected man, i.e., as one body to another, but rather as the divinely-powered introduction of the sensation which would be caused by such contact (and thus an introduction which presumably does not even depend on the presence of the fire itself), it would seem to fall short of the requirement that a body is only fittingly punished by another body—at least, it is only making a show of such a relation and in fact renders the bodily fire superfluous. This possible contradiction may well have influenced Thomas to abandon Albert’s position on the poena sensus and affirm consistently in his works after the Sentences commentary that after the Resurrection the hell-fire punishes bodies in the same way it can torment in this life, through contact. The bodies may continually endure such torment without destruction because of the virtue of incorruptibility which is given to all resurrected bodies, not because the torment itself is different than the earthly power of fire.}

In sum, it has been seen that Thomas shows no hesitation about investigating the problem of the poena ignis, but certainly shows an awareness of the difficulties
that his precursors and contemporaries had with it: his longer treatments of the question consider and reject (at least as sufficient in themselves) a great number of positions which appear, at least provisionally or as an option, throughout all the authors thus far considered, Patristic and Scholastic. His initial judgment on the arguments of Gregory and Augustine is harsh—his thoroughgoing Aristotelian view of sensation cannot admit any intermediary images between those which depend upon the body and the un-imaged conceptions of the intellect. All the same he keeps what he sees as valid in all of the partial answers he considers and in the end sees a reflection of his conclusion in certain passages of the Fathers.

What is most distinctive about his treatment, though, is its thorough and consistent emphasis on ligation as the only possible way for the poena ignis to be truly such, making the explanations of instrumentation and vision entirely dependent upon this single real way in which a body may affect a spirit: by limiting it in space.

1.2.5 Siger of Brabant

It might be expected that for Siger—so insistent upon his role as a philosopher strictly speaking, and that as a commentator upon Aristotle—the question of the poena ignis, occasioned solely by Scriptural exegesis and the testimony of certain Fathers, would hold little interest. Moreover, given his well-recognized Averroistic interpretation of Aristotle as teaching the unicity of the intellect for all men, any question of separated souls as individuals would seem meaningless to the Philosopher as such. Nevertheless, one question by Siger on this topic is extant, and in fact he asks it in the particularly unlikely place of a commentary upon Aristotle (not even Thomas, with his frequent return to the question in a
great variety of works, asks it in such a context): the *Quaestiones in tertium de anima*.\(^{196}\) Granted that these are not a literal commentary but a small set of considerations related in various ways to the eponymous book, still the inclusion of this question of decidedly un-Aristotelian provenance must surely cause surprise.

At the start, Siger does agree with Albert on the irregularity of the question, saying that this “est quaestio non multitum philosophica;” he further notes that, not surprisingly, “non videmus quod Aristoteles aliquid dixerit de ista quaestione, quia non invenimus quod ipse alicubi determinavit de statu separationis.”\(^{197}\) Yet he deigns to treat of it, and it is not improbable that this indicates the frequency or insistence with which the matter was raised by his colleagues.

In offering a solution, he follows an order similar to that of Thomas in his longer articles on the *poena ignis*, though in brief: he denies first the claims of “quidam” that the soul could suffer by seeing itself to be in the fire, responding that the soul when separated cannot see “sicut somnians” (recalling Augustine’s explanation), i.e. it cannot have any sensitive species at all; nor can it suffer from the intelligible species.\(^{198}\) It further could not be deceived into thinking that it suffers—and for this Siger gives a more forceful answer than Thomas (who relies, it will be recalled, on the comparison with the fallen angels, who could hardly be deceived), on the basis of Aristotle’s claim here in Book III of *De anima* that an intellect separated from matter simply cannot be deceived.\(^{199}\)

With this possibility denied, “alii” argue that the fire might cause suffering

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\(^{196}\) *Quaestiones in tertium De anima*, ed. and trans. Matthias Perlams (Freiburg: Herder, 2007).

\(^{197}\) *In De an.*, 11.intr., sol., 116-18.

\(^{198}\) *In De an.*, 11.sol., 120.

\(^{199}\) *In De an.*, 11.sol., 120: “Contra hoc Aristoteles in hoc tertio dixit quod intellectus ille, qui est sine materia, non est falsus, sed semper verus.”
as an instrument; and again Siger cites Aristotle, here to the same effect as did Thomas: “Aristoteles primo huius [i.e., De anima I] dicit quod non quaelibet ars utitur quolibet instrumento, sed solum instrumento sibi convente.” The “convenience” of fire as an instrument depends on its being united to the soul, and this can only be “sicut locatum unitur loco, quia operatur in eo;” for the immaterial soul to be located in or at a physical body means that it is confined to operate in it. This fire can be such a divine instrument “quantum ad hoc quod ipse determinat locum suum ita quod ipsa non possit alibi operans, sed solum in ipso igne.”

To this extent Siger has echoed Thomas’s argument, generally speaking, in order and in emphasis; but he is still only reporting previous efforts at a solution, and he adds a last objection to Thomas’ solution—one which is in fact left unanswered: “Si ergo anima locatur in igne, quam operationem operatur in igne?”

The Angelic Doctor said that an immaterial spirit can be in a place per contactum virtutis, and by divine power that contact can be held so as to be irremovable; but it remains that some virtus or precise operation which the soul or angel has in the fire must be identified, else the claim would seem to be meaningless.

Siger, however, does not pursue this objection nor come to a different conclusion on its basis, but proceeds to a reflection on Aristotle’s claim—against

\begin{enumerate}
\item[200] In De an., 11 sol., 120.
\item[201] In De an., 11 sol., 122.
\item[202] In De an., 11 sol., 122.
\item[203] In De an., 11 sol., 122.
\item[204] Perkams suggests a textual lacuna at this point: “An dieser Stelle ist das argumentative Vorgehen des Textes ganz unklar. Weder erfolgt eine Antwort auf die Frage, noch wird recht klar, was er folgende Abschnitt mit Sigers Argument zu tun hat. Stellt der este Satz vielleicht einen Selbstzweifel dar, so ist der Rest des Abschnitts offenbar eine nachgeschobene Erläuterung, die mit der Leidensfähigkeit der Seele durch Feuer wenig zu tun hat” (n. 109, 122–23).
\end{enumerate}
the Pythagoreans—that a soul cannot inform quodlibet corpus, but only a human organism. Certainly this seems to cast into doubt the possibility of an operation of the soul in fire; but then Siger goes on to interpret this as a possible objection against the unicity of the intellect, responding that the Philosopher means to designate one species of body, not one number, so that one intellect may yet be joined to many bodies provided they are all human, and thus leaving unchallenged the claim that “intellectus unicus in omnibus est.”\(^{205}\) Apparently, the significance of this digression for the question at hand is one which turns it on its head, and returns to what the reader may have anticipated from the start: since—for Aristotle—one intellect is joined to all human bodies, it is never separate; it is always united to some bodies of the species. Thus from this perspective the question of the suffering of the separated soul is without meaning, quite aside from the nature of any fire.

What is puzzling is that Siger will admit the question at all, if such an argument is to feature in his response. In that sense his treatment might be regarded as reluctant, and his caveat is similar to Albert’s; he makes a concession, perhaps, but still an odd one in the context of a work where he is elsewhere unapologetic for giving no more and no less that the best reading of Aristotle. The only part of his argument which would still hold relevance—at least in principle—after the evacuation of the question under the aspect of the unicity of the intellect, is his sed contra, which makes his only and brief argument for fittingness, one which has been seen before: “Corporali culpae debet respondere poena corporalis,”\(^{206}\)

\(^{205}\)In De an., 11. sol., 124.

and all sins are committed *per corpus*; thus through a body ought the sinner to be punished. But that aside, the brunt of his argument confirms most of Thomas’s steps of reasoning but then casts doubt on his solution to the problem, leaving the matter unsettled there; this does not necessitate that he denied the theological assertion of suffering from corporeal fire, but his return to the unicity of the intellect at the end of the article indicates that he was in fact only entertaining the question for the sake of argument with his contemporaries, in order to show that—even according to their account of the separated soul, which is not the Philosopher’s—they have not sufficiently established that it is possible for it to suffer from corporeal fire.

And so it remains an open question how this critique of Thomas’s position—or perhaps a request for further clarification—might be resolved. Can the locating of a separated substance *per contactum virtutis* with a particular body be justified without further indication of exactly what this power is, and what it does in the body to which it is thereby bound? It is on this point that Dante’s explanation of the shade-bodies of the *Commedia* will effect a most remarkable reorientation of the whole question.

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207 This claim is given “in oppositum” prior to the solution of the article (“Oppositum potest sic ostendi...”), but no reason is given in that solution to deny its force, at least to the extent that Siger entertains an affirmative answer to the article’s question. *In De an.*, 11.opp., 118.

208 Flasch takes the criticism as decisive, and indicative of Siger’s accurate recognition that the problem of the *poena ignis* is insoluble. See “Die Seele im Feuer,” 122–23.
2.1 The pilgrim’s question

It is evident enough that very setting of the Commedia’s narrative brings to the fore the problem of interim suffering which proved so difficult for theologians. The basic motive of Dante’s pilgrimage through the afterlife—that a living man should be able to change his own destiny by seeing those whose eternal lot has already been determined—certainly presupposes the immediacy of individual judgment and punishment or reward, and at least on the literal level also demands that this exceptional state of separation for human beings be yet somehow corporeal.

That much would be true of many visions of the afterlife; what is exceptional about Dante’s vision, of course, is his explicit engagement with the theological problems involved. At certain points in the poem he shows his awareness of the general terms of the problem of the poena ignis, and, most importantly, in Purgatorio xxv he makes his unique contribution to the debate. The common denominator for all theological treatments of the question, whether Patristic or Scholastic, is the assumption that by nature a body can only affect another body; thus presumably the simplest way to allow for a corporeal fire is to supply a new body for separated souls in the interim. If that be granted, the basic problem is solved—the fire can torment by its natural calefaction. According to an almost
unanimous interpretative tradition, that is exactly what Dante does through the mouth of Statius in this crucial canto: he explains how separated souls produce new bodies for themselves which allow them to sense bodies such as fire and suffer thereby.

The trouble is that this neat solution would make no contribution to the debate at all. The theologians did not simply miss the option of interim bodies because of a lack of imagination, but because it would seem to be incoherent in the context of the problem. If the bodies supplied to separated souls in the interim are of flesh and blood, then the Resurrection to come has been preempted or trivialized; if they are not of flesh and blood, then the human soul has no proportion to union with such a body and could not sense by means of it. Thus given the universal assumption that Statius means to account for sensation as the mode of the poena ignis, it is quite understandable that several commentators on this passage have seen futility in the explanation and attributed it to poetic necessity.

But to read Purgatorio xxv in such a way is to miss Statius’s real meaning and Dante’s true contribution to and reformulation of the debate over the nature of the interim state. In order to perceive this meaning clearly it is necessary to reconsider this canto in the larger context of repeated questioning of the nature of the shade-bodies throughout the canticle of the middle realm.

In Canto iii, as the pilgrim and his guide seek for a way to begin their ascent up the daunting mountain, Dante momentarily thinks himself abandoned as he is surprised to see no shadow cast by Virgil; the latter rebukes him for his ignorance or forgetfulness of the fact that shade-bodies are unlike those of Earth and do not impede the sun’s rays any more than the celestial spheres do. This remonstrance is not sufficient, though, because Virgil seems to sense an unvoiced objection (and it
is notable that he himself makes the connection, even if he does so in expectation of the pilgrim’s curiosity: to point out the transparency of the shades to light at the same time calls into question their apparent opacity to heat and other dispositions, and indeed their continuous functioning with at least a *simulacrum* of normal physical experience and interaction, as has been apparent—with a few exceptions—throughout the *Commedia*. The exceptions to consistent physical interaction will later be considered; for the time being, the crucial point is that Virgil is quite explicit in taking up the presumed question: how “simili corpi”—that is, bodies similar to the diaphanous celestial spheres—could “sofferir tormenti, caldi e geli.” He answers with vigor that it is quite simply a mystery, possible only through divine dispensation: “la Virtù dispone / che, come fa, non vuol ch’a noi si sveli.” Warming to his task, Virgil then inveighs against mankind’s presumption to comprehend the ways of the mysterious Trinity:

Matto è chi spera che nostra ragione possa trascorrer la infinita via che tiene una sustanza in tre persone.

State contenti, umana gente, al quia; ché, si potuto aveste veder tutto, mestier non era parturir Maria;
e disiar vedeste sanza frutto tae che sarebbe lor disio quetato, ch’etternalmente è dato lor per lutto:
io dico d’Aristotile e di Plato e di molt’ altri... (III.34–44).

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His import could not be clearer: the manner in which the separated soul suffers by means of a quasi-ethereal body cannot be investigated by human reason, and it is a dangerous presumption which seeks to comprehend and explain all things; indeed having once confessed that God is both three and one, and that one of those three has become man while remaining God, it would be most foolish not to recognize the limitations of the human intellect.

How, then, does Dante dare to ask the same question later in the journey? In fact, he seems to probe this problem again even before Purgatorio xxv. Two cantos prior to Statius's discourse, the pilgrim encounters the shades inhabiting the Terrace of Gluttony, and his amazement at the change in their features is exceptional even within a journey which has been consistently marked by wonder. Uniquely among the exempla of virtue and vice given on each terrace, in this case the pilgrim is so moved as to pronounce himself the paragon which illustrates the severity of the fast:

Io dicea fra me stesso pensando: ‘Ecco la gente che perdé Ierusalemme, quando Maria nel figlio diè di becco!’ (XXVIII.28–30)

This exclamation constitutes an “originale variatio” on the motif of Purgatorial exempla and thus calls attention to the pilgrim’s astonishment. There follows the striking image of a face with bones so prominent that the custom of seeing the word *omo* (*uomo*, ‘man’) written on man’s face would there see the *M*—that is, the nose and structure of the skull around the eyes—most clearly described. Finally, the poet declares that the sight (of this his own creation) is really too much to be believed, if its cause be unknown, calling attention both to his implicit claims of verisimilitude to the reader, and to the pilgrim’s curiosity towards the cause of

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2 Chiavacci Leonardi, ed., *Commedia*, 676 n. 28.
the torment:

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

Now there is a ready narrative plausibility for this unusual reaction. While all the torments seen up to that point certainly imply *prima facie* the capability of sensation in the shades, until one begins to reflect on the difference between the constitution of these aerial bodies and that of earthly bodies, such torments may not seem marvelous as to their *a priori* possibility, but only as to their grotesqueness. Emaciation, however, caused by an unfulfilled need for food, depends precisely upon the way in which living bodies are constituted and maintained; when a body grows unnaturally thin (or fat) it may easily call to mind for the viewer the way in which food, initially external to the body, not only comes within it but becomes a part of it. But the problem remains of how this questioning relates to Virgil’s earlier admonition against undue curiosity into supra-rational mysteries, and indeed the pilgrim’s interest only grows as the canto continues.

As soon as he has recognized (with difficulty) the shade of his fellow poet Forese Donati, he asks about this disfigurement so extreme that it nearly prevents identification: “Però mi dì, per Dio, che sì vi sfoglia...” (XXIII.58). If Virgil’s earlier rebuke is universally valid and the pilgrim has simply forgotten it, the reader might expect another and perhaps harsher correction of undue curiosity; instead Forese responds willingly:

De l’eterno consiglio
cade vertù ne l’acqua e ne la pianta
rimasa dietro, ond’ io sì m’assottiglio.
Tutta esta gente che piangendo canta
per seguitar la gola oltra misura,
in fame e ’n sete qui si rifà santa.
Di bere e di mangiar n’accende cura
l’odor ch’esce del pomo e de lo sprazzo
che si distende su per sua verdura (XXIII.61–69).

Viewed in relation to the discourse in Canto III and to the further questioning regarding the very same shades in Canto xxv, this exchange displays both an ambiguous regard for Virgil’s teaching, and a shift in the curiosity of the pilgrim which alters the emphasis of the question. Forese’s answer is to a certain extent in accord with Virgil’s statement regarding the suffering of all shades: this suffering is accomplished by divine power (“De l’eterno consiglio cade vertù”) and therefore has no purely natural explanation—hence it is a cause of wonderment. Thus far, one might say that the pilgrim has indeed failed to heed Virgil’s warning, since his curiosity has continued unabated and he must be told substantially the same thing again by another shade.

It is obvious, however, that Forese also regards this divinely-instituted suffering somewhat differently than does Virgil, because he is willing to explain it insofar as he can, and indeed he says more than “the way of this cannot be understood;” his answer clearly implies, without further explanation, that the shades have sensory powers: he names “l’odor” as the means by which the “vertù” of the Divine Counsel uses the fruit and water to effect the desire for food and drink in the shades. In fact, that their scents in particular stand as intermediate causes was presumed by the pilgrim while he yet wondered about a further cause of the phenomenon: “Chi crederebbe che l’odor d’un pomo...” Forese’s answer seems to take for granted the capacity of the shades for sensation, and to explain rather the intensity of the
scent and of the shades’ consequent desire as requiring divine fiat, than how any physical body could have any effect on the shades. Thus in one respect, Forese appears to be more knowledgeable than Virgil about the capacities of shades and the means of their punishments, and does not regard this as an entirely inscrutable mystery (even if its cause be supernatural); and yet, as he gives no indication of the means by which odor, a physical attribute, is made to have an effect on either the separated soul as such or on the shade-body as a medium, he does not really progress beyond the terms laid out by Virgil.

There is, however, more to his response, which puts the significance of “l’odor ch’esce del pomo” in a new light, and draws an anticipatory connection with Statius’s discourse—in which the apparently insoluble problem of the sensation of torment will be recast as a profitable question of its manifestation. Forese adds that, every time they pass the trees in their circuit around the terrace, their pain is renewed; but then he corrects himself:

Io dico pena, e dovria dir sollazzo,
ché quella voglia a li alberi ci mena
che menò Cristo lieto a dire ‘Eli’,
quando ne liberò con la sua vena (72–75).

That the purging souls should be conforming themselves to Christ is not unexpected, but the same cannot be said for the details of this remarkable expression.

Christ is said to be glad (“lieto”) while hanging on the Cross, and not only then but in the very moment of his crying out “voce magna” in the words of the Psalmist, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt. 27.46)—a troubling verse for many theologians, as it may appear to indicate despair or the separation of Christ’s divinity from his humanity, either of which would be inadmissible for medieval Christology, on the whole. However that may be, in this canto there is a
ready explanation for Forese’s choice of words in the comparison he draws: Christ can be called glad in his moment of greatest torment just as the purging souls’ pain can be called solace, because as he willingly took on this penalty knowing that it would free mankind, so the purging do not struggle against the punishment divinely imposed upon them but run to it knowing the prize to be gained. This much would indeed explain “lieto,” and there are obviously further correspondences to be drawn between the alberi and pomo of this terrace, the fruit and tree of the Garden of Eden, and the tree upon which the New Adam was hung.

Yet there remains a strange discrepancy—one which scarcely affects the validity and importance of these interpretations, and may seem a comparatively minor point, but which nonetheless requires some specification. As most every commentator glosses the verse, the reference to the cry from the Cross simply stands in for the Passion as such—suffering is being compared to suffering, the shades go to their trees as Christ went to his. But this is not what Forese says; it is not that this voglia led Christ to take up the Cross, but that it led him to speak, to cry out those terrifying words. Medieval exegesis offered various ways of understanding the difficult meaning of this cry—or rather, of at least avoiding interpretations of it which would impugn Christ’s divinity, even if it cannot be fully comprehended: Christ shows that he continues to fulfill the Old Testament; he shows that this suffering is taken in obedience to his Father; he shows the dereliction in which mankind now stands and which he is about to remedy, the head speaking on behalf of the members. But for the present context the details are less important

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4For a compilation of Patristic commentaries on the verse, see Thomas Aquinas, Catena aurea
than the common principle: if Christ did not in fact despair, if he was *lieto* insofar as he was willing and obedient to the last, *usque ad mortem*, 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: “clamavit Jesus voce magna.” The desire which draws the fasting to the trees is the same desire: to make their suffering manifest. Just what this claim means will be more evident by the end of Statius’s discourse.

For the moment, the pilgrim gives no indication that he is unsatisfied with the answer (in fact, he gives no reaction to it at all, but proceeds immediately to the next question piquing his curiosity); yet Canto xxv will show that he still harbors doubts about this phenomenon of emaciation in some aspects. In fact his interest—only in part addressed by Forese—was from the first focused on the manifestation of the torment, which caused him so to marvel that he could not initially even respond until his doubt had been assuaged, concerning the yet hidden reason of their “magrezza” and “trista squama.” In this respect, though, Forese inspires more questions than he answers. Fruit and water are, divinely, made to cause a most intense desire; if this means that their sensible qualities are accentuated, then the reader could understand how one already capable of sensation could be tormented. But in fact the reader has at this point no further understanding of how the shades might sense any odor. Moreover, and for the pilgrim’s interest more importantly, nothing whatsoever has been resolved of the problem of *magrezza*: it is not the sensation of food or the feeling of hunger which causes thinness, but the absence of food in a body which uses up some of its own

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*in quatuor Evangelia*, 2 vols., ed. P. Guarenti (Torino/Roma: Marietti, 1953), 410–13. Thomas himself offers the above-mentioned interpretations, along with the warning that “quidam male intellexerunt” so as to deny the hypostatic union on this account, in *Sentencia super Meteora*, in *Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, vol. 3 (1886), 365–66.
quantity in the activities of life and thus must consume in order to maintain a certain magnitude.

This is the precise question that the pilgrim asks of Virgil and has answered by Statius in *Purgatorio* xxv: not how the shades sense, but (as most affected him at the sight of the fasting shades and as Forese did not fully explain) how they make manifest their torment, however it may be experienced: “come si può far magro / là dove l’uopo di nodrir non tocca?” Of course, this question turns on the nature of the shade-bodies—the extent to which they are like or unlike organic bodies of flesh and blood—and so it has some relation to the question which is generally read into it (i.e., “How do the shades experience hunger?”). But it is crucial to note, especially in light of the coda to Statius’s answer which will be examined presently, that what the pilgrim in fact demands and what follows naturally from the spark which ignited his curiosity—is in fact quite distinct from the problem of sensation, and concerns simply how the torment which the souls do in fact experience (somehow caused by divine power operating through physical objects, according to Forese’s account) could possibly be manifested in this way, since it can hardly by nature reduce the size of a body which never eats.

2.2 Virgil, respondent and rebuked

If this is the case, then *Purgatorio* xxv is less at odds with Virgil’s admonition in Canto iii; and yet it remains that the pilgrim seems to doubt his guide’s competence in probing further any question of the details of this miraculous torment, when Virgil had expended all his authority and rhetorical power on closing the

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5In paraphrasing the pilgrim’s own words, commentators often silently add the question of sensation which is not there, and hence prejudice the rest of the discourse. See, e.g., Nardi, “Il canto xxv,” 140: “Come possono sentire fame e sete e farsi magre le ombre dei golosi, testè incontrate, se esse non hanno alcun bisogno di nutrirsi?”
subject. Nor is there any surprise in this, when what follows the pilgrim’s question in Canto xxv confirms that in some way Virgil is here beyond his ken. That much is obvious from Virgil’s own words, and is a commonplace of Dante scholarship: in Purgatory the journey has entered the Christian realm, in the sense that the way to the mountain is opened only through faith in Christ, which Virgil lacked; and unlike most of Hell, this is a realm to which he has never journeyed before. The matter becomes more complicated, however, when the reader seeks to understand exactly how it is that the aforementioned reasons require that he should lack competence to answer the question at hand.

In the first place, Virgil does actually offer an answer, if only by way of brief analogies; this would be entirely incomprehensible in comparison to his attitude in Canto i if the same question had been asked, which further reinforces the emphasis on manifestation here. What is more surprising is that, viewed in hindsight after Statius’s explanation, Virgil’s effort seems rather poor—as one commentator has described it, the *exempla* offered are “di scarso valore esplicativo,” and indeed it is not clear that the two analogies are even in agreement with one another. The first refers to the story of Meleagrus as narrated by Ovid, whose life was bound by divine power to a brand, which when cast into a fire by his own mother in a fit of grief and anger, consumed him by its own consumption. The second is a purely natural occurrence, familiar to all: the way a mirrored reflection mimics the every move of the living subject.

What answer, precisely, do such examples offer to the question? Virgil’s following comments indicate that he, at least, feels that they are quite equal to the task—in fact his tone rather suggests that it is no complicated matter, and

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only the sluggish intellect of his pupil requires a more discursive answer: “Se
t’ammentassi...non fora...a te questo sì agro; e se pensassi...ciò che par duro ti
parebbe vizzo” (xxv.22–27). In the case of Meleagrus, if the brand is the analogue
of the means of torment in the afterlife—here, fruit and water—and the myth-
ical character named corresponds to the shades, this story would demonstrate
how divine power can, quite externally and arbitrarily, allow a physical object to
cause—only in an indirect and derivative sense—the dissolution of another body,
or more generally the affectation of another substance without any contact or
medium between the two. But as this might apply to the fasting shades of the
previous few cantos, Dante already knows that the torment is caused to a certain
extent by divine decree (and is in that sense arbitrary), and moreover Forese had
given him a different account by emphasizing the odor of the desired goods and
thus seeming to imply sensation. If, on the other hand, Meleagrus and the brand
are to be likened to shade-body and to soul respectively—so that the “consump-
tion” of the soul (by way of the purgation of gluttonous habituation) is paralleled
by the reduction of the airy quantity of the shade, this remains no more of an ex-
planation than “it is done by divine power, which reveals not its way to us:” such
a comparison yields no greater understanding of the affectation of a soul (since it
is perfectly obvious how the brand burns, and that a separated soul cannot burn
in such a way), nor of the exact means by which torment is manifested, other than
divine decree which could conceivably link any two changes such that one follows
upon the other, without any natural correspondence.

Manifestation certainly seems to be the import of the second example, that
of a mirrored reflection: what takes place truly in the reflected subject (i.e., the
torment affecting the separated soul) is displayed in the image in the mirror,
even though the glass itself (like the shade-bodies) has no properties *suae naturae*
susceptible of the kind of changes which are displayed in the image reflected on it. This comparison, however, like that to Meleagrus, when examined offers little explanation of the phenomenon in question, whose perplexing character derives from the incommensurability between the disposition of the separated soul and an airy body which, whatever its nature, evidently is not sustained in magnitude by the incorporation of more air—to say nothing of apples and water. But if it is not so sustained, the continued lack of such consumption—even granting that in some mysterious manner the bodiless soul is made to feel the desire for the incorporation of external bodies (which are called food because they are potentially flesh) despite being no longer united to flesh—gives no reason that the shade should diminish in quantity or otherwise change in appearance. The apples and water are not potentially shade; and the activity of the souls does not use up the substance of the shades—at least, nothing the pilgrim has to this point learned of them would indicate any such thing.

It should be noted that Virgil’s metaphors, even in the hindsight which finds them ineffective, are not false; this indeed would be a surprising change in his character, were he to be misleading outright. He has admitted limits to his knowledge, and has been tricked by deception; but nowhere has he been simply false. Here it may be said that even after Statius has had his say, it is certainly true that the consumption of the shade-bodies of the fasting souls is in some sense caused directly by divine power (and so the case of Meleagrus is not inapt) and that the bodies reflect the disposition of the soul despite being of another and seemingly incommensurable nature (and so the example of the mirror has some validity). Nevertheless, they leave much unsaid; and it is curious that Virgil seems at once
to think that his contribution ought to be entirely sufficient, and yet to recognize
that the pilgrim has not yet been healed of the “wounds” of ignorance, and that the fulfillment of this healing must fall to Statius:

Ma perché a tuo voler t’adage,
ecco qui Stazio; e io lui chiamo e prego
che sia or sanator de le tue piage (xxv.28–30).

Indeed the mutual recognition between Virgil and Statius that only the latter
can fully answer the pilgrim’s question is perhaps the most puzzling aspect of nar-
rative arrangement of the episode. Statius responds by, remarkably, apologizing
to Virgil for giving “the eternal view” in his presence:

‘Se la veduta eterna li dislego’,
rispuose Stazio, ‘là dove tu sie,
discolpe me non potert’ io far nego’ (31–33).

Most commentators have found sufficient explanation for this apology in the argu-
ment that the following discourse is a matter of theology, and is therefore a
mystery to Virgil but open to Statius who is saved. Nothing could be clearer:
as Virgil represents human reason unenlightened by faith, and as the explanation
given by Statius will be seen to turn on a datum of revelation—namely, that in
every human generation the rational soul is created directly and infused individ-
ually by God—Virgil simply could not know this datum and therefore could not
have known the answer Statius will give.

There are at least three difficulties with this explanation. First, in presuming
that for Dante the external and divine origin of the rational soul can be known

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7This metaphor may imply that it is no trivial or new question, but a tortured doubt; see Nardi, “Il canto xxv,” 142–43.
8See, e.g., Chiavacci Leonardi, ed., Commedia, 2.738 n. 29.
only by faith, it begs a much-disputed question, namely whether Aristotle recog-
nized something like this when he said that “reason alone comes from without.”
Certainly “the master of those who know” had no clear doctrine of divine cre-
ation, and thus Averroes was led to the erroneous teaching that because reason is
from without, it is not individuated and formal for each man; Statius, of course,
will refute this very opinion. Some readers of Aristotle, however—most notably
Thomas Aquinas—thought that Averroes had not gone astray only because he
lacked faith, but because he had misread the Stagirite, and that the proper and
consistent reading of De anima yielded the conclusion—rationally attained—that
a single human soul is a substantial form of matter and yet has a power which
is from without, independent of any material organ, and therefore incorruptible;
which means that the soul of which reason is the highest and specific power is
incorruptible, even if it also has powers subject to the corruption of the composite
because they are the acts of material organs.

That Dante may have understood Aristotle in a similar way is strongly in-
dicated in the Convivio, where the Philosopher is taken as a chief example of
the agreement even among most pagan authors that there is in man something
immortal, whence disbelief in the afterlife is a most foolish and contemptible error:

Dico che intra tutte le bestialitadi quella è stoltissima, vilissima e
dannosissima, chi crede dopo questa vita non essere altra vita; però
che, se noi rivolgiamo tutte le scritture, sì de’ filosofi come delli altri
savi scrittori, tutti concordano in questo, che in noi sia parte alcuna
perpetuale. E questo massimamente pare volere Aristotile in quello
divinum esse solum: nihil enim ipsius operationi communicat corporalis operatio.”}

\footnote{Convivio, 2 vols., ed. Franca Brambilla Ageno (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1995), i.8, 103. Cf.
Granting that some uncertainty is allowed ("pare volere"), it would hardly serve the point at hand if the De anima were interpreted as teaching merely the immortality of one, separate intellect—perpetuity of this sort is scarcely a vita dopo questa vita. And regardless of the interpretation of Aristotle, it is quite certain that Virgil himself has already said that the intellect belongs to the substantial form of man which is united to matter, and so he—allegedly knowing only what human reason can establish—does not share in the error of Averroes:

Ogne forma sustanzial, che setta
è da materia ed è con lei unita,
specifica vertute ha in sè colletta,
la qual sanza operar non è sentita,
né si dimostra mai che per effetto,
come per verdi fronde in pianta vita.
Però, là onde vegna lo 'ntelletto
de le prime notizie, omo non sape (Purg. xviii.49-56).

The second objection is independent of the first, and more grave: Virgil does, in fact, know the data of revelation. This is a peculiar feature of the knowledge which he displays, which has received scant attention from dantisti: while he refers to the ignorance of the true God which dooms himself and his confrères in Limbo to their fruitless desiring,¹¹ this ignorance apparently does not mean that he does not or cannot conceive of at least the dogmatic content of Christian mysteries, and indeed those mysteries most central to the Christian creed and most liable to be stumbling blocks to the Greeks (and Romans): the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Resurrection of the Body.

The first two mysteries are pronounced by Virgil in a passage already noted in Purgatorio iii; in the case of the Trinity, he not only shows his awareness of

¹¹ See Purg. iii.40-44.
the truth but gives the orthodox formulation: three persons in one substance (or nature, as the Latin theologians preferred), “una sustanza in tre persone” (III.36). His reference to the Incarnation is more of a circumlocution—“se potuto aveste veder tutto, / mestier non era parturir Maria”—but still serves to confirm the point: he knows at least some of the details of revelation and theology, and though he be damned, that which he lacked is not an object of eternal rejection, as is the case with all the residents of Hell proper, who do not long wistfully for the virtues they lacked but wallow in their sin and persist in “making figs at God” to the last.\(^{12}\)

This seems to be the import of his claim regarding the other Virtuous Pagans (and including himself) that they have been given a desire as their eternal “lutto,” a desire without fruit; presumably, then, they can grasp (without comprehending, of course) the dogmas of faith intellectually, but can no longer assent to them with their wills.

Of the last of these mysteries Virgil shows his awareness in Inferno vi, in an episode which is of interest to the question of the association between the shade-bodies and the purgatorial Terrace of Gluttony, since this canto comprises the infernal Circle of Gluttons, and in that context draws attention both to the insubstantiality of the shades and the substantiality that these souls will have when they are reunited with their flesh. The shades of the Gluttons are all prone along the ground, enduring the filthy rain which is their torment, and as the pilgrim and his guide cross the circle, the reader is first made aware that the images which these shades present are quite otherwise than human bodies:

Noi passavam su per l’ombre che adona
la greve pioggia, e ponavam le piante
sovra lor vanità che par persona (Inf. III.34–36).

\(^{12}\)See *Inf.* xxv.1–3.
Unlike living persons, the shades do not obstruct the feet of the pilgrim, which pass through them as easily as through the surrounding air. This may be the first moment in the *Commedia* where the reader is asked to question the nature of the shades; but for the time being no answer is forthcoming (and in fact, before more is expressly said on the matter, there is contrary evidence from lower Hell that the pilgrim can indeed come into contact with certain shades).

One alone of these Gluttons sits up: Ciaccio, a Florentine who recognizes Dante and gives a foreboding prophecy regarding the future of Florence and of the present condition of some of their esteemed fellow-citizens. When he has finished, he returns to his former position, and rather gratuitously Virgil offers the information that this movement will not be repeated until Ciaccio rises indeed—that is, until he is reunited with his flesh to stand before the Last Judgment:

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\text{Più non si desta} \\
\text{di qua dal suon de l’angelica tromba,} \\
\text{quando verrà la nimica podesta:} \\
\text{ciascun rivederà la trista tomba,} \\
\text{ripiglierà sua carne e sua figura,} \\
\text{udirà quel ch’in eterno rimomba (v.94–99).}
\]

It is not generally regarded as problematic for Virgil to know that “ciascun... ripiglierà sua carne,” just as few have objected to his indication of the Trinity and the Incarnation: he knows, but cannot enjoy. Yet if this be so, there seems to be no reason why Virgil could not argue from a datum of revelation as a premise to draw a further conclusion, which is precisely how Statius allegedly (according to the common view) argues from the infusion of the rational soul to the nature of the shade-bodies. In fact, Virgil does just that here in *Inferno* v1, after referring to the Resurrection of the Body: when Dante subsequently wonders whether the Resurrection will increase the pains of the damned, Virgil responds by calling his
attention to pagan science (Aristotle’s *Ethics*, in particular), which is of relevance here even though Aristotle knew nothing of damnation and its torment.

Ritorna a tua scienza,
che vuol, quanto la cosa è più perfetta,
più senta il bene, e così la doglienza.
Tutto che questa gente maledetta
in vera perfezion già mai non vada,
di là più che di qua essere aspetta (106-11).

In short, Virgil appears to be doing a fine imitation of a Scholastic theologian, in the practice of *fides quaerens intellectum*: using the tools gained from the purely rational sciences and applying them to the data of revelation in order to gain further conclusions which were not explicitly part of the articles of faith but are necessitated by them.

What, then, prevents him from giving the explanation which Statius offers, if the crux which forced Virgil to give way in *Purgatorio* xxv is the revelation of the divine creation of the rational soul, as applied its *post mortem* separated state? It seems improbable to suggest that Virgil should have been left unaware of this, when he has clearly been made aware of the greatest Christian mysteries; nor can it be argued that he is aware of it as a fact but cannot argue from it to other conclusions. If anything, the divine origin of the rational soul is a weaker case, since it is at least arguable that Aristotle had attained such knowledge according to his cryptic statement in *De anima*, a purely rational discovery (which was simply misrepresented by Averroes). Indeed, why could not Averroes himself—he who made the great commentary, a fellow resident of Limbo and subject to the same condition as Virgil, Aristotle, and Plato—have offered a correction of his own error, had he been asked, regarding the individuation of rational souls, since such

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13 *Inf.* iv.144.
knowledge is now given him “per lutto”? Whatever the precise limits of Virgil’s knowledge in the afterlife may be (and this difficult question will be considered once more evidence has been adduced), they are certainly not reducible to what unaided human reason can attain, absent the data of faith.

Finally, a third objection to the claim under consideration (that when it comes to the nature of the shades, Virgil’s authority is exceeded simply as faith exceeds reason) is that at an earlier moment, Virgil actually corrects Statius on the properties of shade-bodies. The incident occurs when the pilgrim and his guide first meet Statius, just after he has been released from the Terrace of Avarice (and Prodigality), causing the whole Mountain to tremble with joy. Statius is so overcome when he learns that it is Virgil standing before him—the poet whose work first spurred him towards conversion to Christianity, and who is thus in part the author of his salvation—that he attempts to embrace the latter’s feet, but to no avail:

Già s’inchinava ad abbracciar li piedi
al mio dottor, ma el li disse: ‘Frate,
non far, ché tu se’ ombra e ombra vedi’.

Ed ei surgendo: ‘Or puoi la quantitate
comprender de l’amor ch’a te mi scalda,
quand’ io dismento nostra vanitate,
trattando l’ombre come cosa salda’ (xxi.130–36).

In the moment, Statius’s forgetfulness may seem only a hyperbolic touch adding to the piquancy of the scene, not meant to have defining significance for the reader’s understanding of the intellectual capacities of the souls inhabiting Purgatory, in comparison to Virgil’s understanding. But in the light of Canto xxv this scene must take on a greater significance: the question upon which Virgil defers to Statius turns precisely on “trattando l’ombre come cosa salda,” i.e., on the apparent
potency of purgatorial fasting to treat a airy body as if it required food, and diminish it.

This matter is complicated further by the fact that in an earlier episode on the Mountain of Purgatory, another fellow poet sought to embrace Virgil and was successful—as if the rules governing the shades were suddenly suspended, or the author suffered a rather embarrassing lapse. Yet there it stands in Canto vi, seeming to resist every effort to find some distinction which would avoid the inconsistency:

Pur Virgilio si trasse a lei, pregando<br>che ne mostrasse la miglior salita;<br>e quella non rispuose al suo dimando,<br>ma di nostro paese e de la vita<br>ch 'inciese; e 'l dolce duca incominciava<br>‘Mantüia...’, e l'ombra, tutta in sé romita,<br>surse ver' lui del loco ove pri stava,<br>dicendo: ‘O Mantoano, io son Sordello<br>de la tua terra!'; e l'un l'altro abbracciava (v1.67–75).

Dante uses the very same verb which describes Statius’s failed embrace, ‘abbracciare’, and comments no more upon it, the rest of the canto comprising his long invective against the sins of “serva Italia” (76). Furthermore, in the first “failed embrace” of Purgatorio, which takes place in Canto 11 between the pilgrim himself and Casella (of whom Dante tries three times to take hold, but his hands pass right through, recalling Aeneas’ meeting with Anchises in Aeneid vi)\(^\text{14}\), the same verb is again employed, and the result serves only to confirm that the embrace with Sordello is an aberration, for here the “vanitate” which Statius describes in Canto xx1 is closely echoed:

It has been suggested that the dichotomy between the embraces of Sordello and of Statius has more to do with fraternity than with solidity: while Virgil and Sordello embraced only as fellow-Mantuans inspired by love of their common city (for at the time Sordello had not yet learned Virgil’s identity, only his origin), Statius sought to embrace Virgil’s feet in an act of homage; and the latter gently chastises this inappropriate submission, calling him “Frate” as an equal. In this case the judgment would be that two shades can, in fact, embrace; Dante’s hands passed through Casella because they are true flesh and incommensurable with an aerial body, but Statius failed only because of the inappropriateness of his action. Much of this explanation may be correct, but it does not really even meet the needs of Canto xxi: for as has been seen, both Virgil and Statius emphasize ombre and their insubstantiality as the reason for their failure to embrace, marking nothing of race or origin. Thus it is with good reason that no Dantist has been able to bring all of these episodes under a single and consistent line of interpretation. Either at the meeting with Sordello Dante the poet nodded, or the consistency desired is not to be found without a different understanding of the constitution and purpose of the shades.

This would be required at any rate, for quite aside from the mystery of the

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15 Chiavacci Leonardi, ed., *Commedia*, 633 n. 131–32: “Virgilio dunque ferma Stazio non tanto per la ragione data, che due ombre non possano abbracciarsi (egli ha pur abbracciato Sordello a vv 75), quanto perché non vuole un riconoscimento di superiorità, tanto più trovandosi lui di fatto, sul piano dell’eternità, inferiore all’altro. Così si spiega, crediamo, la contraddizione apparente tra i due luoghi.”
Purgatorial embraces, it is simply untenable to claim that Virgil's competence is exceeded in Canto xxv because of a simple ignorance of the divine origin of the human soul. He is not lacking in revealed knowledge; what, then, is 'the eternal view' which he cannot perceive?

2.3 Statius i: Embryology

2.3.1 Identity of powers

The first half of Statius's explication of "la veduta eterna" will follow closely Aristotle's account in *De generatione animalium*, the key source for the Stagirite's embryology. One brief passage captures most of the essential elements which will feature in the discourse, and should be kept in mind as a point of reference throughout:

De anima quidem igitur, quo modo habent fetus et genitura et quo modo non habent, determinatum est: virtute quidem enim habent, actu autem non habent. Spermate autem existente superfluitate et moto motu eodem secundum quem quidem corpus crescit partito ultimo alimento, cum venerit ad matricem, constare facit et movet superfluitatem femelle, eodem modo quo quidem ipsum existit motum. Et enim illud superfluum omnes partes habet potentia, actu autem nullam.\(^\text{16}\)

Now, for Statius to begin with a summary of human embryology may seem a bit of a *non sequitur*: what has this to do with the afterlife? The reason why knowledge of the shade-bodies depends on knowledge of human generation will be manifested in the second part of the discourse; but it should be noted that in fact there is no initial gap to be accounted for, because the answer begins exactly where Dante's question left off: that is, with the normal human processes

\(^{16}\) *De generatione animalium*, ii.i, 54-55.
of ingestion and digestion, the basis of contrast against which the pilgrim seeks to understand the presumably very different processes taking place in the shades.

In short, Statius begins with food:

Sangue perfetto, che poi non si beve
da l’assetate vene, e si rimane
quasi alimento che di mensa leve... (37–39).

If the first explicit term is “perfect blood,” food is the prior and understood term: blood is food which has had part of its potentiality towards flesh reduced into act, and precisely that potentiality is the point of emphasis here and crucial to the explanation. It is therefore not circumstantial that his first metaphor compares the “leftover” blood, i.e. leftover from the need of the flesh of the body of the father, to “alimento che di mensa leve,” much like Aristotle’s own comparison.

This residual blood is given a “virtute informativa”—which will be the common thread holding the whole of Statius’ discourse together—the virtue which eventually reduces all of the blood’s potentiality towards flesh into activity, making it to be the flesh of a human member:

prende nel core a tutte membra umane
virtute informativa, come quello
ch’a farsi quelle per le vene vane (37–42).

The blood, however, which concerns the present argument, remains after the veins have taken all that is required for the augmentation of the father’s own flesh—“non si beve da l’assetate vene, e si rimane” (37–38)—and is digested again (being still on a continuum with food). The result of this final digestion, once it has descended to its intended place, becomes semen—which is simply a final development of food-as-potential-flesh, so that beyond the stage of having the material capacity to be formed into any given organ, and again beyond the stage of having received
the informative virtue which would impart any given form of an organ onto that matter, the semen is so rarefied as to be no more than a vehicle for that virtue and allow it to inform not just any one organ but the human organism as a whole. But it is important to note that it is the very same kind of virtue in perfect blood and in semen, the virtue of potentially forming flesh; and most importantly, this virtue is not a material part of either substance, but is properly called a motion. Aristotle often terms it κίνησις, rendered in Latin translation as motus: “Spermata autem existente superfluitate et moto motu eodem secundum quem quidem corpus crescit partito ultimo alimento…”

Since the finally digested food has been reduced to merely a carrier of that virtue, it requires some other material to work on, to inform; this is the blood of the mother in the womb, which is likewise in potentiality to all parts of the organism:

That “perfect place” is the heart of the father, which imparted the active virtue. In the womb of the mother, the virtue—because it is an active potency pertaining to all human members, and because the maternal blood on which it operates has the passive potency to be made into all human flesh—is able to begin the formation of a new individual, solidifying the blood and vivifying it:

giunto lui, comincia ad operare

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coagulando prima, e poi avviva
ciò che per sua matera fé constare (49–51).

To this point, Dante has been following the embryology of *De generatione animalium* in a relatively uncontroversial matter. But for him as for many of his contemporaries, reading Aristotle meant reading him in translation and with commentary, often a commentary which is heavily depended on for understanding famously obscure and difficult texts. This dependence on commentary leads to difficulties of its own, since the interpreters of Aristotle varied amongst themselves, often to a wide degree. Such is the case with the next claim of Statius’ discourse, which continues from the moment at which the newly-coagulated substance in the womb has been vivified.

Anima fatta la virtute attiva
qual d’una pianta, in tanto differente,
che questa è in via e quella è già a riva (52–54).

As currently-received wisdom has it, the first verse—“Anima fatta la virtute attiva”—crucially signals Dante’s commitment to one particular camp among rival interpreters of a contentious point in animal generation.\(^{19}\)

Why should there be such significance in the claim that “the active virtue is made the soul” of the embryo? Aristotle notes himself that there is a certain difficulty related to the very moment in which a new animal comes to live:

De quibus est dubitatio plurima, quomodo quidem fit ex spermate planta aut animalium quodcumque. . .Aut enim extrinsecorum aliquid facit, aut inexistens aliquid in genitura et spermate; et hoc est aut pars aliqua anime aut anima, aut habens erit animam.\(^{20}\)

\(^{19}\)This is the primary legacy of Bruno Nardi regarding this canto. See “L’origine dell’anima,” esp. 22–24, 50–51; and “Il canto xxv,” esp. 145–47.

\(^{20}\) *De generatione animalium*, 11.1, 47. Of course, this is not the thorniest problem of the work, namely the unresolved problem of how the power of reason is produced in human generation.
Essentially, the problem concerns the status and activity of the semen, as compared to both the father from which it derives and the new being which it will help to produce. Only that which has soul potentially can come to have soul in actuality, and thus for Aristotle the maternal blood which takes the passive role in generation—whose prime matter is the substratum of this substantial change—already has soul potentially. Nothing is too troublesome there: this does not mean that the blood is already a separate, living substance, but that it has a particular privation so as to dispose it to receive a particular form. But furthermore, only that which already has soul in actuality can be the efficient cause of ensoulment. Taking the overall view of generation, this is unproblematic, since it is obviously man which generates man; but in the details it is complicated by the fact that in many animals the male parent does not cause ensoulment directly and immediately, but through semen which seems to work at a remove from that parent—apparently causing the ensoulment of the embryo itself. Does, then, the male seed possess an animal soul in actuality? If so, then it is already an animal itself; but this is absurd, not least because it is not an organic body—that is, it is not a complex body having differentiated organs, which for Aristotle is the only kind of body whose first actuality can be soul.  

21 But if it does not have soul, how can it cause a soul to be in the embryo? Thus, as Aristotle posed the dilemma, it would seem that at the moment of ensoulment the soul could come neither intrinsically nor extrinsically.

Obviously, ensoulment does take place, and so what is required is simply a more precise explanation of how exactly the power from the father is in the seed,

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21 Cf. De generatione animalium, ii.3, 53–54: “Quorumcumque enim principiorum est operatio corporalis, palam quia hec sine corpore imposibile existere, ut ambulare sine pedibus; quare et deforis ingredi imposibile: neque enim ipsas secundum ipsas ingredi possibiles inseparabiles existentes, neque in corpore ingredi: sperma enim superficium permutati alimenti est.”
without violating basic physical principles. Both residues—the maternal blood and the paternal seed—have soul virtually, not actually: “virtute quidem enim habent, actu autem non habent.”\(^{22}\) But soul can be had “virtute” in two ways: the maternal residue has the passive power to be ensouled, and the paternal the active power to ensoul—which would later be termed the *virtus formativa*. How can a thing have an active power, having soul in a certain sense, yet without being ensouled properly speaking? Aristotle compares it to an instrument in the hand of an artisan:

Quemadmodum neque a fabro ad lignorum materiam neque provenit nihil, neque particula nulla est tectonice in eo quod fit, sed forma et species ab illo provenit per motum in materia, et anima quidem in qua species et scientia movet manus aut aliquam particularum alteram qualis quodam motu, altero quidem a quibus fit alterum, eodem autem a quibus idem: manus autem organa, organa autem materiam. Similiter autem et natura que in masculo sperma emittentium utitur sperma ut organo, et habente aut motus aut actus, sicut in his que secundum artem fiunt organa moventur: in illis enim aliqualiter motus artis.\(^{23}\)

The male seed is an instrumental cause: while it is distinct from both the man generating and the man generated, it does not simply act on its own, but transmits the activity given by the father—to whom it belongs to cause ensoulment—to the matter of ensoulment. If an artist uses a brush instead of finger-painting, this does not make him less of a painter himself, nor does it introduce a second painter; the brush simply transmits the motion in which the art consists from the one who possesses it in full actuality to the material in which a new instance of the art will be actualized. And if one were, Pollock-like, to employ projectile motion in painting—say, to throw a paint-sopped brush at a canvas—the mere fact that for

\(^{22}\)See n. 16 supra, and *Generation of Animals*, ii.1, 172: “δυνάμει μὲν γὰρ ἔχει, ἐνεργείᾳ δ’ οὖκ ἔχει.”

\(^{23}\) *De generatione animalium*, 1.23, 38–39.
a limited time the brush is not in contact with the artist and nevertheless already has in it a virtual power to apply paint to canvas still does not entail that the brush can be said to paint. It has been moved by the painter, and only because he is actually an artist is the fleeting motion of the brush—which is virtually art—productive of what can properly be called art (subject to the latest critical fashions, of course).

Likewise, the contribution of the paternal residue to generation is not any material part, but its very activity—and that a fleeting and instrumental activity. The virtus which it carries is more like a motion than a form; hence it can effect ensoulment without being itself ensouled.

Now this is only a background to Statius’s much-disputed line, “anima fatta la virtute attiva”; thus far it does not determine whether for Aristotle the virtus should be said to become the soul. (De generatione animalium is not perfectly clear on that point, and regardless, there is no guarantee of Dante following Aristotle in every detail; he might vary from the Stagirite’s thought unconsciously through the medium of a commentary or consciously through deliberate modification.) But it is essential to observe what exactly is the character of the virtute formativa which Statius has brought to the fore, prior to involvement into the once-fiery debate over which Scholastic master, if any, Dante follows here.

Certainly, it is prima facie contrary to Thomas’s explanation of Aristotle’s biology to say that the virtue of the semen itself becomes the soul of the embryo: Thomas calls this a natural impossibility, and insists rather that the seminal virtue dissolves upon educing the vegetative soul from its matter, the maternal blood.24 Statius’s claim, that the seminal virtue becomes the vegetative soul,

24See, e.g., In Sent., ii.18.2.3: “in hoc processu sunt plurimae generationes et corruptiones.”
and the vegetative the sensitive, appears to follow more closely one version of the embryology of Albertus; and thus it has been argued that the latter can be seen as the most consistent and significant source for the discourse (although it does contain certain unique aspects).²⁵

But what exactly is at stake here? The alternative, propounded by Thomas, is that there is a non-continuous succession of forms,²⁶ with each form replaced at the advent of the next (as the seminal virtue is replaced by the vegetative soul, the vegetative by the sensitive). Albert considered this unacceptable, as contrary to the nature of substantial form: to one substance corresponds one substantial form. Thus if there is a succession of substantial forms, there must be a succession of substances; one would have to claim that there is not a single embryo but at least three different substances—one vegetative, one sensitive, and one rational. But this is absurd: every generating substance generates its like, and if there are distinct substances during gestation, then one would have to say that first a man generates a vegetable, then a vegetable generates an animal, and so on; which is impossible. Therefore one must hold that there is a single substantial form from the moment that a new substance exists—conception—through to the fulfillment of the highest capacity of that form, i.e., the actualization of the rational power. While, as will be seen, the substance cannot actualize that power on its own but must await the activity of God, it is nevertheless different from a merely sensitive substance by being ordered to have such a power, in other words to have that power potentially: just as at the vegetative state the substance yet differed from a vegetable—"in tanto differente."


²⁶That is, a succession which is not a motion—which occurs over time and can therefore be divided into a potentially infinite number of different moments—but a series of discreet and instantaneous transformations.
Thomas’s reason for rejecting this line of argument is clear: it violates the very definition of form. It is impossible for form as such to be the subject of becoming; it is actuality, not a thing having actuality. A substance can have potencies for other actualities than are present at a given time, but it is precisely the composite substance which has them, that is, the substance insofar as it possesses matter in which are the privations of possible forms. To predicate potentiality of form as such would be to predicate it of actuality, and thereby to fall subject once again to the arguments of Parmenides, who denied the reality of change. If one is to claim that form itself (and not the substance of which it is a principle) becomes something, e.g., a certain form becomes a higher form, one would thus be forced to posit yet another substratum, a matter belonging to the form as such (beyond the matter to which it is united to make the substance)—every change presupposes a substratum which persists. There would then be a form-matter compound called ‘vegetative soul’ which would be susceptible of change to become ‘sensitive soul’ by way of having the privation of ‘sensitive’ in the substratum which has the actuality of ‘vegetative’. But this process will go on infinitely: if once one suggests that the soul as such is the subject of becoming, there is no reason not to suggest the same of the form of the supposed compound ‘vegetative soul’; thus another substratum will have to be presumed, and then another, and so on. If a step is made which would make the argument go on infinitely then it will make the argument fail altogether; such a step is made if one says that a form as such becomes.

The implication, then, for the development of the human embryo is that only the substance as a whole can, properly speaking, come to be; and therefore if it is found to have different essential powers at one point and at another, this must be because of different forms which have advened to the substratum, not because the
same form has developed. Thus even if it is counter-intuitive for a single substance to have different substantial forms, one must posit that if the embryo is at one time vegetative and at another sensitive, this must be because there is at the one time a vegetative soul and at the other a sensitive soul, which is indeed—in terms of power—what the vegetative was and more, but in terms of continuity is not the development of the previous but its succession; and since multiple substantial forms cannot coexist in the same substance, when the vegetative soul is succeeded by the sensitive, it must simply cease to be.

As the currently-accepted interpretation of *Purgatorio* xxv has it, Dante could not have agreed with Thomas to this point. Because the poet has Statius assert that the active virtue of the semen is made into the vegetative soul, it is argued, he is clearly opposed to Thomas’s position (and more in line with that of Albert) in claiming that a single, substantial, active principle can be itself the subject of development. Now, Albert himself does not claim that the seminal virtue becomes the vegetative soul, only that once the soul is brought into existence by that virtue, it is susceptible of progressive actualization while remaining a single form. The assimilation of Dante’s position to Albert’s is made because the development of the seminal virtue into the vegetative soul follows this same rationale of a single activity which is progressively made more actual—even if Albert only applied it after ensoulement—remaining numerically identical without dissolution.

This can be seen in the continuance of the discourse in which Statius describes the progressive increase in powers and organization within the embryo, saying of

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27 Note that, as observed by Nardi, Albert appears to change his position on the life of the embryo between his *De animalibus* (in which he argues that the seminal virtue and the soul of the mother are sufficient to account for embryonic development prior to the infusion of the complete rational soul by God) and *De natura et origine animae* (in which he argues for the development of a single soul which is first vegetative, as is here the position of interest with respect to Dante). See “L’origine dell’anima,” esp. 20, 24–33.
the active virtue:

\[
\text{tanto ovra poi, che già si move e sente,} \\
\text{come spunge marino, e indi imprende} \\
\text{ad organar le posse ond' è semente.} \\
\text{Or si spiega, figliuolo, or si distende} \\
\text{la virtù ch'è dal cor del generante,} \\
\text{dove natura a tutte membra intende (52–60).}
\]

Statius’s primary point of emphasis, it seems, is the continuous presence of this active virtue, hence his reference back to the “cor del generante” from which it came and where it took on the potency to form every human member. If the virtue continues to be present as developed into the vegetative and then sensitive souls, then apparently Dante expresses here the very doctrine which Thomas rejects as impossible in nature.28

Likewise, when God infuses the now-organized embryo with a “new spirit,” this gathers the preexisting vegetative and sensitive activity with its own divinely-created rational activity to form a single soul: i.e., it is a development of the preexisting soul and the perfection of a potency already present therein, not a new soul with new powers of vegetation and sensation which replaces what came before (as Thomas would have it). Thus Statius, after an allusion to Averroes which will be treated shortly, pronounces:

\[
\text{si tosto come al fetò} \\
\text{l'articular del cerebro è perfetto,} \\
\text{lo motor primo a lui si volge lieto} \\
\text{sovrà tant' arte di natura, e spira}
\]

28 Nardi, “L’origine dell’anima,” 50–51: “Anche per Dante, come per Alberto, la virtù informativa deriva dall’anima del generante ed avviva l’embrione; ma mentre, per Alberto, essa non diventa mai vera anima, cioè atto ed entelechia dell’embrione, Dante invece, qui come nel Conversio, ritiene. . . ‘ipsam prædictam virtutem (seminis) fieri animam vegetabilem; deinde, organis magis perfectis et multiplicatis, eandem perduci ut sit anima sensitive.’” Nardi’s quotation is of Thomas’s rejection of this argument; see Summa contra Gentiles, II.89, 541.
spirito novo, di vertù repleto,
che ciò che trova attiva quivi, tira
in sua sustanzia, e fassi un’alma sola,
che vive e sente e sé in sé rigira (68–75).

Thus far the interpretation most widely accepted in the last half-century, whose opposition of Dante’s embryology to that of Thomas has been occasionally moderated but never fundamentally uprooted.29

As it is certainly true that Thomas denies repeatedly that the seminal virtue can, properly speaking, develop into a soul, or that one soul can develop into another, it is rather curious that in his Sentences commentary he gives an account which prima facie suggests the contrary and implies a developmental view:

Virtus formativa convertit materiam a muliere praeparatam in substantiam membrorum...et secundum quod proceditur in perfectione organorum, secundum hoc anima incipit magis ac magis actu esse in semine, quae prius erat in potentia: ita quod conceptum primo participat opera vitae nutritivae, et tunc dicitur vivere vita plantae; et sic deinceps, donec perveniat ad completum similitudinem generantis.30

If Thomas’s primary concern is to reject the possibility of increase or decrease in a single substantial form, why would he say that the “anima incipit magis ac magis actu esse,” referring explicitly to the transition from vegetative activity to those higher activities which will bring it “ad completum similitudinem generantis,” namely sensation and intellection? If anything, he goes farther than Albert here, and is more completely in accord with Statius’s apparent meaning: at no point was Albert willing to say that the informative virtue itself becomes the vegetative

29Gilson, Cogan, and to a lesser extent Boyde and Gragnolati, have disputed or qualified certain aspects of Nardi’s presentation. See: Gilson, “Dante’s Notion of a Shade; “Qu’est-ce qu’une ombre?; Cogan, The Design in the Wax,” 1:26–47; Boyde, Dante Philomythes, 271–81; Experiencing the Afterlife, 67–77.

30Thomas Aquinas, In Sent., 1.18.2.3.co., 470.
soul, but the above passage at least permits the interpretation of the continuous development of a single activity from the seminal virtue onwards. It cannot be that this represents an early position which Thomas later rejected; in the very same article’s response to an objection he makes it explicit that to the different stages of embryonic life respond different perfections—at least, different in number:

Per actionem huius virtutis primo consequitur conceptus vitam nutritivam et postea vitam sensitivam. Sed quia, ut Avicenna dicit...in hoc processu sunt plurimae generationes et corruptiones, sicut quod semen convertitur in sanguinem, et sic deinceps; quando venitur ad secundum perfectionem, prima perfectio non manet eadem numero, sed acquiritur simul cum acquisitione secundae; et sic patet quod in infusione animae rationalis homo simul consequitur in una essentia animae animam sensitivam et vegetativam; et priores perfectiones non manent eadem numero.\textsuperscript{31}

Item. In the disputed question \textit{De potentia}, Thomas considers the following objection: if a rational soul is infused in the embryo which performs all the activities of its life, particularly the formation of organs from blood, then the previous virtue which performed that activity on the embryo prior to the infusion of the soul—the informative virtue carried by the semen—would continue to exist without purpose ("otiosa"), and this is contrary to the operation of nature, which does nothing in vain.\textsuperscript{32} Anticipating the response that the formative virtue is destroyed upon the advent of a soul which can perform its function and more, the next objection contends that "dispositions," among which the formative virtue can be counted, cannot be destroyed by a form because they are the condition of its inhering in

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{In Sent.}, 11.18.2.3.\textit{co.}, 471-72.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{De potentia}, 3.9.arg. 16, 22: "Si non est ibi anima vegetabilis ante adventum animae rationalis, sed virtus formativa; adveniente anima, illa virtus suam operationem non habebit; cum operatio quam illa virtus faciebat in embrione, sufficienter postmodum fiat in animali per animam. Ergo erit ibi otiosa; quod videtur esse inconveniens, cum nihil sit otiosum in natura."
the matter—in a certain way they hold form in matter.\textsuperscript{33} Given Thomas’s insistence, in this very article as elsewhere, that the seminal virtue cannot successively develop into various gradations of soul,\textsuperscript{34} one might expect that he would respond to this objection by denying its portrayal of the relation between disposition and form; but in fact he allows its claim:

Virtus formativa quae in principio est in semine, manet adveniente etiam anima rationali; sicut et spiritus in quos fere tota substantia spermatis convertitur maneat. Et illa quae prius fuit formativa corporis fit postmodum corporis regitiva. Sicut etiam calor qui fuit dispositio ad formam ignis manet forma ignis adveniente, ut instrumentum formae in agendo.\textsuperscript{35}

How is it that Thomas is able to say in one place that the seminal virtue remains in the soul, and in another that the soul grows in activity, when in these same articles and in all of his treatments of the same question, he never doubts that substantial form is not susceptible of progressive development and must therefore be produced instantaneously, with the destruction of the previous perfection?\textsuperscript{36}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{33} \textit{De potentia}, 3.9.arg. 17, 22: “Sed dices, quod illa virtus destruitur adveniente anima rationali. — Sed contra, dispositiones non destruentur adveniente forma, sed manent, et quodammodo tenent formam in materia. Sed illa virtus erat quaedam dispositio ad animam. Ergo adveniente anima, illa virtus non destruitur.”
  \item \textsuperscript{34} \textit{De potentia}, 3.9.ad 1, 67: “Non potest esse quod illa virtus quae est a principio in semine, successive proficiat ad diversos gradus animae.”
  \item \textsuperscript{35} \textit{De potentia}, 3.9.ad 16, 68.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} See: \textit{De potentia}, 3.9.ad 1, 67: “Forma substantialis non continue vel successive in actum producatur, sed in instanti . . . nulla forma substantialis suscipiat magis et minus;” \textit{Summa contra Gentiles}, 1.86, 535; “Secundum enim hanc positionem, sequeretur quod aliqua virtus eadem numero nunc esset anima vegetabilis tantum, et postmodum anima sensitiva: et sic ipsa forma substantialis continue magis ac magis periceretur. Et ulterior sequeretur quod non simul, sed successive educeretur forma substantialis de potentia in actum. Et ulterior quod generatio esset motus continuus, sicut et alteratio. Quae omnia sunt impossibilia in natura.” Note that in the latter case Thomas echoes closely the phrasing of his \textit{Sentences} commentary used in support of the claim of persistence in kind—“magis ac magis periceretur”—but here in approbation of the claim of persistence in number. It is possible that the latter opinion became more of a perceived danger in his later works; regardless, given the constancy of his overall teaching throughout, the comparison shows precisely the conditions for speaking of generation as a gradual progression, in Thomas’s view. See also: \textit{Summa theologiae}, 1.118.1.ad 4, 564.
\end{itemize}
An answer is suggested by Cardinal Cajetan, who in his commentary on the Summa theologiae notes that the above-cited response to an objection in De potentia could be seen as conflicting with Thomas’s judgment in the Summa; he responds that the permanence can be understood in two ways, numerically and according to species: “[virtus] remanet formaliter, et desinit materialiter; idest remanet secundum speciem, et corrumpitur secundum numerum.” This is in accordance with the Sentences commentary, in which Thomas specifies that in the development of the embryo “priores perfectiones non manent eadem numero.” Yet the cardinal’s explanation, while consistent, is somewhat unsatisfying; certainly the proper way of speaking of the permanence of some thing is according to number, and what remains only according to species remains only secundum quid. If one is asked whether one’s dog is still alive, and answers, “Fluffy survives,” without specifying that the individual Fluffy is now dead but survives in her brood of puppies, one is certain to be misunderstood. Why would Thomas have said without the explicit clarification of secundum speciem that the seminal virtue remains?

It should be recalled that in this context both virtus and forma refer to activities, not substances. By Aristotle’s own emphasis (in resolving the problem of how the semen can be said to have soul), the seminal virtus is best considered an instrumental motion being transmitted from the father to the maternal blood (and Thomas also says that while the seminal virtue can in a way be considered a forma, it is most properly a mover); under this aspect the strong opposition

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37 Commentaria in Summam theologiae Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, vols. 4–12 of Opera omnia iussu impensae Leonis XIII P. M. edita (Roma: Commissio Leonina), i. 118.1 n. 8, 565
38 See n. 31 supra.
39 In Sent., 11.18.2, 469: “Huic autem spiritui conjungitur virtus formativa, magis per modum motoris quam per modum formae, etsi forma eius aliquo modo sit.” For De generatione animal-
which the dominant interpretation of Statius sets up between the continuity of a single *virtus* on the one hand, and its destruction and succession on the other, yields to a distinction which allows for both ways of speaking within Thomas’s account.

An analogy will be of assistance: when a cue ball is struck and collides with the center of another billiard ball, the former comes to rest and the latter is set in motion. Is the motion of the latter ball a second motion, different from that of the first, or is it the same movement which has become the movement of another? Under one aspect, there must be two numerically different motions: to say that the movement of the second ball is numerically identical to that of the cue ball, would mean that they are the same ball; precisely because the particular movement of the cue ball is of that ball it cannot exist when that ball is at rest. After impact the cue ball is at rest and the second ball is in motion; therefore there must be two movements. Under the aspect of the process taken as a whole, however, it is evident in what sense there is a single movement which is transferred from one ball to another. The second ball moves because it has been moved by the first, and the motion it takes on is not merely the same as that of the first *secundum speciem* (as any other locomotion would be), but is determined by the precise velocity and direction of the cue ball. In fact, as Aristotle says in the *Physics*, at the moment of contact between mover and moved, the movement of two is one and the same, differing only in definition: “they belong to the same *subject*, the motion; for the ‘actualization of *X* in *Y*’ and the ‘actualization of *Y* through the action of *X*’ differ in *definition*.”

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*iun*, see n. 16 supra.

Granting that substantial changes, generation and corruption, are not motions in the strict sense,\textsuperscript{41} they are nonetheless analogous to accidental changes such as motion; indeed it is only through an analogy with accidental change that the principles of substantial change are identified. Likewise the efficient cause of substantial change can be called a mover, even though the unqualified becoming which it causes is not a motion: the efficient cause ‘moves’ by reducing potency to act.\textsuperscript{42}

Therefore, since generation can also be described as “the actualization of \(Y\) through the action of \(X\)” — in the case of the generation of a human being, the actualization of the material furnished by the mother through the action imparted to the semen by the father — it can be said equivalently it is “the actualization of \(X\) in \(Y\)” — the actualization of the semen in the menstrual blood — for at the point of contact that they have one and the same activity. After the contact is complete and generation effected, the activity of the now-vivified blood will not be numerically the same as that which was the activity of the semen — just as when instruction is complete, the knowledge of the student is numerically different from that of the teacher (even though at the moment of instruction the teacher’s teaching and the student’s learning are numerically the same activity, differing in definition

\textsuperscript{41}Motion can only be of what already exists, from one disposition to its contrary, and over time; whereas in substantial change what exists in an unqualified sense is the beginning or end, and is not from a contrary — since substance has no contrary, and being cannot come from non-being \textit{per se} — and therefore cannot take place in a span of time, since time is the measure of motion. See \textit{Physics}, v.1–2, 203: “Therefore it is impossible for that which \textit{is not} to be in motion. This being so, it follows that ‘becoming’ cannot be a motion: for it is that which ‘is not’ that ‘becomes’... So, too, ‘perishing’ is not a motion: for a motion has for its contrary either another motion or rest, whereas ‘perishing’ is the contrary of ‘becoming’... In respect of Substance there is no motion, because Substance has no contrary among things that are.”

\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Physics}, iii.2, 202ab9–10, 23b6: “The mover or agent will always be the vehicle of a form, either a ‘this’ or a ‘such,’ which, when it acts, will be the source and cause of the change, e.g. the full-formed man begets man from what is potentially man.”
alone).\textsuperscript{43} To say, then, that “the knowledge of the teacher becomes that of the student” can be both true and false: after the movement is complete, it is false according to number but true according to species (since the student’s knowledge will be identical in kind to the teacher’s); and at the moment of actualization, it is true in both respects. Nor is it misleading to say simply that the teacher’s knowledge has become the student’s: if knowledge is regarded as an activity or attribute, not treated as if a substance in itself, the sense is natural. There would no need to specify that the identity in question is specific rather than numeric, since a patent absurdity would result in the latter case: there could not be two knowers after the instruction. Likewise, if the \textit{virtus formativa} were claimed to persist numerically in the soul of the progeny, there could be no progeny: that \textit{virtus} derived from the soul of the father, and more precisely was an activity or motion of his soul working at a distance through the seed; to say that the same \textit{virtus} persists in number in the progeny would be to say that father and son have numerically the same soul. Only if that very \textit{virtus} corrupts in transmitting its activity can souls be multiplied.

It should now be clear how Thomas’s apparently contradictory language can be better understood. The brunt of the above-cited objection in \textit{De potentia} was that there must be a formative function in the embryo, after the advent of the rational soul, simply because formation of organs continues to occur, and therefore if the rational soul provides that formative function there is a redundancy of powers, which is contrary to the action of nature. Thomas replies that there are indeed not two virtues, but the same virtue remaining after the advent of the rational soul, because the rational soul is an actualization which contains within itself all

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Physics}, i i i.3, 202b5–20, 257.
and exactly what the formative virtue was. If the soul and virtue are regarded implicitly as substances, as objects in their own right, this may seem a strained use of “remains” (as if the term were equivalent to “is replaced by another like it”). But when it is observed that—according to Aristotle’s explicit and repeated teaching—what the male contributes to generation, the formative virtue, is not any thing which remains in the product in the way of a material part, but is rather the movement imparted to it, the difficulty is removed.

It is according to this sort of analogy that the relationship between virtus and anima, and between one level of anima and another, is to be understood. The motion or activity which is given by the father in human generation effects an activity in the menstrual blood; that actualization is the coming to be of a new substance. From the perspective of discreet moments, the actualization of the new substance is numerically different from the actualization which was carried by the semen; from the perspective of the process as a whole, a single kind of actuality has been transferred through instrumental virtus—one activity has become another in the sense of being expended in contributing to the causation of that which is exactly what it was, and more.

Thus Thomas could use both locutions without contradiction. He was satisfied with speaking of the process as a progressive increase in actualization and of the permanence of the initial virtue; but would also specify when necessary (and from the different emphases of the articles in the Sentences commentary and in the

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And according to such an understanding, Nardi apparently took this response in De potentia and the above-cited passage from the Sentences commentary as mere aberrations, to be ignored in presenting Thomas’ teaching as hostile to any claim that the virtue remains or comes progressively into greater activity.

See, e.g., De generatione animalium, 1.21, 36: “Palam igitur quo non necesse segregari aliquid a masculo, neque si quid egressit, propter hoc ex hoc ut inexistente quod fit est, sed ut ex movente et specie et ut a medicinali sanatus.”
two *Summae*, it appears that it became more and more necessary until it was the dominant feature of his response) that numerical difference must be upheld according to the very definition of substantial form. It is all a matter of emphasis.46

What, then, is Statius’s emphasis in describing human generation? Clearly his answer is focused on the continuity of the process as a whole and the permanence of a virtue in kind and capability, not in number. He shows no evidence of being concerned to answer an objection that the seminal virtue and the soul which it effects must be numerically different.47 His point is that it is the same seminal virtue, in the sense of being the same kind of activity, having precisely the same power—that of forming each human member—even though it has now become a higher activity. This, it will be seen, is why the rational soul, even once separated from the body, must retain a formative power; whether or not the theory would allow for numerical identity of the virtue is quite incidental.

To return to that discourse: the *virtute* carried by the semen and given to the menstrual blood has now coagulated it, vivified it, and brought it to the level of sensitive organization and activity. But now the critical point has been reached

46 Boyde indicates this in a more limited way, allowing Nardi’s critique but recalling the more expansive common ground between the various interpreters of Aristotle; see *Dante Philomythes*, 274–75.

47 This is Nardi’s preoccupation, which is foisted upon the text to such an extent that the one point at which Dante most clearly differed from Albert the Great—“anima fatta la virtute attiva”—is made the lynch-pin of an interpretation of the whole discourse as essentially Albertian and thoroughly un-Thomistic. That the most obvious understanding of that phrase, if one presumes the virtue to be a substance, does indeed indicate numerical identity is easily granted; but that is an erroneous presumption. Moreover, the vastly more important question is, what does this part of the discourse contribute to its culmination and *raison d’être*, the explanation of the shade-bodies? And is the basis of that contribution not equivalent in both the Thomistic and Albertian accounts of the origin of the soul? (Nardi argues that for Thomas, the informative virtue is absent because it has corrupted; it should be patent from above that this groundless—the very same power is most certainly present, the only question is how it becomes part of something higher. See “L’origine dell’anima,” 57.) It has thus been a bit of a digression to argue that Nardi is also mistaken concerning the compatibility of the discourse with Thomism; but his reading has become so thoroughly entrenched as to merit a full treatment.
when nature itself cannot complete the species; all the organs of the human body
are present (in nascent form), and yet their activity, the activity of the composite
as to this point formed, is ordered to an activity which defines the species but is
yet out of reach, precisely because it is not the act of any organ:

Ma come d’animal divedna fante,
non vedi tu ancor: quest’è tal punto,
che più savio di te fé già errante,
sì che per sua dottrina fé disgiunto
da l’anima possibile intelletto,
perché da lui non vide organo assunto (61–66).

The one “more wise” than Dante was “Averois che ’l gran comento feo” (Inf. iv.144),
who taught that the possible intellect could not be joined to the individual human
soul because the soul is the form of the body, and therefore all of its activities
must be the acts of corporeal organs; but intellect—because it receives immaterial
species—has an immaterial activity, and therefore (as Averroes concluded) it must
be a separate and immaterial being, joined to individual men only in the act of
understanding.

This was no facile error; Aristotle’s teaching on the origin of reason and the
possibility of its union with corporeal powers is obscure, and indeed the understood
premise—that no purely corporeal form can have a non-corporeal activity—is true
so far as it goes. The human soul is unique in all of nature, and it is not surprising
that the investigation of nature which in the Physics yields an understanding of
form should carry a danger of misunderstanding when it comes to consider that
soul which is indeed the form of a body, but is also more.

Statius then divulges the truth of the matter, with a prelude that indicates to
pilgrim and reader the importance of this moment:

Apri a la verità che viene il petto;
The response to Averroes is centered in “un’alma sola,” a single soul which has all the powers of the embryonic life which preceded it—nutrition, which is ‘life’ in the most universal sense in nature, and sensation, thus “vive e sente”—but is those activities and more: it also and as the very fulfillment or perfection of the lower activities “turns upon itself,” i.e., it is reflective. Its activity can be interior to itself because it is not materially dependent in se. Whereas Averroes had regarded intellect as a separate substance which had to be judged in itself as commensurable or not with information of a body (and under that aspect, of course, it is not), the truth is that intellect is the power of a soul which has also the powers corresponding to a material form, and can thus be united to a single human body. If this is possible, if a single soul can have all the powers of life, sense, and reflection, then it must be the case (and here is the precise point which Averroes did not see) that the natural limits of corporeal form do not exclude its being taken up into a greater perfection which includes it.

Greater perfection is possible only because God grants it, and “breathes a new life” into the work of nature. Why can it be said that God is “lieto / sovra tant’ arte di natura”—in one commentator’s words, “as if God admired Nature’s handiwork”?48 While all the works of nature are ultimately caused by God, and

so no strict disjunction can be understood in the phrase, this work is peculiar and the cause of joy because it is the occasion—or rather the prerequisite—for the multiplication of the greatest good in all creation: intelligent life. The work of nature is wholly dependent upon God’s special, direct, and properly creative action for the immaterial power of reason; but as Statius has so emphatically affirmed, human reason is not a prior substance existing in and of itself, but the incorporeal power of a corporeal form. Since no corporeal form can come to be independently of the composite, no human soul can be created alone and in itself. This claim entails no limitation to God’s power, but merely observes that the suggestion of the preexistence or pre-creation of souls involves a contradiction in terms: “to come to be in itself” is incompatible with the definition of “human soul,” and so if God were to create reason alone, it simply would not be a human soul. Of course, he has created in this way, and these creatures are the angels. In that sense, then, God’s infusion of the rational soul is dependent upon nature, through the parents who beget the child insofar as they are capable of causing a new composite substance: without that composite, there could be no soul which is the act of the composite, and therefore he can be said to rejoice at the art of nature.

Of course, what makes the case difficult and has caused much confusion on this point is that the human soul can indeed exist without the body, as the pilgrim and reader at this point are in no position to doubt; therefore Statius must take all the more trouble to lay the groundwork which shows why this separate existence can only be after its initial union with the body, not before: it can only be created as the act of a body, but once created, its immaterial power of reason is incorruptible.
Here again, established commentary must be taken into account: is the “new spirit, full of virtue” simply the possible intellect, possessing (in potency) all intelligible forms but having nothing more than this intellectual power in itself, which must thus be united with the preexisting sensitive soul in order to form a rational soul with all its powers? It is significant that Statius, introducing the creative action of God, refers to Him as the Prime Mover: once again it is precisely in terms of motion, used analogically, that one can understand how exactly the new

49 Nardi interprets the statement that the new spirit “takes what it finds active there (in the embryo) into its substance, and makes a single soul” as meaning just the opposite of its prima facie meaning, claiming that the preexisting soul takes reason into its substance—on the grounds that when potency is actualized it can be said both that the act takes up the potency into itself and that the potency receives the act into itself. “L’origine dell’anima,” 56: “In altre parole, l’anima sensitiva sta all’intelletto possibile, come insegnà Alberto Magno, nel rapporto de potenza ad atto: ora, mentre la potenza è quella che riceve l’atto, l’atto è quello che tira a sé la potenza e le dà il nome.” That much may be true; but how this language can coherently be applied to the sensitive soul and the new spirit in Dante’s account is in question. How can act, precisely as act, be in potency? Of course, while a sensitive soul an act, it is yet a finite act, lesser in its activity than the rational soul, or an angel, or God. Thus it can be said to be comparatively potential, in Albert’s phrase—see De natura et origine animae, vol. 12 of Opera omnia, ed. Bernard Geyer (Münster i. W.: Aschendorff, 1955), 1:4–5, 10–14—and Thomas, as is well known, speaks of the essence of an angel as being in potency with respect to existence: Summa theologiae, 1.50.2.ad 3.6. But it is of crucial importance that these are not said with respect to change, but only of the already-existing substance. Albert may speak of an incohatio formae as Thomas does not, but he does not on this account attribute the potentiality to the form just as such, but the matter or composite: “sicut in aliis etiam in homine incohatio vegetativi est in materia et in esse primo substantiae animandae et incohatio sensibilis est in vegetativo et incohatio rationalis est in sensitivo” (13). And Thomas’s dictum on the composition of angels would be nonsense if it were taken to imply that an essence stands in potency to existence before a change and then has that potency actualized by existence: “Subtracta ergo materia, et posito quod ipsa forma subsistat non in materia, adhuc remanet comparatio formae ad ipsum esse ut potentiae ad actum” (6). If the essence does not yet exist it is not in potency; it simply is not. Only in the already-existing composite can one say that act and potency can be distinguished relatively within a form. But what Nardi attempts to do is to make an already-existing act, the sensitive soul, the very potency which is actualized by the possible intellect. What Statius actually says, however, rather emphasizes the activity of the sensitive soul: the new spirit “takes what it finds active there,” and one soul can be formed precisely because what came before was act and what comes after is that act and something more, a something more to which the composite stood in obediential potency.

Again, to a certain extent this is all beside the point—just so far as making sense of the discourse as a whole is concerned—when one observes that permanence in species, not number, is crucial for Statius’s conclusion. As will be argued in the following section, however, numerical identity is more important for another discourse later in the Commedia.
spirit can “take up what it finds active there.”

As in the case of the transition between seminal virtue and vegetative soul, whether or not it can be said that the vegetative and sensitive activities of the new spirit are the same as those which preceded them depends upon the intended emphasis of the statement. It has been seen that Thomas, that staunch combattant of the progressive development of substantial form, could say that the informative virtue remains in the vegetative and indeed in the rational soul, because in that context the question is one of specifically identical operation; by the same rationale he could have said that the vegetative and sensitive souls are the same before and after the advent of the rational soul, provided that the question at hand be not of numerical identity or of a soul as the subject of change, but of the permanence of the very same powers and activities in that which is a further perfection of them. Again, this is exactly the point which Statius is concerned to emphasize: when the rational soul is complete it has, as a single soul, precisely the same virtus formativa as first acted upon the menstrual blood; all that will matter for the explanation of the shade-bodies is that this is the same kind of power, with no necessary implications for numerical identity.

2.3.2 Creation and mediation

If Statius’s discourse is neutral on the numerical identity of the ex traduce formative virtue and other sub-rational powers with those of the complete rational soul—that is, on the question of whether God’s infusion of intellect gives to the composite life simpliciter, or only adds another and created power to a life naturally produced and continuing in number—that of Beatrice in Paradiso vii is not. Her discourse on creation indicates that the “spirito novo” which God breathes
into the new human being is not only the possible intellect, but its life altogether:

L'anima d'ogne bruto e de le piante
di complession potenzïa tira
lo raggio e 'l moto de le luci sante;
ma vostra vita sanza mezzo spira
la somma beninanza, e la innamora
di sé sì che poi sempre la disira (139-44).

While reason, as the highest power of man’s soul and thus the source of his specific difference, can itself be called his soul or life *secundum quid*, this is to take the part for the whole: by the very fact that reason is not the act of any organ, it cannot (*qua reason*) be the life of an organic body. If Beatrice thought that the vegetative and sensitive powers which are the life of man’s body are powers educed by created agents (as they ultimately exist in the completed human soul), there would be no contrast here—man’s life, very like that of every brute and plant, would indeed be drawn “di complession potenzïate” by the celestial spheres, cooperating with natural parents, and what “la somma beninanza” adds would not be man’s “vita” but the raising up of a pre-existing life to higher capability. If, however, the life which is produced by created agents is only the preparation for the advent of a newly-created and complete soul which in itself both has an immaterial rational power and is the life of an organic body, then it can be said that man’s “vita” is breathed immediately by God, in contrast to the life of lower beings.

Furthermore, the coda which Beatrice gives to this discourse at the conclusion of the canto confirms that by “vostra vita” she means the human soul with all of its powers—though this can only be seen once a long-standing misinterpretation has been avoided. Immediately following her distinction between the souls of brutes and the life of man, Beatrice applies this newly-imparted knowledge to the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body:
What argument does she intend the pilgrim (and reader) to make for the Resurrection? The interpretation of these lines turns upon the meaning of the two adverbs *quinci* and *come*: the argument is a consequence (*quinci*) of her preceding instruction, and depends upon the particular manner (*come*) in which the flesh of Adam and Eve was made.

There is a limpid way of explaining both of these terms, which constitutes the almost unanimous interpretation of this text among commentators. This second half of Beatrice’s long discourse is governed by a single distinction: while all things come from God, some come from him alone and *sanza mezzo*, while others are produced *con mezzo*. The former, by virtue of being created “in loro essere intero” (132) by God alone, are immortal and free; the latter are not, precisely because in their production they were made subject to already-created principles: “da creata virtù sono informati” (135). This distinction must be the antecedent for *quinci*: from the difference between production *sanza mezzo* and *con mezzo*, man can argue for the Resurrection. If one then looks to the creation of “li primi parenti” in Genesis 2, it is there said that God alone formed the flesh of Adam and Eve. In context, then, Beatrice must surely mean that this account should be understood as creation *sanza mezzo*, with the consequence that the first parents’

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flesh was made immortal.

Of course, Adam and Eve and all their progeny (save one) have died indeed, and so obviously human flesh is not immortal, simply speaking; but this has already been accounted for in the same discourse of Paradiso vii: if immortality and freedom are the direct consequences of immediate creation, still they are called gifts or dignities,\(^{51}\) implying that they can be taken away—and indeed they were taken from the human creature by sin, which alone “la disinfranca / a falle dissimile al sommo bene” (79–80). In fact, another way of saying that a creature has the divine properties of immortality and freedom on account of the directness of its descent from the divine, is to say that it is made in the image of God (as Genesis also says of the production of man); and thus the loss of these gifts follows upon his becoming dissimilar to the highest good. Through the sacrifice of Christ, however, that wound has been healed, and the likeness restored—therefore it is necessary that the dignities belonging to that likeness be restored. Still born into sin through Adam’s seed, man must pass through death in order to be united to that sacrifice, to accept the ransom paid for him; but presuming this, the original argument holds: since man’s flesh was made by God senza mezzo, and other obstacles having been removed, it will necessarily put on incorruption and live eternally.

On the other hand, it is written: “thou [shalt] return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken; for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return” (Gen. 3.19).

In response to this common interpretation, it should be noted—as a very few voices in Dante scholarship have observed—that such a reading entails a number

\(^{51}\)“Di tutte queste dote s’avvantaggia / l’umana creatura” (76–77); “Vostra natura, quando peccò tota / nel seme suo, da queste dignitadi, / come di paradiso fu remota” (85–87).
of great difficulties, of which it is implausible to think that the poet was unaware.\footnote{See Denis O’Keeffe, “Dante’s Theory of Creation,” Revue néoscolastique de philosophie 26 (1924): 45-64, whose arguments on this passage are amplified by Christian Moëvs, The Metaphysics of Dante’s Comedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 130-31. The following discussion of the passage owes certain crucial insights to O’Keeffe and Moëvs, namely the importance of the temporal simultaneity of all creation (Moëvs), the meaning of Genesis’s “de limo terrae” (O’Keeffe), and the suggestion of an argumentum convenientiae (both); the following claims, however, regarding the inseparability of immortality and freedom, the original priority of matter, and the non-univocity of matter in the heavens, insofar as they may be found wanting, are the responsibility of the present author.}

In the first place, Beatrice gives no indication that the properties of immortality and freedom can be separated: both of these gifts follow upon immediate creation. But it is nonsensical to speak of human flesh as free, in Beatrice’s sense: even in the original state of innocence, human flesh was subject to “cose nove” (vii.72) in the way of all physical bodies, mortality aside—it was, for example, bound to earth by the natural tendency of its elements. In fact, the freedom which Beatrice describes seems comprehensible only with respect to intellectual being (and this point will provide a clue to understanding what Beatrice means by “mezzo”).

Secondly, in the verse of Genesis 2 to which Beatrice evidently refers, while God alone is named as agent, the action is described not as creation but as the formation of a medium: “formavit igitur Dominus Deus hominem de limo terrae” (Gen. 2.7). It should be remembered that Beatrice does not confine the meaning of mezzo, a medium of production, to instrumental causation by the heavenly spheres: prime matter itself is a medium. She says of “li alimenti” and “quelle cose che di lor si fanno” (133–34), in order to show that they were not created senza mezzo: “creata fu la materia ch’elli hanno” (136). If this “materia” is the substrate of the elements themselves, it must be prime matter. Thus, even if the activity of moved movers—the heavenly spheres—is excluded from a given act of divine production (as the dominant interpretation presumes for the production of the
first parents’ flesh), this limitation of the \textit{a quo} is not sufficient to characterize that production as \textit{sanza mezzo}. If there is a material \textit{ex quo} the production is made, then it is not creation properly speaking, according to this distinction.

In the case of the production of man, “de limo terrae” clearly indicates a medium, which might be interpreted variously: for example, as the four sublunary elements (earth especially), existing already as composites (i.e., having the form of earth, etc.), but also as a “complession potenzïata,” having potential for the form of man’s flesh; or as analogical, indicating no pre-existing substance at all, but only (by the lowliness of the metaphor) prime matter.\textsuperscript{53} Even in the latter case, however, it cannot be said that the flesh of man was made \textit{ex nihilo}, if Beatrice’s statement regarding the matter of the elements pertains to all elemental compounds.

It should be noted that this use of \textit{sanza mezzo} production to delineate those things which may be called created, “even as they are, in their entire being”—i.e., to mark out a most proper sense of ‘creation’—has a complex correspondence to various theological and commonplace senses of \textit{creatio}, which may account for much of the misinterpretation of this passage: Beatrice is not speaking of ‘creation’ in an obvious or unproblematic way. In its broadest possible meaning (which Thomas understands to be its proper sense), \textit{creatio} means simply causation in complete being, the dependence of any thing just insofar as it exists on the first principle of all being.\textsuperscript{54} In this sense, all things whatsoever are created by God:

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\item \textsuperscript{53} Cf. \textit{Convivio}, iii. 7, ??: “… e altrimenti dalla terra che dalli altri, però che è materialissima, e però remotissima e improporzionalissima alla prima simplicissima e nobilissima vertute che sola è intellettuale, cioè Dio.”
\item \textsuperscript{54} In \textit{Sent.}, i.i.1.2, 18: “Hoc autem creare dicimus, scilicet producare rem in esse secundum totum suam substantiam. Unde necessarium est a primo principio omnia per creationem procedere;” \textit{Summa theologiae}, i.45.1resp., 464: “opportet considerare… emanationem totius entis a causa universali, quae est Deus: et hanc quidem emanationem designamus nomine \textit{creationis}.”
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creation is not limited to the six days of Genesis, but refers to the universal and continual dependence of all things upon God for their very being (and hence that whole universe and all the substances in it may be referred to as “creation” and “creatures”). Of course, it is also a common usage to speak of creation as limited to the opus distinctionis, the production in time of the first condition of the world in the Hexaëmeron; in this sense, creation distinguishes those limited substances to which none were prior and thus did not come to be as the result of a mutatio, having no proximate efficient cause or material cause preexisting in a prior substance, but created “immediately.” But Beatrice quite evidently makes a further limitation here in Paradiso vii. Her meaning for creation sanza mezzo in a way combines the universal and existential denomination of dependence in total being with the limited and prioritizing denomination of the work of the six days—except that for Beatrice, the priority is not temporal but ordinal. Immediate creation is not simply of those substances which existed before any others, but of those principles which are prior in dependency to any others. Earthly, material substances were made in the beginning: these can cease to be, and are not properly immediate, because even though they were made by God instantaneously and without precursor along with the rest of the universe (and in this sense, ex nihilo), in their mode of being they are dependent upon prime matter and the influence of the heavenly bodies—God made them instantaneously so as to be the kind of things which exist in such composite dependency—and so they were not created sanza mezzo. By way of example: if God were to make, just now, a new wax seal, such that it not be formed of any preexisting thing but suddenly come into existence ex nihilo, still the seal would be made of wax; it would therefore not

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55 See, e.g., Bonaventure, In Sent., ii.1.2.2, 29: “omnia in prima conditione immediate a Deo sunt producta.”
be made *sanza mezzo*, and a sign of this would be its capacity to be melted (and lose its divinely-given seal)—the fact that despite its having been made directly by God it could cease to be (as a seal). Just so all entirely earthly substances made in the *opus distinctionis*: while they are created in the broadest sense just as anything else, and created in the second sense as having no precursors, still they are not created *sanza mezzo* and hence they can and do die.

This interpretation is confirmed by Beatrice’s metaphor in her later account of creation in *Paradiso* xxix, in which she names the three immediate creations which sprang forth from the Godhead simultaneously, like arrows from a three-stringed bow:

> Forma e materia, congiunte e purette,  
> usciro ad esser che non avia fallo,  
> come d’arco tricordo tre saette (22-24).

These three creations—pure form, pure matter, and matter and form conjoined—can equivalently be put in terms of act—pure act, pure potency, and act and potency conjoined—as appears from Beatrice’s sequel:

> Concreato fu ordine e costrutto  
> a le sustanze; e quelle furon cima  
> nel mondo in che puro atto fur prodotto;  
> pura potenza tenne la parte ima;  
> nel mezzo strinse potenza con atto  
> tal vime, che già non si divima (31-36).

But to what specific creations—what created substances, if they are such—do these three permutations refer?

Since they are said to be the first productions of God and the metaphor reinforces their immediacy, it stands to reason that they are equivalent to the creations *sanza mezzo* which are enumerated in *Paradiso* vii. These latter are, at
first glance, fourfold: angels, the pure country, celestial informing virtue, and the matter of the elements. Such is expressed when Beatrice says that "li angeli, e il paese sincero" were "creati, / sì come sono, in loro essere intero;" and that the elements are not in fact elemental but presuppose created principles: "creata fu la virtù informante in queste stelle," "creata fu la materia ch’elli hanno." These four ought to correspond to the three arrows of Paradiso XXIX.

The correspondent of "pure form" is simple enough: multiple substances of "pure act" which are "the summit of the universe" must surely be "li angeli."56 Form and matter conjoined could refer to any body; but it is clearly affirmed that this composite is immortal: its union of act and potency will never be torn apart (XXIX.35–36). The only composites which have never been corrupted are the celestial bodies, and these constitute "the pure country" where the pilgrim hears

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56 As the angels are called pure form and contrasted with form and matter conjoined, it is clear that the universal matter of Avicebron or Bonaventure has no place here. It should also be noted that "pure act" would be reserved for God alone by most theologians; but its usage is comprehensible here insofar as matter and form are the relative potency and act under consideration. Any creature is comparatively potential with respect to God; but the angels do not have two substantial principles, one potential and one actual, and so their being is (comparatively) nothing but act—it is unmixed act, though not infinite act. In Beatrice's metaphor, the potentiality of all of these creations has already been established—they are the arrows which come from the bow, and that very derivation or dependency is potentiality for all of them; granted that context, they creations can be compared with one another—as arrow to arrow, not arrow to bow—as pure act, pure potency, etc. Likewise, while St. Thomas frequently says that only God is actus purus, at the same time he may speak of angels as having no potency for non-being, no potency within the context of created beings (and of the celestial spheres as a medium between the angels and the material world in terms of act and potency): "Deus autem est actus purus absque potentiae.permixtione; necesse est ea quae sunt suprema in entibus, magis esse in actu, et minus de potentia habere, quae autem inferiores sunt magis in potentia esse. . . Illa sunt in rebus infima. . . quae sunt generationi et corruptioni subjecta, quae quandoque sunt, et quandoque non sunt. . . Oportet igitur in eis esse aliquid quod possit quandoque formam habere, quandoque vero forma privari, quod dicimus materiam. . . Illa vero quae sunt suprema in entibus creatis, ad similitudinem divini esse maxime accedunt, nec est in eis potentia ad esse et non esse, sed a Deo per creationem semperternum esse adepta sunt. . . Necesse est autem huiusmodi substantias incorruptibilis esse. In omnibus enim corruptibilibus est potentia ad non esse. In is autem non est. . . Sunt autem inter utraque praedictorum quaedam media, in quibus est non potentia ad esse et non esse, est tamen in eis potentia ad ubi. Huiusmodi autem sunt corpora caelestia." Compendium theologiae, vol. 42 of Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis P. M. edita (Roma: Commissio Leonina, 1979), i.74, ??.
the words of Paradiso vii; thus two arrows and two specific creations have been accounted for. Now the “informing virtue in these stars” is quite explicitly part of the celestial bodies, being simply their power with respect to the lower levels of being, and so this specific creation is also accounted for by “form and matter conjoined.” Therefore for “pure matter” there remains only the last creation, that matter which underlies the very elements; because of that priority, and because it is called pure potency, there is no doubt that this is not any proximate compound, but prime matter.

This may seem rather too simplistic to deserve a careful justification; yet controversy has followed these passages because of the difficulty of positing that prime matter was created in itself—that is, prior to having any form. It is thus worthwhile to establish with clarity that the matter which shoots forth from the bow is indeed prime matter, “pure potency,” not any composite. But how can pure potency be itself the subject of creation, which causes being in act? Most of the Scholastics were agreed that the separate creation of matter involved a contradiction in terms: whatever of the universe was first produced, it was of necessity a composite of form and matter, whatever further conditions may be attributed to it.57 Yet Dante, as has been shown, seems both to posit prime matter as an immediate creation (Canto xxix) and to affirm that matter is immediately

57 Even Bonaventure, comparatively sympathetic to certain considerations of separate “unformed matter,” affirmed that insofar as matter has “esse in natura,” “impossible est materiam informam existere per privationem omnis formae,” even though the form of its first production “non erat forma completa nec dans materiae esse completum,” and one might even speak of the “esse, quod materia habuit ante productionem,” as opposed to the “esse quod materia habet post productionem” (In Sent., 1.12.2.1, 294). Thomas is more definite: “Dicere igitur materiam praeecedere sine forma, est dicere ens actu sine actu: quod implicat contradictionem. Nec etiam potest dici quod habuit aliquam formam communem, et postmodum supervenerunt ei formae diversae, quibus sit distincta. . . Quia cum illa forma praeecedens daret esse in actu in genere substantiae, et faceret esse hoc aliquid: sequatur quod supervenientes forma non faceret simpliciter ens actu, sed ens actu hoc, quod est proprium formae accidentalis” (Summa theologiae, 1.66.1.co., 154).
created without any elemental forms (Canto vii).

As has recently been argued, however, this is does not necessarily entail that Dante posited prime matter existing alone, temporally prior to its formation; in this very passage of Paradiso xxix the poet is at pains to clear the reader’s mind of a temporal understanding of the sequence of creation. Augustine was a key authority for an interpretation of Genesis which argued that the temporal distinction of the work of the six days, and indeed the apparent distinction between the first creation of heaven and earth—which Augustine interprets respectively as the angels and prime matter—and the rest of the work of production is quite simply a figure of speech. The universe came to be instantaneously, as informed matter; but it cannot be described instantaneously: human speech must proceed seriatim, and so it is fitting for this production to be depicted in terms of successive days, and for the earth which indicates prime matter to be given separate mention from those material substances in and with which it in fact simultaneously came to be. There is a sense in which matter comes before form, but it is not temporal:

Non quia informis materia formatis rebus tempore prior est, cum sit utrumque simul concreatum, et unde factum est, et quod factum est...deus creator non priore tempore fecit informem materiam et eam postea per ordinem quarumque naturarum quasi secunda considerat ione formauit; formatum quippe creauit materiam—sed quia illud, unde fit aliquid, etsi non tempore, tamen quadam origine prius est, quam illud, quod inde fit, potuit diuidere scriptura loquendi temporibus, quod deus faciendi temporibus non diuisit.59

That prime matter was created immediately by God, and the substances composed of form and matter were not, does not mean that there was ever a time when the former existed separately. Rather, the directness of the creation of prime matter

58Moevs, Metaphysics, 44
59De Genesi, l.15, 21.
is prior to the mediated production of bodies according to dependency: *quadam origine prius est*, in Augustine’s words.

If the matter of any body has ordinal priority within the production of the whole, then no bodies are susceptible of creation *sanza mezzo* and *in loro esse intero*—which is for Beatrice creation proper.  Even if a body is said to be created by God *secundum quid* (according to one or both of the first two senses indicated above), and even if the composite comes to be instantaneously as a whole, still in that whole—just because it is a composite whole, having two essential principles—there is a principle having a distinct relation to the Creator, which must therefore be distinguished from the relation of the whole. The ultimate material principle of any composite must depend on God *sanza mezzo*—as Beatrice affirms—while the composite depends upon that principle as *ex quo fit* or *unde fit*, which means that such composites cannot be created “in loro essere intero” with uniform, non-mediated dependency. The matter which is a part of “loro essere intero” stands as a degree of removal, so to speak, for the whole from the source of its being: the matter depends immediately on God and the composite depends on God through matter (as well as immediately for its form, in cases of creation in the second sense). The same point may be put in terms of the kinds of causation: what is created *sanza mezzo* has God alone as its immediate cause; while God can be the formal, efficient, and final cause of any creature, He cannot be a material cause, but rather creates the ultimate material cause; therefore whatever has a material cause cannot have God alone as its immediate cause.

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60 Thomas also says that no composite substances can exist as one immediately, i.e., *sanza mezzo*. *Quaestiones disputatae de spiritualibus creaturis*, vol. 24/2 of *Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, ed. J. Cos (Roma: Commissio Leonina, 2000), 1. ad 5, 15: “Ilia enim que sunt composita ex materia et forma non statim sunt ens et unum; set materia est ens in potentia et fit ens actu per audentium formae, que est ei causa essendi. Sed forma non habet esse per aliam formam: unde si sit aliqua forma subsistens, statim est ens et unum.”
Thus it has no bearing on immortality if the flesh of the first parents of the human race was made by God without a like substance preceding—the same is true of the elements and of the first exemplars of each species, so that the same reasoning (which belongs to the predominant interpretation of the end of *Paradiso* VII) would imply that all of these original substances ought to be immortal. To avoid such a conclusion is precisely why Beatrice hastens to assure the pilgrim that these other substances made in the *opus distinctionis* were in fact made *con mezzo*. The crucial distinction which ensures immortality is not directness but immediacy, and insofar as human flesh is a body, it cannot be made *sanza mezzo*.

A notable difficulty arises at this point, however, one which has been avoided in most interpretations because prime matter was not understood as a *mezzo*, but which has also been not entirely resolved in the few treatments which have that understanding: if prime matter is a *mezzo*, how can the celestial bodies be made *sanza mezzo* and therefore eternal, as they are thrice affirmed to be? If these are composites of matter and form, and yet are properly created so as to be eternal, it would seem that one cannot, after all, interpret Beatrice in the manner just described; in this case, one could simply assert that the bodies of Adam and Eve shared the privilege of the celestial bodies, albeit on a provisional basis.

Concerning the matter of the heavens, it must be remembered that for the late Middle Ages as much as for Ptolemy and Aristotle, there was no certain record of any *nova* ever observed among celestial bodies: as the Philosopher said and the Angelic Doctor much later confirmed of his own time, in the whole of human history (as far as they knew) there had been no sensory evidence of any change taking place in the heavens save perpetual, circular local motion.61 (Remarkably,

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61Aristotle, *De caelo*, vol. 5 of *Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois commentariis* (Venetiis apud Junctas, 1562–74), reprinted Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1962, 16f: “Accidit autem et hoc
Thomas did recognize the possibility that the heavens could be corruptible, but that their rate of substantial change was so slow with respect to sublunar change as to seem nonexistent to man.)\textsuperscript{62} Thus even though all the evidence of the sublunar world indicated that any compound of matter and form must be corruptible, and that prime matter as actualized by a given substantial form is always in potency to other substantial forms, nonetheless the celestial spheres—which must be material composites, since they are visible and have locomotion—seemed not to be subject to corruption.

Now to assert a theory against all sensory evidence—indeed in this case the longstanding and unanimous sensory evidence of mankind—would be contrary to the \textit{dicta} of the Philosopher which asserted that the testimony of the senses is to be preferred to the postulations of bare theory.\textsuperscript{63} Granted that in the study of the heavens, man’s evidence is most scanty,\textsuperscript{64} still this is his necessary starting point and constant corrective.

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\textit{per sensum sufficienter, quo ad humanum dixisse fidem.” Cf. Thomas Aquinas, In De caelo et mundo, in Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis X\textsuperscript{111} P. M. edita, vol. 3, 1–257 (Roma: Commissio Leonina, 1886), 1.7.6, 29: “In omni enim praeterito tempore, secundum traditam invicem memoriam, nihil videtur transmutatum, neque secundum totum ultimum coelum, neque secundum partem ipsius propriam ullam.”}
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\textsuperscript{62} \textit{In De caelo}, 1.7.6, 29: “Nec tamen hoc est necessarium, sed probabile. Quanto enim aliquid est diuturnius, tanto maius tempus requiritur ad hoc quod eius mutatio depredhendatur; sicut transmutatio hominis non depredhenditur in duobus vel tribusannis, in quibus depredhenditur transmutatio canis, vel alciuius alterius animalis breviorem vitam habentis. Posset igitur alquis dicere quod, etsi caelum sit naturaliter corruptibile, est tamen tam diuturnum, quod totum tempus eius memoria potest haberi, non sufficit ad depredhendendam eius transmutationem.”

\textsuperscript{63} Aristotle, \textit{De generatione animalium}, III. 10, 760b230–32: “non tamen accepta sunt accidentia sufficienter, sed si quando sumantur, tunc sensui magis quam rationi credendum, et rationibus, si confessa demonstraverint apparentibus.”

Therefore, even though it would have been in one way more convenient to the science of nature to suppose that substantial change occurs in the heavens—since in that case, all material composites would be corruptible *ipso facto*—a supposition which would later have been verified when celestial *nova* were first observed, still this supposition would have been in another way a great violation of a principle crucial to the science of nature, namely, that the evidence of the senses is foundational and must be trusted.\(^{65}\) Thus the only remaining option was to suppose that there could be a composite of matter and form which nonetheless had no potential for non-being—which was sometimes described as a substantial form “exhausting the potentiality” of its matter—since this is what was observed in the heavens. As is well known, it was supposed that the element of these celestial compounds must be different from the sublunary elements, and it was given the name *aether*. What is less commonly observed is that a different understanding of prime matter, the substratum for *aether* itself, is also required.

In short, according to Aristotle’s repeated arguments and the general agreement of his major Scholastic interpreters,\(^{66}\) prime matter can at most be predi-

\(^{65}\)To be sure, Aristotle took the historical record as corroborative evidence, not the primary proof, of the incorruptibility of the heavens: he first argued that they cannot be subject to generation and corruption because their proper motion—circular—is the one local motion which has no contrary; generation and corruption can only be caused by contrary motion; ergo etc. But this argument is equally dependent upon sense data, susceptible of disproof if it could be shown that the motion of the heavens was not perfectly circular but partook of rectilinear motion to varying degrees.

\(^{66}\)See, e.g., Aristotle, *Metaphysica (recensio Guillelmi)*, Aristoteles Latinus no. xxv/3.2 (Leiden/New York/Köln: E.J. Brill, 1995), viii.4, 175: “In naturalibus quidem sempiternis autem substantiis alia ratio. Forsan enim quaedam non habent materiam, aut non talem sed solum secundum locum mobilem.” The reasoning is straightforward: the incorruptible differs generically from the corruptible, and different genera do not have common matter. “Quoniam vero contraria diversa specie, corruptibile autem est incorruptibile contraria [privatio enim est impotentia determinata], necesse diversum esse genere corruptibile et incorruptibile” (x.10, 216); “omne namque differens differt aut genere aut specie. Genere quidem quorum non est communis materia nec generatio ad invicem, ut quorumcumque alia figura cathegorie” (x.3, 203).

Despite disagreements on the universality of matter, Albert, Bonaventure, and Thomas all agreed with these *dicta* with respect to matter as it actually exists in the composite. See, e.g.,
cated only analogically of sublunary and of celestial bodies, even though with respect to extension in space and time and capacity for local movement the meaning is the same. For despite those commonalities, the definition of prime matter which respects the justification for its postulation by analogy in *Physics* 1—namely, that it is the substratum of substantial change, which must exist (as a principle, not separately) because substantial change is observed—cannot be predicated of the celestial bodies, because in them no substantial change is observed.\(^67\)

Therefore it is true in one sense that nothing which is a compound of form and prime matter is susceptible of creation properly speaking, because prime matter, properly speaking, does not belong to the celestial spheres; in another sense it is false, because any bodily substance must be a composite of form and prime matter, and celestial bodies are indeed bodies. And thus Beatrice can say on the

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Bonaventure, *In Sent.*, i.12.2.1, 333: “Si secundum esse, quod habeat materia post productionem, quod quidem est esse completum, sic absque dubio differt materia caelestium et terrestrium quantum ad esse, tum quia sub una forma est corruptibilis, sub alia incorruptibilis, tum quia sub una forma est subjecta privationi sub alia non;” Albertus Magnus, *Summa de creaturis*, vols. 34–35 of *Opera omnia*, ed. Auguste Borgnet (Paris: Ludovicum Vivès, 1895–96), 1.2, 335: “differt materia per esse secundum quod differunt mobilia in genere, secundum quoddam transmutabile secundum formam: et secundum etiam lunic modum differt potentia materiae, ut habitum est in auctoritate Philosophi.” Thomas Aquinas, *In Sent.*, i.1.2.1.1, 301: “in inferioribus est potentia ad esse, sed in superioribus tantum ad ubi. Ergo videtur quod non eorum tantum sit una materia... unde remanet communitas materiae secundum analogiam tantum.” It has recently been argued that Thomas’s position in the *Sentences* commentary in fact commends the position of Averroes that the celestial bodies are simple, and only in later works does he teach that of these bodies there is a matter differing from sublunary prime matter; see Steven Baldner, “Aquinas on Celestial Matter,” *The Thomist* 68 (2004): 431–67. For the present argument, the relevant point is that Dante clearly regards the heavens as composite, and that in Scholastic thought the matter of this composite was commonly, if not always, understood to differ from earthly prime matter.

\(^67\) Bonaventure, who taught the universality of matter—applying the term to all potency, such that even spiritual substances must be compounds of form and matter, since they are certainly not infinite act and must therefore be composites of act and potency—nevertheless granted that matter is said only analogically of different levels of being. If the *esse* of matter is considered *ante productionem*, before the substance has been produced, then it is one and undifferentiated; this does not involve contradiction (considering the being of non-being) because before the production of a substance, for Bonaventure, *mater una fuit moles, habens unam formam inompletam*, a form which allows it a certain level of being but which does not exhaust the appetite of the matter for further being through complete substantial form. See n. \(^{57}\) supra.
one hand of the elements that “created was the matter which they have,” and on
the other hand of the celestial spheres that although they are “form and matter
conjoined” yet they were created “in their entire being” so as “never to be riven.”
It is not surprising, then, that these passages engender confusion, because there
is an unspoken shift in the meaning of “matter,” one which was well-recognized
in the Western interpretation of Aristotle. When Beatrice designates the three
arrows of immediate creation as “pure form,” “pure matter” and “form and matter
conjoined,” it is generally presumed that “matter” has the same designation in the
second and third kinds, i.e., that the same definition applies to each term in both
its separate and conjoined contexts: which is no more the case for “matter” than
it is for “form.” 68

Certainly this can be considered an awkwardness in the theory; but it is one
which, as has been noted, was based on sound method, and preferable to an
alternative contrary to all sensory data. Howsoever matter is to be defined in
the superlunary world (and the definition must be somewhat ad hoc), it is not
a substratum of substantial change, and therefore not a middle term separating
the created substance from direct and total causality by God. Bodies, it has
been argued, cannot be created because creation is ex nihilo and every body is
by definition ex aliquo; but as Aristotle said in De caelo 1, for the celestial bodies
there is nothing ex quo they are made. 69 And thus, with respect to their creation,
the celestial bodies are effectively simple, even though this simplicity is a sort of
brute-force assertion against the recognition that they must be composites of form
and matter insofar as they are sensible; this is what is expressed when Beatrice

68 Angels are called “pure form” on analogy with forms conjoined to matter (be it celestial or
sublunary), not because they share the same, univocal meaning of “form.”

69 Aristotle, De caelo, 151e, 270a25–26: “At vero et id omne, quod augmentatur, augetur a
cognato adveniente, et resoluto in materiam. Huic autem non est, ex quo factum sit.”
says, “such a bond tied up potentiality with act that it is never unbound.”70

In summary, then, the case of the “pure country” actually supports the principle crucial to the question at hand: for the bodies of the first parents, as for any sublunary body, “created was the matter that is in them;” although God made them, and did so instantly and as a perfect whole, still they were made ex aliquo, and therefore they were not made sanza mezzo. Thus the manner of the production of the flesh of Adam and Eve does not seem to imply anything but the eventuality of corruption to which all such composites are subject. Unless Beatrice does not attribute matter to the bodies of Adam and Eve, or believes them to be composites of some other matter than that which is the substratum for the earthly elements—most unlikely suppositions—it seems that her claim cannot be understood according to the customary interpretation. But how else can it be understood?

It should be recalled that she says to the pilgrim, “quinci puoi argomentare”—and most scholars have understood “argomentare” to imply a necessary argument, a simple syllogism (which the dominant interpretation provides, but on faulty

70In this statement it may be that Dante mollifies somewhat the claim that the heavens are immortal by nature, insofar as Beatrice’s reference to “the divine power uniting” them rather recalls the notion of Plato in the Timaeus that the celestial bodies are corruptible by nature but held together eternally by the will of their creator. Plato, Timaeus (a Calcidio translatus commentarioque instructus), ed. J.H. Waszink, Corpus Platonicum Medii Aevi, Plato Latinus (London/Leiden: Warburg Institute/E.J. Brill, 1962), 41A-B, p. 35: “His igitur omnibus, qui vel videntur in convexis caelestibus flammanti corpore vel non videntur, natis atque altis divinitatemque obtinentibus conditor universitatis deus observanda iubet sanctique oratione tali: ‘Dii deorum quorum opifex idem paterque ego, opera siquidem vos mea, dissolubilia natura, me tamen ita volente indissolubilia, omne siquidem quod iunctum est natura dissolubile, at vero quod bona ratione iunctum atque modulatum est dissolui velle non est dei. Quapropter, quia facti generaticae estis, immortales quidem nequaquam nec omnino indissolubiles, nec tamen unquam dissolveremini nec mortis necessitatem subibitis, quia voluntas mea maior est nexus et vegetatior ad aeternitatis custodiam quam illi nexus vitales ex quibus aeternitas vestra coagmentata atque composita est.” Still this can be at most a glance at such an alternative: the coherence of Cantos vii and xxix of Paradiso ensures that the predominant theory is that the heavens are incorruptible in the same manner as the angels.
premises). As a few scholars have suggested, however, “argumentare” may rather indicate a theological *argumentum convenientiae*, an argument of fittingness; and this yields a more probable explanation.\(^7\) Reason cannot demonstrate—either from first principles or from Genesis—the simple necessity of the Resurrection of the Body; but it can *argumentare* for its fittingness, on the basis of Beatrice’s controlling distinction and the text of Genesis—provided that the whole verse in question is taken into account.

Indeed, God made man’s flesh, and made it from the mud of the earth, but this alone does not constitute the production of man: “*formavit igitur Dominus Deus hominem de limo terrae et inspiravit in faciem eius spiraculum vitae; et factus est homo in animam viventem*” (Gen. 2:7). Man’s body was formed, and so properly speaking it was made, not created; but God breathed the spirit of life into him, which was a rational soul, and therefore this spiration was without medium, direct, and a properly creative act (“*vostra vita sanza mezzo spira*”). Only when both parts of his production have been described is it said, “*factus est homo*,” and the distinction between the two parts should not be understood as intending a temporal sequence (as the foregoing discussion sought to clarify), but as emphasizing the twofold manner of his production, which is both formation and spiration, each ordered to the other. Man as a bodily composite can only be understood as the formation of presupposed matter; man as an intellectual being can only be understood as an immediate creation; and yet the two are one production, making one substance: “*factus est homo in animam viventem*.” Thus in the first place (Genesis 1), man as a whole was created at once in the image of God, because his highest and specific power is by nature immortal; considered

further (Genesis 2), that creation—still instantaneous—is both the formation of
earth and the spiration of God-like life, and hence that earth is always ordered to
a life quite beyond the order of its nature.

Therefore, if one should ask how the flesh of Adam (and perforce that of
Eve from Adam’s rib) was made according to this account of Genesis—which is
Beatrice’s indirect question—there is a threefold response. First, it was formed
by God as efficient cause; but this does not indicate anything regarding eternal
life, since it establishes directness but not total immediacy. Second, it was formed
from the mud of the earth; and this rather seems to indicate that eternal life does
not befit his body, since it is of dust and ought to return to dust (i.e., it was made
ex aliquo and all such productions are bound eventually to decompose). Third, it
was formed so as to receive the breath of life from God’s own spiration—formed
such that its very life was that spirit—and this does have a bearing on whether
eternal life befits it.

If the created spirit is the very form of the body, its life entire, then the
following can be said of how man was first made. What was made came to live
by that which was created; or rather, the life of what was made was created. And
while man’s flesh remained subject to the material cause which it presupposed,
it was only truly flesh when it came to live, and this life was a created life,
destined never to perish utterly. This does not change what one could prove
necessarily about the human body—i.e., that as a composite of matter and form,
as a body mixed from the elements, its natural course would eventually lead to
corruption. But if life, the powers vivifying the flesh—indeed the form of the
flesh, containing within itself the elemental forms, and being that which makes
the body a body—came to the flesh entirely from God, then it is an eternal life,
and will exist forever with the same power to vivify and inform the same kind of flesh. Thus while one could never argue according to nature that any earthly body can be made so as to be properly incorruptible, one can argue that, were the human body not to be given incorruptibility through an action beyond the natural order, the human soul—the life which from its beginning was the life of that body—would be forever frustrated in fulfilling its ordained purpose and would live with muted powers. Incorruptibility is a supernatural gift to the human body, not something ever belonging to it essentially, even in its pre-lapsarian state—as many a medieval theologian would have confirmed, and which it is necessary to assert in reading *Paradiso* vii so as to avoid the above-mentioned difficulties which follow upon the customary interpretation. Nonetheless, the non-essential gift of incorruptibility can be seen as most fitting when one investigates the nature of man with the powers of reason, and reads of his origin in Genesis; indeed it would then appear that without such a gift there would be a glaring lacuna in the divine plan according to the way in which man was first made. This, it seems, must be Beatrice’s meaning, if her words are to be coherent and theologically consistent.

Finally, this reading fits the coda of the discourse of *Paradiso* vii more closely to its immediate context and to the originative question. The predominant in-

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73 Indeed, if incorruptibility belonged to the body according to its essence, its forfeiture through sin would entail that sin yield a second nature—not in the analogous sense of the habitation of a single nature, but really and truly a different essence—and therefore Adam would have become a different species after the Fall.
terpretation reads “quinci” as referring back to the general distinction between immediate creation and mediate production, but in fact it is contextually more exact: it refers to the immediately preceding idea, that “vostra vita,” man’s soul, was made *sanza mezzo*. This is the basis of the argument for the Resurrection, not a new and separate application of the overall distinction between *con mezzo* and *sanza mezzo* to the production of the bodies of Adam and Eve alone, as opposed to their souls. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the question Beatrice seeks to answer with the whole of this discourse concerns not creation but redemption: “perché Dio volesse... a nostra redenzion pur questo modo” (56–57)—that is, the way of the Incarnation and Crucifixion. The distinction between production *con mezzo* and *sanza mezzo* serves to show from how high a dignity man had fallen, and thus how great was the restoration to be made—“Non potea l’uomo ne’ termini suoi / mai sodisfar” (97–98)—which nevertheless could only be made justly by man himself: “Tuom per sé isso / avesse sodisfatto a sua follia” (92–93). Justice was thus perfectly served only when God humbled himself to be made man:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{tutti li altri modi erano scarsi} \\
&\text{a la giustizia, se ’l Figliuol di Dio} \\
&\text{non fosse umilïato ad incarnarsi (118–20).}
\end{align*}
\]

The wonder of man’s production was the union of immediate creation with mediate making; the greater wonder of the Incarnation was the union of the Creator himself with the *factum*: the Word was made flesh, in time, *ex aliquo*, *con mezzo*. The Son of God partook of the lowliness of man’s nature, seen from the side of his making—Adam included, *de limo terrae*—so that he might be restored to the loftiness of his nature, seen from the side of his creation—in Adam and in every man, as Statius verifies—only much more so, since the restoration even exceeded the fall. Thus the Resurrection of the Body, the perfection of that overflowing
restoration, is the final bridging of the gap between \textit{con mezzo} and \textit{sanza mezzo}, through the one mediator—not the restatement of \textit{sanza mezzo} to itself.

2.3.3 Spiration

It has recently been observed that,\textsuperscript{74} in the course of working out the philosophical details or poetic implications of Statius’s discourse, scholars have largely forgotten (or at least have paid scant attention to) the primary and indeed most obvious source at the critical point of the infusion of the rational soul, the same source to which Beatrice twice refers (once by near quotation and once by clear allusion) at the end of \textit{Paradiso} \textit{vii}, namely Genesis \textit{2.7}: “\textit{Inspiravit in faciem suam spiraculum vitae}.” When Statius says, of the moment when a new man comes to be properly speaking, that God “\textit{spira spirito novo},” Genesis is surely a crucial referent, whatever significance Aristotle et al. will have for the further determination of what this means in terms of philosophical anthropology. It may be that this Scriptural connection has been disregarded because it is thought to be too obvious, too much a commonplace which is drawn on for piety’s sake and for aesthetic quality, but is surely too primitive to indicate anything specific for the intricate discussion at hand.

In light of what Beatrice makes of this first and most authoritative source for the production of the first man, however, its significance for Statius’s account becomes more evident. As was the case with Adam, but in a different manner, the body of each new man is made, not created; and in the latter case it lives indeed before the act of creation takes place, as Statius has described its embryological process. Now if each new man is to be of one race with Adam and to share his

\textsuperscript{74}Barański, “\textit{Canto xxv},” esp. 393.
life essentially, the spirit which God breathes into him must be like that spirit given to Adam—which was his life altogether, the animation of the body as well as the ability to reason. There is good cause, then, to suppose that when Statius says that the new spirit “takes what it finds active there into its substance,” he does not mean that the new spirit in itself is anything less than the life of the new man through-and-through; this then requires that the previous life not remain numerically but only in the sense of continuity of motion and specific identity, as described above. This interpretation fits “tira in sua sustanzia” if both souls are understood as acts on the analogy of motion, which is prepared by Statius’s focus on virtus from the start.

In this context should be considered the other two major arguments brought to bear for the claim that only the possible intellect is infused by God in Statius’s account, namely: that the description of human generation in the Convivio has less ambiguous language indicating so; and that the metaphor of the formation of wine which concludes the first part of the discourse likewise befits such an understanding.75

In Convivio iv Dante gives this account of human generation, in the course of explaining how it is that one human soul differs from another in “bontade:”

E però dico che quando l’umano semo cade nel suo recettaculo, cioè nella matrice, esso porta seco la virtù dell’anima generativa e la virtù del cielo e la vertù dell’elementi legati, cioè la complessione; [e] matura e dispone la materia alla virtù formativa, la quale diede l’anima [del] generante; e la vertù formativa prepara li organi alla vertù celestiale, che produce della potenza del seme l’anima in vita.76

Even to this point there is notable variance from Statius’s discourse: here there are

76 Convivio, iv.21, 390-91.
two other virtues which do not figure explicitly into the latter account, one which prepares “la materia” for the formative virtue, and one for which the formative virtue itself prepares, which is the proximate efficient cause of ensoulment. These are, however, not difficult to integrate with the presentation of human generation in the Commedia: celestial virtue and the virtue of “complessione” are referred to explicitly by Beatrice in Paradiso vii, as involved in the generation of every plant and animal,77 and what Statius describes does not exclude them while making one of the other virtues, la vertù formativa, of preeminent importance.

More importantly, though, the generative process is not yet complete:

La quale [l’anima in vita], incontanente prodotta, riceve dalla vertù del motore del cielo lo intelletto possibile; lo quale potenzialmente in sé adduce tutte le forme universali, secondo che sono nel suo prodotto, e tanto meno quanto più dilungato dalla prima Intelligenza è.78

Here Dante’s description seems clearly to indicate that a single soul—numerically identical before and after—receives intellect alone, as he specifies that the “motore del cielo” gives possible intellect, not “vita” or “spirito.”79 But—as has been argued—to limit God’s direct contribution to the intellectual power alone, excluding the activities which are the life of the body, would make incoherent Beatrice’s claims in Paradiso vii, especially her implied argumentum convenientiae for the Resurrection of the Body—as well as vitiate Statius’s account of the reason that the immortal, intellectual soul should maintain its virtus formativa.

What then is to be made of the above passage of the Convivio? If Dante at

77 “L’anima d’ogni bruto e de le pianta / di complessione potenziata tira / lo raggio e l moto de le luci sante” (139–41).

78 Convivio, iv. 21, 391.

79 Nardi argues for a substantial agreement between this account and that of Purgatorio xxv, in part by suggesting (as noted above) that it is the same to say that the sensitive soul “receives” intellect as to say that the intellect “takes up” the sensitive soul “into its substance.” “L’origine dell’anima,” 56.
the time of writing this passage held, as he appears to hold in the *Commedia*, that man’s life as a whole comes from God directly, one would have to suggest that “l’intelletto possibile” stands for the intellectual soul with all its lower powers. At the least it is clear even in this work that the intellect and lower powers comprise a single form, which is a wondrous effect of divine power: “Intra li effetti della divina sapienza l’uomo è mirabilissimo, considerando come in una forma la divina virtute tre nature congiunse.”

But the question is what precisely is denoted by “congiunse,” and to apply the above interpretation of *Purgatorio* xxv to the phrase “riceve...lo intelletto possibile” would strain Dante’s choice of words. In the context of the *Convivio*, it seems in fact more likely that his view of the infusion of the soul differed somewhat from that which he came to hold in the *Commedia*—and that perhaps because the consequence which Beatrice draws from the infusion of life *simpliciter*, the fittingness of the Resurrection of the Body, is altogether absent from the *Convivio*.

Of course, this earlier work is not a theological treatise; but neither does it shy away from introducing data of Scripture or invoking the authority of Tradition, there where the ancient philosophers’ vision was least sufficient. Yet when he comes to speak of the union of body and soul in this life and of man’s continuing existence in the next, Dante gives not the slightest indication that bodies will have

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80 *Convivio*, iii.7, 195.

81 E.g.: “Questa è quella magnificenza della quale parlò il Salmista, quando dice a Dio: ‘levata è la magnificenza tuo supra li cieli’ [Ps. 8:2] (11.3, 76); ‘Veramente, fuori di tutti questi, li cattolici pongono lo cielo Empireo... Questo loco è di spiriti beti, secondo che la Santa Chiesa vuole, che non può dire menzogna” (11.3, 75); “Ma noi sappiamo da ciò abstenuti da colui che venne da quello, da colui che [le] fece, da colui che la conserva, cioè dallo Imperatore dell’universo, che è Cristo, figliuolo del sovrano Dio e figliuolo di Maria Vergine (femmina veramente e figlia di Giovacchino e d’Adamo); uomo vero, lo quale fu morto da noi, per che ci recò vita” (11.5, 85-86); “per che la sua sposa e secretaria Sante Ecclesia—della quale dice Salomone: ‘Chi è questa che [a]scende del diserto, piena di quelle cose che dilettano, apoggiata sopra l’amico suo?’ [Cant. 8:5]—dice, crede e predica quelle nobilissime creature quasi innumerabili” (11.5, 87); etc.
any part of that existence; the body is spoken of as the prison of the soul.\textsuperscript{82} If such language could be compatible with bodily resurrection (as it was at times in some of the Church Fathers), in the \textit{Convivio} it seems continuous with a disregard for the body in eternity: when from the body the soul “è partita, perpetualmente dura in natura piú che umana;”\textsuperscript{83} all worthy philosophers have agreed “che in noi sia parte alcuna perpetuale;”\textsuperscript{84} but the emphasis is on “some part,” and unlike the question of the number of angels, Dante gives no correction or fulfillment of these speculations through “what the Holy Church teaches,” and indeed his “perpetualmente dura” at face value indicates that the soul alone lives eternally. When he caps off the rational arguments for the immortality of the soul with “la dottrina veracissima di Cristo,” nothing of the body is said.

Certainly, this is not to suggest that at any point Dante denied or would have denied the dogma of the Resurrection of the Body—only that when he considers in the \textit{Convivio} how man is made (and created), and especially whence comes his nobility, the teachings of the philosophers which he accepts prompt no reconciliation with faith—whether by correction, completion, or confirmation—and that this is not due merely to the genre of the work, since in other cases the doctrines of faith play just such a role. If one were to take only the arguments of the \textit{Convivio} on the immortality of man, there would be nothing to suggest the Resurrection of the Body; the potential for conflict with the creed which Dante would presumably have professed is simply left undetermined.

As a result, there is no firm ground on which to take the formulation of human generation in the \textit{Convivio} to bolster an interpretation of \textit{Purgatorio} \textit{xxv} which

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Convivio}, ii.4, 84–85.
\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Convivio}, ii.8, 102.
\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Convivio}, ii.8, 103.
limits what is infused by God to the possible intellect, understood as a part in
distinction to other parts which together constitute a man’s life. Again, this would
be problematic in the context of the Commedia because of Beatrice’s teaching
in Paradiso vii; and it adds to the significance of this apparent discord that
Beatrice immediately connects her teaching with an argument of fittingness for
the Resurrection of the Body, which is so conspicuously absent in the Convivio.
Thus it is plausible to suggest that Dante’s understanding, either of the infusion
of the intellect by God or at least of its implication for and coherence with the
doctrine of the Resurrection, had changed when he wrote the Commedia, or at least
its latter half. Indeed, Statius seems to indicate that he is imparting something
new to the pilgrim, not merely as to the nature of the shade-bodies which is the
point of the question, but as to the infusion of the “spirito novo.” Up to that
point, the Aristotelian embryology need not be thought of as new to the pilgrim;
it is given as a sort of refresher course, calling to mind already-known principles
so that something further might be established on their basis, just as Dante is at
times admonished to remember the teaching of Aristotle, not to learn it for the
first time.\footnote{See, e.g., Inf. vi.106: “Ritorna a tua scienza;” xi.79–80: “Non ti rimembra di quelle parole
/ con le quai la tua Etica pertratta. . . ?”} But when Statius comes to the infusion of the soul created by God,
he very deliberately prepares the pilgrim for this teaching—in itself, and not yet
in application of it to what he has experienced in the afterworld—as a new truth
to which he must open himself, which he must now come to know: “Apri a la
verità che viene il petto, / e sappi…” (67–68). What meaning would this have
for the pilgrim, in consistency with the narrative, if the following doctrine were
in perfect accord with what he had already expressed in the Convivio? Had the
Dante of the Convivio put the matter adequately, Statius ought to have said, if

\footnote{See, e.g., Inf. vi.106: “Ritorna a tua scienza;” xi.79–80: “Non ti rimembra di quelle parole
/ con le quai la tua Etica pertratta. . . ?”}
anything, “ritorna a tua scienza.”

As a caveat: to suggest development or even self-contradiction within any author’s work in too facile a manner would be unsound. Now as any reader is aware, Dante does at certain points in the Commedia quite explicitly trump an opinion he expressed in the Convivio: most notably, regarding the spots of the moon, in Paradiso 11. Obviously this does not make every doctrine of the Convivio equally suspect in comparison to the Commedia; at many points Dante confirms a doctrine pronounced in the earlier work. But as the case of the macchie lunari indicates, the Commedia leaves the Convivio behind not merely because it constitutes a new and better approach to the same truths, but also because his earlier work contains at least some admixture of plain old error as to the content of the doctrines professed therein, and that one such error is significant enough to warrant a canto-length and exhaustive correction by Beatrice as a condition or prerequisite for his journey through Paradiso. Now there may indeed be a connection between Dante’s error regarding the spots on the moon, and his teaching on the infusion of the soul and silence on the Resurrection of the Body in the Convivio—a link between Statius’ “Apri a la verità che viene il petto” and Beatrice’s “così rimasto te ne l’intelletto / voglio informar di luce sì vivace, / che ti tremo levà nel suo aspetto”—such that these two informations of Dante’s heart and intellect with a new and fuller truth might be of a piece in correcting the assumptions of the Convivio; but this leads well beyond the scope of the argument at hand. For present purposes, let it suffice to say that it would be hasty to deny an interpretation

86 That is, one might argue that only in the vision of the Commedia could Dante express adequately the truths contained more pedantically in the Convivio, or that his expression of truth in the latter work did not bring about the internal change which contemplation of the truth ought to effect, a change which does take place in the former. Cf., e.g., Moews, Metaphysics, 46–47. Both of these may be true, but it is also true—and more explicitly so—that Dante in the Commedia regards the Convivio as being also simply mistaken on some doctrinal points.
which yields consistency and coherence within the *Commedia* for one which yields contradiction within that work as the price for a possibly better agreement of just one of its passages with just one of the *Convivio*—especially when the relationship between the two works already includes a certain amount of tension.

Finally, regarding the metaphor of the production of wine:87 the pith and purpose of this image is to make the union of two different orders less marvelous—“E perché meno ammiri la parola” (xxv.76)—by means of showing its analogy in nature. More specifically, this example shows how one single and superior substance can result from the fruit of a natural process and a virtue which comes from without and is as far beyond the power of the subject as the sun is from a grape. The result of this cooperation is not hot grape juice, celestial heat accidentally inhabiting a terrestrial substance, but a new and unified substance which is different from both because it is both fruit of the vine and celestial heat or vigor: the vigor now belongs essentially to what was merely juice.88 This is precisely what is remarkable about fermentation, according to this understanding of the process; and thus it is why the observation of this process should make the infusion of the soul more fathomable, if yet wondrous.

87Nardi argues that this, too, is only appropriate if the possible intellect is distinctly given to a vegetative-sensitive soul which persists. “L’origine dell’anima,” 56–57.

88 Cf. Cogan, *The Design in the Wax*, 138: “Strikingly, in the simile that Statius uses, it is not the grape juice but the heat of the sun that becomes wine. The sun’s heat ‘assumes’ the grape juice to become wine; the new spirit infused into the human embryo similarly assumes the body and corporeal functions in becoming human. The key here is that it is the higher power that gives its character to the new creature. Wine is not grape juice with alcohol added; it is a new substance of its own. The human soul is not an animal soul with an added intellectual power; it is an intellectual substance of its own.”
Having now reached the completion of the creation of a new human being, Statius immediately passes to the end of its mortal life in order to connect more directly the principles of embryonic development with the activities of the soul once Lachesis—who measures out the line of human lives—runs out of thread:

Quando Lâchesis non ha più del lino,
solvesi da la carne, e in virtute
ne porta seco e l’umano e ’l divino:
l’altre potente tutte quante mute;
memoria, intelligenza e volontade
in atto molto più che prima agute (79-84).

It may be noted that the identity of the soul as infused by God in perfection of the embryonic development and as leaving the flesh behind at death is stressed even by the canto’s syntax: the subject of these verses is not stated within them, but is carried over from the previous tercets—from the other side of the whole of man’s life on earth—that is, the “spirito novo” which God breathed, and which possessed powers of the natural level and actions of the composite (“l’umano”) as well as those which are the acts of no organ (“il divino”). The former are the sensitive and vegetative powers which, the preceding embryology has taught, are the necessary prerequisite for the rational soul—that of which it is the completion and container.

This is why all these powers, even those which depend on the body for their activity, remain in the soul “in virtute” upon separation from the body. “In virtute” is often misleadingly treated as equivalent to “in potency” or “potentially;”89 Dante

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89 In English translations such a rendering is all but universal; in some commentaries the exact distinction is noted—see, e.g., Chiavacci Leonardi, ed., *Commedia*, 2.746 n. 80-81. Nardi swings to the other extreme, claiming that the vegetative and sensistive powers remain in first actuality:
is more precise.\footnote{In the first place, ‘in virtute’ refers to both sets of powers, and if one of these sets is “in atto molto piú,” it is most certainly not present only potentially. As for the powers now inactive—“tutte quante mute”—to say that they are ‘in potency’ would be to reduce them to the status of the menstrual fluid, which had a vegetative soul in potency (meaning simply that its matter was disposed to receive such a form). This would be in contradiction to the definition of rational soul, which contains the definitions of the vegetative and sensitive souls, being what they are and more. Moreover, the whole point towards which Statius has been aiming is that the separated soul retains, in a precise way, the specifically same formative virtue which was in the semen and first organized the embryo; and his language is quite consonant with Thomas’s description of how the separated soul retains the powers pertaining to the composite. These, the Angelic Doctor says, remain ‘virtually’ in the sense of remaining in their principle and root:}

\footnote{Quaedam vero potentiae sunt in coniuncto sicut in subiecto, sicut omnes potentiae sensitivae partis et nutritivae. Destructo autem subiecto, non potest accidens remanere. Unde, corrupto coniuncto, non manent huiusmodi potentiae actu: sed virtute tantum manent in anima, sicut in principio vel radice.\footnote{Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa theologicae}, 1.77.8.co., 249.}}

And in response to an objection, the matter is put in terms close to those of \textit{Purgatorio} xxv: “tamen potest dici quod trahit secum anima huiusmodi potentias,"
It is clear that Statius intends a meaning similar to this ablative “virtute” when he says “in virtute,” from the application of this phrase to both sets of powers, the human and the divine: for the soul to have a given set of powers “in virtute” must be compatible with those powers being either “in atto” or “tutte quantè mute;” such is the above-mentioned sense of permanence “in radice,” because the powers belonging to a soul always belong to it as to their principle and root, whether they are in act or not. In the case of the separated soul it is simply that the sensitive and vegetative powers are present only “in virtute,” while memory, intellect, and will are present both in virtue and in act.

It should be noted that at this point, the crossing-over of the life of man to its existence without the body, the coherence of the discourse depends entirely upon the unity of the substantial form—on the rational soul being at once rational and sensitive and vegetative.\textsuperscript{93} In no way can the discourse be said to suggest a plurality of forms or to move from plurality to unicity;\textsuperscript{94} if at each stage there is not a single form which is what the preceding activity was and more, there is no reason why the “spirito novo” should necessarily bring anything of the human with it after death.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{92}Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa theologiae}, i, 77.8.ad 1, 249.

\textsuperscript{93}Cf. \textit{Purgatorio} XVIII.51–57.

\textsuperscript{94}Pace Gragnolati, \textit{Experiencing the Afterlife}, 69–77. Gragnolati does note that at the end of the discourse, Statius’s account of the shade-bodies depends upon the doctrine of unicity (77), but in analyzing the earlier embryology he elides the distinct problem of the succession or development of souls in epigenesis with that of unicity or plurality of forms; while the first problem is certainly debatable, for the second Statius simply says nothing to suggest even a tendency towards plurality, and much which demands unity. And there is \textit{Convivio}, iii.7, 195: “Intra li effetti della divina sapienza l’uomo è mirabilissimo, considerando come in una forma la divina virtute tre nature congiunge.”

\textsuperscript{95}Nardi particularly undercuts the conclusion of the discourse by continuing to speak of a distinct vegetative-sensitive soul in contrast to the possible intellect: “l’anima umana... al separarsi dal corpo, trae seco e l’umano e l’divina, cioè appunto l’anima vegetativo-sensitive, venuta per generazione dalla virtù del generante, e l’intelletto possibile, che è lo spirito nuovo creato da Dio” (“L’origine dell’anima,” 78). This is contrary to Statius’s explicit claim (“un’ alma sola, /
Because the rational soul was at its moment of creation the fulfillment and perfection of all the activity that had come before, from the seminal *virtus* onwards, there can be no doubt of its continuing to be the root and principle of these powers, even if they are no longer present in act. It drew what was active there into its substance, such that it contains it not as a part but as being what it was and more, as the quadrilateral contains the triangle:

Ché, sì come dice lo Filosofo nel secondo dell’Anima, le potenze dell’anima stanno sopra sé come la figura dello quadrangolo sta sopra lo triangolo, e lo pentangolo, cioè la figura che ha cinque cantii, sta sopra lo quadrangolo: e così la sensitiva sta sopra la vegetativa, a la intellettiva sta sopra la sensitiva.96

Thus far, though, the pilgrim’s question has not yet been answered—to no surprise, since neither for the Philosopher nor for any of his Scholastic interpreters was the formation of an aerial body by the separated soul a consequence of identifying how higher levels of soul contain the lower (and this is equally true regardless of questions of plurality or unicity of form, development or succession). Surely it must have appeared from the first that at some point, Statius would have to go somewhat afield from the permissible paths of theological and philosophical treatments of the separate existence of the soul or the requirements for sensation, and in what follows he apparently does so with abandon:

Sanza restarsi, per sé stessa cade
mirabilmente a l’una de le rive;

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96 Convivio, iv.7, 305-6; cf. De anima, 11.3.
quivi conosce prima le sue strade.
Tosto che loco li la circumscribe,
la virtù formativa raggia intorno
cosi e quanto ne le membra viva (85–94).

At this point, the vast majority of commentators give up any serious attempt
to show how Dante’s doctrine is amenable to this or that Scholastic thinker or
indeed to the preceding embryology, generally reverting to the allowances of poetic
license or the influence of poetic sources. This surrender is not made without
good reason. To say that an incorporeal substance is circumspectively in a place
would go against the authority of Aristotle (not to mention Boethius, et al.)
under any interpretation. Now, this might be excused (though the reading is

97See, e.g.: Francesco da Buti, in Biagi, ed., Il secolare commento, 534: “Et è qui da notare che
questa finzione è stata necessaria a l’Alighieri per fare verisimile lo suo Poema, nel quale ha e finto
l’anime parlare, ridere, cantare, e così de l’altr’passioni; e benché questa sia stata
opinione d’alquanti, non è approvata dai Santi, ma tegnano che miraculosamente Idio faccia
l’anime possibili dei tormenti, richiedente questo la sua justizia;” Nardi, “Il canto xxv,” 148:
“Anche qui, più che il vigore e la chiarezza del concetto filosofico, è la vivacità della similitudine
che ci avvince…;” Boyde, Dante Philomythes, 279–80: “This second part of his speech must
be approached in a rather different way. It is unlikely that Dante would have upheld the
views which he here puts into the mouth of Statius in a prose work…The explanation…is
based on agreed facts, but it finds no explicit support in the Bible, in Aristotle, or in Dante’s
teachers. It is persuasive rather than cogent; and it relies heavily on imagery…As part of
Dante’s fiction this solution may be judged both ingenious and ingenious;” Figurelli, “Il Canto
xxv,” 58: “La incongruenza del fenomeno resiste dunque alla spiegazione di Stazio, ed è a
nostro parere da attribuirsi…alla felice ispirazione fantastica di Dante;” Citanna, “Il Canto
xxv,” 946: “L’idea di attribuire all’anima, dopo la morte, la facoltà di crearsi un corpo aereo
cart la presenza di tutti i sensi, non si trova certo in S. Tommaso. Ma, senza dire delle visioni
medievali, Dante aveva i precedenti delle antiche figurazioni delle ombre nel regno degli inferi.
discorso sulla generazione…non è affatto necessario alla questione qui propiamente proposta,
cioè la teorizzazione dei corpi aerei…La stessa spiegazione dantesca è in ultima analisi generica
elvisu e non sufficientemente argomentata sul piano filosofico…Con questa spiegazione il
poeta intende infatti dare support teorico a quei corpi aerei dei viventi nell’aldilà quali imponeva
la tradizione poetica che più gli era cara;” Freccero, “Manfred’s Wounds,” 203: “There does not
seem to be a precedent in specifically Christian thought of the Middle Ages for the belief that
the soul could unite with air in order to form an aerial body, although that demons had such
power was a commonplace of popular and learned belief. Neoplatonic thought might well admit
such a possibility, but the Christian emphasis on the indissoluble unity of the human composite
and the Aristotelian theory of hylomorphism to which Dante subscribed rule out the possibility
that Dante means us to take the fiction seriously as metaphysics. It does not require a great
deal of the reader’s imagination to see in this fiction a disguised poetic claim.”
perhaps strained) if one understands the adverbial phrase “tosto che” to mean “simultaneous with”—the stanza *prima facie* seems to indicate that formation of the body follows upon the determinate locating of the soul, but to say that these happen simultaneously would be more comprehensible: as the soul begins to act on a certain dimensionate space so it is again located (even if this localization would not properly be called circumscriptive).

But this is in fact the lesser difficulty; a much greater follows, even if one gets clear to the point at which the formative virtue “raggia intorno / così e quanto ne le membra vive.” Statius has shown how the separated soul must possess, *in virtute*, the specifically same powers which governed the development of the embryo, and thus it follows that the *virtù formativa* should be present; but presumably, it should be present only *in radice*, or *quanta muta*, while it lacks its proper matter. Yet Statius appears to claim that the virtue acts without the blood which it was made to form, which had soul potentially—despite his having just brought this correspondence to the attention of pilgrim and reader—and that it informs another kind of material:

\[ E \text{ come l'aere, quand' è ben piorno,} \\
\text{per l'altrui raggio che 'n sé si reflétte,} \\
\text{di diversi color diventa addorno;} \\
\text{così l'aere vicin quivi si mette} \\
\text{in quella forma che in lui suggella} \\
\text{virtùalmente l'alma che risette;} \\
\text{e simigliante poi a la fiammella} \\
\text{che segue il foco là 'vunque si muta,} \\
\text{segue lo spirto sua forma novella (91–99).} \]

In this Statius again seems to be quite at odds with the clear teaching of Aristotle under any viable interpretation, and if so it is a wonder that he bothered to give an embryology based on the authority of the Stagirite, if it was to be adduced in
support of such a claim as this. A form can only inform its proper matter; the
informative virtue could educe the form of animal life because it had blood to
work on, which is potential flesh, and the virtue itself was a movement fitted to
precisely that potentiality—not an all-purpose informing tool which could become
the entelechy of any material. Air is not potential flesh.

Statius’s comparison of the formation of the shade to, in effect, a rainbow—the
making-visible of air by way of condensation through which light is refracted—
does bear some similarity to Scholastic descriptions of the aerial bodies by means
of which angels have been made visible to men; for example:

Licet aer, in sua raritate manens, non retineat guram neque colorem;
quando tamen condensatur, et figurari et colorari potest, sicut patet
in nubibus. Et sic Angeli assumunt corpora ex aere, condensando
ipsum virtute divina, quantum necesse est ad corporis assumendi for-
mationem.\footnote{Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa theologiae}, i.51.2.ad 3, 17. Thomas understands air alone to be
susceptible of condensation and rarefaction, so as to take on shape and color. Albert tends
a bit higher on the elemental scale, supposing that the bodies are either of air or of \textit{aether};
\textit{Summa theologiae}, vols. 31-33 of \textit{Opera omnia}, ed. Auguste Borgnet (Paris: Ludovicum Vivès,
1895), i.18.75.3.sol., 787: “Angelus assumit ex aethere sive ex puriore parte aeris corpus, quod
ipse virtute divina spissat, solidat, et organizat.” Bonaventure suggests that it is more probable
that water present in air allows it to be presented so—\textit{In Sent.}, 11.8.1.2.2.resp., 218: “corpus ab
Angelo assumptum principaliter ab aëre intelligitur esse formatum, concurrente ad hoc natura
alicius vaporis terreii vel aequos, qui quidem faciat tam ad varietatem condensationis, quam ad
multiformitatem coloris.”}

In these cases, however, the theologians are careful to note that the angel is
not the form of the aerial body; to suggest this would be a category mistake,
for a simply spiritual being cannot be the form of any body. Granted divine
dispensation, an angel can take over the shape and movement of such an aerial
body, a condescension for the sake of men who so often need to see in order to
believe. Such bodies could simulate, to the eye, any human form or activity; but
they could not have the activities actually belonging to composite life. And by no
means does the angel use the body in order to see; it can mimic by the control of local motion those activities which proceed from the soul as principle and have an external *terminus*, but it cannot (nor would it have any need to) effect those activities which terminate in a soul, such as sensation: “Angeli nullo modo vident per oculos corporis assumpti, quia haec est operatio potentiae corporis viventis.”

These activities require the substantial union of a body and a soul appropriated to one another, and it is equally impossible for a spirit vastly different from the human soul to be a substantial form as it is for an aerial body vastly different from the human body to take the place of flesh and bone, in those operations wholly dependent upon the organization and complexity of a high-level mixed body and the intimacy of the union between that body and its form.

This possible correspondence has occasionally been noted, but treated incidentally insofar as it does not seem to affect the primary problem of the canto: unlike an angel, the separated soul is indeed a substantial form, having the powers of sensation *in virtute* and awaiting the re-information of a body to actualize them anew; and after all, it is sensation which is presumably the point of the

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99 Thomas Aquinas, *In Sent.*, 11.8.1.4.3 co., 213.

100 Two among the *trecento* commentators mention this possible relation, Giovanni da Serravalle—“Ita considerandum est quod virtus formativa facit de aiere circumstante illas animas, sicut dicitur quod Angeli faciunt quando volunt apparere alioquie persone; formant de aiere eos circumstante aliqua corporea aerea, et ita loquuntur, etc”—and Pompeo Venturi: “Dante dunque finge che dall’anime separate si assumano corpi aerei; e questo passi per finzione poetica non essendo vero il fatto bencché non sia di sua natura impossibile: poiché se ciò posson gli Angioli perché non l’anime separate?” (Biagi, ed., *Il secolare commento*, 332–33). Gilson regards it as an important example for taking the shade-bodies seriously, and in this comes closest to the present argument: “Two orders of consideration suggest that Dante really believed in the existence of such beings, the one related to the theological conception of the angels, the other related to the condition of the soul between the death and the resurrection of the body... The body assumed by an angel is united with him as ‘with a mover represented by the moved body which it assumes.’ The notion of a union consisting of a representation agrees with Dante’s conception of the shades; they ‘represent’ their movers” (“Dante’s Notion of a Shade,” 131). But he does not allow this to prompt a reconsideration of whether in fact the shades of the *Commedia* are a means of sensation, as well as of manifestation, and thus he does not make the discourse plausibly coherent for Dante.
discourse. Surely the soul informs this body, by Statius’s account, whatever the consequences for his rapidly-deteriorating philosophical credentials. Now to be precise, he does not say exactly that the separated soul or its informative virtue becomes the form—properly speaking—of air, only that the virtue “raggia” and the soul as a whole “suggella” a “forma” in that air. Thus far, however, it is unclear in what other way the virtue or soul could be asserted to influence the aerial body—much as it is absurd to claim that the substantial form of flesh actualizes what is not potentially flesh.

Regardless, Statius concludes with his long-prepared answer to the main question:

Però quindi ha poscia sua paruta,
è chiamata ombra; e quindi organa poi
ciascun sentire infino a la veduta.
Quindi parliamo e quindi ridiam noi;
quindi facciam le lagrime e ' sospiri
che per lo monte aver sentiti puoi.
Secondo che ci affliggono i disiri
e li altri affetti, l'ombra si figura;
e quest' è cagion di che tu miri (100–8).

What is most remarkable about this conclusion is that if Statius means to account for the capacity of the separated souls to sense through shade-bodies—and thus to experience hunger, for example—then this is no answer at all to the original query. Even if the dubious claim of formal union be granted, the feeling of hunger (provoked, say, by the scent of apples) would not give any reason for the aerial body to decrease in magnitude, to farsi magro.\textsuperscript{101} The shade-bodies are said to

\textsuperscript{101}Figurelli observes this clearly—Il Canto xxv,” 58: “Il ragionamento di Stazio può esser valido a spiegare l’atto di usare i denti a vuoto per fame, che Dante aveva colto in alcune anime, e il tendersi bramoso di tutte verso i frutti e le acque (essi, sì, specchio del senso della fame e della sete); non però la magrezza, che non è espressione mimica d’un desiderio.”
mimic or express the affectation of the souls—that much is perfectly clear, but that mere assertion was already present in Virgil’s examples, and even in the pilgrim’s question; what is desired of Statius’s argument is a better understanding of just precisely how this process is possible. Yet if all of the build-up concerning the virtute informativa was for the sake of explaining sensation, it adds nothing whatsoever to an understanding of how exactly those bodies take on such an appearance as magrezza which in living bodies is not an effect of this virtute, part of its role in organizing a body which can sense, but the result of its inaction, the absence of food from which the informative virtue helps to produce new flesh. No one grows thin just because of the feeling of hunger or the smell of food. If this most customary and obvious understanding of the discourse as a whole would be both philosophically incoherent and irrelevant in its poetic context, what else could it mean?

Statius says that the shade “organa poi / ciascun sentire infino a la veduta,” and this clause has universally been understood to mean that the soul informs aerial organs which it uses for sensation, even the highest sense which requires the finest level of organization, sight. This is a natural reading, of course. But there is an unappreciated ambiguity in the conclusion of the phrase which could turn the apparent meaning of the statement on its head. The shades form organs “even to the sight”—the question is, to whose sight? Is it certainly the sensitive power of the shades?

At either end of the phrase “infino a la veduta” there are two possible emphases (which are demonstrable from evidence internal to the Commedia). Literally,
“infino” indicates extension to a limit, a *fine*; depending on context, there may be a slight emphasis on the extension or the limit—i.e., it may carry something of the sense of “even so far” or “only so far”—or most commonly, it may be neutral in this respect. Likewise, Dante occasionally uses the participle “veduta” as a noun for the object of sight, i.e., for what is seen, rather than the power of vision. But moreover, these individual variations can be put aside, because even if both terms are used in their respectively most common senses, the ambiguity of the phrase as a whole still remains—it still does not determine whose power of sight is in question. Does Statius in fact mean that the shades form organs even to the

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103 Numerous usages of the term in the *Commedia* are simply neutral, since the passages are comprehensible either way and there is no reason to choose either emphasis; yet there are also instances in which only one of these meanings makes sense of the context. There are, in fact, two examples of great concrete similarity which demand quite opposite understandings of *infino*. In *Inferno* X it is said of the sudden appearance of Cavalcante dei Calcavanti, “Allor surse a la vista scoperta / un’ombra, lungo questa, infino al mento” (52-53). Surely it is nonsensical to say that such a great deal of a human form was visible as from its top to its chin; the clear meaning of *infino* here is only, “to this small extent and no further.” Two cantos later, the reader hears of other submerged shades, the Violent sunk in the Seventh Circle’s river of blood, “Io vidi gente sotto infino al ciglio” (XI. 103). Surely in this case, there is no sense in understanding an emphasis on how little of these shades are below the surface, and quite obviously in context these are the most submerged.

104 He also uses a variety of other terms—such as “vista”—for either of these meanings. A remarkable example of this variety may be found in *Convivio* III, where Dante describes tersely the ancient philosophers’ arguments concerning the sense of sight, and then plays rhetorically on the forms related to *vedere*. “Veramente Plato e altri filosofi dissero che l nostro *vedere* non era perché lo visibile venisse all’occhio, ma perché la virtù visiva andava fuori al visibile: e questa opinione è riprovata per falsa dal Filosofo in quello del Senso e Sensato. *Veduto* questo modo della vista, *vedere* si può…” *Convivio*, 111.9, 208-9. This passage indicates both that Dante used intentionally the ambiguity or fluidity of the participles of *vedere* and that he had usages at hand when an unambiguous reference to the active power of sight was desired (*vedere* as a noun, or to be most technical, *la virtù visiva*). Furthermore, the plays on grammatically passive forms of *vedere* are no mere decoration but concisely demonstrate the philosophical debate just summarized, i.e., the question of whether the initial act of sight is indeed active or passive.

There are, of course, several instances of the use of *veduta* in the *Commedia*, and these show a pattern similar to *infino*: while many cases are ambiguous or show the active meaning usually read in this crucial verse, there is at least one instance only comprehensible passively. When descending in terror on Geryon’s back, the pilgrim says he “vidi spinta / ogne veduta fuor che de la fera” (*Inf.* XVIII.113-14); this can hardly mean that he saw the power of sight removed from all but the beast—clearly here *veduta* can only mean the object of sight. Examples of the positive or ambiguous usage include: *Inferno* XX.51, XXVI.135, XXVIII.93, and XXIX.42; *Purgatorio* XII.132 and XXXIII.82; *Paradiso* XIX.52, XIX.81, XXVII.107, and XXXIII.84.
point of being able to see, or even to the sight of another—that is, the appearance of organs such as eyes, not true organs which can in fact see? There can be little doubt that Dante would have expected the former understanding to be most common; but he also phrased it in such a way as to allow the latter (for any with eyes to see it).

As the phrase is found here in *Purgatorio* xxv, it is obvious why the first interpretation has been universal: it is certainly the most natural reading of the phrase itself; *prima facie*—or at least according to the common reading—the faculty of sensation is the focus of the whole discourse; and indeed the immediately preceding word is *sentire*. If Statius is speaking of the organization needed for the acts of sensory powers—that is, the organization of a body to which the soul is united as its form, thereby allowing it to actualize the powers of the composite—then by all means he must be referring to the souls’ faculty of sight. But aside from the philosophical absurdity which attends that reading, one should consider the following.

Firstly, as has been argued, the pilgrim’s question which initiated the discourse in fact concerned appearance, not sensation.

Secondly, following the phrase, every example which Statius gives is of expression, of the making apparent (and therefore susceptible of sensation by another) of passions, not at all of the means by which those passions are introduced: “parliamo,” “ridiam,” “facciam le lagrime e ’ sospiri.” If Statius meant this as an explanation of the means by which shades sense, it would be passing strange for his examples not to include at least one aspect of suffering, of actual sensation, especially the particular torture which occasioned the question. Furthermore, Statius’s final tercet indicates clearly that in fact the shade-body is relevant only.
after the soul has experienced “i disiri / e li altri effetti”—accordingly as these “affliggono” the souls, “l’ombra si figura,” not accordingly as the shade-body comes into contact with some physical influence, the souls are affected.

Thirdly and finally, there is indeed a comprehensible manner in which Statius could speak of “forming the organs for every sense” and yet mean to emphasize not the actual powers of sensation but merely the appearance of those organs to one who does have the faculty of sight in body and in truth.

Certain commentators have already recognized that, as mentioned above, the description of a shade-body as the coloring and configuration of condensed air has a certain affinity with Scholastic accounts of the bodies by which angels appear to men—in this latter case, bodies which are undoubtedly non-essential and are only moved as an instrument by the angels, not united to them formally so as to be used by them for sensation. Because the assumption has been that the shade-bodies are used in the latter way, the comparison has not been taken any further. Yet these same theological accounts must take up the question of why the angelic bodies form the appearance of sensory organs—such as eyes—when they cannot make use of such differentiation in the color and figure of cloudy air. The reason given is that the angels must form eyes, ears, and so forth, in order to present a human appearance, for the sake of being seen as a similitude of human nature—and naturally enough, since in these contexts it has already been determined that such aerial bodies are formed and moved entirely for the sake


106 See Bonaventure, In Sent., II.8.1.2, 213: “Unde corpus assumptum coniungitur illis sicut instrumentum motori.” Of course, not every body moved by an angel is said to be assumed, but only those bodies moved in such a way as to represent the angel itself. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, 1.51.2.ad 2, 17: “Corpus assumptum unitur Angelo, non quidem ut formae, neque solum ut motori; sed sicut motori representa-tato per corpus mobile assumptum.”
of appearing to man on his own terms, as it were.\textsuperscript{107} Nor is this supposed to be a deceptive appearance—man was not meant (at least, upon later reflection) to think falsely that these messengers from God are indeed men, but that their being figured as men is a true sign of certain of their qualities, which cannot themselves be sensed.\textsuperscript{108} Thus while the angels who visited Abraham appeared to eat with him, not having flesh they only made the show of it, to manifest their acceptance of his hospitality; they could chew, but not eat.\textsuperscript{109} Neither was the magnitude of the bodies assumed dependent upon food previously consumed, and neither would it diminish in the absence of future consumption—obviously enough. As a subtle body being moved, not a heavy body being informed, it could be given whatever shape was apt to convey something of the spiritual substance moving it.

Now as a matter of fact, the only sensation to which Statius refers unambiguously is that of the pilgrim: “...che per lo monte aver sentiti puoi” (xxv.105). This is not an incidental remark. It is not to say simply: “Here concludes an explanation of phenomena which you may have seen,” but rather, “The shades make these expressions so that you might see them.” If the shade-bodies are not pro-

\textsuperscript{107}See Bonaventure, \textit{In Sent.}, \textit{II.8.1.2}, 213: “Hoc autem magis exigit indigentia ex parte nostra quam indigentia ex parte sua.”

\textsuperscript{108}See Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa theologiae}, 1.51.3.ad 2, 18: “nullo modo est dicendum quod angeli per organa assumptorum corporum sentiant. Nec tamen superfue sunt formata. Non enim ad hoc sunt formata, ut per ea sentiantur: sed ad hoc ut per huiusmodi organa virtutes spirituales angelorum designentur; sicut per oculum designatur virtus cognitiva angeli, et per alia membra aliae eius virtutes;” \textit{De potentia}, 6.7.ad 9, 179: “Nec propter hoc oportet quod sit ibi aliqua fictio...sed ut per humanas proprietates, Angelorum virtutes cognoscantur; sicut nec etiam metaphoricae locutiones sunt falsae, in quibus ex aliorum similitudines res aliae significatur;” Bonaventure, \textit{In Sent.}, \textit{II.8.1.3.2} ad 2, 222: “Angelus non tantum assumit corpus humanum ut instrumentum ad operandum, sed etiam ut signum conveniens ad se ostendendum. Et qua corpus carens organis debitis homini non esset convenienter angelici spiritus ostensivum; ideo corpus habens omnia organa assumit, non ad ipsorum organorum sensificationem, sed potius ad sui ipsius ostensionem.”

\textsuperscript{109}See Thomas Aquinas, \textit{In Sent.}, \textit{II.8.1.4.1} ad 1, 212: “Angeli non vere comederunt, sed suum ibi vera divisio cibi, et trajectio in corpus assumptum.”
duced for sensation but for manifestation, moved rather than informed, then they are produced for the only one who can see them, the only subject of sensation. At the end of his discourse, Statius has in effect hinted that the shades are all for the pilgrim’s sake.

What then of the informative virtue, which had been the continuing emphasis of the discourse and which was indicated to be the means by which the souls operate in the shades, generally understood as formation? If, indeed, the shades are to be understood as complementary to the aerial bodies which are the explanation of angelic appearances, then separated souls are not the forms of the shades—in the precise sense of being their entelechies, their actualities which make them to be the substances they are—but merely their movers. In this case, the purpose of isolating this *virtus* from a point prior to the organization and animation of a new human being finally becomes clear—the reason why understanding the peculiarity of this virtue in its nutritive and generative role is absolutely necessary for understanding the possibility of aerial bodies united to separated souls.\(^\text{110}\)

Now for the theologians, the explanation of angelic appearance in terms of union to aerial bodies *ut motor moto* does not simply extend to separated souls, which are not (like angels) naturally superior to all physical substances so as to be able to move them simply *per virtutem*. At least, Thomas denies that this can

\(^{110}\)Of course, many commentators have made use of the *virtute informativa* in explaining the discourse, giving a superficial correspondence between its embryological and skiaological halves: by this virtue human organs are formed in the first place, and thus by the persistence of this virtue after death new aerial organs can be formed. But if the formation in question is information properly speaking, the actualization of sensory organs, then the identification of the *virtus formativa* is rather trivial—as the grounds for explaining the supposed information and actualization of air-as-potential-sense-organ, an embryology without the seminal *virtus* would work just as well, or rather just as badly. Statius would be performing the very same bait-and-switch, under this interpretation, if his embryology simply began with the vegetative soul as directly produced by the father and claimed that this, rather that the *virtus*, informs the air; in either case, if he means to explain sensation, he simply has to reverse course on his claim that the organic powers are mute after separation from their organs.
be done by the soul’s own natural power—because it is of the nature of a soul only to move a body through vivifying it—while admitting that such movement is not impossible \textit{in se}, as it could be permitted through divine power.\textsuperscript{111} Presumably, this is how he would explain the miraculous appearances of separated souls to the living, which he accepts on the authority of Augustine and Gregory.\textsuperscript{112}

Statius goes further, of course, giving every indication that the formation of a shade-body is natural (perhaps even unavoidable) for a separated soul. How could this be, if the organic powers which could move only as a consequence of organic information cannot be reawakened until the last trump? Certainly there are inorganic powers in the human soul, the powers which make it rational: intellect, will, and memory (the last being the memory of intelligible species, not of phantasms). Statius has just emphasized how these powers, not being the acts of organs, can operate without the body and are indeed more acute in that state. But precisely because they are beyond organic entelechy, these are not moving powers—they cannot naturally affect physical substances.

Essentially, then, the problem which Statius had to address, if he meant in earnest to account for the capacity of the separated soul to affect a body, is to determine whether the human soul has any power which is not the act of any organ, and is nevertheless a moving power. And in fact there is such a power—not merely according to some poetic fancy, but according to Aristotle and his

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textit{Summa theologiae}, i. 117.4, resp., 561: “anima separata sua naturali virtute non potest movere aliquod corpus… cum anima est corpori unita, non movet corpus nisi vivificatem… quantum est ex virtute suae naturae: supra quam potest alicuid ei conferri virtute divina.”}
\footnote{\textit{In Sent.}, iv. 45.1.3, sol., 1115: “Sed secundum dispositionem divinae providentiae aliquando animae separatae a suis receptaculis egressae conspectibus hominum praesentantur, sicut Augustinus in praedicto libro (codem cap.) narrat de Felice martyre, qui civibus Nolaniis visibiliter apparuuit, cum a barbaris oppugnarentur. Et hoc etiam credi potest quod aliquando de damnatis contingat, quod ad eruditionem hominum et terorem permittantur viventibus appareere, aut etiam ad suffragia expetenda quantum ad ilios qui in purgatorio detinentur, ut per multa quae in 4 Dialog. narratur, patet.”}
\end{footnotes}
medieval commentators—one which is developed in the Stagirite’s embryology and which Statius has just taken great pains to bring to light.

As has been noted, it was the peculiar character of the *virtus formativa* to be a power of the soul which depends on bodies and operates through them, and yet not to be properly their form or entelechy, but rather a moving force. It was just this character which explained for Aristotle the way in which paternal seed can educe soul without having soul in full actuality itself; and the same character remains in the complete human soul, being given to blood in the heart and carrying that blood to the point of formal integration with an organ, but not being formal itself. The name of this power should no longer mislead; it is *formativa* not because it is properly formal, but because it shapes and prepares material for form, and in the proper circumstances educes it—that is, when the material is potentially living flesh, the transient vital movement of the *virtus* becomes the stable vital principle of animal life, a true form which is now a formative virtue and much more. With a material which is not potentially flesh, it could not become such an actuality—but it might be thought to maintain the power to move, at least without manifest incoherence.113 Thus at the other end of the spectrum from the intellect which transcends organic entelechy, there is another power of the soul which is not, strictly speaking, the act of a body, simply because of its lowliness: it is merely

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113 And note how exactly Statius claims that the separated soul stamps a form on the surrounding air: “così l’aere vicin quivi si mette / e in quella forma ch’è in lui suggella / virtuàlmente l’alma che ristette” (94–96). This specification of “virtualmente,” like that of “in virtute” above, has not been adequately realized; it seems evident here that Dante recognizes the distinction of virtual potency from both potential and actual. This adverb is used only once more in the *Commedia*: in *Purgatorio* xxx, Beatrice’s rebuke of the pilgrim includes the claim, “questi fut ne la sua vita nova / virtualmente, ch’ogne abito destro / fatto avrebbe in lui mirabil prova” (115–17). Clearly this can mean neither “actually” nor “potentially”—if the former, there would be no cause for rebuke; if the latter, he would not yet have entered the state of expectation: Dante was only potentially such as “fatto avrebbe in lui mirabil prova” before he first saw Beatrice, before he received the impetus which gave him such new life that he was virtually what he ought to be. (The present author is indebted to Lino Pertile for this last suggestion.)
an interim power, needed to cross a spatial and temporal distance between one truly informed body and another—whether from father to child, through semen, or from food to flesh, through blood.

Some Aristotelian commentators made note of this unusual quality, which invites a perhaps startling comparison. The very term *virtus formativa* comes to Scholastic interpretation through the Latin translations of his great Arabic commentators, not only on the *De generatione animalium* but on book vii of the *Metaphysics*, in which Aristotle briefly brings up animal generation in a larger consideration of the principles of substance.\(^{114}\) There, Averroes comments concerning the generative virtues:

> Et istae virtutes assimilantur intellectui in hoc, quod non agunt per instrumentum corporale. Et in hoc differunt istae virtutes generativae, quas Medici vocant formativas, a virtutibus naturalibus, quae sunt in corporibus animalium. Istae enim agunt non actione intellectus operativi, sed agunt per instrumenta terminata, et membra propria. Virtus autem informativa non agit per membrum proprium. ... non agit nisi per calorem, qui est in semine: non ita quod sit forma in eis, sed sicut anima in calore naturali, sed ita quod sit inclusa in eis, sicus [sic] anima est inclusa in corporibus coelestibus. Et ideo Aristoteles magnificat hanc virtutem, et attribuit illam principiis divinis, non naturalibus.\(^{115}\)

Thomas, referring to this passage in his *Sentences* commentary, expands upon the comparison between the union of the *virtus formativa* to its vehicle—immediately prior to his account of fetal development which stresses the continuity in species of *virtus* and *anima*.

> Aliae enim vires utuntur in suis operationibus determinatis organis:

\(^{114}\) In fact, Thomas cites the commentaries of Averroes and of Avicenna on the *Metaphysics*, not on the biological works, as the primary sources of the term; see *infra*.

\(^{115}\) *Metaphysics*, vol. 8 of *Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois commentariis* (Venetiis apud Juncta, 1562), reprinted Frankfurt am Main: Minvera, 1962, vii.10, 181E–L.
intellectus autem nullo: haec autem utilitur aliquo corporali in sua operatione quod nondum habet determinatam speciem. Subjectum autem et organum hujus virtutis est spiritus vitalis inclusus in semine; unde ad continendum hujusmodi spiritum semen est spumosum, et haec est causa albedinis ejus. Huic autem spiritui conjungitur virtus formativa, magis per modum motoris quam per modum formae, etsi forma ejus aliquo modo sit; unde dicit Commentator in 7 Metaphys., comm. 3, quod includitur in semine virtus illa quodammodo sicut uniuntur mores orbibus.116

The *virtus formativa* is united to its vehicle in a certain way as angels are to celestial bodies—because it is more of a mover than a form. And Aristotle himself compared the substance of that vehicle to celestial *aether*—“interceptus in spermate et in spumno spiritus aliquis et in spiritu natura, proportionalis existens astrorum ordinationi”—just as Virgil said that the shades are somehow “simili corpi” to the celestial spheres.117 Because this virtue is the prerequisite for the formation of any organ, it can have no determinate organ to which its activity is bound. And because it was present prior to the formation of any organ in the beginning of a new human life, and remains as the same species of power in the fully-developed rational soul, it is present and could still conceivably act at the end of life, when the organic body corrupts. The separated soul bears with it “l’unamo e l divino,” the one set of powers now mute, the other more active than before; and one power more, which is not properly in either category. It is too

116 *In Sent.*, 11.18.2-3.40., 469.

117 *De generatione animalium*, 1.3.54. This is said analogically; properly, the vehicle is a mixture of hot air (*πνεàµα*) and water: “Est quidem igitur sperma commune spiritus et aque, spiritus autem est calidus aer: propter quod humidos secundum natrum quia aque” (1.1.52). In different relative quantities, these are the two elements which for Bonaventure constituted the aerial bodies of angels, and which Statius alludes to in his image of the rainbow. Note also that in the *Aeneid* Virgil has Anchises speak of the aether and fiery air of purified souls: “exinde per amphium / mittimur Elysium et pauci laeta arva tenemus— / donec longa dies perfectio temporis orbe / concretam exemit labem, purumque relinquit / aetherium sensum atque aurai simplicis ignem” (VI.743-47). Cf. Friedrich Solmsen, “The Vital Heat, the Inborn Pneuma and the Aether,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77 (1957): 119-23.
lowly to be called properly human, yet life cannot begin or be sustained without it, because it is the bridge between what is potentially human and actually so.

It has sometimes been said of Statius’s justification of the shade-bodies that Dante improvised in the space left uncharted by formal philosophical and theological treatments of the afterlife, by using the principles of Scholastic Aristotelianism for a purpose which nonetheless went far beyond what the theologians themselves would allow.118 Under this rereading of the discourse, the same may be said, but now with at least some accuracy, and of a rather different conclusion. If the discourse indeed argued, according to the common reading, that the separated soul becomes the form of air and actually exercises sensory power through it, this would not be a new appropriation of Aristotelian principles under any interpretation, but a rather obvious disregard for them; the discourse as a whole would then be, at best, somewhat incoherent. There is, however, room to improvise, if one wishes to argue that the separated soul is the mover alone of such a body, and uses the body purely for physical manifestation.

In this case it would really be true that basic physical principles are not violated. Theologians such as Bonaventure and Thomas saw no logical impossibility in such a body being moved either by an angel (and that was a matter of historical occurrence according to Scripture, thus demanding explanation), or indeed by a separated soul, granting divine intervention (and that had somewhat less authority, needing only a brief hypothetical remark). Certainly Statius says nothing of the influence of divine power in the production of the shade-bodies, and

118 See, e.g., Gilson, “Dante’s Notion of a Shade,” 142: “It is [Dante’s] boldness in providing a scholastic and Aristotelian explanation of those creatures of his imagination;” Cogan, The Design in the Wax, 129: “In formulating his solution Dante relies on familiar philosophical and theological authorities, but interprets them in a unique way, consistent with the letter of what they have said but manifesting a whole new spirit than would have conventionally been discovered in these texts.”
there is much yet to answer for regarding the coherence of the narrative under this understanding. In the next chapter it will be argued that his explanation is in a way completed and put into a greater context by Beatrice, and further objections will be addressed. But he has already shown how Aristotelian embryology reveals in the soul a power which might be apt to move such a body in the separated state—once his precise language is understood, and the whole discourse seen as coherent and actually explanatory for the pilgrim’s question. It would be too much to say that this formation of aerial bodies follows necessarily from the Aristotelian specification of the *virtus formativa*—neither Aristotle himself nor any of his commentators drew such a conclusion, much as they noted the unique character of this power. But they did leave room for making an argument for such a possibility: not a gratuitous display of erudition which falls into contradiction for the sake of an irrational poetic fiction, but a real argument for the plausibility of such a state, which might not have been argued to by necessity, but which might be shown to be fitting. Indeed the final hint of his discourse is that such fittingness is not limited to the shades themselves, but also—perhaps primarily—is concerned with the making known of these shades and their conditions to the living. And thus by Statius’s argument, Dante makes a Herculean effort to draw together two modes of speculation on the interim state which had grown farther and farther apart since Gregory’s *Dialogues*: strict theological consideration of what is logically possible for that state, and accounts of miraculous visions which cast aside all rational critique for the moving reality of what has been seen.119

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119Cf. Barański, “Canto xxv,” 397: “le spiegazioni proposte dai saggi Dottori furono ingegnose ed altamente contorte. D’altro canto, però, esisteva pure una ricchissima tradizione visionaria che presentava, in maniera, del tutto aproblematica, gli abitanti dell’aldilà come se fossero degli esseri viventi... L’ambizione di Dante nella *Commedia* è di sintetizzare le due correnti; *Purg.* xxv è il luogo in cui questa sintesi viene finalmente effettuata.”
CHAPTER 3

AD ALLEGORIAM

3.1 Argumenta: Objections to the proposal

It has been argued that both the question and the answer of the discourse of *Purgatorio* xxv concern the shades’ capacity for self-manifestation rather than sensation, on the grounds that such an understanding is not only permitted by the precise language of that canto, but also yields a more theologically coherent explanation of it—especially in light of the creation-passages of *Paradiso*. As a result, this interpretation would allow for a more meaningful dialogue between Dante’s claims for the nature of the otherworld he portrays and the late medieval tradition of Catholic theological speculation on the afterlife using the terms and tools of Aristotelian anthropology. Understanding Statius’s final assertion in terms of *movens* and *motum*, rather than *formans* and *formatum*, allows that the sensitive and vegetative powers remain “tutte quante mute” without formal union to flesh and blood, and thereby preserves some continuity between the embryology with which he begins and the skialogy with which he concludes. In this sense, such a reading yields a greater consistency for the text in one respect: namely, the consistency internal to the arguments of this one passage.

There are, however, ready objections to such a reading, which would critique it rather in terms of consistency within the *Commedia* as a narrative whole, and
which thus must be considered if this reading is to maintain any claim to plausibility or interest.

First, if Statius’s discourse is indeed meant to disclose to the reader (and in a manner, it must be confessed, rather opaque and circumspect, even deliberately ambiguous) that separated souls are made to be only the movers of aerial bodies (after the manner of angelic appearances) and therefore have no sensation through them, the consequences for the rest of the poem are wide-ranging and, at first blush, rather improbable—at least for the first two canticles, in which the damned and purging all display individual, and for the most part human, form, and give every indication of being the subjects of sensation. Indeed, in most any canto of *Inferno* alone, there abound apparent counter-examples to the claim that the souls encountered by Dante through their shades cannot sense: even if this is admitted regarding their punishment, how are they aware of what transpires around them? Nearly all of the shades whom the pilgrim encounters—putting aside for the moment a few anomalous episodes—seem to act exactly as if their knowledge depends upon and is derived from sensation, in natural ways: they are aware of the pilgrim only when he comes into their field of view or makes sound within their hearing; indeed certain souls are able to identify him precisely because of his aspect or the quality of his speech; they see their fellow-shades and remark upon what occurs visibly to those aerial shapes; and in a few cases, they even receive pain directly from the physical action of the pilgrim—namely, upon the tree of Pier delle Vigne (*Inferno* xii), and the scalp of Bocca degli Abati (*Inferno* xxxii)—which would seem definitively to contradict the notion that these souls cannot feel through their own shade-bodies or suffer only by way of localization from the solid bodies around them. Indeed, the whole scheme of *contrapasso*, and
all of the individual torments of the damned and the purging, seem to belong to a completely different paradigm than the rarefied theological discussion of the *poena ignis*, which carefully constricts that penalty to a mode difficult to define and still more difficult to imagine—a mode in which the particular physical attributes of the fire or other body used as a means of torment seem to be quite unimportant. Punishment in the *Commedia*, quite to the contrary, is overwhelming in its abundance of physical imagery and is moreover founded upon the appropriateness of precise, concrete bodies as applied to shades for their torment. What relevance, then, could the Scholastic determination of the *poena ignis*, or the interpretation of Statius’s discourse which would allow it to be compatible with Scholastic limitations on the powers of the separated soul, have for the *Commedia* as a whole, not merely a few doctrinal passages in isolation?

Second, even if it be granted that all the shades of the *Commedia* can be understood as aerial bodies moved by souls without sensation, this leads to another difficult question for the consistency of the poem: does such a reading entail that Dante claims literal truth for the whole of the narrative—that is, an extra-temporal, physical substance corresponding to every body described as seen in an historical journey? Even though divinely-given aerial bodies are in a way less substantial than bodies of flesh and blood, they are in this context more demanding of substantial truth in their own right: if apparently normal bodies had been described without any explanation of or justification for them—the sort of explanation Statius seems to give—then they could be more easily explained away, as either the inventions of the poet, or at least the imaginative content of a vision given him, not as necessarily physical and made present to the poet’s senses at some time. If, however, one justifies aerial bodies explicitly, in a manner meant
to be accepted as a valid argument by the reader, such a metaphorical escape is preempted, so to speak: Statius has himself interpreted the shades, and has thus precluded certain other interpretations which the reader might otherwise have had available; now it would seem that some extramental reality must be granted to Dante’s vision, or else it must be rejected as false. Many commentators across the centuries of Dante scholarship have been at pains to avoid just that dilemma, and on the whole the most common (and certainly less scandalous) reading is to maintain the ultimate, spiritual truth of the poem at some remove from the truth of the literal, historical narrative, lest impossibilities or contradictions within that narrative should bring down the whole. In recent decades arguments of this kind have generally fallen under the subject-heading of the allegory of the *Commedia*, and that debate has an obvious bearing on the revised reading of Statius which has been suggested.

Finally, even if it can plausibly be argued that throughout the *Commedia* Dante intends his aerial bodies to be understood literally as just that—true bodies (physical substances perceptible through the senses of the living), truly of air (thus not a possible means of sensation for their movers)—the question would still remain, *cui bono*? What difference would it make to posit such bodies as the means by which a vision of the afterlife is presented to a living man, i.e., through his senses, as against the seemingly simpler claim that such a man had an intellectual vision, whose truth was spiritual but which he presents in an humanly-communicable form, through the textual representation or description of physical substances? And if it should be said that physical images were necessary on the part of the seer, according to the needs of his own way of understanding—in other words, that his only capacity to receive a vision from God was through

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images—why should it not be said that God gave such images directly to his mind (to put it in a modern phrasing), or directly introduced phantasms into his imaginative faculty (to put it in Scholastic-Aristotelian terms)? It would seem that the least tenable position for any reader is to be asked to understand the shades as truly corporeal but yet aerial and non-sensing; surely either a more credulous, literal reading, or a more spiritual and metaphorical, is to be preferred: either to presume superficially that the bodies which in most respects appear and act just as if they were passable and sensitive are indeed such, without regard for the consequences for Aristotelian physiology and Catholic theology; or else to judge that these bodies are treated so consistently as physical because their presence and experiences are either the creation of the poet (to express wholly spiritual truths) or at most the content of a vision which he received without extramental correspondence—hence explanations of their physical natures are not to be taken dogmatically. What stands to be gained by the difficult middle road of real aerial bodies, even if one wishes to support in a theologically and philosophically rigorous way the truth of the vision presented in the Commedia? What can be said, what conveyed by means of an actual body (which is nevertheless not what it seems to be, since the aerial bodies seem to be flesh and bone prima facie) which cannot be imparted just as well by an internal phantasm alone? It would seem that the latter is no more deceptive in its representation, and if the spiritual message conveyed by the image is the point of the vision, it is simpler to remove the tertium quid in the last analysis.

If these objections can be answered, the responses may contribute to the foregoing examination of theological considerations of the poena ignis. This would pertain especially to the third objection mentioned above; for a similar critique
may well be made of attempts to justify the corporeality of the interim fire, one which may have contributed to the rejection of that position (or the silent bypassing of it) by modern theology, and whose principle can be inferred from Origen’s contrary position: the supposition of bodily fire yields nothing but trouble for theologians seeking to understand the interim state, and what even stands to be gained from it? This objection is raised only partially and irregularly in the Patristic and Scholastic sources in support of a literal fire thus far considered; corporeal fire is said to be demanded by the crucial Scriptural passage of Matthew 25:41, but in the end it seems that this reading depends rather upon a presumption of corporeal fire, which that passage would then apply to fallen angels; subjugation to bodies is said to be a fitting recompense for the self-subjugation to lower goods in which sin consists, but it seems that this completion of the penalty, secondary to the poena damni, could as well be reserved for resurrected bodies after the Last Judgment, when it could be applied with less difficulty.¹ Thus it may remain doubtful why this notion of corporeal fire kept its hold on great minds, none of which was slavishly literalistic (pace some critics of Gregory), when the spiritual interpretation of the interim fire is so much more easily defensible, and (if coupled with a defense of a material fire after the Resurrection) seems to have no substantial disadvantage. Here also, in other words, the question must be asked: Why bother? What difference does it make?

¹In the interim period, after all, there is necessarily a lacuna in the overall argument for proportional justice, insofar as those suffering in Purgatory who sinned in the composite whole undergo purgation in the soul alone.
3.2 *Responsio*: The consistency of shades

If it should seem outlandish to suggest that all the shades encountered by Dante in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* are, so to speak, put there for his sake—to be more precise, are bodies present not for the sensory activity of which they seem to partake, but to display as it were a great pageant for the pilgrim’s vision—the first thing to be noted is that this is exactly what is claimed for the vision of *Paradiso*, explicitly within the poem itself.

By the fourth canto of the last canticle, having ascended from the Earthly Paradise atop Mount Purgatory to the Sphere of the Moon and having had his first encounter with a blessed soul in the heavens, the pilgrim has begun to grasp something of the arrangement of the Paradise which he is to see: just as the lower two realms were marvels of organization, here above the Earth groups of blessed souls are assigned appropriately to each of the major heavenly bodies (of a mainly Ptolemaic universe), in whose spheres Dante will meet them. At this realization, a doubt strikes him: was it not Plato who suggested, quite in opposition to Christian faith, that at death souls return to the heavenly bodies from which they had once descended into the prison of the flesh? Beatrice explains:

D’i Serafin colui che più s’india,
Moïse, Samuel, e quel Giovanni
che prender vuoli, io dico, non Maria,
non hanno in altro cielo i loro scanni
che questi spiriti che mo t’appariro,
né hanno a l’esser lor più o meno anni;
ma tutti fanno bello il primo giro,
e differentemente han dolce vita
per sentir più e men l’eterno spiro (iv. 28–36).

Plato may not have meant as literal doctrine the *rediturus* he describes in the *Timaeus*, but regardless, this account is contrary to the truth of the matter,
present appearances notwithstanding. If any location can be predicated of the blessed, it is the Empyrean, the highest heaven, in which all see God face to face, and therefore all can be called equally blessed. Nevertheless, the blessed differ in their capacity to receive the Beatific Vision: all are filled completely with joy, only some vessels are larger than others; thus there can be gradation within perfect bliss. Piccarda dei Donati taught the pilgrim this in the previous canto, wherefore Beatrice can now explain the appearance of the blessed souls in different celestial spheres: because human beings learn through their senses, the pilgrim could not have understood the gradations of blessedness unless those gradations were displayed physically.

Qui si mostraro, non perché sortita
sia questa spera lor, ma per far segno
de la spiritüal c’ha men salita.
Così parlar convien al vostro ingegno,
però che solo da sensato apprende
ciò che fa poscia d’ intelletto degno (37–42).²

If this should seem inappropriate, too much an occasion of error, Beatrice reminds the pilgrim that this is precisely what Scripture does in order to teach all of the living about God: man cannot understand except by means of images, and so in order to convey something of the power of God, for example, Scripture speaks of his hand; and so forth.

Per questo la Scrittura condescende

²In verse 39 the text here follows the reading of Leonardi ("spirituel"): “il Petrocchi legge celestïal, lezione meglio documentata dalla tradizione. Tuttavia spiritüal (portato da codici autorevoli) è sicuramente più proprio, in quanto ‘celestïale’ sembra potersi dire di tutto il paradiso dei nove cieli astronomici piuttosto che dell’Empireo (cielo che è di pura luce intellettuale) come intendono i commentatori; e qui si tratta di porre la differenza tra ciò che è sensibile, quindi percepibile da Dante (si veda la terzina seguente), e ciò che invece è appunto ‘spiritüale’. Per questo celestïal appare piuttosto una lectio facilior.” Chiavacci Leonardi, ed., Commedia, 3.112 n. 39.
At face value, this explanation conveys something unique to Paradiso in the vision of the Commedia, a dramatic difference between the lower two realms and the highest. In Inferno and Purgatorio, the reader no doubt presumes—whether the narrative is ever assumed to be literally true or not—that at least according to that narrative, the substances experienced by the pilgrim exist as they are seen quite without regard for his presence there; he discovers them as an incidental observer. What Beatrice indicates here is the marvelous notion that what Dante sees has been prepared specially for him: it is what has been described as a “command performance,” in which the whole host of Heaven reconfigures itself just for this moment, spreads itself out among the spheres for the benefit of a living man who, like all men, can only learn through the senses.

A further interpretation, common enough and compatible with the above understanding of the narrative sense, sees a more important or fundamental message in Beatrice’s claim—that is, something which either pertains to the entirety of the Commedia, or at least primarily concerns the author’s own poetic challenge in the last canticle—just so long as it is understood as a discourse which momentarily pulls aside the veil of the fictional, literal narrative, in order to comment on that narrative directly. According to the narrative, this discourse still speaks in terms

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3Lino Pertile, “Paradiso IV,” Lectura Dantis 16-17 (1995): 46–67, 53: “Dante’s representation of what he sees in Hell postulates the existence of a corresponding reality that is eternal. . . . On the contrary Piccarda is no longer to be seen in the heaven of the Moon. . . .”

4Pertile, “Paradiso IV,” 53: “What the poet describes in Paradiso, at least up to the Empyrean, is a series of unique events, a ‘command performance’ that was put on only once for his benefit.”

5See, e.g., Chiavacci Leonardi, ed., Commedia, 3.112–13 n. 43-45: “Come nella Bibbia si
of the content of the vision, the allegedly spatial movement of visible forms (some-
how associated with the souls of the blessed) to the spheres of likewise visible and
spatially distant heavenly bodies. But this is not the meaning ultimately intended
for the reader. Rather, it should be understood that Beatrice is no longer speak-
ing simply of the literal narrative; indeed, this is not so much Beatrice’s speech
as the author’s. Dante is telling his readers how to interpret his poem, i.e., in
the way of the pious reading of the Timaeus suggested by Beatrice: the author
non sente come dice. There was never truly any such celestial configuration; what
the poet has done in depicting this arrangement was done “per far segno / de la
spiritual,” and here he guarantees the correct interpretation of his fictional novelty
by means of a fictional discourse (insofar as it represents words actually spoken
in the sphere of the Moon) which in truth explains his own intentions. Dante has
arranged the souls he encounters in various spatial gradations—and this might
possibly apply as well to the circles of Inferno and the terraces of Purgatorio
(even though these could perhaps be accepted more easily as literal truth for the
medieval reader than the apportioning of the blessed)—not as a literal assertion
concerning the physical disposition of the afterworld, but so that the reader—who
“solo da sensato apprende / ciò che fa poscia d’intelletto degno”—might, through

presentano con immagini corporee esseri spirituali (Dio o gli angeli), e quelle immagini hanno
valore metaforico (altro intendevano), così nel libro di Dante le apparizioni dei beati nei cieli fisici—
e le stesse sembianze corporee che all’inizio si scorgono—sono soltanto figure, metafore, della
realità spirituale che si vuol rivelare al pellegrino della terra, ancora avvolto nei sensi;” Teodolinda
Barolini, The Undivine Comedy: Dethelogizing Dante (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
1992), 186: “Dante now deals with the representational aspects of his problematic, projecting
onto the souls a concern for representing themselves to the pilgrim which is in fact a displaced
articulation of his own concerns as writer of this text.” For a larger claim, which virtually
contains a similar interpretation of this passage, see Christian Moews, “God’s Feet and Hands
1–13, 8–9: “This is Dante’s understanding of his own poem... What does this passage leave of
naive (‘accurately reporting how things are in space-time’) notions of how Scripture is ‘literally
true’?”
the suggestion of fictional images, make fit for his intellect the notion that the souls of the blessed differ in invisible degrees of glory according to the merit of their earthly actions, even though they are in truth not spatially differentiated, since they are nowhere other than the Empyrean (which itself "has no other 'where' than the divine mind"). Likewise the distinct locations and the otherwise varying situs of the damned and the purging may be understood to convey the spiritual gradations among their respective sins or vices; neither are these truly in assorted, physical places, but are merely shown in this way for the reader's understanding.

That the physical structures of the vision of the Commedia are meant to convey moral and invisible structures is, of course, a commonplace of interpretation of the poem, which can find plentiful and explicit corroboration elsewhere within the text itself. The additional note which Paradiso iv gives to this understanding is that now the metaphorical move itself is no longer left to the reader, but is stated by Dante himself: these things are not truly as they appear, as "qui si mostraro."

Therein lies the difficulty of this interpretation. If the poet has guaranteed the desired reading of the phenomena of his narrative by writing it into the literal sense of the poem itself, he has simultaneously made these phenomena more difficult to dismiss as simple fabulae. That is to say: if Dante had simply presented the serial arrangement of blessed souls, without comment on the cause or meaning of that arrangement as a whole, perspicacious readers could have understood just the interpretation which Beatrice explicitly offers. But this interpretation could have been applied more consistently without this discourse, allowing for a consistent (and patently false) literal sense which is understood metaphorically to have a

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6 "E questo cielo non ha altro dove / che la mente divina" (Par. xxvii.109-10).
7 While implicit in most commentaries, this principle is less often made explicit; for a direct explication see Cogan, The Design in the War, xix–xxiii and passim.
(possibly true) spiritual sense. As it is, in order to maintain this interpretation a reader must leap back and forth among Beatrice’s words in this passage between a false literal sense which belongs to the narrative and a true literal sense which is the interpretation of the rest of the narrative. “Qui si mostraro,” for example, needs a secondary meaning; “qui” in its true sense should be understood of the text, in Dante’s address to his readers: “these souls, lector, are shown to you here in this canto by me.” On the other hand, “per far segno,” “così parlar,” etc., are true in their primary and only meaning: they are simply didactic.\(^8\) There is nothing impossible in making such a shift; but the very presence of the explanation in the text renders less consistent the overall application of such a hermeneutic method. If Paradiso iv is understood to be Dante’s explicit confirmation that the narrative is not literally true, then the reader finds that this interpretation would apply more consistently if Paradiso iv had not been written.

The point may be clearer by way of comparison: already thus far in Paradiso there have been a few didactic discourses, concerning the possibility of Dante’s ascent, the fittingness of different degrees of blessedness, and the nature of the spots seen on the moon. There is no apparent difficulty in separating the content of the discourse from its historical occurrence: one need not suggest that Dante really was present within the sphere of the moon with the soul of Beatrice in order to assert that what is expressed in the second canto is truly Dante’s reasoning (as corrected from that of the Convivio) concerning a real moon and its visible spots. Likewise, the discourse of the first half of Paradiso iv may well be dismissed as to

\(^8\) And Dante noted in the Convivio that in obviously didactic poetry—such as the third canzone of that work, which deals with a malady so grave that the medicine should be given directly, not hidden under any veil—one should not look for any secondary, allegorical sense: “E però che in questa canzone s’intese a rimedio così necessario, non era buono sotto alcuna figura parlare... Non sarà dunque mestiere nella esposizione di costei alcuna allegoria aprire, ma solamente la sentenza secondo la lettera ragionare” (iv.1, 363–64).
the truth of its historical occurrence, but presumably its didactic content should be literally maintained. But in this case—as opposed to Piccarda’s “e ’n la sua volontade è nostra pace” (11.85) and Beatrice’s “virtù diversa fa diversa lega / col prezioso corpo ch’ell’ avviva” (11.139-40)—the thrust of the argument is to justify a phenomenon of the narrative itself, to support the prerequisite of its literal sense. If Beatrice’s reasoning is sound, then it should support the actual possibility of the very phenomenon described, prior to any further interpretation of it; if it is unsound, this fault will undercut even the metaphorical reading, which depends upon at least the coherence of the literal sense as its foundation.

The same is true of Statius’s discourse in Purgatorio xxv. It is quite possible (and attractive from a certain perspective) to explain away the difficulties in the Roman poet’s reasoning—especially in the last few tercets which describe the formation of the shades—by attributing his real meaning to the level of the Florentine poet’s aside to his readers: in effect, “these things must be made for you to see such suffering; there is nothing real about them, but for the sake of verisimilitude I will insist upon them.” Only it remains that this interpretation would have been stronger without the presence of this discourse in Purgatorio xxv: for such a reading is nothing more than the concession to the narrative or suspended disbelief which most readers would already have brought to this point in the text, and which Statius apparently tries to defeat. To interpret away the literal content of this discourse or of that in Paradiso iv as a feint veiling an argument about the nature of the poem itself may yield plausible conclusions, but as a method ignores the fact that these statements are not made by the narrator but are written into the literal content of the vision—are put into the mouths of characters whose narrative existence depends upon that literal and didactic
content.

One may also note that in the canto just prior to Beatrice’s discourse on the arrangement of the blessed—*Paradiso* iii—when the pilgrim is at first deceived by the ethereal appearance of blessed shades into thinking that the images are only reflections in a mirror, Beatrice responds: “vere sustanze son ciò che tu vedi, / qui rilegate per manco di voto” (iii.29-30). These are true substances, and they are still to be called shades, just like the forms of the damned and the purging: “E io a l’ombra che parea più vaga / di ragionar, drizza’mi, e cominciai” (34). Granting that this applies only until the pilgrim has passed beyond the Earth’s shadow, after which point blessed souls will appear as lights or in shapes other than the human, still that latter rule is also temporary, as human form will return in the Empyrean—and in fact is present all along, crucially, in the figure of Beatrice.

There is another way of understanding the discourse of *Paradiso* iv as normative for the entire *Commedia*: not according to its metaphorical meaning, but on the level of the narrative, as an explanation for the arrangement and appearance of “vere sustanze” by way of “l’ombra.” While this account is predicated directly of the blessed alone, it may be meant to apply in fact to all of the souls which the pilgrim has seen.

It is a well-known (and widely-praised) element of Dante’s presentation of characters situated in the afterlife that he has them speak within the limitations of their moral state—that is, when the pilgrim is given an explanation of some facet of eternal punishment and reward, this explanation cannot always be taken at face value to reflect the author’s ultimate judgment, but may reveal some distortion belonging to the speaker’s point of view, best discovered by the reader in retrospect after revelations later in the poem. At least, this notion is frequently
a part of interpretation of the _Inferno_ and souls encountered there alone; it is less often applied outside of the canticle (and even within, it is not always remembered when one of the damned is speaking).

The best-known example is probably Francesca da Rimini, in one of the most famous episodes of the _Commedia_. She attributes the sin which has led her and Paolo to the Circle of Lust to the irresistible force of love, a love which dominates the lover. Her speech is meant to move, and move it does: the pilgrim faints at hearing it, and many a reader has likewise lost consciousness in a certain respect at the pitiable (some say, even unjust) way in which a solitary and unpremeditated moment of passion, brought on entirely by the bewitching qualities of a legendary romance, consigned two feeling and lovely hearts to an endless tempest—so immediately that they had not even a moment’s chance for repentance. At least, this is how Francesca tells it; but the consciousness often lost by readers is the awareness of the _situs_ in which the speech is given: the poet has reported the damnation of this woman before he reports her heart-rending story, and as the poem proceeds both pilgrim and reader (hopefully) will begin to see how much more can be understood from Francesca’s words than belongs to her (apparent) intention in speaking them. By mid-Purgatory, at the least, a partially-corrected perspective is offered by Virgil’s renowned description of the love which belongs to all creation, to which can never be attributed a despotic or sin-inducing force: love is that which moves every thing to its good; it is an answer to a call deep within the nature of all beings, and where sin enters in to the world, it is not because of obedience to that call but the perversion of it, by those creatures who at the threshold of assent are able to reject the true good to which love in fact
moves them, and dwell on lesser goods in spite of it.\footnote{Purgatorio XVII passim.}

From this perspective, Francesca’s discourse is anything but the author’s effort to convince his readers that her love (or any love truly so-called) was just as she describes it; rather, it is a \textit{tour de force} of damnation as exemplified perfectly within character and perfectly according to free will—by her own words she condemns herself, showing her willing subjugation of her own freedom to the winds of passion, expressing despite her intentions the error which defines this circle and is made manifest by its physical torment. She is not simply false—she believes herself truly to be revealing what has happened to her—but the reader comes to know that the crucial point is precisely that she believes only that things have happened to her, as an object, not that she has freely chosen; and with that realization, much that she does not falsify but also does not express may be supplied: What exactly was Paolo’s relation to her? Is it very likely that the crucial moment was without precedent or premeditation? Was the text really the culprit, or would some other occasion have presented itself (or more truly, would they not have found some other occasion) for their already-cultivated desires to come to expression?\footnote{Cf. John A. Scott, “Dante’s Allegory (Book Review),” \textit{Romance Philology} 26/3 (1973): 558–591, 566–67: “Francesca accuses the book, but I am not sure that the poet levels the same accusation—or that he would expect his readers to do so… It is surely important to understand that Dante… chose the act of reading about another’s love not as a warning against such tales but as an illustration of the way in which secret desires are brought to fulfillment. The act of reading was innocent: it could only be judged by the outcome. For Paolo and Francesca, it is evident that, had they not read of Guinevere’s kiss, some other spark would have kindled their lust.”} Her words are in that respect a sort of primary or literal sense upon which another sense is built—not allegorical by any understanding, but simply a larger sense which knows her words to reveal more than she herself knows.

Again, this is a commonplace of interpretation, especially with respect to this
particular episode—but it has been very irregularly applied. Certain other infernal discourses—such as those of Ulysses and Ugolino—are sometimes regarded as having been skewed by the speaker’s own state, as is revealed from a more distant perspective; but very often, when a discourse has an explicitly universal import (as opposed to the account of a particular sin, such as those of Francesca, Ulysses, Ugolino, et al.), it is taken to be the decisive word of the author on the matter—even when the speaker is one whom the author has placed somewhere short of that blessed state where the good of the intellect is found in fullness.

In no case is this more prevalent than in Virgil’s: here is one of the damned, whose authority as guide is, in the view of many commentators, unperturbed by his damnation, or other narrative indications of a distance between the author and the words spoken by this character. Of course, there is also great honor given to Virgil throughout the Commedia, not least his various and frequently honorific epithets and the pilgrim’s explicit praise; indeed his authoritative status as a guide and speaker of truth in large part makes the journey possible and comprehensible (at least as far as the Earthly Paradise); hence the common assumption that wherever he speaks he speaks in loco auctoris. Nonetheless, it cannot be ignored that this authority is repeatedly called into question, the more so the further along in the journey he goes—not, to be sure, as a matter of rebuke or poetic parricide on Dante’s part, but in order to cast into greater relief the extent of man’s dependence upon revelation.\footnote{The very appearance of Statius is, of course, a critical stage in the counterpointing of Virgil’s importance, which shows the latter’s insufficiency without at all diminishing his importance; cf. Teodolinda Barolini, Dante’s Poets: Textuality and Truth in the Comedy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 268–69. At the same time that Vergil will ultimately be reduced to a grammatical aside by the verace auctore, we should remember that he is unique in being chosen for so extreme—and dangerous—a compliment. He is the only poet considered worthy of being compared and being found wanting, his are the only poetic shoulders strong enough to fail to carry such a burden. There is, in the Comedy, only one auctore besides God,
Certainly, Virgil himself makes no secret of the fact that the realm of Purgatory is beyond his ken, and there is no reason that it should be otherwise; but in that canticle he does not cease to make authoritative pronouncements—that is, he continues to act as moral guide even when he is not competent to be a geographical guide. (There is nothing difficult about that—except that the physical structure has all along been the key to an understanding of the moral structure.) And even within *Inferno*, there is the famous showdown at the gates of Dis (where only the *ad hoc* provision of an angel prevents disaster),\(^\text{12}\) and Virgil’s gullibility towards the demon Malacoda in Malebolge, which brings the life of his charge into yet nearer danger.\(^\text{13}\) In the latter case, it even seems that the poet of the *Commedia*, great as his respect for the Mantuan poet may be, has him mocked: when pilgrim and guide are finally safe and learn from one of the Hypocrites how they were deceived, Virgil is troubled, but Fra Catalano responds:

> Io udi’ già dire a Bologna  
> del diavol vizi assai, tra ’ quali udi’  
> ch’elli è bugiardo e padre di menzogna (*Inf.* XXIII.142–44).

This is surely a jest at Virgil’s expense: the friar introduces his information as if it were a subtle distinction or the latest theological theory overheard in one the great halls of learning, the University of Bologna; but the message which follows is a hoary epithet that any Christian child ought to know—the Devil is a liar and the father of lies. How could a purported guide to Gehenna not know this?\(^\text{14}\)

\(^\text{12}\) *Inf.* VIII.115–IX.105.

\(^\text{13}\) *Inf.* XXI.146–11, XXIII.34–57.

\(^\text{14}\) Cf. Chiavacci Leonardi, ed., *Commedia*, 3.698 n. 142: “La frase è chiaramente sarcastica:
Again, in *Purgatorio* III, after his diatribe of “state contenti, umana gente, al *quia,*” what by all rights ought to be simply a poignant and even tragic moment for remembrance of the nobility of the intellects now consigned to Limbo is made almost comic by the pilgrim’s response to his master’s inability to find a way up the cliff while he is “tenendo ’l viso basso” (55):

Leva... maestro, li occhi tuoi:
ecco di qua chi ne darà consiglio,
se tu da te medesimo aver non puoi (61–63).

This is as much as to say, “If you want to go up, dear and wise master, it might help to look up.”

There is nothing new in observing that this moment shows a limitation of Virgil’s understanding, geographically speaking: everyone knows that he is ignorant of the topography of Purgatory, through no additional fault than that which has already been reported. But few are the readers who then revisit the preceding discourse in the light of this patent undermining of his authority which immediately follows. If Dante is showing by circumstance and *situs* Virgil’s ignorance, why should the preceding speech be considered any less in character than Francesca’s, and less in need of critical examination? Almost universally, “state contenti” is taken as if given in Dante’s own voice: readers stand behind Virgil and join in his finger-wagging at excessive curiosity; they ought also to stand in front of him, to see the flaw in his discourse as they saw Francesca’s in hers, and learn to see what Virgil himself does not see in his own speech—to see by his light which illumines him not, as Statius did.

non c’è bisogno di studiar teologia a Bologna per sapere che il diavolo è il padre della menzogna!”

154 “È disiar vedeste sanza frutto / tai che sarebbe lor disio quetato, / ch’è ettemalmente è dat lor per lutto: // io dico d’Aristotile e di Plato / e di molt’ altrì;’ e qui chinò la fronte, / e più non disse, e rimase turbato” (111.40–45).
The flaw, or rather the characteristic revelation in this particular discourse will be considered presently; but as preparation, another example less germane to the topic of suffering souls may serve as independent evidence, so to speak. The first of Virgil's purgatorial discourses on love, in canto xv, would seem prima facie to be irreproachable in content: love is not decreased by giving, because the love of all created things is fed by the infinite Good which will supply more love for all that is given away, and thus no one's supply can be exhausted but will increase the more it is sent out. It is generally assumed that this represents without qualification the thought of Dante himself on the matter, put into the mouth of the most authoritative voice available at that point in the narrative. In fact, however, Virgil is the least authoritative voice in the vicinity of this narrative place, and indeed of any place on the Mountain of Purgatory; if Dante was able and concerned to have his characters speak in character—in the sense exemplified by Francesca—according to their relationship to their situs, then this lack of situational authority ought to be significant. In fact, the pilgrim himself, though he has not yet been "crowned and mitred over himself,"16 is a more competent guide—or at least a less incompetent wayfarer—than Virgil at this stage, because he belongs here as a pilgrim: unlike his guide but like all the purging, he must improve to advance, as shown by the marks on his forehead; moreover, he has hope to return here again, as an unexceptional pilgrim shade.17 Again, the pilgrim's superior capacity for orientation at this stage is plainly shown in the narrative of Purgatorio III when Dante discovers how to ask for guidance while Virgil broods looking at the

16 As Virgil dubs him at the top of the mountain: "per ch'io te sovra te corono e mitrio" (XXVII.142).
17 As he says to Casella, "per tornar altra volta / là dov'io son, fo io questo viaggio" (11.91-92).
ground.\textsuperscript{18} Certainly, here in Canto xv Virgil himself notes that his answer may not be complete, and that the pilgrim will have to wait for Beatrice if he needs to hear more;\textsuperscript{19} but what exactly should be thought lacking? Why would his answer need any completion?

As at least one scholar has observed,\textsuperscript{20} if one is aware of the possibility that Virgil’s teaching might be lacking—not only with respect to a future and more enlightened moment, but even for the present circumstances—then the immediately following tercets strongly suggest an answer.

\begin{quote}
Com’ io voleva dicer “Tu m’appaghe,”
vidimi giunto in su l’altro girone,
si che tacer mi fer le luci vague (82–84).
\end{quote}

The pilgrim was about to express satisfaction with the answer, when their entrance into another circle stopped him. This could be simply circumstantial; but it could also mean that what follows in the new circle shows the answer to be less satisfying than originally thought. And what follows is given to the pilgrim alone (though Virgil claims to be able to read his thoughts): a vision of \textit{exempla} of meekness contrary to the vice of wrath which the just-entered terrace purges, examples which happen also to display a kind of love which is quite beyond Virgil’s reckoning.

What the Mantuan poet offered is often glossed as an unobjectionable account of the good diffusive of itself, quite compatible with and indeed confirmatory of

\textsuperscript{18}One might say that Mantuan poet’s vision is in a way still locked onto the place where he really belongs, though it be distant through miles of solid earth and whole gaping cone of Hell.

\textsuperscript{19}“E se la mia ragion non ti disfama, / vedrai Beatrice, ed ella pienamente / ti torrà questa e ciascun’ altra brama” (xv.76–78).

\textsuperscript{20}Sayers, \textit{Further Papers}, 63–64: “Dante is about to reply that he is satisfied, when he is caught into a trance, and there sees a vision of St. Stephen praying for mercy upon his murderers. That is the true measure of heavenly love, weighed against the good pagan’s best conception. The natural reason can grasp the exchange of love for love; the exchange of love for hatred is irrational: it belongs to another frame of discourse.”
the Christian view of love. Upon further examination, it is rather economic, a sort of offer of matching donations: divine love finds its like in creation and provides, in close correspondence to the extent of the giving of the created love, recompense in kind. Nothing of this is strictly false from the perspective of Purgatory, only it is woefully insufficient, and insufficient not just by comparison to something later to come which is appropriate to a higher stage of the purging and perfection of the soul; it is lacking even here—it does not belong in Purgatory at all. It is the view of Limbo, and that is—granting the necessary qualifications—an infernal view. If the generosity of divine love were that it recompenses earthly love in measure, or even simply that it is offered because it finds its like, then neither the pilgrim nor anyone else would be anywhere better than Limbo.

Such a retributive view of love is shown to be so unsatisfying by the display of what is beyond its ken: love offered beyond expectation or likeness, love of enemies, love given to the all-undeserving and persisting even as the offer is met with hatred. Mary is mild in her grief and anxiety in searching for her child; Pisiastrus cools the anger of a slighted mother; and, especially, Stephen proto-martyr imitates Christ by praying for those stoning him to death. It is perhaps to be expected that Virgil should think not in terms of the Sermon on the Mount but according to his own lights (though he is at least aware of other Christian teachings, as has been observed); but this immediate sequence of his own seeming-flawless words and the failed attempt by the pilgrim to declare them satisfactory, caused by examples of truly generous love which are given exclusively to the pilgrim, seems designed to call the readers’ attention not just to the greater thing which follows, but also backwards to reexamine the partial account in juxtaposition.21

21Again, this is not at all to say that Dante would reject Virgil’s account when speaking in propria persona; indeed part of his own account when examined on the virtue of love by St.
What then of Statius, who is met as one of the saved and having just completed his terraced purgation, but not yet experiencing blessedness? One would expect his vision to go farther than Virgil’s, and this is explicitly confirmed in *Purgatorio* XXV; but how far does it reach? Does he, for example, know what Beatrice knows, on a particular question? He describes the production of the shade-bodies as the consequence of the natural powers of the human soul acting in their separated state; by an analysis of the origins of these powers, he is able to suggest how the shade-bodies are united to the separated soul just as moved by its informative virtue, to express the affections of the soul, making only oblique reference to the purpose of such manifestation or a possibly divine purpose behind it. Beatrice, supposedly speaking only of the blessed, reports that by divine condescension souls have taken on a particular, physical arrangement precisely for the purpose of conveying something to the pilgrim, of giving him sensory knowledge which is the pathway to his intellect. But if Statius’s words can be understood as suggested in the previous chapter, there is nothing in his discourse which is quite incompatible with the process which Beatrice describes; if Statius’s words are true, but incomplete, then there is no reason that Beatrice’s words could not in fact apply to all of the souls of the *Commedia*.

What this would mean is that in fact, the ultimate reason for the existence of shade-bodies—not just the shades of blessed souls arranged throughout the

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John the Evangelist in *Paradiso* XXVI is somewhat similar—“ché l bene, in quanto ben, come s’intende, / così accende amore, e tanto maggio / quanto più di bontate in sé comprende” (28-30)—but in this case there is a careful and explicit organization of the way in which love is revealed by reason and by faith: the pilgrim begins with the distinction, “Per filosofici argomenti / e per autorità che quinci scende...” (25-26), and the above tercet (the argument of which is credited to an unnamed “colui”—scholars have suggested Plato, Aristotle, and Pseudo-Dionysius) belongs to the first part. The love that faith teaches is in perfect accord with this philosophical argument, as grace with nature; it can only lead astray if it is separated from the larger whole of “l’esser del mondo e l’esser mio, / la morte ch’el sostenne perch’ io viva, / e quel che spera ogne fedel com’ io” (58-60).
heavens, but all of the visible forms seen in Hell and Purgatory—is precisely to make the afterworld visible: they are really bodily forms, and are produced in order to be accessible to really bodily senses, to condescend to speak through that means by which alone the living learn. If indeed the two accounts should be compatible, the reason why Statius describes the situation with so different an emphasis than that of Beatrice—indeed, gives what seems prima facie to be an account incompatible with or unrelated to that of Paradiso iv—could be that his perspective is still purgatorial; he knows more than Virgil knows of the matter, but he still does not see it from the top down, so to speak.

Each of these three guides (taking Statius as a brief and companionate one) speaks of the nature of the shade-bodies presented to the pilgrim’s senses, in a manner of progressive revelation in which a true but limited (and even potentially misleading) treatment is superseded by a greater truth belonging to the next realm of the afterlife. At first blush, they address three different questions: Virgil, how any diaphanous body could be tormented by heat and cold (and the question is unanswerable); Statius, how a separated soul can have a virtual plastic power on surrounding air and mirror its affections thereby; Beatrice, why the souls of the blessed are presented in different locations to the pilgrim. But their respective discourses can also be seen as increasingly penetrating insights on a single line of argument, namely, the full explanation of the existence of shade-bodies connected to separated souls which are in themselves immaterial. Virgil supposes that they might exist for the sake of the souls’ sensation, knows—correctly—that this would be utterly inexplicable, and as a result simply takes any account of that process off the table; Statius follows by subtly turning the question from sensation to manifestation, reopening the possibility of a theologically credible
account of the shades; Beatrice fulfills the argument by giving the final cause of such manifestation. Virgil’s contribution is negative, removing what is impossible or unaccountable according to reason; Statius more positively show a reasonable possibility; but as this is the possibility of a phenomenon which is not necessary (as it would be if sensation had to be accounted for) but fitting, the problem is not really solved until Beatrice shows the convenientia of the phenomenon.

When Virgil claims in Purgatorio 111 that the way in which diaphanous bodies suffer heat and cold and other afflictions cannot be known,\(^{22}\) he may be quite right, but in leaving it at that, he is also quite beside the point: he abandons the investigation just where it should have led to a different kind of answer. As one of the damned, who is (according to his own account) allowed to see the truths which he knew not in life but simply excluded from the enjoyment that such knowledge otherwise brings, he treats mysteries as shibboleths; he does not realize that for a believer they are not simply beyond understanding (though of course this is strictly true) but are a goad to greater understanding, not the cutting off of the intellect but its elevation. His “state contenti, umana gente, al quia” is impugnable insofar as orthodox Catholic theology of any era would confirm that man can only know that God is, not what he is; but as to the consequent, as to the effect which faith in that quia should have for the living, his lapidary advice is something like the contrary of the truly Christian dictum which expresses the right relationship: fides quærens intellectum.

A theologian confessing the mystery of the Trinity knows that the quia is all that he knows (and that a certain kind of curiosity can be culpable); still his reaction is not to be content but to yearn, and to answer: he can show that

\(^{22}\) A soferir tormenti, caldi e geli / simili corpi la Virtù dispone / che, come fa, non vuol ch’a noi si sveli” (111.31–33).
objections to the logical possibility of the Trinity do not hold (thereby making more precise the necessarily imperfect verbal expression of his faith), and can further show the fittingness of the doctrine by non-necessary arguments which show its correspondences in nature, and so forth. These are, so to speak, the two paths of the search beyond the *quia*—so long as that is understood not as positive knowledge of the *quid* but the application of the *quia* within human reason’s proper domain—and they are the reason that Augustine and Boethius, for example, were not generally considered over-curious trespassers on the mystery of the Trinity but great champions of its doctrine.

Just so does Statius exceed Virgil—not by violating the letter of what the latter accurately reports as inconceivable, but by changing the terms of the problem in a way comparable to a theologian *quaerens intellectum* in response to a mystery. At first glance, there is mere opposition: Virgil says that the way of the suffering of separated souls through such bodies has not been made known to man, while Statius gives an exact account of this process. It could be suggested that this contradiction is intentional, and simply shows what Statius knows by virtue of being in a state of grace, and that Virgil is simply wrong. As has been argued, however, Statius’s discourse does not in fact accomplish an explanation of sensitive suffering, and indeed he was never asked that question in the first place. It is certainly true that his vision is wider than Virgil’s—else there would be no sense in his apology for revealing “la veduta eterna”—but in fact nothing that he says accounts for the capacity of shade-bodies to suffer from heat and cold. His broader vision is rather that he moves the problem from one of sensation to one of manifestation.

If this were Statius’s intention all along, why would he put it so cryptically,
as if hiding the doctrine within words which seem destined to be understood by most readers as explaining sensation? It is fair to say that this is the kind of picture painted by the interpretation of *Purgatorio* xxv suggested in the previous chapter; is it a plausible one? If Dante actually wished to communicate such a doctrine, why would he not put it more plainly?

The first part of the answer has already been indicated: as a character who is yet *in via*, Statius cannot simply be presumed to partake of the full insight which the author ultimately wishes to convey; his words too, though having a relative authority, may be spoken in character. While he has completed his terraced purgation at the point of the discourse of *Purgatorio* xxv, he has yet to pass through the wall of fire and the waters of Lethe and Eunoe in preparation for entry into the Earthly Paradise and beyond. Thus his explanation may be completely valid without being absolutely complete; he may explain thoroughly the moving and material causes of the shade-bodies while having only a hint of their final cause. One group, at least, is given an explicit *imprimatur*, as Beatrice indicates in *Paradiso* iv the necessary truthfulness of the blessed: ‘Io t’ho per certo ne la mente messo / ch’alma beata non poria mentire” (94–95). Certainly this need not mean that Statius misleads or is even capable of doing so—it cannot be extended to blanket everything spoken in *Inferno* or *Purgatorio* with doubt; but this special privilege claimed only for the blessed, along with the overall context of speech given in character, at least raises the possibility that Statius should have only a partial truth at this stage of the afterlife, and not express the fullest explanation of the matter at hand.

And if there is one certain, evident, and universal difference between the knowledge of the blessed and that of the purging, a limitation on the cognition afforded
to the latter group which is unmistakably clear in the narrative and in stark contrast to the knowledge had in Paradiso, it is that the purging do not know that the pilgrim is coming. That is, short of the Earthly Paradise, no one outside of Virgil knows in advance of the pilgrim’s visit—his identity, that of his guide, their respective conditions and the means and purpose of the journey itself are a mystery to all, and most explicitly so in Purgatorio where this ignorance always causes wonder and an eagerness to learn (as will be considered in more detail presently). Thus if there is an aspect of the account of shade-bodies which has to do precisely with the pilgrim’s visit, or with that kind of possible occurrence—a justification of them which is, so to speak, ad extra, beyond what concerns their internal possibility—it is quite plausible that Statius should be shown as only hinting at it, leaving the door open (as it were) in a way which as a character he may not even realize.

The second part of the answer is a matter of narrative pragmatism. If Dante indeed meant to justify the possibility of a vision of separated souls received truly in the flesh and seen with mortal eyes by way of aerial bodies which do not really sense, then the great danger of this justification would be to take the fangs out of his imagery for many readers. If he had declared outright that all of the apparent bodies with their hideous wounds, burnings, and other infernal or purgatorial torments, are in fact but airy representations of the affectation of immaterial souls which are truly tormented only in the will, many readers—who would be little moved by an abstract account of the invisible poena damnii (the suffering of the will on account of separation from its true good) or perforce by the theologians’ nicety of suffering from a body ut locatum—would lose something of their suspended disbelief in the narrative and the consequent horror and pathos at
realistically-described suffering, thereby losing something (perhaps a great deal) of the poem’s capacity to instigate conversion. The emotional potential of each horrific episode would be preempted in the reader’s mind by the reassurance that even if the author is credited with true knowledge of the character of eternal punishment and reward, he has made it known that he is describing nothing but air: Bertrand did not really suffer the pain of living through decapitation, that is merely the way his shade shows his intellectual anguish. While the theologians may assert that the latter pain is greater than the former, they do not always make a very moving case for the assertion *ad laicos*.

What Dante seeks to accomplish, however, not only here in the *Commedia* but as a theme across several of his works, is to speak fluently to both the theologians who sit richly at the table of divine learning, and to the Lazaruses of the workaday world who can have only fallen scraps (but whose language is in fact the nobler).23 In order to accommodate both audiences, Statius speaks with double meaning.

For the lay reader—who might or might not follow with exactitude the embryology of the first half of the discourse (but may be assisted by the metaphor of the production of wine) and who would not see any reason that a shade would “organa poi ciascun sentire” other than to see, hear, and feel—the brunt of the argument is that although these bodies are made of air, they are somehow real—they are more or less comparable to earthly bodies and suffer in the same overall manner, granting that they exhibit supernatural qualities in some respects by never being wholly corrupted, passing through other bodies, etc. This fits very well with popular representation of the dead suffering in the interim period, giving them a vague and *sui generis* corporeality,24 and confirms that this poem takes its bodies

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23Cf. *Convivio* i.1, *De vulgari eloquentia* i.1.

seriously. If this interpretation is superficial, still it has more than a kernel of truth: Statius is, at least, emphasizing the radically embodied nature of human existence, so that even in the strange stage of that existence which is defined by its lack of a fleshly body, the enduring principle of human life still somehow expresses itself in a bodily way.

For the theologian or philosopher who will examine Statius’s words more carefully and critically, there is another message, though it carries a greater danger of misunderstanding. Such a reader may understand Statius to be justifying a formal union between the substantial form of a human body and a certain quantity of air so as to allow sensation; he may well regard this proposition—if he knows something of Aristotelian physics and anthropology—as simply impossible, even nonsensical; therefore this reader will either think that the argument is meant literally and in earnest but is a miserable failure, fit only to mislead the unlettered, or else he will think it a deliberate display of the impossibility of a visible afterlife, whose foreseen insufficiency is meant to put into relief the necessity of poetic fiction, the invention of shade-bodies which are clearly unreal—as well as a metaphorical understanding on the reader’s part. Among dantisti the latter interpretation has generally been favored (insofar as the conclusion of the discourse has been understood as a philosophical dead end); but, as has been observed, this understanding fails to account for Dante’s presentation of the discourse in the first place.

There is a third path, though, which a theologian or philosopher might recognize, as presented in the previous chapter: understanding the discourse as given in earnest and indeed producing an argument which is at least plausible within some form of Scholastic Aristotelianism—namely, that separated souls manifest
themselves according to the model of angelic appearances, and therefore are the
movers, not the forms, of their shade-bodies. They form them in the looser sense
of modeling them like clay, moving their shape—not forming the substantial union
which would be necessary for sensation—and thus forming sense organs simply in
order to present a truly human appearance to the one seeing them. A reader rec-
ognizing this argument—which is hidden, so to speak, in the ambiguity of “infino a
la veduta” and in Statius’s omission of any acts of sensation in his examples of the
actions performed through the shade-bodies—would most likely be one who al-
ready knew sensation to be impossible without a body of flesh and blood, and who
therefore never took the narrative as literally true, but (most likely) a metaphor-
ical expression of the poena damni. Statius’s discourse would still be a revelation
for him, in that it would present to him the argument that, granted the impos-
sibility of separated sensation, an afterworld which is made sensible to the living
is not impossible, whether by solid bodies which are the means of non-sensory
torment for the souls, or by bodies given accidentally to the souls themselves to
be moved. Whether or not he takes the narrative as a whole to be literally true,
such a reader can understand the discourse of Purgatorio xxv to be an earnest
argument for the real possibility of such a vision, had by a living man through his
very eyes.

The same can be said of Beatrice’s discourse in Paradiso iv, only in this
case, the argument is not for the possibility of a visible body moved by a sep-
arated soul—since this has already been established—but for the fittingness of
such manifestation, the reason why such bodies should be granted to souls if they
cannot in fact be a means of sensation. This passage, too, admits of both a naïve
and a critical interpretation, and as in the case of Statius’s discourse, whereas
most critical readers have interpreted it metaphorically—in clear opposition to the credulous, literal reading—there is a way of reading Beatrice critically which nonetheless brings her meaning more into line with the literal sense. The naïve reader might accept at face value that this conversation took place in the sphere of the moon and that the soul of Beatrice indeed spoke audibly to Dante the words given. The critical reader might be tempted to explain the whole episode away spiritually, just as he does all of the literal sense of the narrative (as regards the historical occurrence of the journey), but he must account for the fact that in this case the literal sense preempts his metaphorical understanding by containing it, literally expressed, within the narrative. There remains for such a reader the path less taken, of allowing that the narrative journey may be fictional but maintaining that this explanatory discourse, like that of Statius, does not simply conceal under falsehood a truth about the text, but is verily an argument for at least the possibility of the kind of journey literally described—and that very possibility might then be the basis for a further poetic meaning (and one rather more significant than the banal observation that sometimes words are used figuratively). That is, rather than understanding Beatrice merely as a stand-in for the poet and her words as Dante’s metaphor for his own text, a reader might understand her as arguing in character for a literal proposition of which her own characterization in the narrative is a crucial part.

According to this understanding, Beatrice reveals in Paradiso iv not the peculiarity of that cantica but the principle of any manifestation of the otherworld to the living—according to the narrative, then, the principle explaining (at least teleologically) all of the pilgrim’s vision of Hell and of Purgatory as well. These things are shown to him for the sake of his understanding: the souls who al-
ready are experiencing invisibly the result of their clinging to God or turning away from him, are given the means by which they might make these experiences truly visible, for the sake of the living—so that one like Dante might be able to have a true vision of them, true insofar as there are indeed physical substances to be seen, and true insofar as those bodies are united to and moved by the souls which they represent by as much of a union as is possible according to the constraints of the separated state. As in the earthly missio of an angel, the aerial body which it moves does not belong to it essentially but nevertheless, because it is for a time the exclusive locus to which that angel’s virtus is joined, becomes something more than a metaphorical representation, something susceptible of a demonstrative predication which is true secundum quid—hic est angelus—so the shade-bodies of the Commedia, much as they cannot be united formally to a separated soul and are not part of its substance, are yet the maximal extent to which souls can be present to the senses in the separated state through the medium of their own powers—a virtual presence. Hypothetically, a hortatory vision could be granted which is quite fictional and has no connection, virtual or otherwise, to the very souls of the damned, and yet is true according to its spiritual meaning; but a vision of actual shade-bodies, actually moved by the souls, is at once more fully true and a surprising way in which good can be taken even from damnation. The devil is, in a way, cheated even of those whom he conquered, because the damned can despite themselves be—in the very manifestation of their penalty—a spur towards salvation for those whose fate is yet in doubt.
3.3 *Ad primum*: The inconsistency of cognition

To maintain that visible shade-bodies which manifest the souls of the departed are not merely the stuff of poetic fiction and vulgar ghost-stories, but can be justified theologically as to their possibility and fittingness, requires certain limiting conditions, most important of which is that the shades cannot allow for the actualization of sensitive powers belonging only to a truly composite animal. In short, such shades (if considered to be possible for the sake of argument) would allow the separated soul to manifest its knowledge, but would not allow it to gain knowledge through the senses. Herein lies the first major difficulty in suggesting that the *Commedia* argues for the real possibility of such shades: in the overwhelming majority of encounters (at least in Hell and Purgatory), shades give every indication of gaining all their knowledge of the pilgrim and of the happenings of their respective circles through their senses in addition to the apparent tactile sensation of their respective *poenae*. Even if the discourses of Statius and Beatrice can be understood as the literal justification of the sensible manifestation of the otherworld to one still living and sensing in the flesh, does not the rest of the poem itself display to the reader that Dante followed no such understanding in his narrative, but presented entities which gain knowledge through sensation?

There are two distinct problems here: whether or not the souls of the *Commedia* should be understood to undergo a *poena ignis*—a penalty distinct from the *poena damni* and administered in the interim by means of bodies, whether fire or no—if it be granted that they do not sense; and, under the same supposition, how they should be understood to gain cognition.

Indeed, according to the argument presented thus far, the question of the *poena ignis* is for the *Commedia* rather less important than the further consideration
to which it leads: the possibility of manifestation. What the separated souls experience—whether the poena damni or further penalty inflicted by means of bodies—they manifest as if a poena sensus, so that it can be seen, and for the damned as a precursor or foreshadowing of their state of undergoing true poena sensus after the Resurrection. But what of that penalty, under the proposed interpretation of Statius? Do the souls of the Commedia suffer from the various other bodies sensed by the pilgrim, if they do not sense them—perhaps by ligation to them as to an instrument of divine justice, as was the common thread of theological explanations of the poena ignis from Gregory to Siger?

The clearest indication of the mode of torment in Dante’s afterlife is given, naturally enough, on the sole occasion when the pilgrim witnesses and hears an account of a fundamental change in that torment: i.e., when Statius is released from the Terrace of Avarice, to the trembling of the whole mountain and the singing of Gloria in excelsis Deo by the penitent. Having encountered the pilgrim and Virgil, and not yet knowing their names, Statius satisfies their curiosity by explaining what he himself has only just learned:

Tremaci quando alcuna anima manda
sentesi, sì che surgà o che si mova
per salir sù; e tal grido seconda.
De la mondizia sol voler fa prova,
che, tutto libero a mutar convento,
l’alma sorprende, e di voler le giova.
Prima vuol ben, ma non lascia il talento
che divine giustizia, contra voglia,
come fu al peccar, pone al tormento (xxi.58–66).

And lest the reader miss the significance of this revelation, the narrator insists upon how much it enlightened the pilgrim:

Così ne disse; e però ch’el si gode
tanto del ber quant’è grande la sete,
non saprei dir quant’el mi fece prode (73–75).

Here the full extent of a rule already adumbrated in *Inferno* is at last made plain. Much as the punishments may appear to be quite externally mandated and enforced, just as for any prison, this is not truly the case; it is, at least in the case of the purging, a power of the souls themselves which is set upon the means of their torment by “divine giustizia,” in fitting recompense for the way that the same desire was set upon the lesser good which constituted their sin: “come fu al peccar.” Nor is there any reason to restrict this circumstance to *Purgatorio*; as has already been noted, the damned regularly reveal—behind the appearance of wholly external constraint—that their torment indeed consists in the realization of their own disordered desires, now shown as they truly are.

The punishment of those purging avarice or prodigality is in fact carefully chosen for this revelation of an overall principle. At first glance, the Fifth Terrace boasts one of the lightest penalties yet seen, for the shades are merely prone on the ground; and yet this is claimed to be the worst torment of the mountain:

Quel ch’avarizia fa, qui si dichiara
in purgazion de l’anime converse;
e nulla pena il monte ha più amara.
Si come l’occhio nostro non s’aderse
in alto, fisso a le cose terrene,
cosi giustizia qui a terra il merse.
Come avarizia spense a ciascum bene
lo nostro amore, onde operar perdési,
cosi giustizia qui stretti ne tene,
ne’ piedi e ne le man legati e presi;
e quanto fia piacer del giusto Sire,
tanto staremo immobili e distesi (115–26).

So Pope Adrian V reports to the pilgrim. Why should this penalty be so harsh—
and indeed what justice is there in having a lesser vice purged by a greater penalty, as presumably the vices of the lowest three terraces are the most grave? Little needs to be said on why Dante would accord special infamy and destructive power to avarice (and hence an especially great torment to purge it), even as structurally he recognizes that it is less radical disorientation of love than is pride or envy. The corruption that most tainted his city and his Church need not be that which is theoretically the greatest degree of corruption. But it is the claim that “nulla pena il monte ha più amara” which surprises. Here is interim punishment stripped of all accoutrements and reduced to that which is common to every stage of Hell or Purgatory, localization: “tanto staremo immobili e distesi.” Other shades enduring other penalties may move about within their allotted circles but are nonetheless bound to that place; here there is nothing left but the binding, and this alone is as painful as any.

Taken in concert with Statius’s account of his release from this same torment, and further with his explanation of the shade-bodies as a means of manifestation, the Pope’s explanation takes on a new aspect. The latter believes—or perhaps merely expresses metaphorically—that he and the other souls are bound there, hand and foot; but Statius reveals that the release of a soul consists not in the untying of any constraint but in the perfection of the will, and when that is achieved the soul simply realizes that it was never bound to this place by anything more than its own power, that is, its own desire for lower things which is set upon this particular place. This is done by divine justice, indeed, but in accordance with what it truly desired in life; and it is held not until a second and arbitrary decree (as Adrian may be taken to imply—“quanto fia piacer del giusto Sire”) but simply until that desire is finally in perfect accord with the will which would
ascend. And the penalty involved in that in that binding is apparently nothing other than the binding itself, the immobility enforced.

Yet there is something more: the souls are not merely immobile but held face-down, so that they cannot look towards the heaven in which they long to be. Now if the shade-bodies were the means of sensation, this would indeed limit one of their powers, as they could only look in one direction; but it would be the more absurd to claim that no other purgatorial penalty is greater, since the envious are deprived of sight altogether, and much more painfully in the apparent means—their eyes are sewn shut. But if the torment of the souls in fact should not be so entirely separated from their self-manifestation, the sense of this becomes clearer: the shades are prevented from showing their faces, and this is part of their penalty. The way in which the penalties of *Purgatorio* are related to the manifestation—especially of eyes—will be considered at greater length presently.

For the moment, it need simply be noted that if the torment of Dante’s afterworld can consist fundamentally and simply in localization, then his account of the interim correspondent of the *poena sensus* is quite compatible with the theological consensus on the problem, and especially Thomas’s solution. Bonaventure and Thomas both argued for the fittingness of a penalty which reveals the desired union with a lower good in which sin consists, and this Pope Adrian echoes quite precisely: “Si come l’occhio nostro non s’aderse / in alto, fisso a le cose terrene...”

As to the problem of cognition, it is crucial to understand the discourses of the *Commedia* in terms of progressive revelation or realization, given in character according to the level of understanding befitting a certain region. In *Inferno*, there are certain indications of the manner of knowledge belonging to the souls of the damned; but as to the nature of the shade-bodies themselves, there is
little or no reflection—they are taken by the pilgrim and his guide as a matter of course, with all their attention (and that of the reader) focused on the content of what is portrayed to them, not its method. In *Purgatorio*, the shade-bodies themselves begin to be questioned in earnest, if not quite conclusively. The various attempted embraces of the canticle, and the frequent attention called to that other kind of *ombra* which belongs to the pilgrim alone—his shadow—along with the discourses of Virgil and Statius demand that the reader consider just how it is that separated souls could manifest such interactions as have been displayed from the very beginning of the poem. In *Paradiso*, a shift of focus already begun in *Purgatorio* is completed, from the nature of shades to the reason for them; and this stands as part of an argument for the fittingness of embodiment in the afterlife *tout court*—that is, the eschatological view of embodiment.

3.3.1 Far-fetched knowledge

Before examining the many incidents in which souls in the *Commedia* appear to gain knowledge of new, particular, and proximate events through their senses, it must be asked: what other means is even available for such cognition? If the narrative is to be taken as theologically credible in at least the basic elements of its literal sense, is there any alternative to sensation for the knowledge of individual things to come to a separated soul?

Scholastic theologians considered the way in which separated souls could gain or exercise knowledge, a question crucial for the notion of an interim state altogether: without the body, the soul cannot exercise its vegetative or sensitive powers, and if it were impossible for it to use its intellective power as well, it would be left without any bodiless activity, and this would threaten its very ex-
istence in that state—for everything is, insofar as it is in act. In other words, if human life is said to continue after earthly death, that life must consist in some activity; dormancy is not an option, because such a state as sleep is only possible in a composite (in which the soul remains the first actuality of the body even as many of its power are not in second actuality). If the soul were ever altogether inactive during sleep, that sleep would be annihilation—the soul would not in fact exist, because as a form the soul simply is activity. Thus with the lower faculties of the soul mute in the interim state, intellection must be possible (and indeed constant) for the soul to continue to exist.  

This much was generally agreed upon; but differences arose concerning just how and what the soul could know when separated from sense organs and their phantasms, which are the constant companion of its earthly mode of knowing.  

It is crucial to note that this question concerns the natural knowledge of the

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25 Or, to put it another way, nothing can exist without its proper operation; if granted that the intellectual soul cannot be corrupted with the body, “per consequens necesse est quod intelligat, cum intelligere sit ejus propria operatio.” Thomas Aquinas, *In Sent.*, iv.50.1.1 resp., 1247.

26 Differing somewhat from the position of Thomas to be presented below, Bonaventure wishes to preserve some meaning of the *dictum of De spiritu et anima*, erroneously attributed to Augustine, that the separated soul senses, imagines, and understands. Still first two verbs must be distinguished from their meaning for the composite: “Quando anima amittit corpus, amittit *passivam* respectu actus sentiendi: ideo impossibile est, quod aliquo sensu utatur, sive interiori sive exteriori, quamdui est separata.” So it is in fact only the intellectual power which is active in the interim: “Sicut corpore corrupto, nihil operatur per potentias, quae respiciunt *vegetabilem*; ita nihil operatur per potentias, quae respiciunt sensibilem.” Nonetheless, the intellect itself in this life can be said to understand things in three ways: “Per *intellectum autem cognoscit res sub conditionibus materialibus, prae sente materia, et hoc est sensus exterioris*; et res sub conditionibus materialibus, *absente materia, et hoc est imaginat ionis*; et illas etiam res cognoscit, abstractis omnibus materialibus, et hoc est *intellectus*.” Because all of these cognitions properly belong to the intellect, when separated from the powers of the composite it simply comprehends them all with greater simplicity, as do the angels: “Ideo recte dicitur anima separata *sentire, imaginari et intelligere*, non per diversas potentias, sed per *unam*, quae potest omnibus his modis cognocere, sicut ponere est in Angelo.” *In Sent.*, iv.50.1.1 resp., 1046. As to what exactly is known in the interim, his treatment indicates only briefly that by nature no separated souls know of earthly affairs, but the damned may learn from demons or one another, while the blessed learn not only from angels but also “per illustrationem et revelationem;” yet they do not know all things. *In Sent.*, iv.50.1.2 resp., 1048.
separated soul, prescinding from the light of grace: inestimable knowledge belongs to those who see God face to face, and some foretaste or anticipation might be granted to the poor souls in Purgatory; but the damned do not simply cease to exist, and if so, they must exercise their intellects in some fashion—they must be capable of knowing according to the nature of the principle of life which persists through bodily death. This means of knowing is therefore natural to the separated state (though preternatural by comparison to earthly knowledge), and thus is that which is perfected by grace in the illumination of the blessed.

Thus framed, the question has three primary divisions: the origin and novelty of the separated soul’s knowledge; its specificity; and its comparison to the knowledge of other separate substances, i.e., the angels. First, does the soul gain any new knowledge in the interim state, or is it limited to the use of intelligible species gained during its time in the body? Second, is its knowledge (whether carried-over or newly-gained) only of universals, or does it know singulars? Third, is this knowledge an unqualified improvement upon the earthly state of the soul, a perfection which assimilates it to the angelic mode of knowing?

Thomas’s various treatments of this question are notable, among other reasons, for their adjustment between his early and mature work, and (in one later instance) for an emphasis on punishment of the damned as a guideline for the resolution of the problem. In the first place, though, there are two general parts of his answer which remain constant throughout his writings.

While the human faculty most commonly referred to as memory—that by which sensible forms are recalled after having been received in the sense organs—cannot be operative without the body, there is also an intellectual memory in the soul, in which intelligible species are retained and can be recalled into considera-
tion by the light of the agent intellect. In its earthly activity, the human intellect always turns to phantasms in the senses, even while knowing through immaterial species from intellectual memory; nonetheless, when separated it can employ these species without such recourse, and therefore can maintain its proper activity independent of the presence of the body, even if the mode of that activity will differ according to a different mode of existence for the soul. This cannot, however, be the only means by which the separated soul thinks—otherwise, the souls of those who die in the womb or as infants, and which have not yet abstracted any intelligible species, could not operate and therefore could not continue to exist.

Since such a soul can in no way take new species a rebus without sensation, it must receive knowledge from above: “intelliget... per influentiam a substantiis superioribus, Deo, scilicet, vel Angelis; et loquor de naturali influentia” (the caveat added to distinguish this influence from special illumination, such as by the light of grace).

What would it mean to receive knowledge “de naturali influentia” from God or an angel, and without any accompanying sensitive or imaginative activity? In what would this knowledge consist? There is reason to think that it could only be universal: the proper mode of man’s intellectual knowledge is through abstracted, universal species, whereas singulars—particular substances—are known in their

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27 Thomas argues this point against Avicenna’s denial of intellectual memory, calling to witness Aristotle’s claim that the intellect is the locus specierum and Augustine’s attribution of memory to mind. In Sent., iv.50.1.2 resp., 1248–49.

28 *Summa theologiae*, 1.89.1 resp., 370: “cum nihil operetur nisi inquantum est actu, modus operandi unius cuiusque rei sequitur modum essendi ipsius. Habet autem anima alium modum essendi cum unitur corpori, et cum fuerit a corpore separata, manente tamen eadem animae natura.”

29 In Sent., iv.50.1.1 resp., 1247: “Nec sufficit ponere in ea cognitionem solum quae fuit a sensibus accepta in corpore, propter animas puerorum decedentium in maternis uteris, quae a sensibus cognitionem non acciperunt.”

30 In Sent., iv.50.1.1 resp., 1247.
singularity only in conjunction with the senses. Things are intellectually knowable insofar as they participate in form, and they become known— for the human intellect— only insofar as the intellect in question receives their form denuded of matter; matter being the principle of individuation for composite substances, the intellect does not know these substances as individuals, but only through the species in which they participate.⁴¹

If this were all that could be said on the question, however, it would follow that God and the angels, not having sensation, would be incapable of knowing singular composites. In fact, purely intellectual beings do know such singulars, even though all knowledge is through forms, because there are two kinds of formal knowledge: “Formae rerum, per quas intellectus cognoscit, dupliciter se habent advers; quaedam enim sunt factivae rerum, quaedam autem a rebus acceptae.”³² The latter, abstracted from things, are those which the human intellect uses on Earth and are connatural to it; but the former, causal or factive forms, are those which make singulars to be (and which are nothing other than participations in the mind of God), and these are the proper objects of intellects separate by nature.

Prime matter is the crux: it would seem to be unknowable in itself since in itself it cannot exist, and yet as it is the principle by which composite singulars are individuated, these things cannot be known in their singularity independent of it. But prime matter does not lie outside of God’s causality. Human arts, just like human sciences, presuppose their matter—and thus the human artifex, though he has a causal form in mind to a certain extent, knows even his own artifact only universally, according to the only manner in which its form can come

³¹ In Sent., iv. 50.1.3 resp., 1233: “per hunc modum non cognoscitur materia, quae est individuationis principium.”

³² Quaestiones de anima, 20. resp., 396.
to his mind. God, however, is the artifex of both of the principles of composite substances, form and matter, by way of causing such substances in their entire being altogether—which happens to be a composite being. While forms connatural to the human intellect are abstracted from the material of composite beings, and are therefore imperfect similitudes pertaining only to a part of the thing known, God's causal forms—which are, of course, not actually multiple in him but his own simple self-knowledge—make things to be and thus make them known exactly as they are. Likewise, the intellects of angels are created with similitudes of or participations in these causal forms, so that they too know things according to the way they are produced by God—that is, in their complete being—not by an ex post facto abstraction. In Thomas's words, God himself “per suam artem cognoscit et universalia et singularia,” and those creatures who know directly through the influence of divine self-knowledge—i.e., separate substances—know not abstracted forms but “similitudines rerum intelligibiles quibus res recognoscant secundum quod producentur a Deo.”

But how exactly is it that an immaterial form can be a similitudo rei even quantum ad materiam? What is complex in lower things is simple in higher; there is one cause of form and matter, “unum existens se habet ad utramque;” and precisely because the same infinite intellect is at once the cause of a composite substance in its entirety and particularity, it makes knowable—that is, immaterial and intellectual—that substance in its entirety and particularity. Hence God

33 Quaestiones de anima, 20 Resp., 357: “Quia nulla ars hominis causat materiam, sed accipit eam iam praexistentem, quae est individualis principium.”

34 Quaestiones de anima, 20 Resp., 357.

35 Quaestiones de anima, 20 Resp., 357: “Nec est inconveniens, formam quae est factiva rei, quanvis sit immaterialis, esse similitudinem rei et quantum ad formam et quantum ad materiam. Quia semper in aliquo altiori est aliquid uniformius quam sit in inferiori natura. Unde licet in natura sensibili sit aliud forma et materia; tamen id quod est altius et causa utriusque, unum
knows all individual things as well as all universals; angels can likewise know even composite singulars by receiving the causal similitudes of things from God; and the separated human soul can know singulars by receiving such forms, either directly from God or through the ministration of the angels, having been made “paratissima ad recipiendum influentiam a substantiis superioribus”\textsuperscript{36} by its removal from the body, which brings it closer to the higher aspect of its nature (man being a \textit{medius} between material and immaterial being).\textsuperscript{37}

Regarding this last observation, though, Thomas modifies somewhat the position of his \textit{Sentences} commentary in his later work.\textsuperscript{38} In the former, the Angelic Doctor makes little qualification to the assimilation of the human intellect, once separated from the body, to the mode of understanding proper to the angels; later, though, he comes to address the objection that if indeed human beings can understand in a more perfect way without the body, credence may be given to the Platonic claim that the soul is imprisoned in the body and has its understanding obscured thereby: the unified state may be called natural, but in comparison with the separated state the body seems to be an obstacle to the perfection of natural capacity. This objection is raised explicitly in the \textit{Summa theologiae}, and the answer of the \textit{Sentences} commentary modified: granting that the separated soul understands more after the manner of an angel, insofar as it receives new knowledge solely through the influence of superior substances, still this is a less existens se habet ad utramque.”

\textsuperscript{36} In \textit{Sent.}, iv. 50.1.1.resp., 555.

\textsuperscript{37} In \textit{Sent.}, iv. 50.1.1.resp., 555: “Intellectus enim noster est medius inter substantias intelligibiles et res corporales; unde anima intellectiva dicitur esse creata in orizonte aeternitatis, in libro de causis.”

perfect mode of understanding for the human soul, within the body or without.\textsuperscript{39}

How can this be, since causal forms are greater and more comprehensive than abstracted forms? Though it receive the former in its separated state, the human intellect is not capable of comprehending them properly; its proper operation always involves an interchange with phantasms, and "non est proportionata universalitati formarum influxarum."\textsuperscript{40} Abstracted forms are the proper object of the human intellect, and though the causal form be simpler, yet the proper perfection of human knowledge lies in greater complexity—it cannot merely be grafted onto a simplicity belonging to another grade of being. The \textit{formae influxae} in themselves comprise a greater knowledge than is possible in this life, comprehending \textit{universalia et singularia}, but the separated soul—even one of the blessed, prescinding from additional knowledge had by grace—understands them only "in quadam universalitate et confusione:" it knows not all the singulars which the form can communicate, but only those "ad quae habet aliquem ordinem specialem vel inclinationem, sicut ad ea quae patitur, vel ad ea quae afficitur, vel quorum aliquae impressiones et vestigia in ea remanet."\textsuperscript{41} The soul’s natural mode of knowing reasserts itself, insofar as the \textit{habitus scientiae} developed in life continues to determine the extent to which the separated soul can make use of \textit{formae influxae}; to give another delineation, these souls know only:

\begin{quote}
illa ad quae quodammodo determinantur, vel per praeecedentem cognitionem, vel per aliquem affectionem, vel per naturalem habitudinem, vel per divinam ordinacionem: quia omne quod recipitur in aliquo, determinatur in eo secundum modum recipientis.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Summa theologiae}, 1.89.1.\textit{resp.}, 371: "tamen ille modus intelligendi, prout erat possibilis animae, erat imperfectior."

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Quaestiones de anima}, 20.\textit{resp.}, 257.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Quaestiones de anima}, 20.\textit{resp.}, 257.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Summa theologiae}, 1.89.4.\textit{resp.}, 378.
This correction was necessary in order to reaffirm in fullness that the human composite was created by God as such: as Thomas notes in these same articles, the question would be much easier to solve for one who supposed the human soul to be created independently and only accidentally joined to the body, as do the *Platonici*;\(^{43}\) against the unqualified assumption—extending well beyond avowedly Platonic circles—that after this life the soul simply becomes like an angel, the real bulwark is Genesis 2. Man was made by God as composite; that is his intended mode of existence and therein lies his proper perfection, and he is not made more like God by presuming to a higher grade of being, which would be a presumption against the divine plan which had great things in store for him within that very way of being, precisely as a *medius* between brutes and angels, not as a crippled angel delayed in resuming a loftier capacity.

Another justification for the separated soul’s knowledge of singulars—both those retained from earthly life and those newly known thereafter—is expressed only in Thomas’s disputed questions on the soul, and concerns the punishment of the damned soul:

> Cognoscit autem singularia quaedam, quorum prius cognitionem acceptit dum corpori esset unita; aliter enim non recordaretur eorum quae gessit in vita, et sic periret ab anima separata conscientiae vermis. Cognoscit etiam quaedam singularia quorum cognitionem accepti post separationem a corpore; aliter enim non affigeretur ab igne infernali, et ab aliis corporalibus poenis quae in inferno esse dicuntur.\(^{44}\)

The first claim cannot be taken to mean that the separated soul retains the memory of singulars, just as such, which it knew in life, since it is evident in this

\(^{43}\) *Summa theologiae*, 1.89.1.resp., 370: “Si autem hoc non est ex natura animae, sed per accidens hoc convenit ei ex eo quod corpori alligatur, sicut Platonici posuerant, de facili quaestio solvi posset.”

\(^{44}\) *Quaestiones de anima*, 20.resp., 356.
article and in Thomas’s other treatments of the question that the intellect when conjoined to the body does not know singulars directly and cannot preserve them in intellectual memory; rather, having once received the intelligible and universal species derived from a singular, the intellect can consider its own act, reflect upon itself, and thereby consider indirectly the derivation of the universal species from the vis imaginativa and thence from the reception of the singular as such in the senses. When it is said that the separated soul knows those singulars of which it had understanding in earthly life, this must mean (in the complete context of the argument) that the disposition of the soul, the habitus scientiae which is retained and relevant to activity in the separated state, causes it to know more clearly from the causal forms (which flow down from superior substances and which the human soul cannot extrapolate to their full potential to make all singulars known) those singulars which it had come to know in life: the forms contain all the singulars of past earthly history, and what the soul had already become accustomed to know it knows again more readily, only now from a different source; likewise, it knows other things which belong to the same type of knowledge, the same disposition. The second claim also requires qualification, insofar as it may seem to imply that the separated soul is afflicted by the hell-fire per cognitionem; as has been shown at length, when Thomas deals with that question directly he specifies that the real basis of that affliction is the soul’s being locally bound to the fire—only this binding allows for the soul’s cognition of torment (by a body) to be true. Knowing itself to be bound to the fire, it suffers; but this knowledge depends on its capacity for the cognition of new singulars, since both fire and bond are new and individual things to be known, which could not be accounted for either by memory or by the new reception of abstracted forms. Finally, the above passage gives a new aspect
to the memory of singulars known in life; roundabout as this method of explain-
ing such memory may seem (since the soul does not retain singulars in the way in
which they were held in life, but receives them from above and only returns, as it
were, to the same singulars by virtue of the habitus scientiae built in life by the
intellect’s reflection upon those singulars as they were present in the senses), it is
a necessary supposition, because of the vermis which so often accompanies ignis
in Scriptural allusions to torment and which was widely glossed as the worm of
conscience, a metaphor—as opposed to the fire—for the gnawing memory of sin
in the mind. If the separated soul were to have only intellectual memory—that
is, intelligible, abstracted, universal species learned in life—it could not retain the
specific memory of past sins, as these are singular acts; its conscience could not
prick, because it would have no pin-point. Thus the provision of causal forms
through superior substances is triply necessary to explain state of the departed:
to allow for the activity of those infant souls without earthly intellectual memory;
to allow for the singular memory of earthly deeds; and to allow for the knowledge
of the soul’s own, new state.

3.3.2 Inferno: “Nothing to see here”

It is remarkable that this Thomistic account, constructed within the rather
constraining limits of an Aristotelian psychology and yielding what may seem to
be an obscure or unimaginable mode of knowledge, is in fact largely compati-
ble with (or even illuminating of) the picture Dante paints of the knowledge of
souls in the Commedia, despite how radically different the latter account might
seem at first blush. The shades initially appear to have no distinctively different
mode of knowledge than that of the living, but as the journey progresses, that
picture is adjusted more and more. Of course, these adumbrations of the mode of infernal knowledge could easily be glossed as merely accidental modifications of what remains a basically sensory system identical to that of the composite state: the shades sense what is around them and remember their past through retained sensible species, just as the living, only with the addition of at least a limited knowledge of future events, and some knowledge of their own respective states and the laws which they respectively violated. Such has been the common presumption of commentators. There is, however, nothing which prevents a very different understanding of their knowledge, even in Inferno where sensation and sensitive memory appear to be so prevalent.

The journey through Hell lacks any examination of the nature of the shades—despite incidents which should have called it into question—not simply because the author had to distribute speculative discourses throughout the three canticles, but because none of the inhabitants of Hell are capable of fulfilling such an examination. By contrast with Purgatorio (as will be shown), the characters of Inferno show a striking indifference to the qualitative difference between their interim bodies and that of flesh and blood which the pilgrim brings, despite their clear awareness that they themselves are dead (and therefore separated from their earthly bodies) and despite the several episodes in Inferno wherein attention is called to the solidity of the pilgrim’s body and the immediately-evident difference between its effect upon its physical surroundings and that of a shade. Nor are such observations limited to the narrator: the damned, the guarding demons, and the pilgrim himself all make note of the fact that the presence of the one living body in all this realm is distinctive in some fashion, such as the way in which it moves

45Virgil is capable of a very limited account, but only after having left his proper abode for Mount Purgatory.
other objects—its solidity resists other solids. Yet no one brings up the evident problem: if the shade-bodies, by contrast, in no wise resist physical objects, how can they be tormented by them? In fact, as the pilgrim descends through Hell, the shades encountered become progressively less able to recognize his body as physical, as different than their own.

Now the topic of sensation as such in the Commedia has already been considered at length in scholarship;\textsuperscript{46} nothing of such detailed analysis is purposed here. The following will be little more than a list, as it is intended simply to highlight moments of recognition, or other tests of the quality of shade-bodies, so to recall some of the precise circumstances of the many encounters which, taken as a whole, have almost always led to the assumption that the shade-bodies of the Commedia sense.

Charon first evidences the point, distinguishing the pilgrim as living at once and from a distance, and indicating the improper weight with which such a body would burden his boat:

\begin{quote}
E tu che se’ costì, anima viva, 
pàrtiti da cotesti che son morti 
\hspace{2cm} ........................................
più lieve legno convien che ti porti (111.88–93).
\end{quote}

Minos does not mention his state, but evidently he also recognizes instantly that the pilgrim is not a shade coming to judgment: “O tu che vieni al dolcorno ospizio...guarda com’ entri e di cui tu ti fide” (v.16–19). Francesca calls him living and a visitor, without any explicit precursor: “O animal grazioso e benigno / che visitando vai per l’aere perso” (v.88–89). Ciacco knows him to be led through

Hell—“O tu che se’ per questo ’inferno tratto” (vl.40)—and that only temporarily: “Ma quando tu sarai nel dolce mondo…” (88).

More significantly, the pilgrim finds that the shades of the gluttons do not resist his feet as the boats and rocks do:

Noi passavam su per l’ombre che adona
la greve pioggia, e ponavam le piante
sovra lor vanità che par persona (34–36).

At the passage of Styx the pilgrim notes his burden upon the boat of Phlegyas:

Lo duca mio discese ne la barca,
e poi me fece intrare appresso lui;
e sol quand’ io fui dentro parve carca.
Tosto che ’l duca e io nel legno fui,
segando se ne va l’antica prora
de l’acqua più che non suol con altrui (viii.25–30).

Yet these peculiar circumstances provoke no wonder or inquiry other than the mere noting of their incongruence.

Filippo Argenti knows that the pilgrim’s time has not yet come—“Chi se’ tu che vieni anzi ora?” (33)—as do the demonic legions who threaten him at the gates of Dis: “Chi è costui che sanza morte / va per lo regno de la morta gente?” (84–85)

Farinata knows the same, whether by the pilgrim’s appearance or by his voice: “O Tosco che per la città del foco / vivo ten vai così parlando onesto…” (x.22).

Around the river of blood, both the pilgrim and the guarding centaurs note how the former dislodges rocks as he moves, though the latter seem thereby to rely upon deduction of his state as opposed to the apparently immediate knowledge of Minos, Charon, et al.:

Così prendemmo via giù per lo scarco
di quelle pietre, che spesso moviensi
sotto i miei piedi per lo novo carco.

…………………

’Siete voi accorti
che quel dietro move ciò ch’el tocca?
Così non soglion far li piè d’i morti’ (80–81).

Pier delle Vigne, despite his most intimate evidence that the pilgrim’s body can move solid things, seems to give a second indication that the precision with which the damned intuit the pilgrim’s state has decreased somewhat by this stage, since he only postulates that one of the two—Dante or Virgil—might return to the world above: “E se di voi alcun nel mondo riede…” (xiii.76).

Brunetto Latini recognizes the pilgrim at sight, but it is not clear whether he knows him to be living until he has already interacted with him; it is certainly clear that he does not know the means or purpose of his living journey: “Qual fortuna o destino / anzi l’ultimo dì qua giù ti mena?” (xv.46–47) The other Florentine Sodomites likewise recognize him first as a co-citizen, and only after approach do they acknowledge his state: “[tu] che i vivi piedi / così sicuro per lo ‘inferno freghi” (xvi.32-33). The Paduan usurer returns to the pattern of recognition at sight of the pilgrim’s life: “Che fai tu in questa fossa? / Or te ne va; e perché se’ vivo anco…” (xvii.66–67). But Venedico Caccianemico gives only a hint that the pilgrim’s speech has a distinctive sound of the living: “ma sforzami la tua chiara favella, / che mi fa sovenir del mondo antico” (xviii.53–54).

Thereafter, recognition begins to fail altogether. Alessio Intermieri does not know why this one looks at him more than others—“Perché se’ tu sì gordo / di riguardar più me che li altri brutti?” (118–19), indicating that he does not know the pilgrim to be living. Among the Simoniacs, the mistake of Pope Nicholas III shows a similar ignorance: “se’ tu già costi ritto, Bonifazio?” (xix.53) (The latter may be unable to see him; but according to Venedico, the sound of his speech
should have given some warning.) The demons tormenting the Barrators, in their threats toward the pilgrim, show no particular distinction between that living, potential prey and the shades which are their proper charge (XXII passim); in this episode it is most notable that Virgil is able not only to grab onto the pilgrim (as he had done before) but to make his own shade a sled for a solid body, which would seem to contradict the evidence of canto VI, inter alia (XXIII.37–51). The hypocrites note that the pilgrim’s speech has a quality distinctive of the living, but they also need some time to discern it, and even then are not certain:

Mi rimiraron sanza far parola;  
poi si volsero in sé, e dicean seco:  
‘Costui par vivo a l’atto de la gola;  
e s’è’ son morti, per qual privilegio  
vanno scoperti de la grave stola?’ (XXIII.86–88)

Climbing up the other bank, the pilgrim must be careful to find rocks which will support him, reemphasizing the normal, physical interaction between his body and the topography of Hell (XXIV.25–33). Among the thieves, Vanni Fucci only speaks once spoken to, and is not certain that his report will be carried to the world above: “se mai sarai di fuor da’ luoghi bui...” (141); his fellows do not recognize the journeyers at all.

At Guido da Montafeltro, it seems that the final transition is made; already the pattern of recognition has passed from easy and instant awareness to careful scrutiny to uncertainty, and among the fraudulent counselors it moves to simple mistake, for Guido does not believe that the pilgrim is living, or at least that he can continue to be so: “S’i’ credesse che mia risposta fosse / a persona che mai tornasse al mondo...” (XXVII.61–62). Likewise Mohammed speculates wrongly on the pilgrim’s presence, and must be corrected by Virgil:
Ma tu chi se’ che ’n su lo scoglio muse,
forse per indugiar d’ire a la pena
ch’è giudicata in su le tue accuse?” (XXVIII.43–45)

Just following, Piero da Medicina and Bertrand de Born are aware that the pilgrim lives, but apparently only because they heard the exchange with Mohammed; likewise the alchemists are informed by Virgil in advance (XXIX.94–96). Master Adam explicitly does not know why the pilgrim goes unpunished, implying ignorance of his living state: “O voi che sanz’ alcuna pena siete, / e non so io perché…” (XXX.58–59). The giant Antaeus is, again, informed in advance by Virgil (XXXI.127–29). In frozen Cocytus, there is the most strange case of Bocca, whose shade (apparently) is struck by the pilgrim’s foot, in open contradiction to the state of affairs in canto vi; however that may be, he does not know the pilgrim is alive until told: “se fossi vivo…”; “vivo son io…” (XXXII.90–91). Ugolino is told in advance (138); and, finally, Fra Alberigo is openly mistaken, as he believes the passersby to be souls bound to the lowest torments: “O anime crudeli / tanto che data v’è l’ultima posta…” (XXXIII.110–11).

There will be value in even such a barefoot trip as the above if it can make plain that the progressive collapse of the processes of recognition is concomitant with, indeed partly dependent upon, a specific collapse of the awareness of embodiment as such. This progression shows that, despite initial appearances, the awareness that the shades of the damned have of the pilgrim was never simply a matter of sensation—at least not without further qualification. Certainly, they seem to see and to hear him in the way that living persons would; but the difference in what is perceived by shades from circle to circle—whether contemporaries of Dante or no, those in Malebolge and below fail to recognize that he is a living man, as those outside of Dis proper easily did—indicates that either the sensitive
capacities of the shades are reduced lower in Hell (and even presuming that the shades could indeed sense, this would be counterintuitive, since sensation would then be available as a means of torment, and torments presumably increase in the lower circles; moreover, it would not explain the incidents in question, since shades in Malebolge and Cocytus are indeed able to see the pilgrim, but unable to recognize him precisely as living and embodied), or that what appears in the narrative to be sensitive cognition on the part of the shades may not really be so.

The episode of Paolo and Francesca is once again useful, as a well-known account, for more extended examination. Certainly, it appears as if Francesca sees the pilgrim approach, knows him to be a living human being because of certain distinctive qualities of the images he presents to her senses, is aware of his questions to her because she hears them, can recall details of the personal history she recounts because of her sensitive memory, and so forth. There is no immediately-apparent reason to think otherwise, and indeed a reader can go through the whole of the *Commedia* without questioning these assumptions. Nonetheless, there will be no way to justify that apparent sensation as a theologically credible possibility (in the context of late medieval thought), even after Statius’s discourse in *Purgatorio* xxv; but it need not be contrary to reason to allow the possibility of such an interaction, if it be explained not in terms of sensation but in terms of the influx of knowledge from superior substances to an intellect which receives such forms according to the disposition it built in life, “in quadam universalitate et confusione”—as all things are received according to the mode of the receiver.\(^{47}\)

Francesca remembers what she did in a singular way (rather than universal species abstracted from those singulars), but not because she retains phantasms,

\(^{47}\)See n. 41 *supra*.
the sensitive and composite way of knowing singulars—even the usual reading of Statius’s discourse would not allow for that. For even if an aerial body were formally united to the human soul so as to allow it to exercise its sensitive powers anew, still it could then only accept new phantasms; the transition between union with the body of flesh and that of air would not allow any carryover of phantasms, because, even if only for a moment, the sensitive powers become mute. Only the absolutely continuous operation of the sensitive powers (i.e., continuous actualization of the very same bodily organs, which would only occur if Lachesis never ran out of thread) could allow for the continuity of already-received phantasms and therefore the memory and renewed consideration of singulars in the usual, embodied way. Dante could, of course, have been ignorant of, unconcerned with, or opposed to such philosophical restrictions of the knowledge of the separated soul—it cannot be presumed \textit{a priori} that such objections are controlling for his own consideration—but then he does take the trouble to address the problem head-on through Statius, who affirms explicitly that at the moment of death the sensitive powers become “tutte quante mute.”

If, however, the separated souls know all that they know from \textit{formae influxae}, it is possible that the initial appearance of many infernal and purgatorial episodes is deceiving; in fact, there is good reason internal to the \textit{Commedia} to suppose that this could be the case. Francesca could remember her dalliance with Paolo because in the confused way in which she receives the illumination of causal forms

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48He does assert that memory, like intellect and will, becomes keener than before; but in this context, intellectual memory (comprising no singulars but only universal species) would seem to be the proper concomitant of the wholly immaterial powers of intellect and will. It would be strange for Dante to follow the Aristotelian consequences for the separated state thus far but not to regard the memory of singulars as belonging to the sensitive soul. One may recall Aristotle’s observation that even brute animals clearly have this kind of memory, which therefore cannot be proper to the rational powers—not the kind of memory which could be called divine, or put on a par with intellect and will.
the *habitus* of her mind turns at once to her sin and the other singulars around which she had already bent her mind. She perceives the pilgrim’s presence, as well as her own torment, but this need not depend upon the proximity of these singulars to her shade—indeed, she shows that her knowledge is not limited by proximity either spatially or temporally, in predicting the condemnation of her killer to Caïna. To know the singular fact of her torment, she would likewise be dependent on divine influx, and her awareness of the fellow-shades in her circle and events taking place within it spatially (such as the approach of the pilgrim) would come from the same cause: her *habitus* and that of the other lustful souls draws her to those singulars comprehended in the causal forms which pertain to the physical *locus* of the punishment of lust and give her a partial and confused knowledge which, in her presentation of recognition through her *ombra*, appears no different from sensation to an outside observer.

Given this appearance, to explain that knowledge in any way other than sensation may seem far-fetched—and precisely so, in that otherwise her knowledge of near things would have to be fetched from afar, i.e., from the mind of God. What must be recalled is that this mode of knowledge, proper to God and to the angels, is in itself actually more intimate to any thing known than is the sensitive mode of knowledge. A sensitive animal must be spatially proximate to singulars in order first to know them, but that knowledge through abstraction must create a certain metaphysical distance between the way in which the thing itself exists and the way in which it is known. In contrast, the divinely-derived mode of knowledge is in itself more existentially proximate, so to speak; it is knowledge through causes, which is the most perfect knowledge, knowledge deriving directly from the continuous cause of the existence of things—even ephemeral things such as are sensed

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by composite beings—and making them known more according to the manner of
their existence than sensation can.

Yet this mode of knowledge, superior in itself, is not proper to the human
mind, and therefore cannot be held by such a mind with the same comprehen-
siveness and certainty as knowledge taken from the senses. In this way, it could
yield a more subjective cognition, insofar as what is actually made known to the
separated intellect in any precision or singularity is predetermined by the bent of
that intellect (aside from what God may specially make known; it should not be
forgotten that throughout this discussion, there is always the possibility of other
knowledge revealed by God ad hoc, outside of the influentia naturalis which is
available to all separate substances).

It has sometimes been said of earthly life that a man sees what he wants to
see; in the separated state this would be no hyperbole but quite exactly the case.
Cognition of singulars through formae influxae, because of the limitation of the
human intellect, presupposes the dispositions acquired in life, and is more entirely
and ab initio shaped by them than cognition through the senses; the former cog-
nition does not gradually develop the habit of blocking out one thing to focus
on another, but from the very moment of separation it knows only “illa ad quae
determinantur, vel per praecedentem cognitionem, vel per aliquem affectionem,
vel per naturalem habitudinem.”49 A separated soul sees what it has seen, sees
what it wants to see, sees what is of its nature and second nature to see.

Such a method accords well with Farinata’s account to the pilgrim of the
knowledge of the damned, provided that the reader remembers that this is yet
a very partial truth, because it belongs to the damned perspective of which it

49 See n. 42 supra.
speaks—it is an insider’s account, which must carry the error of its limitation even as it ostensibly exposes that limitation objectively. Farinata claims of the damned:

Noi veggiam, come quei c’ha mala luce,
le cose...che ne son lontano;
cotanto ancor ne splende il sommo duce.
Quando s’appressano o son, tutto è vano
nostro intelletto; e s’altri non ci apporta,
nulla sapem di vostro stato umano (X.100-5).

This has an undeniable truth, so far as it goes: Farinata correctly predicts (according to the temporal setting of the journey) Dante’s banishment, but Cavalcante does not know whether his son is presently living. The lack of present knowledge among the damned is confirmed at various points in *Inferno*—by the Sodomites’ questions concerning the current state of Florence, and so forth. But one should expect Farinata’s vision to be limited, even as it holds a partial truth. He affirms that their vision is dependent upon divine illumination, at least so far as the future is concerned, and implies that it is arbitrarily blocked from present things. What he is unaware of is the effect of his perduring sin upon the very words he speaks, as was Francesca. He and his confrères in the sixth circle are among those heretics who claimed with Epicurus that the soul dies with the body, as the narrator describes it; and as commentators have observed, one of the remarkable aspects of Farinata’s appearance is the arrogant grandeur with which he ignores his present circumstances—“com’ avesse l’inferno a gran dispetto” (36)—including the interruption of Cavalcante, and concerns himself only with the pilgrim’s past and future: his ancestors—“Chi fuor li maggior tui?” (42)—and his

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future mischances—“tu saprai quanto quell’ arte pesa” (81). What Farinata could not know, or consider in an objective light, is that his knowledge might be limited not by an arbitrary dispensation (as it appears to him) but by his own disposition. The irony of his position is that as an Epicurean with regard to immortality he was focused on the present, that is, the life of the world, but transposed sub specie aeternitatis his own willing and indeed eager concern is with anything but the present—that is, what is really present to himself. He glories in the past victories of his ancestors, grinds his teeth at their defeats, and is glad to predict their future return; his companion Cavalcante is all concerned with the fate of his stock. These inquiries, unremarkable enough in worldly life, take a sinister aspect here when compared with the horrible state of the souls expressing them: how can they continue to care so much about the affairs of the world when they bear about them the evidence that it is the next world which matters, and that ignorance of that fact leads to eternal pain?

It could be that the inability of the damned to know the present state of affairs on earth is indeed an arbitrary limitation on an equally arbitrary illumination of their intellects in the interim period: hence the divine light still shines on them just so far as to reveal things temporally distant. But the same result can be explained less arbitrarily and more meaningfully in terms of the epistemological consequences of sin: the light of formae influxae is not a spotlight shone in atomo here or there, but is universally available to any separated intellect—only it is received according to the disposition of the recipient, and respects free will by giving one exactly what one desired in life. In the present case, what Farinata and Cavalcante desired was to bend all their attention to the past and future of familial or political fortune while ignoring the one really present thing, namely, the state of
their soul (while they thought themselves to be dismissing an impossible future for
the possible present, but in fact they tied themselves to the ephemeral and passing
to the detriment of what is really present). Other shades may have similarly
limited knowledge of the future, but they certainly have different dispositions
towards their apparent surroundings than that which is proper to the habitus of
the Heretics.

Examples could be multiplied as the pilgrim descends deeper into Hell. In
each case, there is at least the appearance of sight, hearing, or touch—on the
part of the shade—but at the same time, evidence compounds that the same
semblance of an act of sensation can yield wholly different results in different
circumstances. Depending on the state of the sinner, his apparent hearing or sight
might or might not yield insight into the pilgrim’s condition, his shade might or
might not be solid to the pilgrim’s touch, he might or might not show any signs
of the effect of his torment, quite independent of the apparent severity of the
ongoing burning, mutilation, etc.\textsuperscript{51} The result, especially when seen in retrospect
from later in the poem, should be to call to reader’s mind the difference between
the fact of sensation and its display. That is, in a narrative which \textit{prima facie}
invites the assumption of sensing shades, the utter inconsistency of the relationship
between an assumed instance of sensory perception and the manifestation which
results from that instance puts into relief the fact that these are two different and
potentially separable things. Physical and consequent manifestation is, after all,
the only way in which a human being learns of the sensation which another animal

\textsuperscript{51} In fact, one might say that the only consistent rule is that all the rules bend for the sake of
the pilgrim: innumerous shades are wailing in unbearable torment, but those he needs to speak
to can ignore it at will in order to converse with him; he can trod without resistance through a
field of shades when travel is necessary, but when he wants to grab the hair of one, he can do
that too, and Virgil can be a sled for him; and so forth. It is all for the pilgrim, only no one
knows that yet.
experiences; but if the irregularity of infernal sensation breaks any consistent, causal link between a certain kind of sensation and its sensible result, what can the reader infer from these manifestations?

3.3.3 *Purgatorio*: “He’s just here to be seen”

It may be surprising to find that in a certain respect, the shades of Purgatory—including one of its guardians—know less of the pilgrim upon encountering him than did several of the shades and guardians of Hell. Cato, in confronting the newcomers to his shores, does not know whether they are damned (and thus certainly does not know that one of them yet lives) until Virgil tells him (1.40–48). Some of the shades in the early part of the ascent—especially in Ante-Purgatory, which is thick with scenes of deliberate recognition—can at least guess that the pilgrim may be alive; but there is none of the apparently instant and unreflective knowledge of his state which Charon, Minos, Francesca, Farinata, and others display. In fact, at almost every possible instance in *Purgatorio*, the process of recognition is made explicit whereby a new group of souls learns what to make of the newcomers to their realm. And even when they have some evidence to indicate the unusual condition of the pilgrim, this generally instigates not a conclusive judgment that he is embodied, but simple wonder.

In short, throughout the canticle the reader’s attention is very deliberately drawn to the process by which these shades notice the pilgrim as out of place. Quite aside from knowledge of his condition, some shades who knew Dante in life are indeed able to recognize his identity; but even such cases, while apparently

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52“Chi siete voi che contro al cieco fiume / fuggita avete la pregione eterna?... Chi v’ha guidati, o che vi fu lucerna, / uscendo fuor de la profonda notte / che sempre nera fa la Valle inferna?”
emphasizing the sensory powers of the shades, sit uneasily beside the returning reminder (by way of contrast with the pilgrim) that the shades themselves are diaphanous, and permeable by other bodies.

The souls newly-arrived to Purgatory, who sing “In exitu Israel de Aegypto” in the boat on their way to shore, stare hard at the pilgrim; subsequently Casella, having recognized an old friend, comes forward—“così al viso mio s’affisar quelle / anime fortunate tutte quante” (11.73–74)—surely, it seems, because he simply saw the pilgrim, in the usual sense. But at once this notion is undermined by the failed embrace between the two: Casella’s body offers no resistance to the pilgrim’s hands and arms; how can something so slight see? How can an image be received in a body which does not even stop light? As if to drive the point home, the poet exclaims, “Ohi ombre vane, fuor che ne l’aspetto!” (11.79) Just at the moment when the apparent, sensitive power of sight belonging to the shades has been thrown into relief by their staring fixedly, it is cast back into doubt by comparison to their more certain role as objects, not subjects, of sight. Everything about them is vain except the aspect, the appearance.

This meeting may stand in retrospect as a prototype which brings at once to the fore all of the crucial elements of purgatorial encounters: an apparent straining to see (that is, the visible signs of the focusing of the power of sight); a transparency or an inability to touch (casting into doubt the verisimilitude of shade-bodies); and wonder—for the shades stand agape at the pilgrim’s shadow, “maravigliando.”

The next case of consequence is the already much remarked-upon episode concerning explicitly the constitution of shade-bodies, in the first half of Canto III. Here, Virgil proves the rule of purgatorial marvel by being himself an exception,
and more importantly, he makes unambiguously evident the tension between the transparency of the shades and their seeming capacity to sense. It will be recalled that the pilgrim is frightened to see no shadow next to him, forgetting that shade-bodies do not stop light; in rebuking him Virgil makes what may seem to be a non sequitur: he takes this question of transparency to entail a doubt concerning the capacity of the shades to suffer. This transition is only coherent if Virgil is aware that a body must be (in a way) opaque in order to sense—hence the diaphanous quality of the ombre casts into doubt their capacity “a sofferir tormenti, caldi e gielii” (III.31).

According to Aristotle, no simple body can be a medium of sensation, since no simple body can have touch, which is the foundation of all other senses.

Sensum autem non necesse in omnibus uiuentibus: neque enim quorum corpus simplex contingit habere tactum (neque sine hoc possibile esse nullum animal); neque quocunque non suspectiua specierum sine materia... At uero, si sensum habet, necesse est corpus esse aut simplex aut mixtum, impossibile autem est simplex: tactum enim non habent. Est autem necesse hunc habere.53

In order to be “susceptiua specierum” bodies must have a certain give and take, so to speak, which requires a different elemental constitution than simply air, or air and vaporous water. If the organ of sense were not malleable or permeable to some extent, if it were too hard, it could not be influenced by its object with

53 De anima III, 434A–B. Quoted from: Thomas Aquinas, Sentencia in libri De anima, vol. 45/1 of Opera omnia iussu impensaque Leonis XIII P. M. edita (Roma: Commissio Leonina, 1984), 252. Cf. Thomas ad locum: “Oportet organum sensus tactus esse in quadam medietate inter contraria... quod nulli corpori simplici convenit, cum in corporibus simplicibus, id est in elementis, sint excellencia qualitatum tangibilium, puta in igne excellencia calidi, in aqua frigidi” (253). Even more to the present point, in refutation of the reasons given why separated substances might be naturally or permanently united to aerial bodies, see Thomas, De spiritualibus creaturis, 7, resp., 75: “Neque etiam unitur spiritualis substantia corpori aereo propter perfectionem intellectualis operationis: corpus enim simplex non potest esse instrumentum sensus, ut probatur in libro De anima.”
sufficient subtlety to receive a form; if it were too yielding or had no limit of its permeability, it could receive no lasting impression from the object but would be simply passed through by it. Sight is the limit case, as the most rarefied of the senses. As Dante observed in the Convivio, color and light are indeed received through a diaphanous medium (most of the ocular organ), but they are only seen—their impressions are only taken, their forms received and communicated to the brain—when they are stopped: the pupil is like glass which becomes a mirror only because it is backed with lead which stops the light and causes it to reflect (hence one can see a reflection in another’s pupil). To use a more generally-applicable image, all sense organs must be something like wax, insofar as they must be both yielding and resisting, so as truly to receive a form.

This, then, is the problem which Virgil recognizes as implicit in the assertion that the shades are diaphanous, and it is simply a more explicit rendition of what was already suggested by the encounter with Casella: since these bodies only yield, being transparent to light and permeable by the pilgrim’s solid flesh, how can they sense as they seem to, whether apparently receiving the vision of that same flesh, or apparently being tormented by other physical influences?

But Virgil’s reaction to this problem is the antitype of the response of the truly purgatorial shades and of the pilgrim himself; the pagan poet throws up his hands in frustrated invective and then nearly sulks, but all of the souls who belong in

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54 Convivio, II.4, 206-8: “Dove è da sapere che propriamente è visibile lo colore e la luce... Queste cose visibili, sì le propie come le communi in quanto sono visibili, vengano dentro all’occhio... per lo mezzo diafano, non realmente ma intenzionalmente, sì quasi come in vetro transparente. E nell’acqua ch’è nella pupilla dell’occhio, questo discorso che fa la forma visibile per lo mezzo, sì sì compie, perché quall’acqua è terminata—quasi come specchio, che è vetro terminato con piombo—, sì che passar più non può, ma quivi a modo d’una palla, percossa si ferma: sì che la forma, che nel mezzo transparente non pare, nella parte pare lucida e terminata. E questo è quello per che nel vetro piombato la image appare, e non in altro. Di questa pupilla lo spirito visivo, che si continua da essa alla parte del cerebro dinanzi dov’è la sensibile vertute sì come in principio fontale, quivi subitamente sanza tempo la ripresenta, e così vedemo.”
this realm respond with wonder and eager curiosity. Even before they have left the
foot of the cliff of the Excommunicate, when the pilgrim sees the group of shades
above stop at the sight of his shadow—"non sappiando 'l perché" (III.93)—Virgil
attempts to preempt their questioning: "questo è corpo uman che voi vedete... Non
vi maravigliate, ma credete" (97). Once again, while his information is strictly
ture, his advice is all wrong—as is evidenced by the fact that it goes unheeded
throughout Purgatorio. "Non vi maravigliate" is an encore to "state contenti," and
as the canticle continues other shades will repeatedly if implicitly refute him by
showing that maraviglia and grazia are the constant companions of purgatorial
faith. Their directive is not state contenti but andate maravigliando.

Just following, the pilgrim is addressed by a shade "di gentile aspetto" who
asks "se di là mi vestesti unque" (III.107, 105). When he denies "d’ averlo visto
mai," Manfred’s response begins, "Or vedi," and ends with a supplication:

Vedi oggiamai se tu mi puoi far lieto,
rivelando alla mia buona Costanza
come m'hai visto, ed anco esto divieto (110, 142–44).

A scene which, imagined as a picture, would not show any qualitative difference
between the seeing of the pilgrim and that of the shade, in the particular language
of the text is all one-sided as to vision: the pilgrim has not seen, is told to see,
will see if he can tell what he has seen; but Manfred presents an aspect—his role
is to appear.

At the opening of Canto v, an unnamed shade points out again the pilgrim’s
shadow:

Li occhi rivolsi al suon di questo motto,
e vidile guardar per maraviglia
pur me, pur me, e 'l lume ch’era rotto (v.7–9).
The shades look at the pilgrim’s shadow with *maraviglia*, and he looks at them (shadows themselves); but again there is something of a disproportionate emphasis on the latter’s power of sight: he turns his eyes and sees them, sees them looking at him—their apparent sight is itself the object of sight. They do not simply see, but the pilgrim sees them seeing: “vidile guardar.” The pilgrim’s shadow is light which was broken—“l’lume ch’era rottà”—like the light which passes not behind the lead of a mirror or the back of the pupil; and again this observation carries the implicit corollary (by force of Virgil’s correlation) that because the shades do not break light it is doubtful how they can sense.

Only slightly further in the same canto, another group notices (says the pilgrim), “ch’i’ non dava loco / per lo mio corpo al trapassar d’i raggi” (25–26), and sends messengers to ask of him his condition. It is again remarkable that (*prima facie*) these shades have less insight into the pilgrim’s condition than some of the damned. The key to the difference is to be found in their respective responses: the damned presume, while the purging wonder—“mutar lor canto in un ‘oh!’ lungo e roco” (27)—and are filled with curiosity. Made aware that the pilgrim is living, the souls’ further response is to ask him to see—to look at them that he might recognize any known to him, and to bring back news of them for the purpose (as will be repeatedly requested throughout the mountain) of asking for prayers: “Guarda s’alcun di noi unqua vedi” (49).

Yet again, when Judge Nino is met, one might simply picture two faces looking at one another, two powers of sight; but the poet emphasizes the pilgrim’s sight, and the shade’s wonder: “vidi un che mirava / pur me, come conoscer mi volesse” (viii.47–48). The air is dark, which almost obscures their mutual sight—but this is put in external terms, not with any reference to Nino’s power to see as such,
but as dimness between their respective eyes: “non sì che tra gli occhi suoi e i miei...” (50). It is the pilgrim who sees—“quando ti vidi” (54)—while the shades of Nino and Sordello show amazement, and express their gratitude to God, with notable aspect:

Sordello e elli ndietro si raccolse,
come gente di subito smarrita.
L'uno a Virgilio e l'altro a un si volse
che sedea lì, gridando, ‘Sù, Currado!
Vieni a veder che Dio per grazia volse.’

Così dicea, segnato della stampa
nel suo aspetto di quel dritto zelo
che misuratamente in core avvampa (62–66, 82–84).

Finally, it is again notable that both Nino and Sordello do not know that the pilgrim is alive until they are told, and the effect of this is to spark their wonder.

Proceeding to Purgatory Proper, the punishments of the first three terraces are all explicitly noted to prevent the shades enduring them from seeing, to some extent—or at least, to keep the aspect of their eyes somewhat hidden. Omberto says that he would look to see if his face were not turned down: “E s’io non fossi impedito...guardere’ io, per veder s’ io ’l conosco” (x1.52, 56); he too is told of the pilgrim’s condition in advance. Oderisi, however, is said to see the pilgrim, and directly so—but in a context in which the reader’s attention is called entirely to outward aspect, to physical position: the pilgrim can apparently be seen only because he has bent almost double towards the ground to listen:

Ascoltando, chinai in giù la faccia;
ed un di lor, non questi che parlava,
si torse sotto il peso che lo impaccia:
e videmi e connobbemi... (73–76).
The focus on the shades’ power of sight is intensified in the next terrace, where the envious have their eyes sewn shut for their purgation. What punishment would this be, one might readily object, if the shades’ apparent eyes were not truly organs necessary for sensation? But that eyelids of air could be sewn shut—or, for that matter, that such eyelids could block light whenever shut, granting that little is more certain of these bodies than their transparency—is the more absurd; still, this is the less important point. The pilgrim now calls attention to his own sight which has become unique (or is just now known to be unique): “A me pareva andando fare oltraggio, / vegando altrui, non essendo veduto” (XIII.73–74). If it has not yet been brought to mind already, this passage at least must surely recall Dante’s observation near the beginning of De vulgari eloquentia, in justification of his claim that it was more fitting for Adam to speak than to listen immediately following his creation, to make himself sensible before sensing: “in homine sentiri humanius credimus quam sentire, dummodo sentiatur et sentiat tanquam homo.”55 Even though no other human being be present to sense him, the very act of manifestation is itself *humanius*; while any brute animal could sense an expression of language as well (regardless of its comprehension thereof), it is distinctive of rational animals to produce language, to make themselves and particularly their own rationality sensible to another, and therefore to be properly linguistic animals.

This is the crucial point for the purgation enforced upon this (or any other) terrace: not that the envious shades have organs which are needed for sight—or are even capable of being sewn—in literal fact, but that they make themselves seen as being incapable of sight. Throughout Purgatorio, even in an apparent act of

seeing (or its material prevention), the important thing (as indicated by the poet’s particular formulations) is not that the aerial forms really are necessary for sight, but that they are apparent, that they make curiosity and wonder, the desire to see, visible. According to the *dictum* of *De vulgari eloquentia*, they are more human by being visible and audible, by making manifest their torment, their wonder, and their coming to new knowledge, to the only one who really sees and hears. Indeed, there is a special appropriateness in this manifestation for the purging shades, who are engaged in climbing their way back to the very place where Adam first made himself sensible, which stands at the top of this mountain: they best approach the fulfillment of their humanity as it ought to have been (before the Fall) by making themselves sensible, regardless of whether there is at any given time any subject of sensation present. What the envious are lacking here is not so much the power of sight—though their knowledge is somehow blocked from what would be visible to one with true eyes—but the completion of a making-visible of a human form and its characteristic activities; their purgation is to go without presenting eyes to be seen. And in this respect it is comprehensible that their penalty, *prima facie* much more painful than that imposed in the Terrace of Avarice, should in fact be lesser: the Envious may at least still show their faces.

Here again, a shade is told of the pilgrim’s condition (having only a hint through *spirando*), and the response is wonder and gratitude, from Sapia herself and from the nearby shades who overhear and turn up their faces: “che gran segno è che Dio t’ami” (XIII.146); “poi fer li visi, per dirmi, supini...‘tu ne fai / tanto maravigliar della tua grazia’” (XIV.9,13–14).

It may also be noted that this is the setting for Virgil’s insufficient discourse on love, discussed above; when the pilgrim has the exclusive internal vision of *exempla*
which show Virgil’s blindness as to the true quality of divine love, the response of the guide is defensively to maintain his own power of sight, with utmost emphasis: “Non domandai, ‘Che hai?’ per quel che face / chi guarda pur con l’occhio che non vede” (xv.33–34). Yet again, the guide no longer guiding has missed the point. This is precisely what the pilgrim was doing unawares as he had the vision—he stumbled along for a time, not seeing his surroundings; it is what the Envious now do gladly for their purgation; it is, in fact, what all the purging shades do: they look with an eye which does not see, in order to be seen.

The Terrace of Wrath completes the tripli cate obscuring of sight in lower Purgatory, for there a dense smoke makes recognition difficult. Marco Lombardo guides them through the fog, and leaves them by telling the pilgrim to see:

Vedi l’albor che per lo fummo raia
già biancheggia, e me convien partirmi
(l’angelo è ivi) prima ch’io li paia (xvi.142–44).

Once more, shades have only a suspicion of the pilgrim’s condition: “parli pur come se tue / partissi ancor lo tempo per calendi” (26–27).

No sustained encounter is possible with the purging slothful, who will not stop their race (which in itself is a sort of limitation of their vision, or their visible vision); with the purging avaricious (and prodigal), the theme of prevented vision is resumed in full force. These shades are prone, face down, upon the ground; Pope Hadrian v, whom the pilgrim addresses, makes specific note of their eyes:

Si come l’occhio nostro non s’aderse
in alto, fisco a le cose terrene,
cosi giustizia qui a terra il merse (xix.118–20).

As has been noted, if this inversion is understood not as the limitation of the souls’ capacity to see but of their capacity to manifest themselves as human, the
pontiff’s words concerning the severity of their torment become comprehensible.

Even Statius himself, a newly-freed soul having just completed his purgation of prodigality and on the verge of blessedness, does not know with certainty that one of the two standing before him is not a shade: “se voi siete ombre...” (xxi.20). Neither does he know their identity; and so there follows the alternately poignant and comic scene of Statius’s praise for Virgil whom he knows not to be standing before him (and who is in no hurry to interrupt him), the pilgrim’s irrepressible eagerness which gives the game away, and Statius’s gratitude apparently blown so far out of proportion that not only would he extend his purgation—i.e., put off the Beatific Vision—to spend time with the poet, but even (finally knowing him present) attempt the impossible: to embrace the aerial feet of Virgil’s shades with his own aerial arms, which prompts a mild rebuke and an touching excuse.

Ed ei surgendo: ‘Or puoi la quantitate comprendere de l’amor ch’a te mi scalda, quand’io dismento nostra vanitate, trattando l’ombre come cosa salda’ (133-36).

And yet—as has already been seen—this is not impossible, for below in Ante-Purgatory Sordello and Virgil embraced without difficulty, indeed without more than passing mention. Having once observed that throughout the canticle to this point Virgil’s restraint has seemed more and more ungenerous in comparison to the purging souls’ promptness to wonder, and his quick explanations in advance of the pilgrim’s uniquely solid state more and more incongruous with the poem’s emphasis on the aspetto of bodies rather than their receptivity, this encounter with Statius takes on new meaning—the fault for the failed embrace is entirely displaced.

In fact, Virgil and Statius could well have embraced; nothing of their state
prevents it, because an embrace between shades would always be the presentation of an embrace, not the test of the capacity of one body to resist another. Nothing in the passage demands that Statius actually failed in the attempt, as Dante did with Casella, only that Virgil’s correction caused him to stop.

In the case of Sordello, common affection for the patria of Mantua made even Virgil forget himself; he simply displayed that affection without concern. But there can be no doubt that with respect to Virgil this is the exception, and his behavior towards Statius the rule. The former case is explicitly meant to display the extraordinary warmth of a civic bond—such that it even reaches across the chasm between the City of God and the City of Dis, if only for a moment—in preparation for Dante’s great invective against the incivility of “serva Italia” (vi.76):

Quell’ anima gentil fu così presta,
sol per lo dolce suon de la sua terra,
di fare al cittadin suo quivi festa (79–81).

Certainly, there are much worse shoes to be in than Virgil’s, his insufficiency in the present context notwithstanding—he still has human virtues in a high degree, and this is enough to allow such an embrace when the focus is political.

But in the meeting with Statius, everything centers around Virgil as being in Purgatory and not belonging there. Prior to his attempted embrace, Statius describes how the author of the Aeneid gave him “la divina fiamma” (xxi.95) of poetry, and shortly after he will claim that Eclogues iv provided the yet greater spark of faith—yet to no avail for Virgil himself. More importantly, with regard to the proper way in which to treat shades, when Statius interacts with the pilgrim in the moments leading up to the embrace, Dante renews with great emphasis the themes of eyes made visible and worthy wonder:
Io pur sorrisi come l'uom ch'ammicca;
per che l'ombra si tacque, e riguardommi
ne li occhi ove 'l sembiante più si ficca (109–11).

The eyes are the focal point of manifestation, not merely of sensation—and this will echo more loudly in Paradiso. The pilgrim is now acting as the purging shades have all along: he is using his eyes to be seen, not merely to see; his supposedly childish or embarrassing lack of self-control is in fact an effect of his assimilation to the eagerness and marvel which belongs to the Mountain, and a distancing from Virgil.

Ond' io: ‘Forse che tu ti maravigli,
antico spirto, del ridere ch'io fei;
ma più d'ammirazion vo' che ti pigli’ (121–23).

Quite appropriately, he wishes to add wonder to wonder, and Statius manifested it in kind, until cut short by Virgil’s well-meant but sadly incongruous refusal.

The embrace failed because Virgil was at fault: they could have made their gratitude and eagerness visible if these qualities had been mutual, but Virgil does not realize that the point is not to sense, to be a solid thing which receives, but to make a sign. This is the effect of Statius’s eager generosity which leaves him “trattando l’ ombre come cosa salda”—and in contrast to Virgil’s characterization of the act as an embarrassing error, he is in fact exactly right: this is what ought to be done, and it is Virgil who has made the faux pas with his false feet. It is a love which Virgil lacks—“Or puoi la quantitate / comprender de l’amor ch’a te mi scalda”—that leads Statius to treat to treat shades like solid things: that is, to use them as a sign of truly human bodies which they are not, but which they can emulate in making a separated soul more human again by making it manifest.

Note also the terms by which the pilgrim describes his ascent in introducing Virgil: “Questi che guida in alto li occhi miei...” (124).
Having now two guides, the pilgrim continues to the next terrace: among the purging gluttons, there is no obstacle to sight as such, but the emaciation of the shades makes recognition difficult. When Forese sees the pilgrim, there is again apparent vision which is yet emphasized as to its aspect, i.e., as to the appearance of sight: “Volse a me li occhi un’ombra, e guardò fisso” (XXIII.41), and as should now be expected, the immediate reaction of the shade to wonder and recognize the grace bestowed upon them: “poi gridò forte: ‘Qual grazia m’è questa?’” (42)
The features of Dante’s friend are so deformed that the familiar sound of his voice is required to make them recognizable again. But while Forese was more quick to know his friend, he does not know his condition; and this is expressed with yet another emphasis on the pilgrim’s sight: “Vedi che non pur io, ma questa gente / tutta rimara là dove ’l sol veli” (113–14). The pilgrim sees, the shades wonder. As their conversation continues, there is again mutual gazing—the pilgrim sees them watching him: “dimmi s’io veggio da notar persona / tra questa gente che sìmi riguarda” (XXIV.11–12). In being made manifest to him, the shades are contented: “E del nomar parean tutti contenti” (26).

Here among the poets there is much talk of sight belonging to either party, but there remains a difference between the sight of the pilgrim—that is, how his sight is expressed (as indicative, sensitive, direct)—and that of a shade (conditional, intellectual, or spoken of in terms of its display rather than its active power). Bonagiunta asks for confirmation of the pilgrim’s identity, and the question is put in terms of sight—“Ma dì s’i’ veggio…”—but the response shows that the crux is not physical perception: “O frate, issa vegg’ io… il nodo / che ’l Notare e Guittone e me ritenne” (49, 55). Forese likewise speaks of his own sight, but like Bonagiunta’s “s’i’ veggio” it is conditional, not the indication of present vision:
“Quando fia ch’io ti riveggia?” (75)

Bonagiunta wanted to see the knot, to see how love privileged the poet Dante, and he sees—“Io veggio ben come le vostre penne / di retro al dittator sen vanno strette” (58)—after the pilgrim has given his famous answer:

E io a lui: ‘T’ mi son un che, quando
Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo
ch’è ditta dentro vo significando’ (52–54).

Much has been written on this tercet and much disputed, in which Dante mixes the humility of calling himself merely a taker of dictation with the audacity of making Love itself the dictator and testifying himself to the novelty and superiority of his own “dolce stil novo” (57), as against his poetic contemporaries. In the context of the present analysis one may simply note a particular connection between this characterization of the poetic act at its highest and the nature of the shade-bodies—especially in their purgatorial functions.

This association is invited by the placement of the interchange with Bonagiunta within a progressively narrowing focus on both the vanitate and aspetto of the ombré, which is conducted entirely by poets—from the attempted embrace of Statius and Virgil in Canto xxI through the dialogue with Forese on “l’odor d’un pomo” (34) in Canto xxIII to Statius’s climactic discourse in Canto xxV—as well as by the very process which the pilgrim describes. There can scarcely remain any doubt at this point that Statius was in the right when he attempted to show his gratitude to Virgil: for this was nothing other than his effort to make a sign for the love which burned within him. More importantly, significando has all along

57See, e.g., Barolini, Dante’s Poets, 90: “Because the only external referent in this process is an outside, indeed transcendent, authority, and because none of us can check with God as to what Dante saw, or with Love as to the fidelity of Dante’s transcription, the apparently humble role of scribe results in a license to write the world, in fact to play God unchecked.”
been the complement and prerequisite of the purgatorial theme of *maravigliando*: the shades go along making signs, and signs precisely of love—not only in their visible affection, but even in their torment, since as Virgil has explained all the punishments of Purgatory are the re-ordering of love. And when Statius finally accounts for the possibility of such true signification in his discourse, he will confirm this characterization—“a quel modo / ch’e’ ditta dentro vo significando”—as the very type and purpose of shade-bodies: what is written within the souls, they go signifying in the air.

In this doctrine of the shade-bodies as in relating his own poetic inspiration Dante is both humble and audacious: audacious in claiming, in all seriousness, the theological validity of his images; humble in showing that this very claim is possible not simply because of his own surpassingly inventive genius but because of the divine condescension which actually makes such images to be true, which unites immortal spirit and corruptible matter so that love might truly say of its own person, “vo significando.” He is, of course, also claiming his own genius to a certain extent, making himself the bearer of a new and unequalled kind of poetry, here and throughout the *Purgatorio*, in comparison to Ovid, Virgil, and Lucan as much as to his contemporaries. But if the shade-bodies can be justified not merely as another poetic invention but as a truth which the poet recognizes—not fabricating them as fictive signs of something else, but understanding them as the inherently signifying quality of human nature, carried over into the interim period (when that very quality has been lost by the death of the body) by the grace of God so as to make that state literally significant for the living—then his explicit efforts to out-do all other poets can be more than mere bravado.58 No other poet

58 Cf. Barolini, *Dante’s Poets*, 223: “The famous vaunts of [Inferno] xxv, in which Dante boasts that his metamorphoses are superior to those of Lucan and Ovid, emerge from the *Comedy’s*
has given signs which are so real, such is Dante’s claim—but not because they lacked his genius; rather, because they did not so well subtend their own genius, and indeed their own lives, to the truly poetic power of God who alone can signify in rebus as well as in verbis. This will be further considered in connection with the alleged allegory of the Commedia; for the present, let it suffice to observe that if in Purgatorio xxiv the poetic act is being compared in anticipation to the production of the shade-bodies whose signifying power is so deliberately put into relief throughout the canticle, then the frank admission put into Bonagiunta’s mouth—of his inferiority and failure to see the nodo—is not Dante’s self-praise through ventriloquy but his exaltation of the presumably lesser poet by making him a willing participant in God’s supreme poetry. Just as all of the purging, Bonagiunta goes signifying, not as an artificial sign of some essentially different and spiritual truth, but as a sign of himself, an aerial body displaying in its very reality the hunger of the souls to inform bodies truly again in the Resurrection, the hunger for complete and lasting re-humanization and assimilation to Christ (which will be more completely expressed by the blessed in Paradiso xiv). In Dante’s poem Bonagiunta is already made a greater poet—and so he can rightly say, “issa veg’ io,” “io veggio ben,” precisely because he has been seen.

Finally, there is yet one more explicit emphasis on the intersection between sight and being seen prior to and preparatory for Purgatorio xxv—at the very entrance to the stairs along which Statius will discourse on the shades. The pilgrim sees an angel, and at the sight of him—his aspect—loses his own sight: “io vide un che dicea... L’aspetto suo m’avea la vista tolta” (139, 142). One might say that

\footnote{Cf. Inf. xxvi.21–22, in preparation for the encounter with Ulysses: “e più lo ’ngegno affreno ch’i’ non soglio, // perché non corra che virtù nol guidi.”}
the pilgrim is now repaying the debt he incurred among the envious, when he saw without being seen. The significance of this encounter (not exclusive of the other angels seen on the ascent, but distinctive in emphasizing precisely that this angel is seen, and in its immediate proximity to the critical discourse) has not been adequately recognized: here is the aspect of one who, as an angel, beyond doubt has taken on an apparent body precisely for appearance’s sake, just to be seen. And his visibility briefly makes of Dante one who *videri sed non videre potest*.

* * *

It was necessary to establish in the first place the plausibility of the reading of *Purgatorio* xxv suggested in the previous chapter—that is, to establish that Statius could be explaining manifestation rather than sensation, just as his discourse stands in itself philosophically and theologically—else there would have been no cause to question in detail prior instances of apparent sensation by the shades. Now, having made such a survey with the possible ambiguity of Statius’s argument in mind, it should be evident that there is a persistent tension, from the shore of the mountain’s foot to this penultimate terrace, between the sight of the pilgrim who receives the vision of shades and the apparent faculty of sight belonging to the shades themselves, which can scarcely be justified as a true sensitive power, but is in fact consistently emphasized as a sight which makes itself seen. This is the build-up, so to speak, to “infino a la veduta,” with the capstone of an angelic *aspetto* which is undoubtedly accidental to the spirit which it manifests whose existence is therefore wholly for the sake of visibility (and audibility), and which makes visible even so far as to overwhelm the sight.

If at this point Virgil’s competence is most explicitly called into question, it should no longer surprise: Virgil has removed himself from this discussion, not by
his supposed lack of theological knowledge as such, but by his lack of maraviglia—
his remaining content (not that he could have done otherwise, given his eternal
and fixed condition). Moreover, what is revealed in the discourse is not so much
a theological dogma in contradistinction to a philosophical one—for Virgil would
have been capable of reciting either, statically—but the reward of the curiosity the
pilgrim has shown throughout Purgatory, somewhat in disregard of his guide’s very
incomplete advice of restraint, but in concert with the curiosity of the marveling
penitent. Furthermore, the very content of the revelation of this canto is the
overflowing of a certain doctrine—namely, the substantial unity of man, body and
soul, regardless of whether it is known from nature or by revelation—into the
unnecessary but fitting opportunity for a remarkable grazia: the making-visible of
souls. “Se la veduta eterna lì dislego” says Statius, and this veduta may partake
of the ambiguity pertaining to the other veduta at the end of his discourse: he
reveals not just the eternal view, what can be seen from on high, but the aspect
of seeing as seen sub specie aeternitatis.60

Hence when he concludes with “organa poi / ciascun sentire infino a la veduta”
and then describes only manifestations presented to the pilgrim’s senses—“che per
lo monte aver sentiti puoi”—and this as the cause for wonder—“è la cagion di che
tu miri”—this is but the gathering of threads which have been laid out throughout
the canticle (though it be not yet the complete pronouncement on the question of
the shades, which must wait for Beatrice). The pilgrim is the one who sees; the

60 And, as Barolini has suggested, Statius’s intermediate role between the first poeta of the
Commedia (Virgil) and the last (Dante himself) may be particularly related to the fact that
while Statius was indeed a poet and a Christian (according to the narrative), nevertheless his
poetry was not Christian: “the poetic mantle passes from the classical poets, essentially Vergil,
to a transitional poet, whose Christianity is disjunct from his poetic practice (and hence the
verse with its neat caesura, ‘Per te poeta fui, per te cristiano’), to the poet whose Christian
faith is a sine qua non of his poetics” (Dante’s Poets, 269).
shades make themselves seen—even, indeed especially, as to their apparent acts of sight—as a grace granted to them so as to adumbrate the return of their complete personhood and humanity, as an allowance which philosophy might show to be compatible with the constraints of the separated state, and which is to that extent a true possibility for the approximation of what these beings would otherwise most be missing, that which as *humanius* would most detract from their humanity as separated souls: not the power of sight, or any other sense, but the capacity to make themselves visible, to be seen.

* * *

The “ultima tortura” which follows Statius’s discourse, that of the Terrace of Lust, completes the pattern thus far observed. The shades within the flame note the shadow cast by the pilgrim, and are curious to know the cause:

\begin{quote}
E io facea con l’ombra più rovente  
parer la fiamma; e pur a tanto indizio  
vivid molt’ombre, andando, poner mente.
Questa fu la cagion che diede inizio  
loro a parlar a me... (XXVI.7-11).
\end{quote}

Even here among the souls closest to the original state of prelapsarian man, nearly ready to be lifted up into blessedness, there is what appears to be less insight, less ready knowledge of the pilgrim’s condition, than was available in Hell. This would be strange indeed, if shades truly took their knowledge from the senses. How could these be less observant or less capable of drawing conclusions than the damned? But there is in fact no need to posit that actually they sense; it is the pilgrim who sees, and they who are aware—by another means—as is again highlighted in this encounter’s specific language: “vidi molt’ombre, andando, poner mente.” The picture may be of two parties looking; but in language one simply sees the
shades, while they place their minds on his shadow. The pilgrim too, at this stage, is spoken of as manifesting: “e io mi fora / già manifesto” (25–26). No longer is Virgil allowed to preempt the discussion with his impatience for amazement; the shades are held for a moment in suspense, and then the pilgrim manifests himself, seeing in their own manifestation that it would be good for him to do so: “Io, che due volte avea visto lor grato, / incominciai” (52–53). Their response is, of course, amazement and praise: amazement showing in their aspect—“e rimirando ammuta...che ciascun’ombra fece in sua paruta” (67–70)—praise in their words—“Beato te” (73). And when Guido Guinizzelli becomes aware of Dante’s affection for him, he asks “che è cagion per che dimostri”—yet again, the very fact of manifestation (which in Inferno may have seemed merely the prerequisite for the encounter and of no notice in itself) is precisely emphasized.

Altogether, then, the meetings of Purgatory proper set a new paradigm for encounters in the afterlife, and especially for how knowledge is gained (short of the Beatific Vision)—and one not necessarily limited to that realm, but which quite possibly pertains to all the damned as well, and simply could not be revealed there. If sensation were the medium of knowledge, it would be inexplicable, or at least improbable, that the purging (even at their highest point) should be less perspicacious than the damned. But if these souls in fact take their knowledge—even of singulars such as the poet’s approach, his specific actions and effects on his environment—through revelation from above (formae influxae) and can poner mente on only those things to which their habitus scientiae bend or for which they are divinely disposed ad hoc, there is no contradiction. The difference is one of response.

Francesca and Farinata discern at once that a living man approaches, and leap
past that fact in itself to the consequence for their own obsession, the *habitus* which defines their state; there is a leap to judgment. The former knows the approach of one who might indulge her self-pity, the latter the approach of one of his language who might be of political interest or bring news of the state of his faction. They know just what they need to know to indulge the same habits of affection or disposition which they freely chose. They get exactly what they want, even as to knowledge, to a certain extent: their minds are apt to occasions of recapitulating the sin which is their eternal disposition.

It is otherwise with the purging—but not because they are less capable of knowing, and certainly not because they have dimmed sense perception in comparison to the damned. They too know the approach of the pilgrim, learning it from above, as it were, which involves no greater difficulty than sensation (rather less, in fact), and is indeed theologically sustainable; but their knowledge is filtered through a different disposition, so to speak, and in their state that is fundamentally a disposition of humility, eager curiosity, and gratitude, befitting those who know themselves to be bound for boundless knowledge and joy but do not yet see it. Thus when they are made aware of the pilgrim, their response is not to leap to judgment but to wonder, and to make that wonder humanly manifest by showing it in the way that human beings best show marvel: by looking with wide eyes.

The journey through Purgatory proper thus makes a compelling (albeit implicit) case for why souls which do not need eyes to see should display not only eyes but even the details of particular actions of sight and of the other senses: they cannot manifest themselves to the pilgrim as human without those details, and manifesting themselves—as physically visible—is the most human thing they can do.
If the importance of the visibility of the human sense organs—and particularly those of sight—has been indicated only implicitly thus far, it takes on an explicit emphasis once the pilgrim passes into the Earthly Paradise and finally encounters Beatrice. What will become a persistent feature of Paradiso is already adumbrated here: as any human being is most clearly and humanly manifested to another person through the face, and above all the mouth and eyes, so the eyes and (once the pilgrim has merited it) the smile of Beatrice are the very means for the completion of his journey and conversion. That is to say, in this case the poet makes it quite clear that the significance of the eyes which this shade presents is not that they permit her to see but that they make her seeing manifest to the pilgrim, that they make her vision visible.

Even before the pilgrim encounters her he is prepared for this focus on the ocular organs. Virgil first leads him through the ring of fire separating the Terrace of Lust from the ascent to the Earthly Paradise by promising the imminent sight of Beatrice’s eyes—“Li occhi suoi già veder parmi” (xxvii.54)—and then tells him that he may sit and wait “mentre che vegnan lieti li occhi belli” (136). When the pilgrim first sees Matelda across the river Lethe, her aspect is described according to her eyes, her appearance of looking at him—“di levar li occhi suoi mi fece dono” (xxviii.63)—and this is the first of several instances in which the appearance of eyes is dazzling: “Non credo che splendesse tanto lume / sotto le ciglia a Venere” (64–65).

Finally, Beatrice herself appears, and after her first address and scolding of the pilgrim, her tempered scorn is revealed when he sees her looking at him, sees her eyes: “vidi la donna che priam’appario...drizzar li occhi ver’ me di qua dal rio” (xxx.65, 67). Her rebuke concerns his failure to persist in devotion when her eyes
had been taken from him: “Alcun tempo il sosteni col mio volto: / mostrando li occhi giovanetti a lui” (121–22). His confession made and absolution given in Lethe, the four nymphs promise to lead him back to his lady’s eyes: “Merrenti a li occhi suoi” (XXXI.109).

Of course, such locutions could be dismissed as simple adornments, poetic variations to avoid repetition in the necessary descriptions of encounters and appearances: to say “we will bring you to her” would do the job prosaically, and to say “we will bring you to her eyes” is just the poet’s art of describing the whole by way of a salient part, and in this case the quite common trope of identifying the human appearance with the eyes which are, again, the most communicative part of the aspect of the human body. But that is just the point: this new and insistent focus on Beatrice’s eyes (recalling a prominent theme of the *Vita nuova*, in the context of the tension regarding the nature of shade-bodies and their apparent sense organs which pervades *Purgatorio*, is like a spotlight shone on that common trope to reveal its foundation and spark a reconsideration of the reason for its truth: the physical means by which a composite human being most receives cognition (i.e., is most sensitive to the manifestation of other beings) is the very same means by which that being, in its humanity, is most manifested to another of its kind. These repeated verbal emphases constitute a certain reflection, as it were, upon the simple fact that the ocular sense organs are just as important in being the objects of sensation as they are in being the instruments of it.

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61 This is just what Dante notes at the revelation of Virgil’s identity to Statius: “riguardommi / ne li occhi ove ’l sembiante più si ficca” (XXI.110–11). See also *Convivio*, VIII.8, 197–98: “E però che nella faccia massimamente in due luoghi opera l’anima—però che in quelli due luoghi quasi tutte e tre le nature dell’anima hanno giurisdizione—cioè nell’occhi e nella bocca, quelli massimamente adornà e quivi pone lo ’ntento tutto a fare belle, se puote... Li quali due luoghi, per bella similitudine, si possono appellare balconi della dona che nel difocio del corpo abita, cioè l’anima: però che quivi, avegha che quasi velata, spesse volte si dimostra.”
And reflection is a key term, for the visibility of Beatrice’s vision takes on a far greater importance (and one far less common or generically poetic) when the pageant of the Earthly Paradise has been introduced and the pilgrim led to the Griffin:

Mille disiri più che fiamma caldi  
strinsermi li occhi a li occhi rilucenti,  
che pur sopra ’l grifone stavan saldi.  
Come in lo specchio il sol, non altrimenti  
la doppia fiera dentro vi raggia va,  
or con altri, or con altri reggimenti (118–23).

In the eyes of Beatrice Dante sees the dual nature of the Griffin, mirrored as all human eyes can mirror what that human being sees; but in this case the pilgrim is directed to look at those eyes and their reflection instead of at the Griffin itself, to see the seeing of the sight rather than the sight itself—and in that aspect both natures are better revealed to him. If (as is universally agreed) the Griffin of the pageant represents Christ, then the pilgrim better sees the human and divine natures of Christ, interchanging wondrously in his own sight, by seeing them seen in “li smeraldi / ond’ Amor già ti trasse le sue armi” (116–17). It is to this revelation and its mode that all the apparent eyes of Inferno and Purgatorio lead, and the eyes of Beatrice will continue to lead in the final canticle: the pilgrim is to be shown the Incarnation. While this could be shown in a certain and well-practiced way by an artificial symbol like the Griffin, it is much better shown in the making-sensible of a power of understanding, in the visibility of the vision of a real human being. The symbolic way in which the Griffin represents Christ is at once trumped by and taken up into the greater way in which Beatrice reflects Christ in the eyes by which Love was made manifest to him on Earth.

62 See n. supra.
3.3.4 *Paradiso*: “Do you see what I see?”

If the foregoing constitutes only a passing glance at the *crucès* for sensation—and especially sight—in the first two canticles, a similar treatment of the third may seem downright negligent: for in *Paradiso*, sight plays a consistently critical and explicit role. Nonetheless, for present purposes it will serve simply to indicate how sight on the part of one shade—that is, the eyes of the shade of Beatrice—now becomes all-important for the pilgrim’s progress, and precisely as visible sight: he sees the aspect of her seeing, and thus his own sight is lifted.

His ascent from the Earthly Paradise into the heavenly spheres begins by means of the same process as revealed the Griffin, with its power now made explicit: Beatrice looks (now at the sun), and the pilgrim, by looking at her looking, is able to see through that mediation what he could not have seen directly.

Quando Beatrice in sul sinistro anco
vidi rivolta e riguardar nel sole:
........................
cosi de l’atto suo, per li occhi infuso
ne l’imagine mia, il mio si fece,
e fissi li occhi al sole oltre nostr’ uso (Par. 1.46–47, 52–54).

In part, this is allowed by the augmentation that human powers experience in their original, Edenic setting—“molto è liceo là, che qui non lece / a le nostre virtù” (55–56)—but the true cause in this instance is sight of Beatrice’s sight, as is confirmed shortly thereafter:

Beatrice tutta ne l’etterne rote
fissa con li occhi stava; e io in lei
le luci fissi, di là sù rimote.

Nel suo aspetto tal dentro mi dei,
qual si fé Galuco nel gustar de l’erba (64–68).
Thus the pilgrim ascends into the heaven of the Moon; once more, there is an explanation of the possibility in terms of the reorientation of human nature to its intended state, but the proximate cause for the pilgrim, the manner in which that reorientation is realized and made manifest in actual transport, is visible vision: “Beatrice in suso, e io in lei guardava” (11.22). And when later the pilgrim refers to this ascent, he leaves no doubt as to its agency: “per lo monte del cui bel cacume / li occhi de la mia donna mi levaro” (XVII.113–14).

Again, while questioning Beatrice in the same sphere about human vows, Dante experiences another dazzling—like that which took his sight at the gate of the final purgatorial terrace—which comes specifically from his lady’s eyes:

Beatrice mi guardò con li occhi pieni
di faville d’amor così divini,
che, vinta, mia virtute diè le reni,
e quasi mi perdei con li occhi chini (iv.139–42).

The difference between these eyes and those of the angel who overcame his sight at the end of Purgatorio xxiv is, of course, that these belong to the shade of a human soul—which is more expected to display eyes—and are the focus of attention here; but at this point the fundamental similarity should be evident: the purpose for which the soul of Beatrice has eyes is not to allow her to perceive—to sense where the pilgrim is, what signs he is making, etc.—but to present that which the pilgrim might perceive, to present a human appearance, so that her perfect vision might be manifested to his vision:

S’io ti fiammegio nel caldo d’amore
dì là dal modo che ’n terra si vede,
sì che del viso tuo vinco il valore,

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63 “Non dei più ammirar, se bene stimo, / lo tuo salir, se non come d’un rivo / se d’alto monte scende giuro ad imo” (136–38).
non ti maravigliar, ché ciò procede
da perfetto veder... (v.1, 3-5).

This manifestation continues to sustain his ascent through and experience of the blessed realm. In the sphere of the Sun, Beatrice’s eyes reassure:

Li occhi di Bëatrice, ch’eran fermi
sovra me, come pria, di caro assenso
al mio disio certificato fermi (ix.16-18).

Again, they organize the mind:

sì se ne rise,
che lo splendor de li occhi suoi ridenti
mia mente unita in più cose divise (x.61-63).

This heaven is also the location in which Solomon reveals to the pilgrim how, in the Resurrection of the Body, the physical eyes of the blessed will be able to sustain a brilliance even greater than that which they already exhibit in the interim, and the way in which Beatrice poses the question is of importance:

Diteli se la luce onde s’iniora
vostra sustanza, rimarrà con voi
eternalmente sì com’ ell’ è ora;
e se rimane, dite come, poi
che sarete visibili rifatti,
esser porà ch’al veder non vi noi (xiv.13-18).

In the last two verses, Beatrice speaks of the return of the souls’ sensitive power of sight—clearly implying that they do not possess that power now; this is not how they are aware of the pilgrim’s approach, but they know this (along with his thoughts, and indeed all that they know) through their immaterial vision of
God (as is indicated at various points throughout the canticle). While the full
cognition of the blessed, of course, far exceeds that of the damned and penitent,
given that the in-Godding of their sight is not merely the reception of formae
influxae but the Beatific Vision which reveals things far beyond any human habitus
scientiae, still this affirmation should again call to mind that sensitive vision
requires flesh, not an aerial shape.

Moreover, Beatrice here makes a deliberate play on the complementarity of
having literal sight and being visible, which recalls the ambiguity of Statius’s
infino a la veduta: she refers to the return of the sense organs, the power of the
sight, as the time when the souls will be visible again: “sarete visibili rifatti.” The
souls are manifested to the pilgrim even now, but they are not visible in se, in
their proper persons, but rather in the shades or pearl-like lights which they
move. They see—intellectually—through the divine light, but when they take on
human form (as did the souls of the blessed in earlier spheres, and as Beatrice
does throughout) they make the appearance of seeing through eyes in order to
convey their sight to the pilgrim; this is nothing other than the process by which
all the souls of the departed have thus far interacted with him, only here it is
finally made explicit; more than that, it is shown to be a foretaste of that time
when in their own personae the souls will have physical sight and (in that very

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64 See: “Dio vede tutto, e tuo veder s’inluia, . . . beato spirto, si che nulla / voglia di sé a te
puot’ esser fuia” (ix.73−75); “Così com’ io del suo raggio resplendo, / sì, riguardando ne la luce
eterna, / li tuoi pensieri onde cagioni apprendo” (xi.19−21); “i minori e ’ grandi / di questa
vita miran ne lo spieglo / in che, prima che pensi, il pensier pandi” (xv.61−63); “così vedi le
cose contingenti / anzi che sieno in sé, mirando il punto / a cui tutti il tempi son presenti”
(xvii.16−18). Note in the last claim opposition to Thomas, who argues that not even angels
can see future contingencies through their vision of God, because this belongs only to the actual
possession of omnipresence, not to the creaturely sight of the essence which is such. But even for
Dante, the blessed have not complete foresight: “noi, che Dio vedemo, / non conosciamo ancor
tutti li eletti” (xx.133−35).

65 As Solomon says of the resurrection of their bodies, “la nostra persona / più grata fia per
esser tutta quanta” (44−45).
fact) will be physically visible through “li organi del corpo” (59), without shades but in their own sustanza. 66

The pilgrim’s encounter with his great-great-grandfather Cacciaguida is significant for a different reason: the latter gives further support to the notion that Beatrice’s “qui si mostraro” in Canto iv need not be limited to the blessed. He makes reference to the whole of the pilgrim’s journey in a way which unifies its mode and casts all of the encounters therein—which in the pit and on the mountain may have seemed the incidental taking-in of phenomena which are in themselves indifferent to the observer—as manifestations, all organized precisely for the benefit and usefulness of this vision:

Però ti son mostrate in queste rote,  
nel monte e ne la valle dolorosa  
pur l’anime che son di fama note (xvii.136–38). 67

The imaginative coup de grâce of Paradiso’s theme of eyes made visible is yet to come, and does not concern those of Beatrice: in the sphere of Jupiter, after the

66 Note that at the end of this canto, Dante even excuses himself for praising something other than Beatrice’s eyes: “Forse la mia parola par troppo osa, / posponendo il piacer de li occhi belli, / ne’ quali mirando mio disio ha posa” (130–35). Even more, he trumps the excuse early in the next canto by suggesting that he could mistake his lady’s eyes for blessedness itself: “dentro a li occhi suoi ardeva un riso / tal, ch’io pensai co’ miei tocch’ardendo / de la mia gloria e del mio paradiso” (34–36).

67 Of course, there is still something paradoxical in this commission; cf. Barolini, Dante’s Poets, 282: “Cacciaguida invests Dante with his poetic mission, telling him that, in order to assure his poem its exemplary power of persuasion, he has been introduced only to famous souls, ‘anime che son di fama note’… even though this is patently untrue: most of the souls Dante meets we would never have heard of were it not for his poem. They are famous now because the text has given them life, making them kinds of exemplary figures whom Cacciaguida describes; Cacciaguida’s assertion, untrue when it was written, is true now, because the text has made it true.” Yet it remains that for the immediate narrative sense Dante apparently wants the entirety of the vision to be understood as a deliberate manifestation arranged just for that sake, and Barolini’s observation need not be at odds with taking this understanding as a real possibility—or more precisely, an argumentum, which remains a distinct line even within a haze of paradox between historia and fabula, i.e., even if “the distinction between text and life—text and truth—is thus deliberately blurred” (282); this will be considered in the following section.
lights moved by the blessed souls of the Just have formed an eagle which speaks to the pilgrim, they call his attention to the eye of that shape, formed by certain blessed souls which are to be pointed out to him:

La parte in me che vede e pate il sole ne l’aguglie mortali, incomincionmi, or fisamente riguardar si vole, perché d’i fuochi ond’ io figura fommi, quelli onde l’occhio in testa mi scintille, e’ di tutti lor gradi son li sommi (xx.31–36).

Here is the rationale for not merely this aerial shape of a living body but all those of the journey which “organa poi / ciascun sentire infino a la veduta,” a rationale which is not per se but directed at the pilgrim: “look at the part in me which in a mortal being sees.”

In the crystalline sphere, Dante again focuses on Beatrice’s sight, as she watches the dance of the lights and indicates St. John the Evangelist to the pilgrim: “né però piuè / mosser la vista sua di stare attenta...” (xxv.115–16). At this introduction, he tries to see the (allegedly) assumed body of the beloved disciple, until he is blinded and learns that indeed only Mary and Jesus are even now in Heaven in the flesh. His blindness, appropriately, is removed by Beatrice’s eyes: “così de li occhi miei ogne quisquilia / fugò Beatrice col raggio d’i suoi” (xxvi.76–79).

This episode has rightfully proved a curious one for commentators. Why exactly should the pilgrim be blinded for trying to see John’s body? Perhaps the most obvious interpretation (at least of the literal sense) is that this is a punish-

68Note also that the eagle’s throat moves in the process, making more evident by macrocosm that natural processes are presented to the pilgrim for the sake of a complete simulacrum, not because the aerial shapes used for their representation actually are necessarily part of such a process.
ment imposed for undue curiosity or credulity in an false legend: it was widely believed (on the basis of a difficult passage in John’s own Gospel) that the beloved disciple had shared in Mary’s privilege of glorification in the body in advance of the General Resurrection; but this is not so, and the pilgrim is culpable either for a theological error or at least for turning his attention to that legend when his thoughts ought to have been elsewhere. Of course, associative or symbolic interpretations might also be given: hope is of things unseen; prophets such as John were often depicted as blind—and indeed in the Earthly Paradise the author of Revelation is represented as “un vecchio solo...dormendo, con la faccia arguta” (143-44); the blindness lasting through the examination on Love recalls Cupid’s blindfold. Further allegorical possibilities could be drawn from the canto’s conclusion which registers the pilgrim’s dismay at being unable to see Beatrice, perhaps indicating that Love must leave even Theology behind, being an act not of the intellect but of the will:

\[
\text{Ahi quanto ne la mente mi commossi,}
\text{quando mi volsi per veder Beatrice,}
\text{per non poter veder, benché io fossi}
\text{presso di lei, e nel mondo felice! (136-39)}
\]

But there are difficulties here. In the first place, while the legend may have been

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69 See John S. Carroll, In patria: An Exposition of Dante’s Paradiso (London/New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), 410-11: “But at the very moment when there appears before him the crowning virtue by which the souls becomes one with God, what is Dante thinking of? Of an old legend of foolish earth below, which had gathered round the body of St. John. He is consumed with curiosity to see if the story is true, and that poor curiosity blinds him to higher things... he was not looking at the sun for the sake of its light, but in order to see the darkness of the eclipse.”


false in Dante’s mature view, it is not clear why it would be impious to believe it.\textsuperscript{73}

At any rate, it could scarcely be said that curiosity or mistaken views on the part of the pilgrim are punishable in \textit{Paradiso} by anything more than the correction itself; moreover, in this case his curiosity would seem to be of a piece with the virtue to which this canto is devoted. The pilgrim has just confirmed that the Resurrection of the Body into eternal life is the essential hope of Christians, when “ciascun vestita / ne la sua terra fia di doppia vesta” (91–92), namely, “le bianche stole” (95) of which John himself speaks in the Book of Revelation. It would seem to be merely an overflowing of that hope, hardly an earthly concern out of place in the present context, for the pilgrim to think that the evangelist’s appearance immediately following this examination is meant to include a confirmation of what was just professed—to see the very first real human body before his eyes since he entered the \textit{selva oscura}. Moreover, this interpretation sits awkwardly with prior episodes in the \textit{Commedia}. The pilgrim has lost his sight before—e.g., at the sight of the angel guarding the passage to the Terrace of the Lustful just prior to Statius’s discourse, and earlier in this very canto of \textit{Paradiso} at the introduction of St. James (27)—with no indication of culpability or punishment. And while in this case he made a special effort to strain his sight, he also did so earlier with St. Benedict, and the response was no rebuke but the promise of a rewarding sight to

\textsuperscript{73} As many commentators have noted, Thomas also appears to allow the possibility of John’s early resurrection—although it would be more precise to say that he fails to condemn it when it is suggested in an objection along with the Assumption of Mary, the response to which would stand equally if the privilege belonged to Mary alone. See \textit{In Sent.}, iv. 43, 1, 3 ad 2, 1064. This precision is given by Giacinto Margiotta, “Canto xxv,” in \textit{Lectura Dantis Scaligera: Paradiso}, 893–928 (Firenze: Felice le Monnier, 1971), 921: the legend was “non rifiutata neppure da San Tommaso.” For a summary of the different legends of John’s dormition or early resurrection, and the argument that Bonaventure is a more significant source for Dante here than Thomas or Albert because of his separation of this doubtful question from the indubitable Assumption of Mary, see Rachel Jacoff, “Dante and the Legend(s) of St. John,” \textit{Dante Studies} 117 (1999): 45–57.
come even greater than the shade-body he hoped to see in that case: the vision of all the blessed in *le bianche stole* which the pilgrim will be given the Empyrean:

Frate, il tuo alto disio
s’adempierà in su l’ultima spera,
ove s’adempion tutti li altri e ’l mio (XXII.61-63).

Therein lies the greatest difficulty with this interpretation: the pilgrim will indeed see glorified flesh—and not only in anticipation for the blessed, but truly in Mary and Christ. Granted that John’s flesh was not truly there to be seen, and that the pilgrim’s sight is said to be stronger after he regains it (and this is presumably necessary for him to sustain the visions of the Empyrean), why should it be counted against him that he so desired to see what will indeed be the fulfillment of his desire?

A proper understanding of the shade-bodies should indicate an aspect a possible answer. The interim state which must be crossed by all save Mary, between the laying-down of flesh and its taking-up again, is a state of being seen without seeing—that is, to focus on the detail most important for the *Commedia*, a state of showing the appearance of eyes—as well as is possible until one can again see and be seen in one’s own substance. As was indicated in *Paradiso* XIV, in the Resurrection for which even the blessed long there will be an increase in the power of eyes so that they will be equal to the glory that they themselves manifest—that is to say, glorious eyes will then be so brilliant that glorious eyes will be needed to see them. But something of the same happens after the pilgrim’s blindness: having completed his examination on Love without sight, when it returns he finds it strengthened. What has happened to the pilgrim here is in fact to pass through his own preliminary interim stage, after which he will gradually enter into what is less a continuation of the general interim than the *eschaton* itself (though yet
a prefiguring in all save the two highest human beings). For a time, he is visible without seeing—as the shades have been all along. This is not to suggest that the episode is meant to be an absolutely fundamental division in the pilgrim’s experience. The difference in his capacity afterwards seems to be more of degree than of kind; and insofar as he is in this journey undergoing his own death, interim, and resurrection in a preliminary way, it would be absurd to think that this division corresponds to anything other than the most obvious tripartite division in the poem. It is only to say that it is entirely fitting (and need not be at all punitive for his special effort to see John’s body) for the pilgrim to undergo—just at the apex of his display of his hope in the Resurrection—a sort of recapitulation of that progress in his own power of sight, to present for a brief interim visible eyes which cannot see (a period longer and more emphatic, at least textually, than previous moments of temporary blindness) as preparation for his vision of truly glorified flesh, since just the same will be required of all the faithful.\footnote{By no means should such an interpretation lessen the importance while Dante clearly sees in dispersing the legend which led to his curiosity: John specifically commands him to do so (127–29), and it has been plausibly argued that this doctrinal assertion is made in order to preserve the uniqueness of the privilege granted to Mary. See Jacoff, “Dante and the Legend(s) of St. John,” 52.}

Having entered the outermost corporeal sphere, the \textit{primum mobile}, in Canto \textit{xxvii} the pilgrim beholds the extraordinary sight of the \textit{punto}, a point of light which illuminates circles of fire rotating around it, the swifter the closer: an inverted model, as it were, of the Ptolemaic universe, with the Earth as the largest and slowest sphere on the very edge of being. This inversion helps the pilgrim to see how the \textit{virtù} which moves the sun and other stars and seems to the senses largest and most encompassing is also the unextended point from which the heavens and all nature hang.\footnote{“Da quel punto / depende il cielo e tutta la natura” (41–42).} This vision, like that of the Griffin in the Earthly Paradise, is
made possible by appearing first in the mirrors of Beatrice’s eyes:

come in lo specchio fiamma di dappiero
vede colui che se n’alluma retro

così la mia memoria si ricorda
ch’io feci riguardando ne’ belli occhi
onde a pigliarmi fece Amor la corda (4–5, 10–12).

Why does he not simply see the punto directly? Why this, as it may seem, unnecessary ornamentation? As the pilgrim approaches more and more closely to the Word made flesh, the prefiguring of that teleological vision through the manifestation of souls not yet reembodied becomes more and more keen. The pilgrim is given in this and the adjoining cantos a new understanding of creation, the dependence of all things on God, the very height of metaphysical speculation, the wonder of the One and the Many. But if only an intellectual enlightenment were at stake, the Commedia would have ended here. This is not enough; it is not the goal. The pilgrim is about to pass out of all space and time; and yet to find space and time even in the Empyrean, simply because he will find bodies there. The dependence of the heavens and all nature on God is through the Word; this is altogether missing from Beatrice’s discourses, it is not to be found in the image of the punto or the three-stringed bow; but it is indeed present, in her eyes. It is seeing the punto in the physical manifestation of human form which prepares the pilgrim to see “la nostra effige” in him in whom all things were made.

In the Empyrean itself, Dante himself now speaks of his sight as visible: “come fec’ io, per far migliori spegli / ancor de li occhi” (xxx.85–86). When last he speaks to Beatrice who has returned to her own seat, the final description of her concerns the direction of her apparent sight: “sorrise e riguardommi; / poi si tornò a l’eterna fontana” (xxvi.91–93). And when St. Bernard of Clairvaux
comes to aid his final vision, the pilgrim is now a mutual participant in eye-gazing: “Bernardo, come vide li occhi miei / nel caldo suo caler fissi e attenti...” (139–42). Indeed Mary herself, whose intercession makes the culmination possible, is described simply as eyes, eyes revered even by God: “Li occhi da Dio diletti e venerati,” and by turning those eyes she obtains the extraordinary request: “indi a l’eterno lume s’addrizzaro” (XXXIII.40, 43).

* * *

Now the particular interpretation given above of how separated souls characterized in the *Commedia* (at least those of the damned and penitent) might come to know new or singular things through *formae influxae* is dependent upon one particular Scholastic account of the knowledge available to separated souls; there are others, and there is no independent way to be certain that Dante was beholden to or even aware of any of them. It remains an interpretation worth considering for two reasons.\(^76\)

The first is that Dante makes it as plain as possible to the reader that he has thought thoroughly through the grounds of justification for the supposed realities he describes—to put it pithily, at the risk of over-simplifying, here is a poet who demands of himself a rigorous account of what he presents.\(^77\) This account of separated knowledge—or another of comparable effect—would allow a poet to premise to describe episodes just as if they took place by means of sensation, without abandoning the effort to construct a philosophically and theoretically plausible literal sense—to make a narrative which could really be, in its basic

\(^{76}\) That is, aside from the bare currency of such ideas, which at the least the Scholastic texts do establish.

\(^{77}\) See *Vita nuova*, xxv, 123–27.
infrastructure, true—because it really is possible for separated souls to manifest themselves, to look just as if they had sense organs.\textsuperscript{78}

Secondly, as has been argued, there are repeated indications throughout \textit{Purgatorio} which make the proposed interpretation of Statius not an unprecedented inversion, but one stage (and a critical one) in a gradual reevaluation of the meaning of apparent vision—in a word, a shift of emphasis within the phrase “apparent vision” from “vision” to “apparent”—which is confirmed in spades by \textit{Paradiso}. The common presumption (which was the primary obstacle to this interpretation) is that sensation is plainly and necessarily the means by which the narrative action of the \textit{Commedia} progresses; in the last canticle at least, however, the explicit logistical requirement for the progress of the journey is the appearance of vision, the physical visibility of Beatrice’s eyes (not at all the capacity of those eyes to receive sensory images by which the soul of Beatrice learns). This revelation, especially as the resolution of the ongoing interplay or tension between vision and visibility in \textit{Purgatorio}, ought to suggest to the reader that the same was true all along: sensation had never been a requirement for the possible truth of this vision, for anyone except the pilgrim himself.

If so, nothing prevents one from reading Statius’s discourse—and indeed all of the first two canticles—in continuity with Beatrice’s claims for the third in \textit{Paradiso} iv. “Qui si mostraro,” she says, for your benefit: the blessed shades manifest themselves to the pilgrim so that he might learn of their state. This

\textsuperscript{78}For example, while Bonaventure gives little indication of a special means of knowledge for separated souls and avoids any difficulties of knowing singulars—speaking only of natural cognition, aside from what may be imparted \textit{ad hoc} by other spirits or through divine revelation—by going much farther than Thomas in allowing that the souls can be said to imagine and sense, yet this is only through the intellect which is the only power still active. Thus this explanation would have the same effect for the possibility of a vision of the afterlife: the souls might interact with the living and gain new knowledge only insofar as it comes not from the senses but through the intellect.
explanation can now be extended; or rather, it can be understood as the fulfillment of the progressive revelation of what is true throughout the *Commedia*, but which can only be fully understood in *Paradiso*. This is not a patently or necessarily fictional narrative, because such shade-bodies—which are really bodies, and could be really visible to a living man—are possible, just as Augustine and Gregory believed had been shown to their contemporaries, and as Scripture attests in the case of angelic appearances. Such manifestation is not merely possible but also fitting, in part for the reason which Beatrice offers: to condescending to the human way of knowing, to make of this interim state—which considered only according to necessity would be a state entirely without manifestation (to the senses), and thereby (according to *De vulgari eloquentia*) an inhuman state—a means for the souls themselves to have a foretaste of the recovery of their full humanity which will only be completed in the Resurrection, and for the living to derive benefit from them, simply by seeing them or hearing the report of one who has.

It is only in Paradise that the souls themselves fully know this—that is, only there do they know the full purpose of their own shade-bodies. In Hell, there is no reflection upon the point; and thus the narrative can be given over completely to descriptions almost indistinguishable from those of solid, living bodies—save for a few critical hints—without necessitating the solid reality of those bodies even according to the literal sense (given that the damned do not speak from “la veduta eterna”). But in *Purgatorio* the veil begins to be pulled back, slowly—and it is shown to be not a false, material veil hiding a spiritual truth, but a veil which is a material truth in itself, united to the spiritual. Even Statius, whose answer goes further than anything the pilgrim has heard to that point, is incomplete, and indeed he apparently does not quite know the full import of his answer. He
is still short of blessedness, and is—so to speak—learning as he goes, just like all the purging. Having been freed from prior penalties he knows, for example, that just as soon as its will is made ready a soul simply knows itself to be free to move and is no longer bound to the bodies of its circle. But the presence of the living pilgrim is still to him a source of surprise and wonder; only when he has completed his purgation will he know explicitly that shade-bodies are not only possible and a fitting expression of the soul’s essential need to be embodied, but are divinely granted precisely for the sake of such a pilgrim—it is, all of it, a “command performance.”

Dantists have often called the shade-bodies a “poetic fiction,” something made up because the poet must have something to see in order to have something to describe. That is precisely right. All that has been mistaken is the authorship. The shades are God’s poetic fiction: made by God so that a poet might have something to see, and thus something truly to describe.

3.4 Ad secundum: Allegory and argumentum

What then—if true shade-bodies can be justified as manifestations, and narrative episodes which seem impossible explained through a theologically plausible mode of knowledge for separated souls (for many masters of Dante’s time, at least), does this mean that Dante presents his narrative as literally true—a journey he indeed took in the flesh, and experienced through his senses just as described?

This is not a reading which has ever attracted a great following among scholarly interpretations of the Commedia, although there may have been warmer times for it here and there. Some early commentators had obviously heard the suggestion that the poem claims a literal, historical truth, which they hasten to correct as a
misunderstanding of the allegorical character of the text, or the purely contemplative character of the vision. And indeed in recent criticism—not at all inclined to credulity for an historical journey to the afterworld—the question of the truth of the literal sense of the poem has been bound up with the question of its so-called allegory. This has been an active debate and a vexed over the last several decades, involving many of the greatest Dantists of the age; and the question of allegory in general has been scarcely less active in other literary and Scriptural studies, so that it is rather presumptuous to think one has anything new to offer on the subject. Indeed, no claim of novelty is made here. But the proposed rereading of the meaning of shade-bodies must certainly intersect with this debate, and so at the risk of redundancy or over-simplification, it is worthwhile to examine the *status quaestionis*.

To begin with a layman’s question: how is it that the term “allegory” comes to be used of the *Commedia* in the first place? Why should this be a focal point of discussion? The term has a long history and in various ages—not least of all the present—it may call to mind many prior associations for most readers; but in its basic and etymological sense, it means to speak otherwise, to say one thing and mean another. Hence if the question concerns whether the truth of the *Commedia* is to be found in what Dante directly describes or in some other

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80It is derived from a Greek compound of ἀλλος, “other”, and ἀγορεύω, “to speak” (in the ἀγορά, i.e., publicly).
meaning, it is clear that “allegory” has at least a generic applicability. But etymologies suggest, never determine; and the rub lies in determining just what sort of “other” an author can intend.

The other reason, of course, that the term “allegory” is relevant for the present discussion is that Dante himself employs it with regard to the interpretation of his own poetry—not within the *Commedia*, but in one or two other contexts which are (regrettably) confused by the circumstances of uncertain textual transmission and attribution.

The later *locus* is the Epistle to Can Grande della Scala, allegedly written to accompany the presentation of the first few cantos of *Paradiso* to that generous patron of the exiled Dante. But the attribution of this letter to Dante has been hotly contested in the last two centuries, and may not admit of a definitive resolution. The author speaks of a multiplicity of senses in the *Commedia* itself; in demonstrating the difference between a literal sense and an allegorical, he refers to Scripture, giving a fourfold exegesis of Psalm 113’s pithy description of the Exodus, *In exitu Israel de Egipto*:

Nam si ad litteram solam inspiciamus, significatur nobis exitus filiorum Israel de Egipto, tempore Moyses; si ad allegoriam, nobis significatur nostra redemptio facta per Christum; si ad moralem sensum, significatur nobis conversio anime de luctu et miseria peccati ad statum gratiae; si ad anagogicum, significatur exitus anime sancte ab huius corruptionis servitute ad eterne glorie libertatem.

This stands as prelude to the claim that the *Commedia* has a twofold subject—or

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81 This is to put aside for the time being disputes over whether another term should be preferred for certain kinds of speaking-otherwise, which is much involved in the history of allegory as a mode of textual interpretation in Greek and Biblical contexts; for a treatment of that history, see Henri de Lubac, “‘Typologie’ et ‘alégorisme’,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 34 (1947): 180–226.

more precisely, the subject about which the alternate senses “currant” is twofold—
literal and allegorical.

Est ergo subiectum totius operis, litteraliter tantum accepti, status
animarum post mortem simpliciter sumptus; nam de illo et circa illum
totius operis versatur processus. Si vero accipiatur opus allegorice,
subiectum est homo prout merendo et demerendo per arbitrii liber-
tatem inustitia premiandi et puniendi obnoxius est.83

Certainly, the recent debate over Dante’s allegory can scarcely be understood
without reference to this epistle, but so long its authenticity remains in doubt, to
depend on it in any way for characterizing the allegory of the Commedia would be
an exercise in begging the question. It is better to remove it from the discussion
entirely if the question can be fruitfully pursued without it, and only at the end
to see how independent conclusions may compare with it.

The other, and indisputably authentic locus for Dante’s explicit account of
allegory is the beginning of the prose section of Book 11 of the Convivio. There,
the author indicates that his exposition of his own canzoni will be both literal
and allegorical. As he defines these terms, there is a lacuna in even the best
manuscripts, so that it is not certain how he describes the literal sense; from the
extant description of the allegorical sense, however, it seems that he presumes a
fictional literal sense—his example is Ovid’s story of Orpheus:

[L’altro si chiama allegorico, e questo è quello che] si nasconde sotto ’l
manto di queste favole, ed è una veritate ascusa sotto bella menzogna:
si come quando dice Ovidio che Orfeo facea colla cetera mansuete le
fiere, e li arbori e le pietre a sé muovere: che vuol dire che lo savio
uomo collo strumento della sua voce faccia mansuescere ed umiliare
li crudeli cuori, e faccia muovere alla sua volontade coloro che [non]
hanno vita di scienza e d’arte; e coloro che non hanno vita ragionevole

83 Epistole, XIII.8.
alcuna sono quasi come pietre.\textsuperscript{84}

The story of Orpheus, Dante says, is obviously not an historical truth but a "bella menzogna" indicating the allegorical truth that a wise man, by the instrument of his voice, can soften stony hearts. Such a method is called the allegory of poets; but theologians, Dante notes, understand allegory differently: "Veramente li teologi questo senso prendono altrimenti che li poeti."\textsuperscript{85} Still, it is poetic allegory which is relevant for the interpretation of his own canzoni, and so he will take "lo senso allegorico secondo che per li poeti è usato."\textsuperscript{86}

Around these two poles the basic dilemma has been formulated which has dominated discussion of the allegory of the Commedia: either the literal sense of the poem is as false as a fable of Ovid, and the only truth intended to be taken from the work is the spiritual sense hidden under that veil—the allegory of poets—or else the literal sense, the journey described, somehow pertains to the so-called allegory of the theologians.

It has been well observed that Dante does not in fact use the latter phrase, which would indicate allegory belonging to a theologian in the same way as it belongs to a poet, but rather refers to the way in which theologians take an allegorical sense in a text which is given them ("li teologi questo senso prendono").\textsuperscript{87} This is important to note because the first ambiguity in Dante’s account is the unresolved

\textsuperscript{84}Convivio, ii.1, 65; interpolations are the editor’s.

\textsuperscript{85}Convivio, ii.1, 65. As Barański observes, this is by no means a standard exemplum for the allegorical sense of a text: “Notes on Dante and the Myth of Orpheus,” in Dante: Mito e poesia, ed. Michelangelo Picone and Tatiana Crivelli (Firenze: Franco Cesati, 1997). One way in which Dante’s choice here may be significant is the status of Orpheus as one of the poetae theologizantes, as will be considered infra.

\textsuperscript{86}Convivio, ii.1, 65.

difference between allegory as a mode of interpretation—the way in which readers prendono a text—and a principle of construction, the author’s intention in writing a text by which he is speaking otherwise, meaning something other than (whether in addition to or instead of) what the letter of the text evidently means.\textsuperscript{88}

In his example taken from Ovid, Dante speaks more or less in terms of the author’s intention, and identification of the allegorical sense consists in his recognition of that intention as an interpreter; in the larger context of applying this sense to his own poetry, the method remains largely the same—except that he has an obviously privileged viewpoint in identifying what the author of such an allegory intended. Li teologi, however, are presumably in a different position, and this difference must be kept in mind throughout the discussion.

Thus far, only two senses have been discussed, but Dante began the discussion by saying that le scritture (taken in general, presumably) have four senses.\textsuperscript{89} The four senses—literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical—were of course a standard paradigm for the interpretation of the Bible, as given authority for the late medieval West by Saints Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Bede, inter alios; but this was certainly not the customary mode for the interpretation of secular texts. Thus Dante’s express intention to follow the poetic mode—mentioning the theological mode only in passing—would appear to be a rather daring appropriation of Scriptural exegesis. But in what follows in the same section of Convivio ii, that point is complicated, if not confused: as examples of the latter two senses (usually reserved for Scripture) Dante chooses only Scriptural passages, and his particular

\textsuperscript{88}This crucial distinction has been highlighted by, inter alios, David Thompson, “Figure and Allegory in the Commedia,” Dante Studies 90 (1972): 1–11, and Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, “Dante’s Conception of Poetic Expression,” Romantic Review 47 (1956): 241–58.

\textsuperscript{89}As John Scott argues, the above passage concerning the allegorical sense should be taken as limited to the second of four senses, not in the wider usage of allegory which comprises all three of the non-literal senses. “Dante’s Allegory,” 29–30.
application of the moral and anagogical senses in these instances increases the reader’s difficulty in understanding just how the fourfold scheme might apply to extra-Biblical poetry.

The moral sense is exemplified, he says, in the Transfiguration, and in particular Christ’s selection of just three of his disciples to ascend the mountain with him: “in che moralmente si può intendere che alle secretissime cose noi dovemo avere poca compagnia.” It cannot be that Dante is here continuing in an unqualified way with the poetic mode illustrated by the example of Ovid’s Orpheus, because (presumably) he takes the literal sense of Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration to be true, not a bella menzogna. On the other hand, his application of the moral sense is rather pedestrian—this particular moral of the story, as it were, appears to have little to do with the monumental revelation which the Transfiguration comprises, and could as well have been taken from a secular (or even fictional) tale; it does not seem to have a necessary dependence as a mode of interpretation on the inspired nature of the text. At most, it could perhaps be said that the effectiveness of this moral sense is strengthened by the revelation of Christ as one preeminently worthy of emulation in the way he conducts himself; but this is a somewhat tenuous connection as regards the particular content of the episode.

In the final example, of the anagogical sense, it is beyond doubt that Dante has not limited himself to a poetic mode (again, as exemplified by Ovid): this text is In exitu Israel, the Psalm on the Exodus which is so critical for the author of the Letter to Can Grande, and here in the Convivio Dante makes certain that for this sense the literal meaning of the words must be true, and that the sovrasenso follows because the true and historical things signified by the letter are themselves

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90 Convivio, 11.1, 66.
signs of other true things yet to come:

Lo quarto senso si chiama anagogico, cioè sovrasenso; e questo è quando spiritualmente si spone una scrittura, la quale ancora [che sia vera] eziandio nel senso litterale, per le cose significate significa delle superne cose dell’eternal gloria: si come vedere si può in quello canto del Profeta che dice che nell’uscita del popolo d’Israel d’Egitto Giudea è fatta santa e libera: che avegna essere vero secondo la lettera sia manifesto, non meno è vero quello che spiritualmente s’intende, cioè che nell’uscita dell’anima dal peccato, essa sia fatta santa e libera in sua potestate.\footnote{Convivio, I.1, 66.}

Thus if it is asserted that Dante begins with a daring claim that the Scriptural hermeneutic applies to secular poetry, including his own—and meaning thereby that four senses can be intended by a human author—his explication of those senses makes this assertion rather tenuous. Moreover, as has been observed, in the remaining text of the unfinished Convivio there is no clear application of the entirety of this fourfold scheme. At the end of this section, Dante summarizes that he will explain his own poems first according to the letter, then according to the allegory, and will finally apply “li altri sensi” \textit{ad hoc}—the plural noun apparently indicating that all four senses are to be employed eventually, notwithstanding the confusing determination of the latter two in solely Scriptural terms—but in the actual application (granting that much more was intended for the ten books of the Convivio which were never written), for the most part one only finds Dante claiming for his\textit{ canzonì} a false literal sense (unless the poem is openly didactic, in which case there is only the letter) and a true allegorical sense (following the Ovidian example). Certainly, moral instruction is taken at several places, but this sits uneasily with the example of the Transfiguration (in which the literal sense is true); and there is nothing at all which could be called an anagogical sense, since
for this Dante made it quite clear that both the truth of the literal sense (not just its coherence) and the capacity of the things signified themselves to signify are required.

It is this last kind of signification, being twofold in a more substantial sense than the allegory of the poets, which many interpreters claim was realized in the *Commedia*. Much as (especially in the modern era) few have wished to call the journey of the pilgrim a literally, historically true account, it has seemed to many readers that it is an injustice to this text to align it with a patently false fable of Ovid: many of its characters are based (in a more than nominal way) on historical persons, and moreover its author is at pains to assure the reader of the truth of his text even—indeed, especially—at those moments which would otherwise seem most obviously to be *belle menzogne* (e.g., Geryon); and finally, he reports the divine commission of the report of his journey by blessed souls.92 If these are not to be taken as mere bluster, and if nevertheless the journey cannot be called historical, what would it mean to accept the literal sense of the text as true? How does it compare, if at all, to the senses of Scripture—is Dante constructing a theological allegory?

In the last half-century of Dante criticism, there have been sundry attempts to answer both “yes” and “no” to that question. One method is to finesse the dilemma between *historia* and *fabula*: “the fiction of the *Divine Comedy* is that it is not fiction;”93 another, to embrace it: “the *Commedia* is...a fiction that IS

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92 Most importantly, the duty is expressed by Cacciaguida: “Ma nondimen, rimossa ogna menzogna, / tutta tua vision fa manifesta; / e lasca pur grattar dov’ è la rogna” (XVII.127–29). It may be noted that the description of writing the *Commedia* as making a vision manifest takes on an additional significance in the context of the present argument concerning the shade-bodies.

true;”

A point which has occasionally been raised, but not applied to its full extent, is that Scriptural allegory does not, in fact, have as its sole or even definitive qualification the truth of its literal sense (though this is required); and what has been altogether overestimated is the extent to which the Convivio’s claims actually conflict with the theologians’, and what it would really mean to say that a human author “imitates God’s way of writing.”

What do the theologians have to say of the way in which they themselves “questo senso prendono”? Frequently in this debate, Thomas’s account of the senses of Scripture has been taken as a point of departure—if only that which Dante reappropriated for purposes decidedly antithetical to the Thomistic usage—though its full import has not been adequately realized. Independently of that critical history, it is useful simply for its signal clarity and precision.

In a quodlibetal question, Thomas puts the distinction as follows:

Manifestatio autem uel expressio alicuius ueritatis potest fieri dupliciter, rebus et uerbis, in quantum scilicet uerba significat res et una res potest esse figura alterius; auctor autem sacre scripture, scilicet Spiritus sanctus, non solum est auctor uerborum, set etiam est auctor rerum, unde non solum uerba potest accommodare ad aliquid significandum, set etiam res potest disponere in figuram alterius... sic est sensus allegoricus uel typicus, secundum quem ea que in ueteri

94Barolini, The Undivine Comedy, 13.
95Moevs, Metaphysics, 185.
testamento contigerunt exponuntur de Christo et ecclesia.\textsuperscript{97}

The things signified by the words of Scripture comprise its literal sense; but the things signified are sometimes themselves the figures of other things (corresponding to Dante’s description of the anagogical *sovrasenso* in the *Convivio*), according to the disposition of history made by and known to God alone, and it is this second level of signification which comprises the other three senses of Scripture, grouped together under the designation, “sensus spiritualis.”

One should note that it is not the truth of the literal sense—though this is required—which is distinctive of Scriptural signification; it is rather the capacity to make things themselves signify, that is, historical things, and to make them signify historically. Aesop, for example, just as any other human author, could easily use a literal narrative to convey a true moral precept or an indicative truth by way of metaphor; and nothing would prevent him from reporting truly historical events in that narrative, not just fables, since earthly events in their courses can be interpreted as a source of moral instruction or, more generally, representative of some truth on a level other than historical. What is distinctive of the spiritual sense of Scripture is that it is, in fact, rather material and historical: a *res* can be the figure of another *res*; it can, just as historical, prefigure another, and future, historical person or event. Now because the latter is future, it is at the time of its figuring invisible, and understood only spiritually; hence the designation *sensus spiritualis*, and Thomas’s willingness to confirm Pseudo-Dionysius’s observation that “uisibilia solent esse figure inuisibilium.”\textsuperscript{98} Nonetheless, both *figura* and *figuratum* are historical *res*, as far as the distinctive spiritual sense of Scripture is

\begin{footnotes}
\item[97] *Quaestiones de quolibet*, VII.6.1 resp., 1.28.
\item[98] See n. 97 supra.
\end{footnotes}
concerned.

In this way, Scriptural allegory is, so to speak, horizontal: both ends of it are on the timeline of history, both are historical res, and one signifies the other in its very particularity and historicity. This by no means prevents such res from having analogical correspondence as well; but it is their historicity which is distinctive. The Passover which allows Israel’s departure from Egypt does not have an allegorical sense on account of anything universal about lambs or unleavened bread or blood marking wood, though these may allow the allegory to be understood more easily in retrospect. What is in fact so remarkable about the Exodus is its incongruity with the universal course of things, its dependence on God’s unique historical intervention; and what it signifies is another historical intervention which is to come, in time and space, within the same race as was led out of Egypt, but this time having broader salvific meaning within that very particularity.99

Thus it becomes evident why Thomas consistently argues that allegory proprie loquendo should not be used of any secular work: the term does not properly apply to analogy or any kind of metaphor, simply because he has defined the ἄλλος of allegory as alia res—two different res are truly other, properly speaking, while one res and the different verba which can represent it are other only secundum quid. What is often called allegory in secular works, because its author is not the author of things in their courses, does not in fact exceed the literal sense—even if it has a metaphorical meaning beyond the direct and physical meaning of the words. If the practitioners of any human art of letters are said to employ allegory, this is an improper use of the term, simply because that art is of letters, not things.

Now the term “allegory” could be understood differently; Thomas’s etymolog-

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ical understanding of the word is deficient in a way which obscured for him its radical connection with speech. One could instead take the term as indicating simply the whole genus of otherness in speech, including even a humanly artificial otherness among *verba*, of which Scriptural allegory is a species or *secundum quid* meaning, since it goes further to posit otherness among *res*. Or again, one could remove the uniquely Scriptural otherness from the signification of “allegory” altogether, substituting another term which avoids this confusion with otherness in words alone (and the connotations of artificiality and arbitrariness which have come to be associated with “allegory” for various reasons). Thus “typology” is often preferred to indicate the exclusively Scriptural mode of multiplex signification, though it has been well observed that this and other alternatives have no less susceptibility to general and ambiguous understandings than does “allegory.”

Whatever the term, what Thomas calls proper or Scriptural allegory requires that the thing signified by the letter should itself, precisely as historical, signify. To determine the significance of a particular as such, within the flow of particulars which is history, is out of man’s ken because it requires a knowledge of the pattern and moving forces of that history; in other words, history has dependencies on something which he cannot probe, cannot discover as he discovers the principles of sciences: free will. This is inscrutable both in man himself, and especially in God, whose free will as pertaining to history is generally called providence.

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101 Charity, *Events and Their Afterlife*, 58.

102 de Lubac, “‘Typologie’ et ‘allégorisme’,” 209–11.
God can know the pattern which his own non-necessary choices and those of men form as played out across time in the world, and therefore if man is to know what historical things signify as historical, i.e., what they signify for the rest of the pattern of history, this can only be because God grants such knowledge to him: either through the gift of prophecy, or through the inspiration by which the Holy Spirit used the human authors of Scripture as instruments.

Now through the inspired writers of Scripture God has revealed to all men the essential shape of the pattern of history, and especially its central point: the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Christ. All the prophets pointed towards these events, all the history of creation and the fortunes of the chosen people are seen in retrospect as preparing for them and all the remainder of human history is the expectation of Christ’s coming again. As simplistic as such an encapsulation may seem, any truly Christian account of the pattern of history must have at least that basic outline—otherwise it would critically fail to understand the significance of the coming of Christ.

By this revelation of God’s plan for human history, the possibility of allegory *proprie loquendo* is, in a way, definitively closed off through its completion. Scripture has unique status as the only vehicle of the four senses properly speaking because it is, first, the gathering of all those authentic partial revelations through the prophets—those brief glimpses at the great pattern—which God afforded the chosen people; and second, in the New Testament it is the singular revelation of the key to and overall shape of the pattern, which therefore must be precisely what is signified by anything which truly signifies as historical. Nothing, of course, prevents God from giving further special revelations of specific aspects of the pattern, more localized views, so to speak; but as the defining event of all history has
already taken place, there has been an end to prophecy in its most meaningful sense, and there can be only one age, however long it may last, for those who must wait in vigil for the coming of the bridegroom. In other words, the insistently historical account of theological allegory has the consequence that this allegory is limited to Scripture not simply because of the inspiration of its authors—others in later times could claim similar inspiration—but furthermore because allegory, unlike analogy and metaphor, takes place within a linear flow of events and thus can be rendered somewhat superfluous if its fulfillment has already taken place.

Thus because of its historicity, Scriptural allegory is not simply a method; it is not content-neutral, a way of signifying the object of which signification may be arbitrarily chosen. Scriptural allegory is not “the way that the Old Testament signifies,” but “the way that the Old Testament signifies Christ and his Church.” Nor could it even be considered a priori as content-neutral, but defined in this way ex post facto because of the content of Scripture. It is indeed defined ex post facto; but that is the only way it could have been defined. The very notion—the meaning of a particular as particular—would be nonsensical without God’s unique intervention establishing the model. In short, historical allegory—which is, according to Thomas, allegory proprio loquendo—is the way in which history, as history, is meaningful; but Scripture’s claim is that Christ is the meaning of history; therefore, if this claim is accepted, all proper allegory must point to Christ, as the only meaning it ultimately can have. As man has only been able to know the meaning of history insofar as it has been revealed by the Holy Spirit, and that revelation vouchsafed by the same Spirit through the Church, no texts outside the canon of Scripture can have allegory proper.

103 See n. supra.
How, then, can there be a so-called double meaning in an uninspired word, such as the rock which Orpheus moves? Such a case can also be considered within Scripture itself, since both Testaments include obvious metaphors and self-avowed parables. Metaphorical meaning falls within the literal sense, since in that case there remains only one true signification, that which the similitude or metaphor represents:

Per litteram autem sensum potest aliquid significari dupliciter, scilicet secundum proprietatem locutionis, sicut cum dico homo ridet; vel secundum similitudinem seu metaphoram, sicut cum dico pratum ridet. Et utroque modo utimur in sacra scriptura, sicut cum dicimus, quantum ad primum, quod Iesus ascendit, et cum dicimus quod sedet a dextris Dei, quantum ad secundum. Et ideo sub sensu litterali includitur parabolicus seu metaphoricus.\(^{104}\)

What of the seemingly different case of a secular poet who in his art relates historical events? Virgil (to take the most obvious example for the present discussion), according to Dante’s understanding, did not invent the Aeneid out of whole cloth but at the very least reported the major features of events which indeed took place—including, most importantly, the protagonist’s journey to the underworld;\(^{105}\) what sort of secondary *sensus* can such a representation have? Thomas does not present this possibility in his remarks on poetry, which (at least to judge from his examples) are focused on the fabulous quality of pagan poetry, not its pseudo-historical character in some cases. Still, it is clear how this poetry would fit into his scheme: the report of historical events obviously belongs to the literal sense (or rather, the literal sense perceives in their stories events which indeed took place), and according to the rule that the human author can only write one sense into his words, that true historical sense is the limit of the text. Insofar as

\(^{104}\) *Super Galatas*, l. 7, p. 620.

\(^{105}\) See *Convivio*, iv. 26, 430.
Virgil reports the travels of Aeneas with historical verity, let him intend whatever he will with regard to the significance of this or that aspect of those travels for future events, it lies not in his power to make them signify, just because they are historical: they are or were res, and this (so to speak) takes them out of the significatory power of Virgil. When Ovid constructed or passed on the fable of Orpheus’s animation of rocks and trees, it was the fictitious character of the story which gave the poet power over the significative level: because the basis of the so-called allegorical (more properly, metaphorical) meaning was nothing more than words, that basis, that sign and the direction in which it was to point lay within the creative power of the poet.

Not so when the subject is a res, an historical fact, because that sign was not made by the poet and is therefore beyond his ken. Now it is not impossible that a man should be able to read the signs which God alone can make; but here one must recall the historical nature of proper allegory according to the Christian theological account. To interpret an historical res as significative beyond itself can have two distinct senses: analogical and allegorical.

All metaphor, including the so-called allegory of poets, is (so to speak) vertical in its signification: it describes a particular, physical state of affairs—perhaps patently fabulous, perhaps just possible, perhaps indeed historical—and intends for the reader to understand some truth further or other than the physical existence of that particular state of affairs at a given time; that further truth can be understood from the particular, and intended by a human author, precisely and only because it is abstracted therefrom—it is taken vertically above and out of the particular. This is, in a word, analogy, and Thomas's defense of the legitimacy of analogical predication (especially in divinis) is crucial here: one can predicate
goodness of God, even though the goodness that one knows comes from earthly things in which it is accidental and differs from God’s goodness as the finite from the infinite, because that earthly, finite goodness could only be real and knowable to man by its being a participation in God’s goodness and in that way the same thing. In a valid analogy, according to Thomas, the thing signified—res significata—is the same; only the way of signification—modus significandi—differs. Thus even the historical poet does not produce a truly polysemous work. There is a material truth corresponding to what he describes, but what he intends, if he intends a valid analogy, is one res significata. Analogy, and perforce any valid poetic allegory, depends upon the unicity of the res; as has been seen, allegory proprio loquendo—that of Scripture—depends upon multiple, historical res.

Thus if Thomas denies secular poetry an allegorical sense proprio loquendo, he does not necessarily deny it any potential of true signification, so long as this is understood according to the validity of analogy. In this respect, Dante’s account of the two kinds of allegory in the Convivio may not be so much in conflict with Scholastic assessment as has often been supposed.

In fact, the very example which Dante chooses of the allegory of the poets—that of Ovid’s description of Orpheus—is notable with respect to the theologians’ assessment of the same question, because Orpheus was commonly considered one of the early Greek poetae theologi and is repeatedly referred to as such by Thomas. This characterization was based in part on the testimony of Augustine, who names Orpheus as greatest among those who preceded the so-called Seven Wise Men. In the works of Thomas, Orpheus is frequently used as an example—whether alone

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106 De civitate Dei, xvi.24, 615: “Eodem Romulo regnante Thales Milesius fuisse perhibetur, unus e septem Sapientibus qui post theologas poetas, in quibus Orpheus maxime omnium nobilitatus est, Σοφοί appellati sunt, quod est latine Sapientes.”
or grouped with his perceived confrères, such as Thales (whom Augustine also mentions), or Hesiod, or even Homer—of the pre-philosophical poet-theologians who paved the way for mature philosophy by their attempts to see and convey the truth of things—often in error, but not always—which they hid under a veil of fable.\textsuperscript{107}

While in his Sentences commentary Thomas’s judgment on the verity of the poetic science is severe, similar to the consistent position of Albert,\textsuperscript{108} elsewhere he makes it evident that he does not seek to vitiate poetry of all veritas. His judgment in the Summa theologiae that poetry is “infima inter omnes doctrinas” is often cited as evidence of his contempt for poetry, but as has recently been argued,\textsuperscript{109} the more significant point is that in that phrase Thomas does grant poetry the status of a doctrina—which is remarkable, however lowly its status among the other doctrinae, given the commonality of the opinion in the long debate between philosophy and poetry that the latter is simply mendacious, and therefore has no part in doctrina or scientia whatsoever.

As in the Sentences commentary, Thomas in the Summa theologiae distinguishes between Scripture’s use of the poetical method—i.e., metaphor, the use of

\textsuperscript{107}See, e.g., Super Meteorum, ii.1, 387: “ante tempora philosophorum, fuerunt quidam qui vocabantur poetae Theologi, sicut Orpheus, Hesiodus et Homerus: quia sub tegumento quarundam fabularum, divina hominibus tradiderunt.”

\textsuperscript{108}Cf. Thomas Aquinas, In Sent., 1.Prol.1.5.ad 3, 18: “poetica scientia est de his quae propter defectum veritatis non possunt a ratione capi; unde oportet quod quasi quibusdam simulitudinibus ratio seducatur;” Albertus Magnus, Summa theologiae, 1.5.2.ad 1, 24: “sacra scriptura poetici usitatur ex divina sapientia formatis et figuratis, in quorum figuris secundum proportionem simulitudinem resultant infigurabilia et immaterialia, eo quod ab illis et ad illa formata et figurata sunt, et ideo certissima sunt, ex certissimis oriuntur et ad certissima dirigunt. In poesi autem philosophorum mira, ex quibus fabula componitur, ex fictione humana oriuntur et propter represtationem ad humana dirigunt, et ideo deceptionis sunt et mendosa.”

\textsuperscript{109}Denys Turner, “How to Do Things with Words: Poetry as Sacrament in Dante’s Commedia,” in Dante’s “Commedia”: Theology as Poetry, ed. Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming).
corporeal similitudes to convey spiritual truth—and the secular poet’s; but in the latter work he does not attribute the secular use of similitudes to a defect of truth and means of deception, but rather to the natural human delight in representation: “poeta utitur metaphoris propter representa tionem; representa tio enim naturaliter homini delectabilis esset.”  

What differentiates Scripture’s use of metaphor is that it is “propter necessitatem et utilitatem,” because man by nature comes to know intelligible objects only through sensible objects, and Scripture is ordained to convey to man the most necessary and useful of intelligible objects. 

Indeed, in the very place where Aristotle famously remarks that poets tell many a tale—Metaphysics i—one finds Thomas comparing poets favorably with philosophers, as a gloss on Aristotle’s comment that the philosopher is a philomythes, a lover of myths:

Patet quod philosophus est aliqualiter philomythes, id est amator fabulae, quod proprium est poëtarum. Unde primi, qui per modum quemdam fabularem de principiis rerum tractaverunt, dicti sunt poëtae theologizantes, sicut fuit Perseus, et quidam alii... Causa autem, quare philosophus comparatur poëtae, est ista, quia uterque circa miranda versatur.

The “theologizing poets” such as Perseus are mentioned repeatedly in Thomas’s commentary on Metaphysica i, and among the “quidam alii,” Orpheus is said to be preeminent: “apud graecos primi famosi in scientia fuerunt quidam poëtae theologic dicti, quia de divinis carmina faciebant. Fuerunt autem tres, Orpheus, Museus et Linus, quorum Orpheus famosior fuit.” In commenting on Book III, Thomas

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110 Summa theologiae, 1.1.9.ad 1, 24.
111 Summa theologiae, 1.1.9.resp., 24: “est autem naturale homini ut per sensibilia ad intelligibilia veniat.”
112 In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio, ed. M.-R. Cathala and Raymond M. Spiazzi (Torino/Roma: Marietti, 1959), 1.3.4. 18.
113 In Meta., 1.4.15, 25.
considers directly the question of whether truth does indeed lie under the fables of one such poet—in this case Hesiod—and determines that it is certainly possible: one cannot be certain, because to know beyond doubt whether a poet was hiding truth under a veil (as opposed to hiding a lie, or simply making fables for their own sake), one would have to hear it plainly from him in another place, or otherwise to know his mind—which unless he has expressed it directly is impossible. This recalls Thomas's famous dictum on a comparable question in his commentary on De caelo; there, he recognizes that some have defended Plato against charges of error—in some of his apparent cosmological claims in the Timaeus—by saying that he did not truly understand things according to the letter of the text. (It will be recalled that Beatrice allows for the same possibility on precisely the same question in Paradiso iv.) Thomas responds that this may well be so, but it is not susceptible of proof either way, and either way it is of little concern, because at that point in the inquiry one would have ceased to seek after the truth of the matter and begun to seek the fortune of a name, the thoughts of this or that man, which is not the study of philosophy.

Again, in Book v Thomas finds occasion to mention the poetic fiction of Atlas, and says that it comes from a seed of truth:

Fingunt enim poëtae quod Atlas est quidam gigas qui sustinet caelum ne cadat super terram... Habuit autem poëtica fictio ex veritate originem. Atlas quidem magnus astrologus, subtiliter motus caelestium...
corporeum perscrutatus est, ex quo ficito processit quid ipse caelum sustineret.\textsuperscript{116}

Finally, in his commentary on Book 1 of \textit{De anima}, Thomas once more has cause to mention Orpheus (Aristotle notes the latter's defective theory of the soul), and proceeds to comment on precisely that metaphor of musical ability which Dante takes from Ovid in the \textit{Convivio}:

Orpheus iste fuit unus de primis philosophis qui erant quasi poete theologi, et fuerunt tres tantum, scilicet Museus, Orpheus et quidam Linus. Et iste Orpheus primo induxit homines ad habitandum simul et fuit pulcherrimus contionator, ita quod homines bestiales et solitarios reduceret ad ciuilitatem; et propter hoc dicitur de eo quod fuit optimus citharedus in tantum quod faceret lapides saltare, id est fuit pulcher contionator quod homines lapides emolliret.\textsuperscript{117}

Whatever the value of Orpheus’s reported teaching on the soul, Thomas reports as historical the poet’s musical ability, and more importantly, understands as a matter of course that the metaphor by which he is said to make rocks move is truth-bearing and effective in precisely the same way that Dante understands it in the \textit{Convivio}, where it is described as allegory.

It is probable, therefore, that the apparent conflict is more or less semantic: what Dante would call allegory in the case of the poetic claim, “Orpheus, by his singing, made rocks move,” Thomas would simply call metaphor, since for him anything short of allegory properly speaking is actually comprised within the literal sense. If Dante uses the term differently, still he certainly recognizes a difference in theologians’ understanding of allegory, and his explanation of the anagogical sense, much as it can confuse after his supposed dismissal of \textit{li theologi} in that context, seems to indicate that he understands the difference of Scriptural

\textsuperscript{116}In \textit{Meta.}, v. 20. 26, 279.

\textsuperscript{117}In \textit{De anima}, i. 12, 60–61.
sovrasenso to lie not only in the truth of the literal sense, but in the way in which things signify things, and that within salvation history.

Now Dantists have certainly recognized the distinction between authorship *in verbis* and *in rebus*, and none have claimed that the poet could have engaged in the latter. Yet the repeated efforts of various scholars to establish for the *Commedia* some unique imitation of Scripture or truth of the literal sense which allow the poem to partake of Scriptural allegory have somewhat obscured the clarity which this distinction ought to provide. It has been argued that Dante undertakes this imitation, or participates in the allegory of the theologians, by writing about persons and events, many of which have at least a kernel of historical truth, in such a way as to persuade readers of both their realism and their bearing of another meaning beyond their literal reality. But in fact, the method just described is by no means unique to Dante, nor is it truly an imitation of the way of writing which is distinctively God’s. In its first part, it is simply the verisimilitude for which most any narrative writer strives; in its second, if it is truly regarded as a power belonging to the artist, then for a human author it must simply be the allegory of poets, or more generally the use of metaphor which is necessarily independent

118 Singleton describes the two kinds of allegory as “statements of ‘reader’s attitudes’,” so that—pace the term’s etymological connection to speaking—“allegory” properly refers only to interpretation and not the authoring of words or things; nevertheless, if this interpretation is thought to respond to a definite quality of the text or res, then there is something distinctive in certain authorship which can make an artifact truly susceptible of such a “reader’s attitude,” and this will commonly—even by Singleton—be called allegory as well, the allegory which exists in an artifact and is presupposed by the reader’s focus: “I may refer the debate on this point to the reading of Scripture itself—to recall that both kinds of allegory were recognized to exist in Holy Scripture and therefore both ‘reader’s attitudes’ were demanded in the reading of it.” “The Irreducible Dove,” *Comparative Literature* 9/2 (1957): 129-133, 132. Thus the question would remain of the limitations on the power of a certain author to make such a property actually to exist in the artifact, prior to any reader and his intentions.


of the historical verity and particularity of the res described.\textsuperscript{121} Indeed, it does not differ qualitatively from Virgil’s method in the Aeneid, especially as this work was often read in the Middle Ages.

One could, certainly, call man’s authoritative power over words an imitation of God’s power over things, but again, this would be nothing other than the allegory of the poets; whereas the contention at hand is that a certain kind of human imitation is qualitatively different than poetic allegory and is based exclusively on God’s method of authoring Scripture. Thus Dantists have tried to forge a compromise between actually claiming divine inspiration for the Commedia and dismissing its narrative as wholly fictive; but the result has been less a compromise than a confusion, which unnecessarily makes the truth of the literal sense a line in the sand (and then finds various ways to blur that line).

One could also go further to claim—and this is another option of recent criticism—that Dante believed himself to be (and perhaps truly was) in the position of the human authors of Scripture—that his is an inspired text, or at least is a text founded upon true inspiration.\textsuperscript{122} If more coherent than the claim of imitating God’s way of writing, this argument (which by contrast claims the imitation of, say, Isaiah’s way of writing) must still contend—if it wishes to attribute allegory or prophecy in a Scriptural mode to the Commedia—with the historicity of that mode.

The primary difficulty with such an attribution is that the narrative of the Commedia, even if accepted as a true vision, is outside of history insofar as it is already (in part) eschatological: it directly concerns in its literal sense what would

\textsuperscript{121} And this Singleton does not adequately distinguish when claiming that Dante’s allegory constitutes a special imitation of Scripture.

\textsuperscript{122} Bruno Nardi, “Dante profeta,” in Dante e la cultura medievale, 265–326, new edition (Bari: Laterza, 1990), passim.
be the anagogical sense of the Scriptural description of some earthly, historical res. Hence some scholars have called the Commedia something of an allegory in reverse: it shows literally the anagogical fulfillment of historical persons and events in order to reveal something about the latter (although not according their very historicity, but according their participation in moral types).123 That is, rather than describing a res which is, within the timeline of history, a figura of a future figuratum, Dante makes future fulfillment his very subject, and by showing that fulfillment as a stark realization of what was obscurely prefigured in the chaos and ambiguity of earthly existence, he makes an allegorical sense of this life. But even if the thrust of this account is true, this representation has actually less to do with the Scriptural mode of allegory, to use the term properly, than the poetic. As other scholars have noted, the allegory of Scripture—even if considered as an imitable mode or as made available to Dante as an inspired writer—is simply not reversible: it only has meaning as a foretaste of a fulfillment of history in history.124 As Thomas argued, when Scripture itself speaks directly of the content of the analogical sense—that is, what the analogical sense of a different kind of passage would reveal—by explicitly speaking of the eschaton, such passages themselves are in no way allegorical or anagogical.125 They are simply the literal

123 See, e.g., Singleton, Dante Studies i, 16: “This the poet will do by so arranging his poem that the reader comes to his literal sense by first passing through the sense that is to be the second and reflected sense; so that our journey here may then be recalled and reflected along the line of a journey there.”

124 Pépin, Dante et la tradition de l’allégorie, 41: “Mais cette dernière représentation, dans laquelle la figure est postérieure à la réalité figurée, ressort-il encore à la typologie? N’est-il pas essentiel à celle-ci que le type soit au contraire antérieur à sa réalisation? Le paradigme de toute typologie n’est-il pas la prophétie messianique et son accomplissement dans la personne et l’oeuvre de Jésus? Or l’histoire du salut a un sense, qu’il n’est pas concevable d’inverser; l’ancien et le nouveau y sont des notions absolues et inconvertibles.”

125 Quaestiones de quolibet, vii,6.2,ad 5, 31–32: “Ilia vero que secundum sensum litteralem pertinent ad statum glorie, nullo alio sensu conuenerunt exponi, eo quod ipsa non sunt figura aliorum, set ab omnibus aliis figurata.”
account of what happens to be indicated elsewhere in an oblique manner. Thus if a Gospel passage should speak of Christ in such a way as to show how he is the fulfillment of a certain type from the Old Testament, it would be a confusion to call the New Testament passage allegorical, though it may be what reveals the earlier events indeed to be allegories. Allegory properly speaking is inherently forward-looking; and thus if the historical res described in the New Testament following the Incarnation should have this kind of sense, it must be anagogical: once the fulfillment of all allegory (properly speaking) has taken place, there is only one thing to look forward to, so to speak—and this, the eschaton, can indeed be the sovrasenso of a res which is itself the fulfillment of a prior res. This sense is only available, however, because the first fulfillment—the events, and above all the person, to which the Old Testament looked forward—explicitly revealed that the perfect completion of this history-centering act would be delayed until a future, and unspecified, time, during which delay history would be in a quite new and unique interim stage.126

Thus the content of the literal sense of the Commedia, quite regardless of questions of its inspiration, is not susceptible of an allegorical sense in the way usually attributed to it, because that way involves a looking backwards, not forwards; neither does it in fact concern the very historicity of the characters it portrays.

126 And this itself is a fulfillment of an Old Testament res which is properly allegorical: when the people of Israel were freed from captivity in Egypt through the Passover, this was the definitive moment in their history, and yet they were not safe until they had been sustained through the desert and had reached the Promised Land. Their time spent wandering in the desert has an allegorical sense insofar as it prefigures Jesus’s forty days of fasting; and both figure and fulfillment have the anagogical sense of the interim time during which the new people of God will be sustained with new manna in between the already-accomplished breaking of their bonds of servitude and their arrival in the new land of promise. (It will be seen that the anagogical sense is not just another connection, one more association made between disparate events which have similar features and are thus said to be related; the content of the anagogical sense is really nothing other than that of the allegorical, only viewed in anticipation of its coming to perfect completion, rather than in the retrospective of its fulfillment of a prior hope.)
Should it provide a figure of something true about earthly life, this would consist in the abstract and moral message of a metaphor—quite uncontroversially the allegory of poets.

Putting the question of allegory briefly to the side, one could still claim inspiration for Dante and the *Commedia*, not so much with regard to the journey described in the narrative but in the predictions and invectives made therein which certainly concern historical *res*, most repeatedly and saliently the present political and religious chaos caused, as Dante strenuously argued, by the illegitimate intertwining of ecclesiastical and imperial authority. It has been argued that in this respect Dante did show himself to be worthy of company with the human authors of Scripture, as one who likewise has been inspired and is truly a prophet. But if Dante were another prophet, this cannot simply mean that he castigated his age for its failings or identified the past and present causes of present corruption; such chastisement may often or even always accompany prophecy, but it is at most a proper accident, because it has nothing of prophecy in itself: it is not foresight into future, historical events. When John the Baptist said “prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths,” he was indeed enjoining conversion, giving a moral imperative; but he was a prophet in retrospect because as a matter of historical fact the Lord was coming (and that right soon)—because he was granted a vision of the future or at least the capacity to predict it. Now Dante’s possible predictions of future events are at times difficult to pin down (e.g., the notorious *veltrò* and *Dxv*), and it is not always certain that he means to make a specific, historical claim (the vision of which could be inspired); but insofar as he did make a prediction which could fairly be called a possible prophecy, which was undoubtedly

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127 Nardi, “Dante profeta,” passim.
of specific, future, historical hope, and thus susceptible of later verification—with regard to the anticipated reign of Henry VIII—he was, not to put too fine a point on it, badly wrong. If this is his supposedly Scriptural mode of allegory, the comparison between his unfulfilled expectations (based on attempts to read the signs of the times, and not altogether unreasonable) and the wholly improbable and very historical fulfillment of Scriptural prophecies beyond all expectation, in fact drives the wedge further between them.

There is another path, though, for a connection between the allegory of Scripture and secular literature, including the Commedia along with other works, which can be opened by the clarification of just what is unique to allegory proprīe loquendo—provided that one is willing to put aside the grandiose claims of an imitation of or even parallel to Scripture, and to allow instead a more modest and necessarily Christian allegory, which draws its power from its subordination to Scripture and the autobiographical focus of its historicity.\footnote{For this crucial insight, see Charity, Events and Their Afterlife, passim, esp. 168 ff., 255 ff.} It is an allegory which can belong to such literature even if a great part of its literal sense is indeed fictional, and even if it makes extensive use of simply poetic allegory, that is, even if much of what it reports is a fable under whose veil the reader is meant to look.

If the drama of history at the highest level has already been resolved, it is still present, of course, at the individual level, since for the Christian the historical battle has been won and the gates of Heaven opened, and yet for any individual that victory must be applied; thus there is great drama in the history of a single life, which will lead either to unification with the fulfillment of history or definitive separation from it.

In this personal drama there reopens the possibility of allegory de novo, in a
way left entirely unconsidered by Thomas and other Scholastic theologians who regarded extra-Scriptural, poetic allegory predominantly according to pagan examples. It is a derivative allegory, to be sure, not at all on the same level as the Scriptural but rather dependent on it—and this is the condition for its possibility. That is, there can still be a kind of secondary allegory of those historical events and persons in the life of an individual human being which as a matter of historical fact were for him significative of Christ—which led him over the history of his own life to Christ, be that initial discovery or conversio after a turning away. It has been said that allegory is exclusively Scriptural because it must be historical and that the things themselves must point to Christ as historical particulars, the which pointing is known only to God unless he should reveal it to man; but if an individual man should come to see in an historical res a sign of Christ, and be led thereby to Christ, is his interpretation not self-fulfilling? Because he saw this res as such a signum, so it truly was: because he saw it as a signum for Christ.

This kind of individual and subsidiary typology has been called the sub-fulfillment of Scriptural types;¹²⁹ in presenting a third option for the allegory of the Commedia, the notion also calls upon a third kind of narrative. The debate over Dante’s allegory has long been occupied with a proposed dilemma between two kinds of narrative, historia and fabula—the former yielding a supposedly daring assimilation of the Commedia to Scripture (with whatever finesse this scandalous claim is made), the latter a supposedly humdrum assimilation to Ovid (however much the surpassing art of the poem is said to differ by degree). But these are only two of the literary modes distinguished in Isidore’s division of narrative, well-known to the later Middle Ages (also to be found in Marius Victorinus and

¹²⁹ Charity, Events and Their Afterlife, 168.
Cicero, and in radical form in an Aristotelian distinction: *historia, fabula,* and *argumentum.* The last of these—narrative which may not be true but which seems true, which could have taken place—has played little role in this debate, to the detriment of clarifying the essential kind of claims that the narrative of the *Commedia* seeks to make.

Presumably, the argumentative mode of narrative which these ancient and medieval authorities distinguished has not been the source of much interest with respect to the *Commedia* because it would seem to be sort of a dud by comparison, and the worst of both worlds: why try to justify merely the possibility of the literal sense? Either go all the way—call it an absolutely true literal narrative and damn the torpedoes of modern skepticism (not to mention geography, astronomy, and so

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forth)—or else let it all be wafted up on a cloud of allegory where no objection can possibly be fatal because every literal claim will melt away as needed. *Argumentum* is the more difficult road, and yet it is the key category if the *Commedia* is to be understood as a sub-fulfillment of Christian typology, as a text which is above all meant to be a sign pointing to Christ.

For an *argumentum* it is not necessary that the things and events described be literally true, but it is necessary that they could be literally true—and thus this narrative mode is at least an implicit claim of the plausibility of some state of affairs. In this sense, the literary category of *argumentum* (which for Cicero or Isidore simply accounted for the mixed character of a certain kind of narrative, one which would now be called—rather unhelpfully—historical fiction) can overlap in a perhaps unexpected way with the philosophical and theological role of *argumentum*.

In the context of the 13th-century debates over the status of *sacra doctrina* as a *scientia*, *argumentum* began to be used of the way in which theologians arrive at new conclusions which are based on the data of revelation or somehow supportive of them, somewhat comparable to the syllogisms or proofs of purely human sciences. This account of theology developed in later Scholasticism against previously dominant notions of sacred doctrine as either limited entirely to Scriptural exegesis or at least incomparable in mode and method to the philosophical disciplines.  

The initial importance of the term *argumentum* for Christianity was established by the Vulgate’s rendering of the definition of faith given in the Epistle to the Hebrews: “est autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non

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apparentium” (11.1). At first glance, there is a stark contrast between the secular and sacred uses of the term for a kind of proof: in the philosophical sciences (considered under an Aristotelian epistemology), the method of each discipline is to start from first premises which are not arguable but immediately seen (within a given science, and ultimately with regard to the very first principles of reasoning) and to move by way of argument to certain conclusions which were not originally seen; but for the Christian faith is itself an argument, which establishes not discursively but by supernatural gift the certainty of things not seen (and these remain unseen even while faith abides). Still, the contrast can be seen not as entirely disjunctive but as a kind of inversion or pivot: “Le mot argumentum, commun au vocabulaire de la science et à la définition paulienne de la foi, sert ainsi de pivot pour exprimer cette inversion de processus de la foi et dans la science.”

If the Apostle’s *argumentum* is in the first place faith itself as evidence, for those Scholastic theologians (preeminently Albert and Thomas) who allowed that theology is a *scientia* which moves from premises to conclusions and incorporates instrumentally the contents of *philosophica documenta*, a theological *argumentum* can also be something further: the elaboration of new propositions which are claimed to be necessary or probable consequences of the articles of faith, but expressed only implicitly in revelation; or the defense of those articles themselves, not as strict proof but as “the accountability of faith, the legitimacy in moving, when theological speculations are involved, from faith to those reasons that make faith credible.”

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132 Chenu, *La théologie comme science*, 37.

133 Giuseppe Mazzotta, “Dante and the Virtues of Exile,” *Poetics Today* 5/3 (1984): 645–667, 663. Mazzotta’s claim, however, that William of Auxerre, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas understood the twofold meaning of *argumentum* as “the contradictory and double sense the word has in philosophy and theology, they explain the contradiction as a mark of the essential heterogeneity of the two disciplines” (663) is overstated. While he depends at this point on
It will be recalled that at the conclusion of her discourse on creation and redemption in *Paradiso* vii, Beatrice tells the pilgrim, “quinci puoi argomentare ancora / vostra resurrezion” — and her choice of the verb *argomentare* was crucial in suggesting an revised interpretation of this coda which might restore its theological coherence, namely that she means not a necessary argument but an *argumentum convenientiae*.\(^{134}\) This interpretation is all the stronger — and better reveals the integration of that discourse into the varied theological modes of the *Commedia* as a whole — in the context of the Scholastic elaboration of the tasks of *sacra doctrina*.

Thomas, who made the defense *par excellence* of sacred doctrine as a *scientia*, distinguishes several ways in which the theologian can be said to employ *argumenta* in the service of the faith, which can be distilled into two basic categories: “ad defensionem fidei et inventionem veritatis in quaestionibus ex principiis fidei, oportet argumentis uti.”\(^{135}\)

The first category — arguments used for the defense of the faith — is properly

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134 This crucial insight into the ambiguity of *argomentare* was provided by O’Keeffe, “Dante’s Theory of Creation,” 62–63. He rests his case for the equation of the Italian term with the Latin *argumentum convenientiae* entirely on the coherence of the discourse which it yields; there remains the task of showing how Dante could plausibly have made that association, and as will be seen, the evidence from uses of the root of *argomentare* elsewhere in *Paradiso* is more than plausible.

philosophical, as it does not rest upon the data of revelation but upon common sensory evidence and principles of reasoning, and therefore it has the widest possible availability and use for defending the faith to those who do not accept Scripture; but its limitation is strict, in that such arguments can only remove obstacles or lay a groundwork—absent supernatural grace, they cannot move the mind a whit closer towards true faith. Granting this subsidiary role, there are two distinct ways in which philosophy can support the Christian revelation: positively but only plausibly, by demonstrating through necessary arguments that some of the basic elements of the content of revelation must be true, which are called the preambles of faith—the most famous and significant example of which is, of course, the existence of God—and thereby making the unprovable mysteries of faith more plausible by association; and negatively but with more certainty, by showing that the mysteries of faith are not altogether impossible or contrary to reason by way of demonstrating that philosophical objections to Christian doctrine (which are themselves, of course, often called argumenta in the common Scholastic format of articles or questions) do not necessarily hold—such as defending the logical coherence of the mystery of the Trinity by means of the philosophical category of relation.

The second category—arguments used in quaestiones to discover truth from the principles of faith—is properly theological (and is thus of use primarily to believers) as it begins with the data of revelation and draws further conclusions from them, which may nonetheless involve comparison with philosophical reflections on nature. Of these argumenta there are likewise two distinct kinds: a theologian may argue that certain propositions which have not been explicitly revealed as such are strictly necessary to assert on the basis of what has been revealed; Thomas’s
preferred example of this is a case of Scripture interpreting itself (and thus the proposition is indeed revealed, but just insofar as it is the consequence of a doctrine essential to revelation), wherein the Apostle asserts, “nam si mortui non resurgunt neque Christus resurrexit” (1 Cor. 15.16)—which Thomas recasts as a positive argument from a principle of faith: “si Christus resurrexit, ergo et mortui resurgent.”\textsuperscript{136}

Beyond this, however, a theologian may also argue \textit{ad inventionem veritatis ex principiis fidei} in a way which is merely probable or associative (and hence Thomas warns that it is best suited to the encouragement and growth of the faithful, not to dispute with unbelievers, who might think that faith actually stands on such grounds).\textsuperscript{137} This mode of argument may find natural similitudes of things divine (such as the many correspondences of the Trinity in nature which the saints have discovered and employed for instruction); or it may show the appropriateness of revealed doctrines, whether among themselves (such as the appropriateness, but not necessity, of the Son becoming incarnate rather than the Father or the Spirit) or with respect to nature—that is, the way in which the commonly-observed state of the world and especially man supports the truth of faith because it cries out the need for just what faith says has been given (such as the appropriateness of the Incarnation itself).

There is, furthermore, Scriptural support for this last usage of the term, which mitigates against total equivocation in comparison to Paul’s usage. In Acts it is said that Christ proved his Resurrection to the disciples “in multis argumentis”\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{In Sent.}, 1.Prol.1.5.ad 4, 19.

\textsuperscript{137}See \textit{Summa contra Gentiles}, 1.9, 22: “Sunt tamen ad huiusmodi veritatem manifestandum rationes aliquae versimiles inducendae, ad fidelium quidem exercitium et solatium, non autem ad adversarios convincendos: quia ipsa rationum insufficiencia eos magis in suo errore confirmaret, dum aestimarent nos propter tam debiles rationes veritati fidei consentire.”
(11.1), and Thomas must answer the objection that proof would seem to destroy faith:

Argumentum dupliciter dicitur. Quandoque dicitur argumentum quaecumque ratio rei dubiae faciens fidem. Quandoque autem dicitur argumentum aliquod sensibile signum quod inducit ad aliquid veritatis manifestationem: sicut etiam Aristoteles aliquando in libris suis utitur nomine argumenti.\textsuperscript{338}

This is important as a basic and philosophically-relevant distinction of the term, not limited to a theological context but most useful in it. Only in the second sense was the Resurrection proven to the disciples: “Christus dicitur suam resurrectionem argumentis declarasse, inquantum per quaedam evidentissima signa se vere resurrexisse ostendit;” this was not strictly necessary, but done “ut per huiusmodi signa eis ostensa efficacius eorum testimonium redderetur.”\textsuperscript{339} Arguments are for such as Thomas the Apostle, who doubted the testimony of his fellows until he himself saw Christ’s resurrected body: the more perfect souls may need no signs beyond the authority of revelation, but nevertheless for those who do need them the merit of faith is not removed, since the sign does not prove demonstratively. Even for that infamous doubter, there was indeed faith, not merely proof: “aliud vidit, et aliud credidit: vidit vulnera, et credidit Deum.”\textsuperscript{340}

Dante shows himself to be well aware of the varied significance of argumentum in his use of the equivalent argomento—the various kinds of evidence (as the term is often translated) to human knowledge—especially during the pilgrim’s examination on the theological virtues in cantos xxiv through xxvi of Paradiso. His account of faith begins with a verbatim translation of the double definition

\textsuperscript{338} Summa theologiae, III. 55.5 co., 520.

\textsuperscript{339} Summa theologiae, III. 55.5 co., 520.

\textsuperscript{340} Summa theologiae, III. 55.5 co., 520.
from the Epistle to the Hebrews, with argomento as the genus of the second part:

fede è sostanza di cose sperate
e argomento de le non parventi;
e questa pare a me sua quiditate (XXIV.64–66).

Faith itself is the irreducible and only certain argument for “le non parventi” available to the living, “sanz’ avere altra vista” (77), beyond all human argumentation. And thus the pilgrim further explains that the Holy Spirit’s gift of the Old and New Testaments is the onde of what he himself believes, in comparison to which all rational demonstrations are as nothing:141

La larga ploia
de lo Spirito Santo, ch’è diffusa
in su le vecchie e ’n su le nuove cuoia,
è silogismo che la m’ha chiusa acutamente sì, che ’nverso d’ella
ogni dimostrazion mi pare ottusa (XXIV.91–96).

Nonetheless, argomento can also mean precisely such rational demonstration, and this kind of argument is by no means entirely ottusa in this celestial context: two cantos later, the pilgrim explains the twofold means by which he has been directed in love for the divine goodness:

Per filosofici argomenti
e per autorità che quinci scende
cotale amor convien che in me si ’mprenti (XXVI.25–27).

141The believer can, at least, give proof for his faith in the sense of plausible reasons for his assent to Christian revelation, such as confirming miracles; the pilgrim adapts an Augustinian argument in this regard: “La prova che ’l ver mi dischiude, / son l’opere seguite, a che natura / non scalda ferro mai né batte incude... Se ’l mondo si rivolse al cristianesmo... sanza miracoli, quest’ uno / è tal, che li altri non sono il centesmo” (XXIV.100–2, 106–8). And see Thomas Aquinas, Summa contra Gentiles, 1.9, 22: “Singularis vero modus convincendi adversarium contra huiusmodi veritatem est ex auctoritate Scripturae divinitus confirmata miraculis: quae enim supra rationem humanam sunt, non credimus nisi Deo revelante.”
Here, a kind of *argomento* is distinguished from authority of Scripture (for which faith provides the non-discursive *argomento*): the philosophical sciences provide discursive arguments which stand as evidence of conclusions by founding them legitimately on true premises, and the pilgrim concludes his *précis* of such arguments for the ultimate direction of all love to God by reference to “il vero in che si fonda questa prova” (36).

Thus not only does *argomento* comprise the two very different kinds of evidence which were touchstones for the debate over theology as a science, but also—and in agreement with Thomas’s view—both kinds can potentially apply to the same conclusion: that is, at least some of the revelation for which faith gives most certain evidence can also proved by human reasoning. Hence, to take the best-known example, Thomas claimed that man could know with rational certainty that God exists, insofar as a first mover (or necessary being, etc.) must exist on the basis of commonly-available sense evidence; that such a conclusion is possible absent faith is not merely a supposition made by the believer, but is evidenced by the fact that a pagan—Aristotle—made these very arguments, and their validity remains.

The pilgrim of the *Commedia* makes this same claim quite directly. In the verses of Canto xxvi cited above, during the examination on *caritas*, *argomenti* (explicitly so-called) are adduced as proof that all loves ought to be directed to God as the true good; back in Canto xxiv, the same kind of arguments (there called *prove*) are brought to bear on the content of faith. Dante clearly agrees with Thomas that God’s existence can be proved philosophically—especially through the Aristotelian arguments in the *Physics* and *Metaphysics* aimed at demonstrating a first and unmoved mover—and in fact may take the claim even further than
Thomas was willing:

Io credo in uno Dio  
sole ed eterno, che tutto 'l ciel move,  
non moto, con amore e con disio;  
e a tal creder non ho io pur prove  
finisce e metafisice (XXIV.130–34).

This belief is also confirmed through Scripture—"per Moïsè, per profeti e per salmi,  
/ per l'Evangelio" (136–37)—but it is notable that even after he has said that  
every demonstration is ottusa in comparison to this gift, the pilgrim introduces  
just such reasoning at the outset of his profession of faith to St. Peter; such  
rational arguments must retain a worthy role for the believer. Indeed, he goes so  
far as to say that physics and metaphysics supply proof for his belief—indicating  
either that belief and certain rational knowledge can coexist simultaneously in  
the same mind concerning the same proposition (which Thomas and many other  
theologians would deny), or that these latter prove are ancillary to faith in such a  
way as to leave the core of belief intact while supplementing it with philosophical  
conclusions.142

142 It is difficult to resolve the manner of this supplementation in full, but similarly difficult  
to see how Dante would understand the rational proof of a belief, strictly speaking. Obviously,  
the pilgrim’s profession here is opposed to Pascal’s claim that the God of Abraham, Isaac,  
and Jacob is not the god of the philosophers; but neither does he seem to distinguish here  
between demonstrable truths which are presupposed by faith, and the indemonstrable articles  
of faith themselves, apparently referring his twofold prove to the very same truth as held by  
the same mind—and if so, this would eliminate the conditions under which Thomas allows  
that demonstration and faith can concern the same truths. Summa theologiae, 1.2.2 ad 1, 30:  
"Deum esse, et alia huicmodi quae per rationem naturalem nota possunt esse de Deo... non sunt  
articuli fidei, sed praebantula ad articulos, sic enim fides praesupponit cognitionem naturalem,  
sicut gratia naturam, et ut perfectio perfectible. Nihil tamen prohibit illud quod secundum  
se demonstrabile est et scibile, ab alio accipi ut credibile, qui demonstrationem non capite."
Perhaps the complexity of the first tercet of the pilgrim’s credo allows for a coherent integration  
of demonstration and belief: he does not say simply that he believes in one God, but in one sole  
and eternal God, who moves with love and desire and is unmoved, and for this belief he has  
proofs and is given truth by Scripture. Thus one might gloss the compound assertion as follows:  
above all, belief in God comes from faith in revelation; that there is an unmoved mover belongs
Whatever may be the resolution of that question, it is clear that Dante sees two kinds of *argomento* converging in matters of faith, so that the believer can profitably construct new arguments regarding that which revelation has vouchsafed. It is convenient to observe this as preliminary to the most crucial moment for an understanding of the theological significance of the term *argomento* for Dante, which comes shortly after his initial recitation of the Pauline definition of faith, when St. Peter asks him to explain just how it is that faith can be classed among *argomenti*:

> E da questa credenza ci conviene silogizzar, sanz’ avere altra vista: però intenza d’argomento tene (XXIV.76–78).

For this explanation to have anything to add to the translation of Hebrews 11.1, *argomento* must have a meaning which somehow bridges the two poles of faith and rational demonstration indicated above: *credenza* is properly called an argument not simply because it is a kind of evidence, but because it is that from which man makes syllogisms regarding things unseen, as from first premises. It is the argument (in the non-discursive, Pauline sense) from which it is fitting or needful (*convene*) that one make arguments (in the discursive, Aristotelian sense); the lower and more properly human sense of the term controls its meaning as it is applied to a higher kind of evidence, else there would be no reason to introduce *silogizzare* in justification of the Apostle’s adaptation or analogous use of the term.

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not to the language of Scripture but is a proof of physics and metaphysics; that this unmoved mover “omnes intelligent Deum” (1.2.3, 30) is the incorporation of a limited demonstration into a much fuller belief, not the *prova* of *credenza* itself but the furnishing of the believer with additional true propositions—which are known, not believed—about the God in whom he believes. All the same, the physical and metaphysical proofs referred to would seem to be proofs of God’s existence, not merely of his properties or relation to the world after his existence has been granted by faith; it is unclear whether the pilgrim would say that the particular proposition “one God exists” is for him proved by faith, rational demonstration, or both.

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as an evidence without syllogism, nor to say that belief is a *de quo* ("da questa") of argument as well as a means *ad quod*. This extension of faith (faith seeking syllogism, one might paraphrase) is needful because man cannot see further in this life ("sanz’ avere altra vista")—a fact that the pilgrim can now reflect on at a certain distance as he see such truths with his own eyes:

Le profonde cose
che mi largiscon qui la lor parvenza,
a li occhi di là giù son sì ascose (70–72).

All the same, it is apparently a proper consequence of faith for him to seek to see more on its basis, to combine the two kinds of *argomento* which he has been granted by grace and by nature.

Thus beyond the *praeambula fidei* for which both faith and reason have proof—but through entirely separate paths, converging only at the conclusion—the claim that "da questa credenze ci conviene / silogizzar" indicates a third kind of argument, corresponding to the *argumentum convenientiae* of the theologians: argument which tries to give some account not only of the preambles but of the mysteries—a differently-limited kind of account—by seeking to understand more, to answer new questions, to show how what is believed is fitting to what is known. Indeed the pilgrim says that the condition under which such arguments are made is fittingness—"ci conviene" (76)—just as with regard to charity the pilgrim said "cotale amor convien che..." (XXv1.27). Such uses of *convien* and similar forms in the *Commedia* are often read (or translated) as if simply equivalent to *è necessa* or suchlike;\(^{143}\) but this should not obscure the fact that there are two distinct kinds of necessity, absolute and relative, and that Dante’s use of the various forms

\(^{143}\) Cf., e.g., Chiavacci Leonardi, ed., *Commedia*, 3.718, n. 25-7: "convien ha qui, come spesso, il senso preciso di necessità."
of the root of *convien* can certainly correspond to the latter—i.e., the necessary consequence of a certain contingent presumption (perhaps left implicit), or the means which must necessarily be taken if a certain end is to be accomplished well—and this is the sense of *necessitas* often equivalent to *convenientia* for the theologians. In the signal use of *convienisi* in *Paradiso* iv—“Così parlar convienis al vostro ingegno” (40)—it can scarcely be doubted that God is not constrained by absolute necessity to speak to man through sense images; other usages of the verb in human context may carry a greater sense of constrictive upon the agent, but in many other cases this also depends upon the presumption of some goal freely desired or rule freely followed, indicating conditional necessity.\textsuperscript{144}

In the above justification of *credenza* as *argomento*, *convene* has just this sense: if those having faith wish to give an account of *le profonde cose* to the fullest extent of which they are capable, then it is (conditionally) necessary that they argue from the basis of that faith, because no other sight is yet theirs. And earlier in *Paradiso*, there is in passing a use of *argomento* which is from faith rather than equivalent to it, an argument in favor of faith:

> Parere ingiusta la nostra giustizia  
> ne li occhi d’i mortali, è argomento  
> di fede e non d’eretica nequizia (iv.67–69).

This kind of argument is clearly of a subsidiary sort: it does not prove the object of faith (which would abolish faith) nor does it quite provide a grounding for faith *ab initio* (prior to belief, Beatrice’s claim would seem mere contradiction), but for one who already has faith it is a kind of extension and support. To find that divine

\textsuperscript{144}Among very many possible examples, as a particularly careful balancing of the relative degrees of constraint see the Emperor Trajan’s response to the widow in a Purgatorial exemplum: “Or ti conforta; ch’ei convene / ch’i’ solva il mio dovere anzi ch’i’ mova: / giustizia vuole e pietà mi ritene” (x.91–93).
justice appears to mortal eyes unjust confirms that man in this life must adhere to it by faith, and given how evidently mortal man has failed to establishing justice in the world there is a certain probable indication that real justice should appear very different from what he knows. This is certainly not a necessary argument, in the sense that one could hardly argue on the basis of what appears just to a mortal mind that divine and true justice is the opposite; but it is an observation of probable evidence under certain presumptions, i.e., of convenientia.

It is therefore fair to say that Dante’s understanding of the meaning of argomento in relation to faith includes the precise sense of the theological mode of argumentum convenientiae, which has been suggested as the meaning of argomentare in Paradiso vii. Moreover, once this mode has been delineated it should be evident that in fact the whole of that canto is an example of the archetypal argument of fittingness, the very question with which Augustine and Anselm and Thomas (among many others) wrestled: how did the Incarnation and Passion of Christ befit both God and man? To what extent was it necessary, and necessarily done in just such a way?

This problem has many aspects—e.g., speculation on whether God would have become incarnate even if man had not sinned was of particular interest for medieval theologians—but Beatrice takes up one which is perhaps the most universally-questioned and most challenging to the believer: how could it befit the God of perfect justice that an innocent should suffer and die? In her answer, she makes an explicit and twofold claim of convenientia. First, any restoration of mankind from the sin of Adam could not be made by man himself but had to come from God—as a matter of conditional necessity, i.e., under the non-necessary presumption granted by faith that man had fallen and that a restoration was to be made:
“Dunque a Dio convenia con le vie sue / riparar l’omo a sua intera vita” (vii.103–4). Second, that while restoration could have been made in two (general) ways—“o che Dio solo per sua cortesia / dimesso avesse, o che l’uom per sé isso / avesse sodisfatto” (91–93)—only one of these was befitting to justice: “tutti li altri modi erano scarsi / a la giustizia” (118–19). Thus by reasoning from the nature of man’s fault and the requirements of justice, one is drawn to the conclusion that the most fitting restoration would come from God and would yet be man himself making satisfaction, rather than a simple reprieve; and thus the Incarnation and Passion which have been preached are in fact the only fitting resolution, the triumph of justice and not its violation.

Hence it is not only in keeping with the theological significance of *argomento* in *Paradiso*, but also perfectly appropriate to the overall argumentative mode of Canto vii, that Beatrice’s final assertion—“quinci puoi argomentare”—should intend “da questa credenza ci convene silogizzar.” The pilgrim is asked to recall the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis—faith being the *argomento* that this is indeed “come l’umana carne fessi allora / che li primi parenti intrambo fensi” (147–48)—and with that *datum* as premise to argue for his Resurrection: an argument which does not have absolute necessity (even on that Scriptural basis, just as even with knowledge of the Fall one could not argue for the absolute necessity of the Incarnation) but which is the only resolution which befits divine perfection. As has been seen, just such an *argumentum* for the Resurrection of the Body was made by Scholastic theologians; and indeed not only on the basis of Genesis but according to the philosophically-scrutinized nature of the human composite, which reveals (according to Thomas) a natural lacuna which fittingness demands.
be filled through supernatural means.\textsuperscript{145}

But Beatrice’s use of *argumenta convenientiae* in this poetic context does more than simply recall certain established theological arguments which, considered just in themselves, would be thought to belong better to a discursive treatise or Scholastic *quaestio*. Theological *argumenta* are, in summary, concerned with demonstrating the plausibility of the faith: showing that such things are not only possible but fitting. This mode of reasoning is weak in comparison to the necessary arguments of the purely human sciences, and yet supremely worthwhile of human effort because of the incomparable height of its object;\textsuperscript{146} moreover, by its very weakness—its dependence upon verisimilitude rather than demonstrative certainty—it lies open to surpassing contribution by the *infima doctrina* of poetry. Plausibility is the proper domain of the poet;\textsuperscript{147} even if many poetic works are self-consciously fictive and make no claims to verisimilitude, still the essential skills of the art are concerned with possibility: the invention of natural similitudes, or metaphors, makes incredible or even ineffable things more plausible by their relation to things better known; and the construction of a narrative meant to engage the reader likewise comprises an implicit argument for possibility—even if professedly a *fabula*—insofar as the comprehensibility of the narrative and its capacity to delight are dependent upon similitude with natural things. That

\textsuperscript{145}See *Summa contra Gentiles*, iv.79, 248–49.

\textsuperscript{146}See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, 1.8, 21: "Humana igitur ratio ad cognoscentum fidei veritatem, quae solum videntibus divinam substantiam potest esse notissima, ita se habet quod ad eam potest aliquas verisimilitudines colligere, quae tamen non sufficiunt ad hoc quod praedicta veritas quasi demonstrativae vel per se intellecta comprehendatur. Utile tamen est ut in huiusmodi rationibus, quantumcumque debilibus, se mens humana exerceat, dummodo desit comprehendendi vel demonstrandi praesumptio quia de rebus altissimis etiam parva et debili consideratione aliquid posse inspicere incundissimum est."

\textsuperscript{147}As Aristotle distinguished it, poetry is concerned with τὰ δυνατὰ, things possible (as opposed to history’s concern with τὰ γενόµενα, things having come to be). See n.\textsuperscript{130} supra.
is, even if contextually a metaphor or a given narrative episode comes amidst a concession of the impossibility of what is described, it can only be meaningful if in itself it indicates a possibility by way of similitude. This may then be denied in judgment as impossible; but what is denied is a positive possibility suggested by the metaphor or narrative, else it would have conveyed nothing at all. If that possibility is indeed denied eventually, then the narrative is a *fabula*; if it purports (or is generally regarded) to be more than possible because it describes what actually happened, then *historia* is claimed; if there is no corroboration of actual events but also insufficient grounds for denying the possibility altogether, this is *argumentum*, in which similitude and plausibility are most at home because they are meant to remain in the final judgement of the reader—neither denied in the end nor taken up into actuality. This plausibility may be considered merely as a means for the delight which the narrative means to effect; but it also has an implicit argumentative content: such a state of affairs is possible, i.e., not contrary to nature, and finds similitude in nature as actually known. And if a narrative explicitly confirms that content by dialectical claims regarded to the possibility of certain elements of the narrative, then to some extent that very plausibility is the point of the narrative; and thus the picture painted by a literary *argumentum* is a sort of *argumentum convenientiae*.

This is why it makes a difference to justify the shade-bodies, the bare possibility of such a journey and vision as is described in the *Commedia*. The point is neither of the usual two poles of interpretation: the truth-bearing capacity of the literal sense is not in the claim that “this truly happened in the body” nor that “this indicates some truth in the spirit,” but that “the truth is embodiment.” Of course, the poem is much more complex than that, and at many instances is clearly
susceptible of the allegory of the poets—i.e., a metaphorical veil which is indeed meant as fictive and whose truth lies in no wise in itself but in that abstract *sententia* which can be learned from it. All the same, the elemental form of the narrative which is foundational for such instances is that of a living human being who sees with his own eyes the state of souls after this life; and the two discourses which seek to establish the fundamental *quomodo* of that vision, of the appearance of separated souls to the pilgrim—those of *Purgatorio* xxv and *Paradiso* iv—show that the poet seeks to argue something concerning that elemental form which goes beyond a poetically allegorical method which would have needed no prolegomena or internal explanation. Otherwise—if the poet should have understood his vision simply as a moral or spiritual insight which must be given fictive form by the poet’s invention alone in order to be comprehensible—the explanations of Statius and Beatrice would have been at cross-purposes to the transition Dante would have wanted to effect in the reader from fictive material sign to immaterial truth.

The struggle to understand the relationship between the *Commedia*’s allegory and Scriptural allegory or typology has the potential benefit of refocusing readers on a point that may have become so familiar as to be forgotten: that the vision of the *Commedia* ends with the human face of Christ. That is its *telos*. Understanding the allegory and *argumentum* of the *Commedia* thus begins where it ends: this one image, along with the physical and human face of Mary which most immediately allows for the final vision, is a kind of fail-safe past which a spiritualizing reader cannot go. Almost any other image supposedly seen in the narrative could in theory be explained away as a fiction meant to lead the reader away from itself and towards a greater, spiritual truth—but not this one. To understand this, “la nostra effige” in the vision of God, as a metaphor would be to move to a lesser
claim, not a greater; it would be to miss the significance of the Incarnation. Thus at least here, at the very last, the content of the literal narrative—if it is not to be regarded as historia—at least must resolve into argumentum, not fabula, in order to maintain its Christian meaning.

It is of no universal theological significance whether, on Easter Thursday in the year 1300, a certain Florentine man was rapt into the highest heaven and saw with his very eyes the very eyes of Mary and the incarnate face of Christ; but it is of significance whether that flesh is there to be seen.\textsuperscript{148} It is in a way all-important for the Christian hope in the Resurrection that it is possible for a man literally to see what Dante says that he saw, that real human flesh is now and forever united to the Second Person of the Godhead, that one could see—physically, though organs of flesh—how man’s nature and God’s are united, for which sight the poet has already kindled the desire:

\begin{quote}
accender ne dovria pi\`{u} il disio
di veder quella essenza in che si vede
come nostra natura e Dio s’\`{u}nio (Par. 11.40–42).
\end{quote}

The reader’s desire should be to see what is seen—“veder...si vede”—to see humanity make itself manifest, sensible, in God. For the individual believer, the possibility of such a physical vision is joined to the possibility of the Incarnation, Resurrection, and Ascension, and to make an argumentum for the first possibility is to ask for a renewed reflection on the second, for a reexamination of whether one

\textsuperscript{148} Cf. Allen Tate, “The Symbolic Imagination: The Mirrors of Dante,” in Essays of Four Decades, 424–46 (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1968), 435–36: “For in the center of the circles he sees the image of man. This is the risk, magnified almost beyond conception, of St. Catherine: the return of the supra-rational and supra-sensible to the ‘common thing.’ It is the courage to see again, even in its ultimate cause, the Incarnation...Are we to suppose that the hero actually attained to the Beatic Vision? No; for nobody who had would be so foolish as to write a poem about it, if in that spiritual perfection it could even occur to him to do so. The poem is a vast paradigm for the possibility of the Beatic Vision. No more than its possibility for the individual person, for ‘Dante’ himself, is here entertained.”
really believes that such things took place in the flesh, and the consequences of
such belief. At this point, then, the apex of the entire vision, the point is neither
the disputedly historical fact of the protagonist’s seeing a physical sight, nor a
something further which such a physical sight could mean in a non-physical sense;
the point is the very physicality of the sight described (regardless of whether the
vision itself is fact or fiction). As the encounters in Purgatorio revealed and is
once again most pithily put in De vulgari eloquentia, it is more significant and
more human for a man to be seen than to see, and so the significance of the
Commedia’s final vision is not a scandalous claim concerning what one particular
man saw (which would in fact be a trivial claim by comparison) but that one
particular man was seen, or rather that one particular man is see-able, who is
also God; which is the same claim of Christian confession in any age, and Dante’s
argumentum is simply a reminder of how scandalous that familiar claim is.

The effect of this teleological and irreducible image at the very pinnacle of
the ascent is something like a Jacob’s Ladder\textsuperscript{149} cascading down through the rest
of the poem, upending the perspective which theretofore might (understandably,
to a certain extent) have resisted a literal understanding of any element of the
external vision described in the narrative. If this one body is necessarily real—
necessary for faith—and that reality is indeed part of the content of faith, then
the other described bodies which constitute signs pointing towards that goal need
not necessarily be physical but are most fittingly so: that is, they are fitting signs
just insofar as they can be understood as actually physical substances.

Once again, the angelic appearances of Scripture are a critical test case for
understanding of how God has “condescended to speak to our ability.” The bod-

\textsuperscript{149}That is, the child’s toy in which one block, flipped at the top of a chain, flips over the whole
chain in succession, to create the illusion of a cascade.
ies said to be taken on by the immaterial intellects called Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael might certainly be interpreted metaphorically—the radiance of their vis-ages indicating their dignity, and so forth. When it is asked whether these were truly physical bodies, rather than merely visions given to the minds of the respective recipients of the divine messages (as was the position of Maimonides), the answer of Scholastic exegesis was preponderantly affirmative, for various reasons.\textsuperscript{150} One supporting argument is that the details of the appearances as described in Scripture mitigate against an intramental explanation—angels appearing to several people at once, being described relative to the physical surroundings, etc.—an \textit{ex post facto} argument, and one which cannot dispense entirely with the possibility of divinely-given vision. Again, certain Scriptural visions are explicitly noted to be dreams or raptures, and thus by comparison it would seem to be deceptive to introduce a vision of the same kind without such notice.

But there is another argument for the reality of angelic bodies—repeatedly presented by Thomas—which is not necessary, but exceeds the others in being \textit{a priori} with respect to the details of a given Scriptural episode. Each angel seen on Earth was sent to deliver a particular message to man concerning the divine plan for mankind, but these messages are not merely unrelated incidents of \textit{ad hoc} aid. From the Christian perspective, all the covenants and interventions of the Old Testament are pointing towards, building up to one particular intervention and eternal covenant, which is itself also heralded by angelic appearances—Gabriel to Mary, and the multitude of the heavenly host to the shepherds. But the content of this central message in retrospect puts into a new aspect the appearances presaging or witnessing to it:

\footnote{\textsuperscript{150}See, e.g., Bonaventure, \textit{In Sent.}, i.1.2., 213; Albertus Magnus, \textit{Summa theologiae}, i.18.75, 782; and the \textit{loci} for Thomas \textit{infra}.}
Hoc etiam quod angeli corpora assumpserunt in Veteri Testamento, fuit quoddam figurale indicium quod Verbum Dei assumpturum esset corpus humanum: omnes enim apparitiones Veteri Testamenti ad illam apparitionem ordinatae fuerunt, qua Filius Dei apparuit in carne.\footnote{Summa theologiae, 1.51.2.ad 1, 17. See also De potentia, 6.7.resp., 178: "Unde cum Filius Dei verum corpus assumpserit, et non phantasticum, ut Manchaei fabulantur, conveniens fuit ut etiam vera corpora assumendo, Angelii hominibus apparet."}

Quite beyond the content of an angelic appearance—what is said and done by the form representing the angel—the very fact of the appearance in truly bodily form takes on great significance. By the very fact that God condescended to speak to human beings through messengers who took on real bodies (though not really flesh and bone), rather than through interior revelation, is prefigured the time when he will condescend himself to take on a real body which is really flesh and bone. Only if these angelic forms—and, indeed, the rainbow after the flood, and the dove by which the Holy Spirit descended upon Christ at the Jordan—were really physical could they be the means for man better to understand—both in preparation and in retrospect—the real and unique extent of the condescension by which God has deigned to speak to man fully on the human level.\footnote{Charles Singleton made a somewhat similar observation concerning the dove: "The Irreducible Dove," 133-35. But it should be noted that he takes Thomas's argument in Summa theologiae III—namely, that the dove is not only a really visible body, the similitude of a dove, but a true animal—as if merely the nearest at hand, for which many other commentaries \textit{ad locum} from the same exegetical milieu (very broadly construed) could substitute and which is thus a "touchstone" indicating a consensus of opinion against the skeptical consensus of another age: "Thomas Aquinas shows no hesitation in formulating his answer, of course, as every reader may see for himself. The dove is a real dove. The Holy Ghost chose to appear in a real dove on this occasion. There is no question of either-or, for Thomas. Nor would there have been for Augustine or for Dante, to encompass a span of a thousand years of thought and feeling on the matter" (133). In fact, Thomas's argument of the \textit{tertia pars} is so significant—and can still support Singleton's exegetical observation, historical generalizations and applications to Dante aside—precisely because it was not part of a consensus, and indeed this question is one of the Angelic Doctor's more patent moments of hesitation: that the dove was \textit{verum animal} is not the position of Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Richard of Middleton, or indeed most Scholastic exegetes; it is not even the position of Thomas's earlier work, such as his Sentences commentary: In Sent., 1.61.3.ad 3, 377-78: "columba illa non fuit verum et naturale animal, sed tantum similitudo columbae." Thomas is consistent, as are the other theologians mentioned above, in}
It will no doubt be evident that if this discussion has relevance for the Commedia, then Beatrice’s first discourse in Paradiso iv on the seriatim appearance of blessed souls may have a significance which has not generally been recognized in criticism. Indeed, according to most accounts and taken at face value, what Beatrice has to say of divine condescension seems shockingly insufficient, when viewed from the end of the poem; or else it has deliberately a double meaning.

The point will be clearer if one first considers what might be called the liturgical setting of this episode as determined by the careful temporal references throughout the Commedia which establish when the pilgrim’s journey takes place, and do so according to the liturgical calendar. According to the most widely agreed-upon interpretation, the journey comprises one octave: the pilgrim finds himself lost in a dark wood on the night following Maundy Thursday of the year 1300 (and even if the year is claimed to be different by a minority interpretation, still the moment of the liturgical year is beyond doubt), journeys through Hell on Good Friday, and climbs up the far hemisphere of the Earth on Holy Saturday so as to arrive on the shore of Purgatory on Easter morning (and the significance of this setting for one who must learn to die to sin by the journey and to live again in Christ is quite evident); the ascent of the mountain, whereon the passage of time has increased maintaining that a similitude of a dove was indeed externally visible, and not merely an internal “visio imaginaria”; but only in the tertia pars and in his commentary on the Gospel of John does he claim that it was not merely the shape or shade of an animal body (as are those assumed by angels) but was in truth a living dove. That this shift is late and peculiar to Thomas helps to indicate that (pace Singleton) it was not at all regarded as a necessary or obvious point for maintaining an orthodox and faithful reading of the text; that Thomas eventually did change his position shows how the convenientia of real bodies in divine manifestations—more properly, missiones— grew in importance for him, the more so the closer the missio to the Trinity: the bodies assumed by angels ought to be real qua physical (not mental images), to be a fitting precursor of the Incarnation; at first, no more than this was claimed for the Holy Spirit’s missio at the Jordan; but then Thomas argues that it was fitting for the dove to be real, “quia spiritus sanctus dicitur spiritus veritatis”—it is not superfluous for the dove to be a real animal as opposed to a shade which would appear just the same, “quia per ipsam veritatem columbae significatur veritas spiritus sancti et effectum eius.” Summa theologiae, iii.39.7 resp., ad 2, 395.
significance, is the longest stage in earthly terms, taking more than half of Easter Week, so that when the pilgrim ascends with Beatrice from the Earthly Paradise to the Sphere of the Moon, it is Easter Thursday on Earth below—and there it remains, since no time passes on Earth in the course of the ascent of Paradiso.

Much work remains to be done in Dante scholarship to determine the full extent to which there is more particular correspondence between this liturgical setting and the content of the poem than the broad outline of death and resurrection. It is at least fair to assume that the Gospel readings of the solemnities in which the journey is set might have some significance for its meaning, this being the apex of the whole liturgical year—the Triduum and the feast of Easter which comprises the whole octave of days between the Pasch proper and the following Sunday, inclusive—and its readings being among the most familiar and important for the Christian. It may be that they are too familiar for their precise meaning with respect to certain passages in the Commedia—especially this discourse of Beatrice—to be easily realized.

She speaks of the appearance of angels, and the attribution of hands and feet to God:

> Per questo la Scrittura condescende a vostra facultate, e piedi e mano attribuisce a Dio e altro intende;
> e Santa Chiesa con aspetto umano Gabriël e Michel vi rappresenta,
> e l’altro che Tobia rifece sano (iv.43–48).

In the former case, the type of Old Testament passage to which she ostensibly refers is obvious: Psalm 118, for example (the psalm for all of Easter Week), sings that “The right hand of the Lord has struck with power,” which presumably does not intend to attribute an action to a particular member belonging
to the divine substance but as an image for the power itself. Likewise in the latter case, most every reader would be familiar with ecclesiastical art representing angels—which is what is literally indicated when Beatrice says that “Santa Chiesa... rappresenta.” But then, it seems odd that she puts it so, because this representation is not a metaphor or condescension belonging to the work of art. It is not that angels never take on physical form and artists must invent forms to portray them, but that, as Scripture attests, angels have truly and physically appeared to human sight, through God’s granting them aerial bodies to move; that is the condescension—God deigning to deliver his messages by physical means—and physical representations of that act are to that extent literally true.

And in the Gospel of the very day on which Beatrice speaks these words, Easter Thursday,\(^{153}\) it is written that Mary Magdalene “vidit duos angelos in albis sedentes unum ad caput et unum ad pedes ubi positum fuerat corpus Iesu” (Io. 20.12)—and here is not only an instance of a Scriptural account of angelic appearance which is prior to and normative for any ecclesiastical art, but an emphasis on the physical, external reality of the bodies taken on by angels made precisely by reference to the physical position of the body of Christ. Images representing angels which were only in Mary Magdalene’s mind could not really be where the body of Jesus had lain because that body was not only in her mind.

Two days prior, on Easter Tuesday, in the Gospel Christ says to the apostles gathered in the upper room, “‘Videte manus meas et pedes, quia ipse ego sum; palpate et videte quia spiritus carnem et ossa non habet, sicut me videtis habere.’ Et cum hoc dixisset, ostendit eis manus et pedes” (Lc. 24.39-40). And on the octave of Easter, there is the Thomas Gospel:

\(^{153}\)That is, this was the Gospel reading for Easter Thursday according to most of the history of the Catholic liturgy, prior to the rearrangement of texts in the late 20th century.

God took on hands and feet. This is no metaphor by means of which one conveys a message; it does not mean that he took on power—quite to the contrary, he emptied himself of it. He took on hands and feet, of the sort that nails can be driven through—and that fact is the message: he did, and they were, and Thomas saw the wounds.

Given the familiarity and centrality of these texts for the Christian reader—even regardless of their liturgical proximity—it is improbable that Dante was unaware of the other sense in which Scripture attributes hands and feet to God, the sense in which that very attribution is the point, when he had Beatrice speak here. *Prima facie*, she makes only the small and trivial claim for Scripture which applies to much other literature besides—namely, that it sometimes uses metaphors whose literal meaning is not true, and *altro intende*. But her particular choice of words, the above-described liturgical setting of the episode, the argumentative context of the claim, and indeed her own characterization within the poem point the reader beyond to the claim which is far greater and unique to Scripture: that it claims to speak of God’s hands and feet with literal truth.

She could easily have used another Scriptural metaphor which is always and unambiguously false in its literal sense—say, God as a rock, or Christ as a lion; but instead she points out human flesh, the same parts of the human body to which Christ calls his disciples’ attention in this very octave in order to dispel their doubt that his resurrected flesh is real.

In the context of the overall argument of the passage, she is often read as if her reference to the *Timaeus* means only that the text of the *Commedia*, too,
should be interpreted metaphorically because its author non sente come dice; but this misses the nature of the alleged error, regardless of whether it can finally be attributed to Plato. Simply because a metaphorical understanding of the ancient text might yield a true understanding does not mean that the error in question is to read a text literally. The supposed re diturus of souls to the celestial spheres is merely the consequence, Beatrice observes, of a mistaken belief concerning their origin—namely, that they are made before human bodies, and are at first united to stars of which they are the form:

[Platone] dice che l'alma a la sua stella riede, cre dendo quella quindi esser decisa quando natura per forma la diede (52-54).

What Statius taught (and is made more evident in Paradiso vii as well) is that there is no such bridge or buffer between the quasi-divine intellectual soul and the body prepared for it; the human soul is spirated by God and bypasses all of the celestial spheres, so to speak, which stand between it and the body, to be a direct link between matter and God. Consequently, the human being’s re diturus—if impediment of sin be removed—ought to be directly to the face of God from which it is breathed; and thus the beatitude of the blessed is here put in terms of the continuing reception of that breath which was their origin: “tutti...han dolce vita, / per sentir piu e men l'eterno spiro” (35-36). Plato’s error (again prescinding from personal attribution) was in this sense companionate to the error of Averroes refuted by Statius in Purgatorio xxv, and to the unattributed error Beatrice rebuts in Paradiso vii when she affirms that “vostra vita senza mezzo spira...” (142). All these sought to insert a middle term, to provide a buffer between the divine freedom, unboundedness, and relative infinitude of intellect, and the grossness of matter, the cramping straits of dimensionate being—whether by
drawing the intellect away from substantial unity with the body (as did Averroes and Plato) or by drawing the human soul away from immediate connection with God (as would any claim that human souls are made con mezzo). Against these attempts at distancing, Beatrice and Statius reaffirm the scandalous directness of the union between limus terrae and spiraculum Dei.

Most of all, even as directly she speaks only of metaphorical hands and feet—the way the poet altro intende, which is to say, allegorizes—in her own role in the Commedia, the character of Beatrice herself who speaks these words cries out their higher meaning which will be fulfilled at the end of the journey, which is the very content of the fulfillment of the way in which God alone can altro intendere. It was already evident in the Vita nuova that Dante was prepared to make the (supposedly scandalous) claim that Beatrice is a figure of Christ.\textsuperscript{154} This is the Christian allegory, the subfulfillment of Scriptural typology, which was alone under Dante’s power, and which he indeed presents by means of poetic allegory in the Commedia: that the historical person Beatrice was really a figura Christi because in actual fact and by her very particularity—through her physical appearance, and above all through her eyes—Dante was, eventually and past many obstacles, led to know Christ better. There is really nothing more scandalous in such a claim than in the claim of mediation by any saint, or indeed, by any person. In the vision of the Griffin, the pilgrim sees the hypostatic union through her eyes; in the Primum Mobile, her eyes are the mezzo of the vision of Creation, figuring the true mezzo of Creation itself; in the Empyrean, her eyes mediate to St. Bernard, whose eyes mediate to the mediatrix, whose eyes mediate to the mediator Dei et hominum.

In short, Dante’s view of his own life was that God had condescended to speak

\textsuperscript{154}Dante Alighieri, \textit{Vita nuova}, XXIV, 121–23.
to him through the hands, feet, smile, and eyes of Beatrice, the which speech can only be fully intelligible as a type of God’s own hands and feet in Christ; and it is this fact which above all speaks beyond the *prima facie* meaning of Paradiso iv.

Hence, much as it may be tempting to discard the literal images here and elsewhere for a spiritual meaning, from the retrospective of the vision of the Incarnation and Resurrection at the end of the poem, there is good cause to take this explanation in earnest—and just the same applies to Statius’s discourse in *Purgatorio* xxv—as an effort to make literally true claims of possibility and fittingness: to make an *argumentum convenientiae*. Beatrice’s reference to angelic appearance is crucial, as the model upon which both shade-bodies and the spatially-gradated appearance of the blessed can be understood as really possible; and her reference to God’s hands and feet is the crucial indication as to why they can be understood as fitting.

Both Beatrice and Statius seek to explain the appearance of shade-bodies, the latter arguing for their real possibility, the former for their real fittingness. The too-common reaction to the literal claims of these discourses follows upon a fundamental and *a priori* incredulity concerning the possibility or appropriateness of a material and visible afterlife, perhaps expressed in words somewhat like the following: “The journey described in the *Commedia* could not really, literally have taken place, even aside from any details of geography or history, in its basic presupposition of seeing the souls of the departed—because that is simply impossible. Therefore such moments in the text as apparently demand the true possibility of the literal narrative are the fiction demanding that it is not fiction, or a deliberately Gordian knot meant to point the reader beyond the traditional terms of the problem, or maybe even a hasty explanation made for appearance’s sake, but
not to be taken seriously." In short, implausibility is presumed, and then the only question is whether by rhetorical dexterity one might or ought to maintain that the literal sense is nonetheless, in some sense perhaps best left vague, true. Again, this interpretative move is understandable to a large extent; but the proposed rereading of Statius and Beatrice would suggest something like a reversal of priorities: the narrative may not be true, but is it fundamentally plausible? That is, is the basic notion of a separated soul appearing by means of an aerial body to human sight, and perhaps suffering by means of other visible bodies, a logical possibility? This is what Statius and Beatrice try to explain, and their arguments should be taken in earnest.

3.5 *Ad tertium: Cui bono?*

But is there any discernible purpose to such an extravagant arrangement? This is really the key question: what message can be conveyed by means of such bodies which could not be more simply delivered to human beings through intramental visions, or dreams, or direct inspiration of the intellect—anything but this awkward *tertium quid* of real but aerial bodies? The answer should now be evident: the message which cannot be true unless it is delivered by a real body is, “this is a body.”

The basic argument of fittingness for the possibility of corporeality given to the interim state—if it can first be argued that there is a means for this gift which is not a logical impossibility, whether regarding a body which might be moved by a separated soul so as to manifest itself physically, in a manifestation which is some sense truly of itself, or regarding another body which is made the means of punishment for the soul, so that the visibility of that body might be truly the
manifestation of that punishment, not merely a sign for it—is that such a state of affairs makes for a *convenientia* which could not be achieved otherwise, the fittingness that souls should, by making themselves visible, both be and appear to the living (if such a vision be granted to anyone) as types of the Incarnation, and of their own final assimilation to Christ which is to come in the Resurrection of the Body.

It has been suggested that, in fact, the resurrected body is the *telos* of the shade-body, without which the latter cannot properly be understood.\(^{155}\) If so, it is only as a possibly real body—not a poetic construct which is patently fictional—that an aerial shade can point towards its end. A shade is anything but a replacement for the resurrected body—this much is clearly expressed by the blessed in *Paradiso* XIV. In short, it might be said that the shade-body is the expression of a need, a figure of what is needed (even for the blessed) in order to conform fully to Christ. In *Paradiso* VII, Beatrice says to the pilgrim “puoi argomentare...vostra resurrezione”—this is not just a hypothetical possibility, because in the *Commedia* Dante in fact took up the challenge: he made an *argumentum* for the Resurrection, and did so in part in just those terms which Beatrice suggested, i.e., as the only fitting fulfillment of the way in which a human being is created (as made most evident in the Genesis account of the creation of Adam and Eve, but in fact applicable to every man), and he did so in large part through Statius’s discourse.

There is, of course, no need to affirm that separated souls do in fact appear through shades, in order to affirm fully the Resurrection of the Body, just as

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\(^{155}\) Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, “‘Le bianche stole’: il tema della resurrezione nel *Paradiso*,” in *Dante e la Bibbia*, ed. Giovanni Barblan, 249-271 (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1988), 252-53: “Ma quei corpi, fittizi, non avrebbero nessuna vera realtà, e quindi presa ed efficacia, se non ci fosse una realtà assoluta che sostiene e giustifica la loro realtà parvente ed effimerà. Tutto l’aldilà dantesca deriva la sua verità da quella realtà ultima e definitiva che lo compie: noi sappiamo infatti che un giorno quei corpi saranno *rivestiti*.”
there is no need to affirm anything about angelic appearances in order to confess
the Incarnation in itself. But these appearances are in fact of great aid for the
Christian to understand better what was promised and given in the Incarnation.
Likewise Dante’s account of the shade-bodies given to the interim state may be of
assistance in understanding just what is at stake in debates over the Resurrection,
which were ever and entirely more important for Christian theology and belief than
the minor difficulty of the *poena ignis*—especially when it is too often assumed
that souls are simply assimilated entirely to the angelic estate when loosed from
the flesh.
CONCLUSION

Ohi ombre vane, fuor che ne l’aspetto! (Purg. 11.79)

So Dante exclaims after the failed attempt to embrace Casella; and the formulation is more exact and profound than has generally been realized. The shades are vain, expect in their aspect—they do nothing but appear, and that appearance is of crucial importance. The painstaking effort of Statius to identify the peculiar character of the virtù informativa which remains in every human soul is only coherent as a means to explaining these aerial bodies if it is meant to indicate how the separated soul could move and shape such a body without being its form, and thereby justify the real possibility of the sensible manifestation of the interim state. The price of this understanding is that the shades cannot be the means of sensation, which requires a thoroughgoing reconsideration of the nature of the afterlife which the narrative has presented to this point in the Purgatorio; the reward is a reunion between theological speculation and poetic vision concerning the afterlife, which might have been thought irretrievable in the West after Aristotelian anthropology called into question the insistence of Augustine and Gregory that such things really can be seen.

If the shade-bodies of the Commedia and the suffering of the souls thus manifested can be justified as a real possibility, really sensible to one of the living—according to Dante’s own understanding of the state of the separated soul in the interim, guided by Scholastic theology but also going beyond it in a plausible
way—then the literal sense of the poem can take on the character of an *argumentum convenientiae*. Simply by making more comprehensible the possibility and purpose of corporeality (however subtle) in the interim stage of the afterlife, the *Commedia* makes a profound argument for a dogma which could never be proven necessarily but which inspires nonetheless a search for greater understanding, an argument for fittingness: not only of the *poena ignis*, but of the Resurrection of the Body, both as already effected in Christ and as the distinctive hope of Christians.

Thus the justification of shade-bodies in the *Commedia* might also shed light on the question which remained somewhat unsatisfactorily addressed in the theological arguments over the *poena ignis*: *cui bono*? Indeed, this connection should already be evident. It was never, strictly speaking, necessary for theologians to admit a corporeal fire used as the means of torment for separated souls. The interpretation of Matthew 25 which supposedly demanded it was itself based on a presumption of fittingness, and does not require corporeal fire in order to avoid some patent absurdity or unavoidable contradiction for the faith. And so one might hear an implicit criticism from the Origenist position continue to echo throughout the debate (and enjoy a present renaissance) even after his position had been rejected by the orthodox tradition: “What is the point of all this? It is simpler and indeed avoids scandal to the faith to understand the penal fire as a metaphor, and nothing essential to the faith is lost thereby.”

The response is that the rest of Origen’s own eschatology (and likewise Eriugena’s, heavily dependent upon it) shows just what danger may have been felt in the orthodox tradition, if not expressed, at the prospect of a metaphorical interpretation of the fire. It is less the significance of the literal fire itself, than that of an exegetical approach which is suspicious of the positing of true corporeality in
the afterlife because of the difficulties such a belief presents to human understanding. It is one thing to dismiss the poena ignis corporealis in isolation and after having taken its possibility seriously, another to dismiss it because earthly bodies seem to be incommensurate with or inappropriate for the life beyond—because of a fear of literalism or naïveté. In that way lie further consequences, because at that point a judgment may already be made against regarding the human person as radically incomplete without the body, longing for it in order to be made whole again, and incomplete precisely with regard to its eschatological fulfillment in conformity to Christ. Indeed, the incorporeal nature of the intellect means that it will in some ways become more acute in the separated state; but if the composite state is in fact the more complete and natural way for man to exist, then separation ought also to be a radical crippling which cries out for resolution. Dante’s shade-bodies are form of this cry, and thus they allow for a richer picture to be drawn of the fittingness of the poena ignis than could ever have been taken from the systematically theological debates.

This fittingness can be understood in three ways.

In the first place, penalty for a separated soul by means of a body is fitting for justice and the confirmation of free will—and this much the Scholastic theologians explicitly argued, above all Bonaventure and Thomas. The radical nature of man’s freedom is shown above all by the fact that in eternity he gets exactly what he wanted—he is given in full what he chose to desire in life, now seen sub specie aeternitatis. But in man’s free choice, even against God, there is never simply negation—man cannot simply hate his source or himself, as Virgil said—but the turning away from God is always a turning to some other and lower good—the will indeed only ever moves to something sub specie boni—and thus in the eternal
confirmation of that choice there is not merely the poena damni of separation from God but the poena sensus of subjugation to an inferior thing—to a body. This justice applies no less to the separated soul, and so it is fitting for this binding to a body to be applied to an immaterial substance in the only logically possible way—that is, as the place to which it is fixed per virtutem. The justice of receiving exactly what is chosen in life by sin—the lesser good of which one makes a god, its true status now revealed—is, of course, represented with great force throughout Inferno; and the principle is given explicitly in connection with the purgative torment and release of Statius.

Secondly, beyond what the Scholastics argued but in conformity with Gregory (and, to a lesser extent, Augustine), the poena ignis can be seen as fitting in concert with bodies representing the souls themselves as a prerequisite for both soul and torment to be manifested to the living. Such appearances were taken credulously by both of these Fathers as granted by divine power precisely so that the interim state might be shown to the living as a goad both to belief in the afterlife itself and to reform of mores in this world so as to avoid the torments displayed. This aspect of the auctoritates for the poena ignis was generally ignored in Scholastic commentary, partly because of the choices of the Lombard, but also (no doubt) because such visions were somewhat superfluous to the problem of the poena considered in itself, and finally (quite possibly) because the perceived pedagogical need of the time was not for a greater credulity in manifestations of the otherworld—indeed a too-facile belief that the soul in the separated state simply is embodied might have seemed the greater danger, detracting from hope in the Resurrection to come. Whatever the reason, it was not taken up from Gregory’s indications by Albert, Bonaventure, Thomas, or Siger; but Dante, in
presenting a vision of the afterlife which at first blush might seem to play to popular notions of a facile, *sui generis* corporeality in the afterlife, but which in fact—and especially in *Purgatorio*—critiques its own presentation and sets the limits for its real possibility, takes up the seemingly-simple Gregorian assertion that God grants to the souls of the departed to appear to the living for their benefit, and conjoins it to a Christian-Aristotelian notion of a separated soul as immaterial and yet a substantial form, in a remarkable way which calls for consideration of its theological plausibility.

Finally, there is a third justification for the corporeality of the penal fire, which is a correlation of the second and which was at most an unspoken motivation behind both the Patristic and Scholastic defenses: the implicit response to the Origenist approach. It is not that the Scriptural fire cannot be understood metaphorically; but that the Christian cannot afford to reject as patently absurd the possibility that it could be meant literally. There is nothing more scandalous in this understanding than in the literal understanding of “the Word was made flesh” and “look at my hands and my feet.” Moreover, in conjunction with the second reason—the possibility of manifestation of souls and punishment in the interim state—its connection with the Incarnation and Resurrection is much closer than mere reliance on another literal, physical claim as *a fortiori*; a corporeal fire or shade-body, by its very corporeality, can be a sign for what it awaits for its fulfillment in the Resurrection of the Body. It can be a message of that type which is only truthful if conveyed by a real body, because the messenger makes reference to his own physicality part of the message. Such a message therefore cannot be accepted as a something other or more purely spiritual than the messenger, but only through acceptance and maintenance of the sign itself—the sign is what it
signifies.

It has been suggested that the generic form of such a claim might be, “This is a body;” of course, the precise and historical archetype in Catholic belief of a sign self-demonstrative as to corporeality is *Hoc est enim corpus meum*. It has been beyond the scope of the present argument to consider the importance of the Eucharist for the *Commedia*, a topic which is lately receiving some attention among Dantists after long neglect. But in closing it may be noted that this is quite possibly a further reason for Dante’s association of the crucial examination of the nature of the shade-bodies with the punishment of fasting in *Purgatorio*. As the reception of the Eucharist is a foretaste of resurrected life through the incorporation of Christ’s incorruptible flesh, the fasting of the souls of the Sixth Terrace is a preparation for the reception of that true body—like the Eucharistic fast—which sharpens their hunger for complete personhood and conformity to Christ resurrected, puts into greater relief their desire to inform flesh by their simulated information of air, and confirms that their fasting is not a means for the rejection of the body but in fact a display of their fitting desire for it.
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