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YOLKING THE END TO ITS SOURCE¹:
CIRCULAR GEOMETRY AND MOTION AS AN IMAGE OF DIVINE ASCENT IN
DANTE'S *DIVINA COMMEDIA*

by

KEVIN TIMOTHY AUSTIN

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Approved by the Examining Committee:

Dr. Jeffrey S. Lehman
Dr. Anthony Nussmeier

{Abstract}

Dante's *Divina Commedia* is one of the most renowned works extant from the medieval era. His poetry is imbued with striking images which characterize the relationship between God, man, and His entire created order. Central to these images is *la via* (the way) which, for Dante, marks the path of man's return to his creator. This return is typified by a geometric image of perfection, i.e., a circle, since God is perfect unity and the rejoining of man with his source consequently follows a circular path. Dante suggests that the circle, being an image of perfection, is concomitant to the image of God Himself, and further that He imprinted this image upon man and the cosmos. Such a suggestion warrants further investigation into the circular mode of man's return to the divine in the *Commedia*, to examine the imprint of the divine image upon man through the creative act of God. This examination of Dante's *Commedia* seeks to outline the structure of Dante's cosmos as principally circular, focusing not only on the overt presence of circular structures but also on the motion of Dante the pilgrim in and through those structures. Further, it endeavors to establish this circular organization, which is formed by Wisdom, Love, and the Good, as a theological image of man's return to 'the way' and his motion toward God.

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O virtù somma, che per li empi giri
mi volvi, cominciai 'com' a te piace,
parlami, e sodisfammi a' miei disiri.²

– *Inferno*, X.4-6

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My interest in Dante truly has its source in a love of the Italian language and an abiding interest in medieval philosophy, though I believe my fascination with Dante arose much earlier in life. One of my most distinctive memories from seventh grade was reading Dante's *Inferno*. I cannot attest in good faith that I understood it at the time, and tragically it was many years afterward that I even realized that it was but a third part of a magnificent whole. Its beauty was, however, apparent and even at that young age I was drawn to it.

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– Kevin Timothy Austin
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Introduction: The Path That Was Lost

Within Dante's masterwork, *La Divina Commedia*, the organization of the various realms and the motion of Dante the pilgrim are prominent features. Some scholars seek to correlate the events of Dante's socio-political environment with the events of the poem, and there are valid arguments made in that regard. Yet, Dante's concern seems more theological, and the profundity of the poem is first and foremost revealed in the path of the pilgrim himself—a path that ultimately informs man's morality and its rightful end. In the first canto of the *Inferno*, it is worth noting that Dante's motion is halted, and the path is lost; he writes in lines 1-3:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
che la diritta via era smarrita.³

And again, in lines 10-13:

Io non so ben ridir com'io v'entrai,
tant'era pieno di sonno a quel punto
che la verace via abbandonai.⁴

His condition here at the beginning of the first canticle is unique because it stands in contrast to the rest of the work; Dante the pilgrim is in near constant motion throughout his journey, but at the outset he is stopped in his tracks.⁵ His disposition is, however, not one of idle repose, but rather one of active reflection upon the sins of man; The 'dark wood' is itself an image of man's transgressions and his way is further barred in this realm by the arrival of three beasts. "Dante's earliest commentators associated them with three of the capital sins,"⁶ G. H. McWilliams notes. The Leopard represented lust; the Lion, pride; and the She-Wolf, avarice. Further, the dark wood is not unlike that "barren land"⁷ that Augustine laments in his *Confessions*. The 'barren land' of Augustine and the 'dark wood' of Dante, as well as the three beasts that halt his progression, are representative of man in the state of sin, and the recognition of this state requires that man's

motion first be halted and that he examine himself; the She-Wolf especially elicits this response in Dante as he observes that “many people it [i.e., the She-Wolf] already made to live miserably.”⁸

Thus halted, Dante seeks a return to the ‘the way’ (*la via*) which is described in the first canto as both ‘straight,’ (*diritta*) and ‘true’ (*verace*). The ‘straight way’ is ‘lost’ as an effect of sin, and the ‘true way’ is ‘abandoned’ in the act of sin itself. Dante is explicit in this distinction, and he uses the adjective ‘lost’ (*smarrita*) and the verb phrase ‘I abandoned’ (*abbandonai*) not only to illustrate the sinful act and its effect but also to lay the groundwork for a return to that which was lost and abandoned. Man’s potential for such a return is evident, “[f]or if a thing is absent from the eye but not from memory—as any visible body may be—its image is held within us,” Augustine argues, “and is sought for until the thing itself is restored to our sight.” He states further, “when it has been found, it is recognized by the image within us.”⁹ Dante’s intention echoes this Augustinian notion, as he means to illustrate that ‘the way’ is still remembered even when it is lost through sinful acts; man begins his return to God when he recognizes God’s image within himself.

Yet the nature of this path, and by extension its end, is worthy of further scrutiny. Given the events of the *Commedia*, Dante’s description of *la via* calls to mind a verse from the book of Sirach: “For she walketh with him in temptation, and at the first she chooseth him. She will bring upon him fear and dread and trial: and she will scourge him with the affliction of her discipline, till she try him by her laws, and trust his soul. Then she will strengthen him, and make a straight way to him, and give him joy.”¹⁰ In this verse, ‘She’ is Wisdom, and Sirach intends to illustrate its qualities through this personification—namely, that even in the midst of transgression, Wisdom rouses man from his sin, accompanies and disciplines him, which in turn fortifies him along the

straight way. It may be argued that wisdom is the proper object of Dante's desire in the beginning of the *Commedia*.^{*} The reader becomes aware of Dante's longing when he first meets Virgil and lauds his station among poets.

O delli altri poeti onore e lume,
vagliami'l lungo studio e'l grande amore
che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume.¹¹

Recall that Dante was so 'full of sleep' that he had forgotten how he came to the 'dark wood,' and, as he notes, the study of Virgil's texts 'refines' him. Yet, Dante's desire is imperfect, since the wisdom that Sirach epitomizes is not acquired through mere study, but through introspection.

John D. Sinclair offers the following analysis:

The first step in Dante's salvation was his discovery that he was lost, when he came to himself in a dark wood. He recovered so far as to realize the condition of sin and ignorance into which he had fallen as if in his sleep, by lethargy and acquiescence.¹²

The introspective wisdom which Dante the pilgrim requires for his own refinement ultimately has its end in the Divine. Dante the poet alludes to such wisdom when he says, "I looked on high, and saw its shoulders already dressed in the rays of the planet that delivers others straight along every road."¹³ Here he is gazing upon *il diletto monte*, which is, "the beginning and cause of all joy."¹⁴ The mountain (*monte*) is the summit of happiness, though not a fleeting happiness, but rather a pure and unceasing bliss; it is precisely, as Aquinas called it, perfect beatitude.[†]

^{*} The symbolic dichotomy between the 'dark wood' and the light that he sees on the mountain (cf. *Inferno*, I.16-17) can be taken to represent the ignorance of sin and virtuous wisdom respectively. Dante attempts to move toward this light before his way is barred. He will later describe Virgil as a source of light (cf. *Inferno*, I.82).

[†] Accord. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame, Indiana: Christian Classics, 1981), Ia IIae, q.3, a.8. Aquinas states in the *respondeo* that "Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence," that is, the beatific vision. Dante the poet in *Inferno*, I.78-9 is foreshadowing this vision which he affirms in *Paradiso*, XXVIII.109-10 "*Qunci si può veder come si fonda l'esser beato nell'atto che vede*" (thus you can see how blessedness is founded upon the act of seeing), and which he will later describe in *Paradiso*, XXX-XXXIII.

Provided man's vision is clear, it seems only natural that the way toward this beatitude would be straight and true. Yet, with the figure of Dante the pilgrim, his vision is clouded with fear, and he is 'full of sleep.' His condition requires that wisdom awaken him from the concupiscence of fallen man. Similarly beset by the cloud of sin, Augustine prays:

Behold my life is but a scattering. Thy right hand has held me up [...] that I may apprehend by Him in whom I am apprehended and may be set free from what I once was, following your Oneness: forgetting the things that are behind and not poured out upon things to come and things transient, but stretching forth to those that are before (not by dispersal but by concentration of energy) I press toward the prize of the supernal vocation, where I may hear the voice of Thy praise and contemplate Thy delight which neither comes nor passes away.¹⁵

The mutual apprehension that Augustine outlines between him and the Divine suggests further the introspective quality of wisdom; as man examines himself he recognizes the image of God and comes to know Him in cooperation with divine grace. Man's mind is made resolute, and his memory is refined and ordered toward 'the prize of the supernal vocation.'

Augustine's desire in this passage is 'stretching forth' toward that same eternal joy that Dante saw upon the mountain, though it is worth noting that his conversion, much like Dante's, involved many departures from *la diritta via*. It would perhaps be an understatement then to say that even the most righteous of men has had his way barred by the occasional She-Wolf. To follow one's desire for wisdom, man must trail that tenuous thread between him and the Divine. To suggest, however, that this path is strictly linear would be to forget Man's source, and to fall into that same error that Lady Philosophy diagnosed of Boethius: "you no longer know what you are [...] overwhelmed by forgetfulness of your nature."¹⁶ So, as Virgil advises of Dante, it is worthwhile for man to follow a different journey,¹⁷ one in which his end and his source are imagined, remembered, and joined together; a journey that is circular in form. The examination of Dante's *Commedia* that follows seeks to outline the structure of Dante's cosmos as principally

circular, focusing not only on the overt presence of circular structures but also upon the motion of Dante the pilgrim in and through those structures. Further, it endeavors to establish this circular organization, which is formed by Wisdom, Love, and the Good, as a theological image of man's return to 'the way' and his motion toward God.

Chapter I: The Characteristics of Image and the Implications of Circular Imagery

A. What is Required of an Image?¹⁸

If the Dantean way is an image of man's return to God, and its circular form is illustrative of the operation of that return, it nonetheless is transitional and occupies a position between man and his end. Concerning the benefit of this and images of the same kind, two questions arise: Does one espouse to these images for their merit and their influence on the soul? Or does one ignore them as intermediary distractions and aspire only toward the Divine? Traditionally, these questions have led to two schools of thought: the way of affirmation, and the way of negation. The way of negation, as its name suggests, is characterized by, "the renunciation of all images," Charles Williams explains, "except the final one of God himself."¹⁹ Alternately, the way of affirmation suggests that an apprehension of God is possible through images. To be explicit, Dante, insofar as the *Commedia* is concerned, wholly takes up the mantle of the way of affirmation and portrays man's path toward God in and through the images he encounters.²⁰

Before an examination of Dante's path can be sufficiently undertaken, an analysis of image is essential to its understanding. Dante the poet, seeking to outline man's moral return to God, means to demonstrate a theological truth through the image of the way since, as Aristotle observes, "without a presentation intellectual activity is impossible."²¹ The word here translated as 'presentation' is φάντασματος (*phantasmatos*) which is tied up in the idea of recollection or imagination. Aristotle notes:

Imagination is different from either perceiving or discursive thinking, though it is not found without sensation, or judgment without it. That this activity is not the same kind of thinking as judgment is obvious. For imagining lies within our own power whenever we wish (i.e., we call up a picture, as in the practice of mnemonics by the use of mental images).²²

The phantasm, for Aristotle, is that which arises in the mind through imagination. It is the mental object, which is a product of the senses, and from which we further formulate opinions, conduct scientific inquiries, and ultimately form intellectual conclusions.²³

In a similar fashion, Plato describes the process of human understanding as it consists in things visible and intelligible. These distinctions comprise the main division upon “The Divided Line” (509d – 511e). The visible is further separated into ‘image’ and ‘trust,’ and the intelligible into ‘thought’ and ‘intellection.’ Image (εἰκών) occupies the lowest segment of the line, and it is the inception point and that which is furthest from the intellect. From image the line ascends to the things “of which this first is the likeness—the animals around us, and everything that grows, and the whole class of artifacts.”²⁴ The implication here is curious, as Plato inverts the logical order suggesting that image comes before (at least in the process of understanding) the phenomenon after which the image is fashioned. It should be understood, however, that the first segment of the line concerns images that are mere reflections or distortions of their objects. In the second segment of the line, “the opinable is distinguished from the knowable.”²⁵ The distinction between them is clarified through trust (πίστις) in the sensitive faculties which contributes to the verity of that which is observed.

Even so, a simple confidence in the accurate perception of reality is scant more than what Plato describes as the perception of shadows.²⁶ What is further required—and what marks the ascent of the mind toward reason—is contemplation and discernment. The act of contemplation (or “thought” [διάνοια]) sees image reestablished as a viable mode of understanding. For Plato these are images which have been abstracted from those observable phenomena that one has come to trust as real. In this third segment, the soul “is compelled to investigate on the basis of hypothesis and makes its way not to a beginning but to an end,”²⁷ that is, through contemplation,

the soul subjects the thing observed to the rigors of scrutiny in order to draw a conclusion. Yet, the final segment of the line is “that which argument itself grasps with the power of dialectic.”²⁸ This is the apex of reason (νοῦς) which uses not images, but the hypotheses formed in thought, to elevate the mind to an understanding of the Form.

Undergirding the entire analogy are the philosophical notions of Being and Becoming. For both Plato and Aristotle, Being is unqualified existence while Becoming connotes existence which is characterized by some quality.* Plato outlines the distinction between these realms in the following passage from the *Republic*:

This power [that is the power to ascertain] is in the soul of each, and that the instrument with which he learns — just as an eye is not able to turn toward the light from the dark without the whole body — must be turned around from that which *is coming into being* together with the whole soul until it is able to endure looking at that which *is* and the brightest part of which *is*. We affirm that this is the good, don't we?²⁹

Being—‘that which *is*’—is properly the highest Good, and Plato describes in this passage the turning of the soul from εἰκόων toward that Good. Here again, one may recall *il diletto monte* from *Inferno*, Canto I,³⁰ toward which Dante turns, and which relates precisely to Being—that eternal Good which exists without qualification. The image of the mountain for Dante is suggestive of that Good and its placement at the beginning of his poem serves as an indicator of man’s end. In the beginning of Dante’s path it is, however, a veiled image ‘robed in light,’ which of itself is insufficient in recalling Dante the pilgrim to its peak. In a certain sense, it is an image that is ‘coming into being.’

* Cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, 188a31-35, and *Metaphysics*, 1079b24-34, and *On Generation and Corruption* 335a25 – 336a14. Plato and Aristotle differ slightly in their treatment of Being in that for Plato, Being is the Form of a thing which is an iteration of its highest nature and in which all things of that kind participate to a degree. Aristotle, in his *Physics*, suggests that the Form is one of four causes which occupies a less eponymous position in relation to its object, but that cooperates with the other causes to generate or corrupt it.

In opposition to Being, is not-Being and the dichotomy of the two gives rise to the tenuous thread which connects them, that is, Becoming. This intermediary path is by its nature transient, and for Plato, it is a realm that does not ensure man's end in Being, but rather holds man in a state of potential in which he is liable to go in either direction.* This 'potency' is perhaps distinct from the Aristotelian notion thereof; however, for Plato, man's potential is tied to the degree to which he participates in divinity. Further, the degree of his participation is mutable. In the *Timaeus* he suggests as much, stating, "He who has lived well throughout his appropriate time would [...] live a life that was happy and habitual to him. But he who had failed to live well would [...] always take on some such bestial nature in the similitude of that mode of life that was born in him."³¹ And yet, it is not only man that has this capacity for change, but also any body which is coming into being, namely, any particular.³² Plato distinguishes the particular from Form saying, "these [particulars] you could touch and see and perceive with the senses, but those that always remain the same [i.e. the Form] can be grasped only by the reasoning power of the mind."³³ Particulars are related to their Forms through a participation in their perfection, though this participation is imperfect. The particular is an image of its respective Form, which in turn is the immaterial essence which imparts that essence to the image, in that the particular reflects aspects of the Form's perfection of Being.

If the particular is an image, and one that through the sensitive faculty can lead to trust (that second segment of Plato's Divided Line), the overt mention of image on the segments above (*διάνοια*) and below (*εικόν*)—the lesser in shadows and the greater in thoughts—evidences

* Book X of the *Republic* [614c] offers the correlating *mythos* to this notion, indicating the two paths – up or down – available to those souls who have reached the afterlife. While the events of this book describe the soul's fate *postmortem* the implication is clear that the path that they follow has already been decided based on the merits of their mortal life viz., their action while in the realm of Becoming.

the transience of the particular and further signifies the effect of images on the soul; “these things themselves that they mold or draw,” says Plato, “of which there are shadows and images in water, they now use as images, seeking to see those things themselves, that one can see in no other way than with thought.”³⁴ While one can indeed draw the mind from the particular toward its Form by way of contemplation, one can just as easily allow the imitations of the particular to moor the mind in darkness.

One must be precise, then, in using image as a means of communication, as Dante does in his *Commedia*,* since it matters whether that image is a shadow of a particular or a likeness of it that leads toward the Form. Charles Williams observes that Dante’s choices of images are recalled in his mind as representations of external phenomena, and that they point toward something further on. In this sense the image employed becomes a symbol. Citing Coleridge, Williams writes, “a symbol must have three characteristics (i) it must exist in itself, (ii) it must derive from something greater than itself, (iii) it must represent in itself that greatness from which it derives.”³⁵ Stratford Caldecott supports this idea further stating, “the symbol is a way of passing from the visible to the invisible. Symbols are bridges, making something present to us that would otherwise be absent.”³⁶ Image (as symbol) is then more than mere allegory, it carries with it an aspect of that which informs it and makes it tangible where it ordinarily is intangible. As Caldecott describes, a symbol is “the marriage of the particular and the universal [Form] in

* See *Inferno*, II.7-8. “*O Muse, o alto ingegno, or m’aiutate;/ o mente che scrivesti ciò ch’io vidi,/ qui si parrà la tua nobilitate.*” (O Muse, o highest genius, help me now; o mind that would inscribe that which I saw, here your nobility will be set down.) Dante’s invocation of his *mente*, ‘mind’—or in another sense, his ‘memory’—demonstrates a mode of recollection. He is detailing his intention in this moment: precisely, that he aims to use the images, enshrined in his memory, to recount “*la guerra sì del cammino e sì della pietate*” (the struggle of both the way and of pity) (Ibid., 5). From this, it can be understood that he means to instruct his reader in some fashion through the use of images.

the eye of the heart.”³⁷ The implication that this carries for Dante the poet is that ‘the way’ which he presents through the recollection of images is imbued with the qualities of symbolic representation; Dante’s images are meant to point toward the highest Good.

Dante’s images are, however, rooted in particular objects, which are by nature not the Good even if they are symbolic of the way toward the Good. The particular, while related to its Form by the conduit of image, participates in the perfection of Form but is itself imperfect, and thereby is ‘coming into being.’ The particular is, however, a material entity of which other images can be made. “Whatever exists on account of another must be worth less than that on account of which it exists,”³⁸ observes Augustine. Accordingly, it should be understood that the particular, and knowledge thereof, is more valuable than the image which is its likeness. Dante echoes this notion in *Inferno*, Canto IX:

O voi ch’avete li’ntelletti sani,
Mirate la dottrina che s’asconde
Sotto’l velame de li versi strani.³⁹

Here he implores his readers to inquire further, toward the true meaning, ‘concealed beneath the veil’ of his poetry. Dante ascribes to an Augustinian prescription of vision and signification, i.e., things sensed and thought of, can only be communicated by way of signs and images. Modern scholarship has noted the correlation between Dante’s *Commedia* and Augustine’s *Confessions* to a convincing degree. “What critics have gradually come to recognize,” Peter S. Hawkins argues, “is that the Augustine who is all but excluded from the narrative surface of the poem [i.e., the *Commedia*] functions as an extensive, even an informing presence within the text itself.”⁴⁰ This informing presence culminates in the Augustinian idea of image—it being of lesser worth than that which it signifies—which is played out on the slopes of Dante’s *Purgatorio*. “What one finds in these cantos [i.e., *Purgatorio* X-XII] are pilgrims preparing themselves for

life in the city of God, for partnership in goodness, by learning to reject the values Augustine associates with the earthly city.”⁴¹ Therefore it is not unfounded to say that Dante intends to signify something greater and more momentous than the images he conjures in his poetry. Yet he implores his readers of ‘healthy intellect’ to uncover the teaching hidden beneath his words,* namely, that man’s morality and path toward God is of greater significance than ‘the way’ described in the *Commedia*. ‘The way’ is a symbol of something undoubtedly greater, but that nonetheless leads toward that which informs it and toward the highest Good that further informs both in turn. In the platonic sense then, the particular is taken up into Form *qua* symbol; Becoming has its end in Being.

* In this sense, Dante applies the Augustinian understanding of words as signs (images). Cf. Augustine of Hippo, “The Teacher.” Augustine gives the example of the word ‘filth’ in response to the objections of his son. He outlines the relationship as follows: “The knowledge of filth, for the sake of which the name [‘filth’] was instituted, should be held more valuable than the name itself—and we found that this is in turn to be preferred to filth. This knowledge is preferable to the sign we are speaking about ([‘namely filth’]) precisely because the latter demonstrably exists on account of the former, and not the other way around.” (9.26.37-42)

B. The Significance of Circular Imagery

The images with which Dante constructs his *Commedia* are abundant and various; an exhaustive interpretation thereof is well outside the scope of the present inquiry. Regardless, having established a working understanding of image, and the way Dante aims to use image, the image of the path which Dante the Pilgrim follows must further be defined. One must contemplate, moreover, its implications on the level of man's motion toward his *telos*, his coming into being. As has been stated in the introduction, man's end is perfect beatitude, and the ideal means toward that end is a straight path. Human transgression, however, impedes this 'way,' and man is invariably led astray, since man in his concupiscence is incapable of a perfect ascent to God, except by way of divine grace. A stark reminder of this comes as Dante cries out in his first exchange with Virgil, "*Vedi la bestia per cu'io mi volsi.*"⁴² The beast—the She-Wolf and the cause of Dante's "return to such misery"⁴³—is undoubtedly an acknowledgement of Dante's own sins,⁴⁴ and it is because of the beast that he is kept from a straightforward ascent of the mountain. One is reminded that he has turned himself away. Further examination of Dante's use of the verb *volgere* in this line reveals a dual meaning. It both suggests a 'turning' motion in the literal sense, and figuratively: 'to become'—albeit a less common use of the verb. Nonetheless, the philosophical idea of 'Becoming' resurfaces here and one is reminded that Dante the pilgrim is a man who has been barred from a direct ascent to God by the sins of man; the degree to which he participates in divinity has been affected. The convergence of these two connotations (i.e., 'turning' and 'becoming') within this singular verb is perhaps no accident, as Dante is intentional in his craft. If waylaid from the straight and narrow, within a single word Dante seems to point to the curvilinear as an alternate means of progress—the efficacy of which remains to be seen.

When considering the roots of geometric thought, it is, likewise, no accident that Euclid arrives first at the figure of a circle, which appears in his *Elements* as a definition⁴⁵ – an *a priori* requirement of the propositions to follow. For this reason, the circle is not the object of a proof but rather a first principle; it is an organizing species of known reality that orders the whole of the geometer’s art. For the Greeks, the circle represented geometric perfection, and the convergence of point, line, and surface. Livio Pestilli notes that, “thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle found the circle and circular motion perfect and the straight line and linear movement imperfect, for, if a straight line were infinite, it would lack a beginning and an end; if finite, there would be something outside itself, and the line could be extended.”⁴⁶ Plato expounds upon the perfection of circles and circular motion in the *Timaeus*; in describing the creation of the cosmos he says the following:

[The Demiurge] gave it [i.e. the cosmos] a figure that was fitting and akin to it... one that has embraced all figures within itself, however many there are; so for this reason too he worked it in circular fashion, sculpting it into the form of a sphere, the figure that keeps itself in all directions equidistant from its center to its extremities and which, of all figures, is most perfect and most similar to itself, since he considered that similar is vastly more beautiful than dissimilar.⁴⁷

The perfection of the circle (or sphere) is contingent upon its inherent self-similarity, and its equal distance from its center to each point on its circumference; moreover, its quality of similarity recalls the participation of the particular in the perfection of its Form. Accordingly, any two circles are similar—and further a circle is similar to itself—as a function of the value π in relation to its diameter. Stratford Caldecott notes that “ π goes on to infinity when expressed in integers, whether we write it as a fraction or a decimal,” and further that “we can see in the infinity of π an expression of the limitlessness of God’s act of creation.”⁴⁸ This expression is inherent in the relationship between the circumference and the diameter, which are representative of, respectively, the eternity of God and His limited creation. Further, it is because of this

relationship that Sean Chorney observes that “to construct a circle, then, is to appeal to the existence of an eternal entity before construction begins.”⁴⁹ Chorney further posits a distinction between the circle itself and one who draws the circle, suggesting a “transitive relation between image and object.”⁵⁰ This is again in accord with the platonic notion of participation, as well as the Augustinian idea that things occupy a place of higher importance than their images.

In addition, the motion of the cosmos exhibits this similarity. In the *Timaeus* it states: “the motion he [i.e. the Demiurge] did assign to it [i.e. the cosmos] was congenial to its body, that motion among the seven kinds which especially attends intellect and prudence. So for this reason, he spun it around uniformly in the same spot and within itself and made it move by revolving in a circle.”⁵¹ Revolution and rotation, among the seven kinds of motion, held for the ancients a certain primacy and reverence among the others. This was, in part, due to its inherent simplicity and that circular motion lacked the impediments involved in linear motion—namely, it had no endpoints. Ptolemy confirmed this simplicity stating, “the circle among plane figures offers the easiest path of motion, and the sphere among solids.”⁵² Circular motion is, further, distinct from the others since, in lacking endpoints, it contains an eternal quality. “The motion of a sphere is to turn in a circle,” Copernicus noted, and “by its very act expressing its form, in the most simple body, where beginning and end cannot be discovered or distinguished from one another, while it moves through the same parts in itself.”⁵³ From this we see the adoption and the extension of these ideas into the medieval era—as Copernicus affirms Ptolemaic thought.⁵⁴ In the midst of this established tradition, Dante then seeks to organize his cosmos according to the perfection inherent in circular structures.

If Dante’s circular images, however, are infused with theological implications, circular perfection must then have its end in the divine, in order for the image to contribute effectively to

the Dantean way. The work of Caldecott may again prove significant here. He outlines the extension of the idea of circular perfection from antiquity into the Christian understanding of the Trinity. Re-envisioning the *filioque* doctrine—that is, the Holy Ghost, “who proceedeth from the Father and the Son”—Caldecott discards the equilateral triangle as a geometric representation of this Trinitarian relationship. Instead, he proposes that a circle is a more apt description, specifically, one that has been perfectly bisected. “We use it here to represent each divine Person by a different kind of movement.” He writes further that “The Father is stillness, represented by the point. The Son is linear motion from the Father. The Holy Spirit is circular motion.”⁵⁵ The image produced has a diameter formed from the relationship of the Father to the Son. The love shared between them (which is the Holy Spirit) proceeds from both, curves around, and encompasses the whole.

C. The ‘Straight’ and the ‘Curved’ in Dante’s Cosmos

Accordingly, an apology must be made for the case of the curvilinear way which Dante will embark upon. The primacy of circular geometry was not lost on Dante when he authored his *Commedia*; the argument can even be made that Dante conceived of his cosmos within curvilinear space, predicated on what are fundamentally circular motions and relationships. It may seem pedestrian to say that Euclid, and further the Greek understanding of circular perfection, was influential in Dante’s organizational choices merely because of their curvilinear quality. After all, Euclid did not invent the circle, and further, Ptolemy’s reliance on circular constructs was based on an established philosophy of circular perfection, imparted by Plato, Aristotle, et al. The importance of the circle is apparent, notwithstanding, in that Euclid devotes nearly a third of his *Elements* to examining circular constructions. For that reason, in addition to

the overt references to Euclidian propositions within the *Commedia*, it is highly plausible that Dante was interested in Euclid's established geometric understanding and sought to incorporate it in his poetry.* Dante's reliance on the philosophies of antiquity concerning circles is also evidenced in his choice to order the heavens in his *Paradiso* according to the Ptolemaic model.

Dante establishes his cosmos according to the geometric proportions of a circle and imbues them with theological implications. First, Dante phrases his understanding of the circle in Euclidean terms. Euclid defines a circle as "a plane figure contained by one line such that all the straight lines falling upon it from one point among those lying within the figure are equal to one another."⁵⁶ The convergence of these ideas—the 'straight' and the 'curved'—such that there is equivalence in the straight lines that measure the radii (the distance from the circumference to the center point), contributes to the inherent perfection of the circle. It is worth noting that these ideas are presented as literal bookends in Dante's work. At the beginning of the *Inferno*, Dante speaks of *la diritta via* (the straight way).⁵⁷ In the final lines of the *Paradiso*, Dante marks the perfection of his desire and will in circular terms: "*sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa*" (itself like a wheel that equally is moved).⁵⁸ Thus the entire *Commedia* can be seen as a bridge between the 'straight' and the 'curved.' Further, it is the point upon which all the straight lines fall that governs the perfection of the circle. Even if all the radii were equal, they must emanate from a

* Mathematics professor and author Mark A. Peterson, in his article "The Geometry of *Paradise*" (*The Mathematical Intelligencer*, 2008) makes mention of Dante's familiarity with Euclid, and his application of Euclidean concepts within his *Commedia*. His argument is however one that proposes Euclid's conception of infinite and continuous quantity as fundamentally opposed to Dante's finite universe. However, the connections between Dante and Euclid are undeniable and at times explicit within the *Commedia*; as such, it is a relationship that cannot be overlooked on merely preferential grounds. The fact remains that Dante's cosmology can be (and is) explained in Euclidean terms, despite his partiality toward circular constructions. Moreover, Peterson's suggestion that Dante's universe is finite is perhaps negligent of the theological understanding thereof; Dante's universe 'ends' in the infinite, viz., God. (cf. *Paradiso*, XXXIII.127-145.)

common point within the figure to ensure the circle is perfect. In Dante's cosmos the circle which orders the whole, has its central '*punto*' in God Himself, and if the entire poem espouses this circular structure, then it is, moreover, no coincidence that the physical center of the work features a discourse on divine love.*

Through circular images, it would seem that Dante aims to invite the reader toward a contemplation of higher things. This too is informed by an established philosophical tradition. Lynne Ballew argues for the spherical essence of 'Being' and the circular motion of the mind which apprehends it, as evidenced in the prevalence of this idea in Greek thought:

Among the Presocratics, Anaximander's map of the world indicated a circular surface, and the circular motion of a vortex may have been part of his cosmological scheme; Empedocles' rounded sphere enjoys a circular solitude; for the Pythagoreans, contemplation of the circular motion of the heavenly spheres and of the harmony produced thereby imparts harmony to the soul of the contemplator; in Alcmaeon's philosophy the soul imitates the circular motion of the stars and heavens; and Anaxagoras' Nous operates as a cosmological principle which causes the circular motion that orders the universe. Orderliness both in human thought and in the universe is interpreted as circular perfection.⁵⁹

Dante the poet places himself squarely within this tradition and adopts the primacy of circular order. It remains to be considered, then, beyond the specific circular images in the *Commedia*, what their theological implications are and how they govern Dante's 'way.' It is not only important that Dante organize the entirety of his Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise in concentric circles. He, moreover, places theological significance on how they are traversed, in what direction they are followed, and ultimately the nodal point from which they emanate and around which they revolve, i.e., Love as an iteration of the highest Good. The whole of the *Commedia*'s circular order is an image, not made in shadows, but rather, that points toward perfection.

* See *Purgatorio*, XVIII

Therefore, a close examination of the *Commedia* yields a kind of discourse on how fallen man returns to God—one in which, for Dante, circular constructions govern ‘the way.’

Chapter II: *Inferno* – The Beginning of the Way and the Imperfect Circle

A. The Environment of Hell and its Relation to Dante the Pilgrim

Dante organizes his Hell as a conical pit, comprised of concentric circles—each one deeper upon the gorge than the one prior. As has been stated, the perfection of the circle arises, in part, out of its eternal nature. The pit of hell is no exception, as on its gates it reads “I endure eternally.”⁶⁰ Even so, for Dante there is perhaps a problem in the perfection inherent in circular forms. Dante the pilgrim as an image of imperfect man cannot participate fully in that eternity. Therefore, he must, by nature, begin somewhere. That beginning properly comes in Canto II of the *Inferno*: “*e poi che mosse fue, intrai per lo cammino alto e silvestro.*”⁶¹ Here, the correlation between the word ‘*silvestro*’ (an adjective, which is sometimes translated as “wild” or “woodland”) and the ‘*selva selvaggia*’ (the savage wood) in which Dante found himself at the beginning of Canto I, recalls the very place in which Dante turned from ‘the way.’ It now marks the beginning of the path in which his fear is renewed,⁶² which suggests something of the character of the path through Hell; properly speaking, this is a path that requires Dante to examine his present condition and the passions which arise in response to his environment. The image of the circle at this point exists in a latent form upon Dante. We can imagine the straight way that he abandons being tangent to the outer circumference of the infernal realm, and he begins by traversing its outer ring in search of its center. Yet, this center is obscured, as he writes, “*mi mise dentro alle segrete cose.*”⁶³ Dante the pilgrim is thrust into a world of darkness, where only the shrieks and lamentations can be heard whirling about,* this itself, a perversion of the noble motion of rotation. Further, if the path of Dante the pilgrim serves as an image of man’s return to the divine, then the beginning of man’s ‘*cammino*’ must rightly begin with a

* Cf. *Inferno*, III.22-30.

confrontation of his own imperfection—a descent into darkness—since this is what separates him from God. The eternity of these circles can only be traversed with an affirmation of man’s relationship to the external. The new journey along the circular path must also begin with a recognition of man’s own free will to either choose those images which point to God or embrace as truth those images which are mere shadows.

In the previous chapter, it was stated that man has potential to either move toward or away from God. Here at the outset of the journey, this potency turns to act, and in choosing, man employs his will. “A human action,” according to Aquinas, “acquires merit or demerit, through being ordained to someone else, either by reason of himself or by reason of the community: and in each way, our actions, good and evil, acquire merit or demerit in the sight of God.”⁶⁴ So man must acknowledge himself and his willful actions as they pertain to those around him. The path of Dante the pilgrim then properly begins with an examination of the corruption of man’s will, that is, those things in ‘shadow.’ An examination of this kind is suitable to the turning of the soul toward the Good. This in turn adopts a kind of rotation or circularity in man’s motion in relation to the external.* Thus, at the beginning of the path, Dante the pilgrim finds himself upon the precipice of the dichotomy between Self and Other, where he must look outwardly upon those miserable souls.† Further, Dante’s circular cosmos is predicated on this interaction between Self and Other since within the tradition “Plato, just a Pythagoras, understood ‘cosmos’ as the order

* Cf. Sean Chorney, “Circles, Materiality and Movement,” 46. Chorney cites Hero’s definition of a circle as evidence for the idea that “a circle is something that is constructed by movement.” (ibid.) From this Dante’s movement, as he comes to relate to the Other, adopts the motion necessary (i.e. rotation) that traces the circles of Hell about the unseen center.

† See *Inferno*, III.17. The terms ‘Self’ and ‘Other,’ though not present in Dante’s poetry, are apt descriptors of the interrelations that Dante the poet recounts throughout the *Commedia*. He traverses the three realms of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven in a constant state of observation of the external while attempting to reconcile those observations with the internal; this is precisely a condition of him being a living man in the realms of the dead, since he is bound to his sensation.

which results from the unification, according to the principles of proportion and harmony, of that which is heterogenous.”⁶⁵ What is required of the pilgrim is the same thing that is required by Plato in the Divided Line: man must contemplate ‘things’ made, things that are different from himself, which in turn gives way to the contemplation of the Divine. Speaking on Dante’s cosmological order, C. S. Lewis clarifies saying, “We watch [...] from its (i.e. the cosmos) outskirts. Our highest privilege is to imitate it in such measure as we can. The Medieval Model is, if we may use the word, anthropo-peripheral. We are creatures of the Margin [sic].”⁶⁶ To qualify, Lewis is advocating for man to imitate the things in the cosmos that point toward the perfection of their creator. It would be incorrect to say that Dante the pilgrim, as a ‘creature of the margin,’ must imitate what he observes in Hell, though Dante the poet places himself as pilgrim upon this margin and the call to observe is nonetheless made apparent. Just as Augustine in the *Confessions* states, “I came to see Your invisible things which are understood by the things that are made,”⁶⁷ Dante too, must enter among those things invisible and observe the cosmos if he is to understand higher truths. So also, man must ponder his own existence in relation to the existence of the Other, and this is a prerequisite of the way of affirmation.

Immediately following Dante’s ‘deep and wild’ beginning, he comes to Hell’s gate, upon which he reads the following inscription:

Per me si va nella città dolente,
per me si va nell’eterno dolore,
per me si va tra la perduta gente.
Giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore:
fecemi la divina potestate,
la somma sapienza e’l primo amore.
Dinanzi a me non fuor cose create
se non eterne, e io eterna duro.
lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch’entrate.⁶⁸

The inscription indicates several important features of the canticle to follow. The first has been mentioned: Hell is eternal, and thereby shares in the unending nature of its circularity. Within the inscription, moreover, Dante the poet gives reasons for the existence of this realm. Notable among them is that man has freedom to choose and to act according to his will, but that his choices carry consequences. Justice (*giustizia*) requires that he answer for his transgressions. The words of Augustine—“for You, O Lord, bless the just man, but first You turn him from ungodliness to justice”⁶⁹—suggest that Justice also enjoins a ‘turning,’ one initiated and then rewarded by God. That man should answer for his injustices is not a peculiar notion; there are myriad biblical references to the judgment of man’s actions. One that may serve as a *locus classicus*, from the book of Ecclesiastes, reads: “And all things that are done, God will bring into judgment for every error, whether it be good or evil.”⁷⁰ Here in Hell, the souls of the damned are not properly being turned either; their actions are done, and their punishment is being wrought. What is interesting is that ‘Divine Power, Supreme Wisdom, and Primal Love,’ fabricates the object of man’s punishment (i.e. Hell). God, who made man in his image—an image which is circular*—designs the eternal torment of the ‘*perduta gente*’ in an outpouring of just love, and in a similar circular form. That outpouring extends from God to man, and thus Dante’s first realm begins with a recognition of the Divine Artificer. In so doing the diameter of the circle is reiterated, and the undefinable distance between God and man is revealed to be the linear distance which bisects the sphere of creation.

* The circular image of God is expounded upon in the final Canti of the *Paradiso* (see *Paradiso* XXX-XXXIII). This idea will be treated in greater detail in a later chapter. For now let it suffice that Dante see’s the image of the Divine as circular in nature and this owing to the eternal quality of circles, aforementioned. (see note 58).

An infernal realm that is circular further mirrors the heterogeneous relation between God and man. Dante's choice in structuring Hell in this way, comments on man's nature as it inclines toward its maker, and perhaps more pointedly, on what the consequences are of defying that nature.* Writing on the nature of man, Boethius poeticizes man's relation to his source: "Now I sing of Nature's faith—the music of loyalty, a song of power. Her grip curves and binds, uniting with firm law."⁷¹ In this passage, through 'curving' and 'uniting' the end and source, those features of the image so integral to the present inquiry begin to emerge, that image of perfect unity: the circle. For Boethius, as was the case with many philosophers even before his time, created things are by nature inclined to return to their source. The same inclination holds true for Dante; however, Hell is an obvious rending of man from his maker—for he is told *lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate*. Accordingly, Dante organizes the infernal pit according to the image of a circle as a reminder of what the shades who reside there have lost: namely, perfect beatitude, and further the hope thereof. For this reason, Virgil speaks of those in the first circle as those "that without hope [...] live in desire."⁷² Yet, this fruitless desire extends beyond Limbo, to all those who reside in Hell. Those whose natures beg to be rejoined with their source, but whose actions warranted damnation, are barred from that light of the blessed circle, and God condemns them to be united with the darkness of their own sins; the circle is still present in them, though only as an image of hopeless desire.

* Cf. *Inferno*, VI.106-111. "*Ritorna a tua scienza,/ che vuol, quanto la cosa è più perfetta,/ più senta di bene, e così la doglienza./ Tutto che questa gente maladetta/ in vera perfezion già mai non vada,/ di più che di qua essere aspetta.*" (return to your science, which wants that, to the degree of a thing's perfection, it senses more of pleasure and of pain. Already all of these cursed people will never become truly perfect, it is expected of here all the more.) Virgil's comments suggest that even though the damned have forsaken their opportunity to become perfect, they will experience and increase in their dolorous condition when, at the second coming, they receive their body back and their painful judgment will be experienced anew.

B. The Motion Through Hell – “A Sinister Spiral”

Beyond the ever-present image of the circle as an organizing feature of the infernal realm, the motion of Dante the pilgrim through Hell is also of significance in relation to those he encounters along the way. Properly speaking, the hopeless souls that populate the circular chasm are in a state of eternal stasis. “The logic of the place [viz., Hell] is for souls to arrive and be sent direct to their place of punishment, where they are to stay for eternity,” Bert Hornback argues, stating that, “Souls in Hell make no progress, from circle to circle, and they don’t go visiting.”⁷³ He notes further that the presence of the various motive features in Hell – paths, bridges, and boats – seem to emphasize an intended trajectory for Dante, the living pilgrim who does in fact traverse from circle to circle. His motion is explicated in Canto XIV by Virgil: “*Tu sai che ’l luogo è tondo; e tutto che tu sie venuto molto pur a sinistra, giù calando al fondo*” (You know that this place is round, and all the while you have come far, descending to the depths and to the left).⁷⁴ One should observe in this passage that Dante’s motion is circular in nature and always turning to the left. The word *sinistra* (left) evokes further the evil character of Hell itself, as it is related to the etymological root of ‘sinister’ in modern English.⁷⁵ The following lines from Virgil further expound the gravity of his motion:

non se’ ancor per tutto il cerchio volto:
per che, se cosa n’apparisce nova,
non de’ addur maraviglia al tuo volto.⁷⁶

This gives the sense that Dante’s path is progressive and that, while he is cautioned against wonder in this realm, there is, for his part, a purpose to his travels in Hell.

What Dante the poet contrives in Canto XIV is the image of a circular path which is yet incomplete, and always progressing down and to the left. The image is reminiscent of Plato’s

famous ‘Myth of Er’ from *The Republic*. In the myth, Er is brought to the realm of the afterlife and sees first a place where there were two openings in the earth and two in the heavens. In this place, the souls that came there received their judgment for their deeds, either good or evil. Those who did good in their lives were permitted to enter upon one of the openings in the heavens, but “the unjust they told to continue their journey to the left and down, and they had behind them signs of everything they had done.”⁷⁷ The similarity between the myth and Dante’s poetry in Canto XIV is striking, to say the least. The motion of the unjust souls from the myth best applies to Dante in his current journey. Hornback suggests that this is because “Dante’s Hell is a very personal Hell, imagined so as to accommodate a living human creature, Dante pilgrim [sic]. Hell’s geography isn’t necessary except that it enables Dante pilgrim [sic] to proceed through it, and out of it.”⁷⁸ Regarding the idea that Dante’s path typifies the ascent of man toward divinity, it can be inferred then that this ascent must begin with a ‘descent’— an examination of one’s action in relation to others and to oneself.

The aforementioned dichotomy between the Self and the Other reemerges throughout the *Inferno*, and for Dante the incessant questioning of the nature of sin that brought each shade to their destination within Hell becomes a trope of his own examination of conscience. He acknowledges this in Canto XVI when he says the following:

Lascio lo fele, e vo per dolci pomi
promessi a me per lo verace duca;
ma infino al centro pria convien ch’i’tomi⁷⁹

Dante admits a desire for more than ‘gall,’ (*fele*) but he must first descend to the center of Hell, gathering knowledge of sin and of his own imperfections along the way before he may ascend toward the ‘sweet fruits promised to him.’ Virgil affirms this idea in Canto XXVIII when he rebukes Mohammed saying, “Neither death has yet reached him, nor guilt has sent him here to

torment him; but in order to give him a full experience, it suits me, though I am dead, to deliver him down here through Hell from circle to circle.”⁸⁰ A confrontation of the sins of man characterizes his experience of those things in shadow, though it is also indicative of Dante’s self-examination. Virgil later rebukes Dante in Canto XXX after he lingers too long to listen to the falsifiers; Dante writes, “When I heard him speak to me with ire, I turned toward him with such shame, that still it turns my memory.”⁸¹ His turning is toward both those things external and inward, as this line suggests (i.e. ‘turning’ toward Virgil and the ‘turning’ of memory). This highlights further his examination of the Other and the Self. His motion through the pit is no exception to this trope as it emulates the very distinction between man and his environs. Dante’s method for locating the center of this circular realm is perhaps less elegant than a Euclidean proof, but his method is rooted in practicality. Dante’s descent is not linear, and it does not rest on bisection as Euclid’s does.* Rather his external experience and his internal reflection require that he descend into the unseen abyss, skirting the boundary of what is known and unknown. Although in his leftward motion toward the center, Dante again seems to be giving a nod to Plato, this time from the *Timaeus*.

Plato recounts the creation of the soul of the cosmos by the Demiurge and describes its makeup as an admixture of “both Same and Other and [...] Being.”⁸² That is, reinterpreted from a Christian standpoint, God (Being) made the cosmos and incorporated Same (i.e., man made in his image) and Other (i.e. external things). Yet, Plato continues by describing how this whole was then split down its length and each part was bent into two concentric circles.

And he took them around in the motion that goes round in the self-same way and in the same spot, and he proceeded to make for himself one of the circles outer and the other inner. Then he designated the outer course to be of the nature of the Same, while the inner course to be of the nature of the Other. Now he led the course of the Same around

* Cf. Euclid, *Elements*, 2002, 51. (Bk. III, prop 1).

sideways to the right, and the course of the Other along the diagonal and to the left, but he gave mastery to the orbit of the Same and Similar.⁸³

The noble motion of rotation returns as a structural component of the relation of these two parts—the ‘Same’ and the ‘Other.’ Further their motions are opposed to one another, and in the case of the Other, its rotation is ‘along the diagonal and to the left’—a motion similar in kind to that of Dante through Hell. Though perhaps the most compelling comparison to Dante’s leftward descent comes a few lines later when Plato writes, “for the course of the Same (which is the swiftest) twisted all their circles into a spiral (because they proceeded in two ways that are contrary and simultaneous).”⁸⁴ The opposed rotation of Same and Other twisting the Other into a spiral, is an image proper to the composite motion of Dante the pilgrim through the abyss: as he proceeds around the circuits and down to the left, his motion toward the center of Hell describes a ‘sinister’ spiral. He and his guide, moreover, are in constant motion and are thereby in opposition to the relatively static motion of the shades that occupy each of the circles. Rightly so, since they are those souls who reap the *fele* (gall) which is the fault of their transgressions and Dante desires the *dolci pomi* (sweet fruits) by way of a passage toward, and ultimately through, the center of the *Inferno*.

C. The Deformation of The Circle as a Reflection of Man’s Sins

In describing the motions of the Same and the Other within Hell, the motion of the Other (i.e. that of the shades which inhabit Hell’s circles) is static insofar as they do not leave their respective circle. There are motions, however, that they describe within their respective prisons. Having stated the opposition of motions between Self and Other, the various motions of these shades seek further qualification. As Dante the pilgrim traverses the infernal landscape, he encounters several circular images and motions, and these instances of circular geometry and

motion are intentionally imperfect since they are ultimately antithetical to the perfect circle later described in the *Paradiso*.^{*} Each imperfection applied to circular motion is, furthermore, tied to the nature of man's transgressions, according to the degree to which they separate man from God.

The first among these images occurs in the vestibule of Hell, just past the doleful gate, where the lukewarm suffer their punishment. These are they who in life were opportunistic and remained neutral in their choice between good and evil. John's *Apocalypse* tells of their fate accordingly: "But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold, nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth."⁸⁵ Thus Dante places these souls in a realm eternally suspended between Heaven and Hell.

Caccianli i ciel per non esser men belli,
nè lo profondo inferno li riceve,
ch'alcuna gloria i rei avrebber d'elli.⁸⁶

Virgil instructs Dante to observe these souls in passing and as he does, he sees a line of souls chasing a banner that is whirling about.

E io, che riguardai, vidi una insegna
che girando correva tanto ratta,
che d'ogni posa mi pareva indegna;⁸⁷

Their motion is frantic and governed by the banner which ultimately runs its circular course around the antechamber of the abyss. The circle they describe is not an iteration of perfection, but rather it is an image that stands in opposition to the reposeful indifference that they coveted in life. They are unworthy of rest, and they are forever doomed to chase after the banners which represent their indecision. Scartazzini and Bernays analyze this scene further by stating, "they follow any standard. But, as the wind is subject to constant change, they are forced, instead of

^{*} Cf. *Paradiso*, XXXIII.112-32.

enjoying repose, ever restlessly to turn in a circle, ever to follow the standard as it moves round in a circle.”⁸⁸ So the symbol that describes the motion of man’s return to his source, and which evokes the Augustinian notion that “our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee,”⁸⁹ is for the lukewarm an instrument of their torment in eternal unrest.

Then in Canto VII, Dante comes upon the avaricious and the prodigal, and their punishment is also a unique deformation of circular motion. These souls – the prodigal who led miserly lives and spent lavishly, and the avaricious who hoarded their wealth – suffer the torment of opposing sins of excess and are thereby condemned to roll large stones in opposite directions. In their motion they only ever complete half a circuit of their respective circle of Hell.

Come fa l’onda là sovra Cariddi,
che si frange con quella in cui s’intoppa,
così convien che qui la gente riddi.⁹⁰

The circular image here is perhaps subtle, though it is evidenced in the word *riddi* which refers to an ancient Italian round dance. The suggestion here is that these sinners, whose sins lack the virtues of temperance and moderation again are restless in their ‘circle dance.’ The image is, however, ironic, since as they crash and shatter against each other, they are inhibited from completing a full revolution and thus moderation is forced upon them. “Bad giving and bad taking has stolen the beautiful world from them and set them to this scuffle.”⁹¹ Their transgressions are rooted in immoderation, which has kept them from seeing true Beauty (i.e. the beatific vision) in their afterlife. Their sin is eternally avenged in a mode which bars them further from the beauty of revolution and their circle is perpetually incomplete.

Farther along the infernal way Dante meets the sowers of discord and scandal in the ninth pouch of the Malebolge—the eighth circle of Hell. These sinners are again committed to a circular

motion which is also marred by the nature of their sin. Their torment is described in the following lines:

Un diavolo è qua dietro che n'accisma
sì crudelmente, al taglio della spada
rimettendo ciascun di questa risma,
quand'avem volta la dolente strada;
però che le ferrite son richiuse
prima ch'altri dinanzi li rivada.⁹²

These souls, who in life bred division among people, now traverse their circle via *la dolente strada* (the road of pain) and are rent by the sword of a devil each time they complete a full revolution. Their wounds are healed as they walk around this pouch, only to be made anew. The imagery here is an unmistakable parody of the rejoining of man's end to his source. Man rightly finds perfect beatitude in his reunion with God, and the motion of these souls (i.e. the noble motion of revolution) is an 'image in shadow' of this reunion. Whereas the blessed move in the same way and are made whole,* these souls return to their start only to be hewn again; they are deprived of their source and physically divided, as was the discordant nature of their sin.

D. Escaping the Chasm – The Inversion of the Spiral

Having identified the intention behind the path through Hell, the motion unique to Dante, and the imperfection of the circular motions of various sinners, what remains is to examine the way out. How is it that Dante is to escape the pit of Hell? And how does his exodus from Hell by

* Cf. *Paradiso*, XXVIII in which is described the nine circles of angels wheeling around the divine 'Point.' Specifically, lines 66-69 state, "*Maggior bontà vuol far maggior salute;/ maggior salute maggior corpo cape,/ s'elli ha le parti igualmente compiute.*" (Greater blessedness desires greater health; greater health comprehends a greater body, if that body has parts equally complete). The sentiment outlined in this passage contrasts with those souls whose bodies are divided for all eternity; Dante the poet reinforces this contrast by placing these passages in nearly the same position within the XXVIII Canto of the first and third canticle, respectively.

way of circular order reflect man's overcoming of sin? There are two areas which require attention: first is the monster Geryon who will reaffirm the need for the spiral descent, and next are the various motions that would appear anomalous to the predominant leftward revolutions. These two will ultimately give way to the phenomenon that Dante experiences as he descends upon the back of Satan, i.e., a gravitational inversion. Further this phenomenon is rightly that moment when the circle is reformed, and Dante's motion is reordered.

Dante places the monster Geryon, at the midpoint of the first canticle, the intermediary between the violent above and the falsifiers below. The beast "that infects all the world"⁹³ is himself imbued with circular imagery: "*dipinti avea di nodi e di rotelle*" (he was painted with knots and circlets).⁹⁴ It has been suggested that this creature correlates to the leviathan of Job,⁹⁵ the means by which Virgil summons it notwithstanding. Dante gives Virgil his *corda* (belt) "*aggroppata e ravvolta*" (knotted and coiled),⁹⁶ which he then swings round and casts over the edge of the pit. The words of Job echo through Dante's imagery here: "Canst thou draw out the leviathan with a hook, or canst thou tie his tongue with a cord?"⁹⁷ Further, that both the cord and Geryon himself are adorned with 'knots' and 'coils/circlets,' seems to be strong evidence for the relationship of one to the other.* These 'knots' and 'coils' should further be seen as distortions of circular perfection; a 'knot' seeks to adjoin two things, though less elegantly than the way a circle rejoins its beginning. A 'knot' may further be taken to mean a disorder or an interruption of something which was otherwise straight.†

* There is further evidence for their correlation in that Dante and his guide are meant to ride the winged beast in their descent to the Malebolge, and in Job we read, "Will he make a covenant with thee, and wilt thou take him to be a servant for ever [sic]? Shalt thou play with him as with a bird." (Job, 40:23-24)

† The word *nodo* (pl. *nodi*) can figuratively mean 'tangle.'

Virgil commands Geryon, “*moviti omai: le rote larghe, e lo scender sia poco,*” (now move: may the circles be large, and the descent slow)⁹⁸ and this recalls the image of the downward spiral. Though upon his back Dante describes a near insurmountable fear:

Maggior paura non credo che fosse
quando Fetòn abbandonò li freni,
per che'l ciel, come pare ancor, si cosse;
nè quando Icaro misero le reni
sentì spennar per la scaldata cera,
gridando il padre a lui: ‘Mala via tieni!’,
che fu la mia, quand vidi ch’l’era
nell’aere d’ogni parte, e vidi spenta
ogni veduta fuor che della fera.⁹⁹

The passage evokes the myth of Phaeton, who having been allowed to drive the chariot of his father Apollo, let go the reins and scorched the sky, resulting in the Milky Way. It also alludes to the myth of Icarus, whose demise came from flying too close to the sun upon wax wings. The implication here is interesting since both Phaeton and Icarus attempted a direct ascent which ended poorly for each; this also parallels the ascent of the mount that Dante attempted in Canto I. Dante the poet evokes these myths to juxtapose their motions (i.e. a straight path skyward) and subsequent folly with the motion that is commanded of Geryon by Virgil: a slow and circular descent. Thus the ‘leviathan,’ though frightening—as man’s confrontation of his sins should be—confirms the need for the downward spiral. Man cannot attain to God of his own accord, forging a direct path upward. His motion must be ‘circular’ in the sense that he observes the external and inquires inwardly, turning away from those things which do not lead toward the Good. Dante’s surrender to the command of Virgil and to the wheeling of Geryon is, moreover, a depiction of the role of free will in man’s redemption. Augustine in his *Confessions* elucidates this idea: “But where in all that long time was my free will, and from what deep sunken hiding-place was it suddenly summoned forth in the moment in which I bowed my neck to Your easy yoke and my

shoulders to Your light burden.”¹⁰⁰ Dante traverses the pit of Hell by divine will, so that he may recognize and overcome his own transgressions and emerge upon the other side. But Dante, as with any man who would be truly free, must exercise his will and freely choose to follow His commands. In so doing, man must form his will ‘in wide circles,’ that is, in the image of the noble motion of rotation, and allow God to reveal Himself through his own image, which is present in man.

The several instances when the pattern of leftward revolution is broken (i.e., in which Dante and his guide turn to the right) further evidence the role of free will in Dante’s path through Hell. To be precise, if leftward motion is akin to the ‘sinister’ nature of Hell and the descent that is required of Dante, then a motion that is antithetical to this (i.e., rightward motion) should signal a departure from the mode of sin and an acknowledgement of divine will. One of Virgil’s turnings will require little explanation beyond what has already been observed; immediately prior to his summoning the monster Geryon, Dante writes, “*Ond’ei si volse inver lo destro lato,*” – ‘then turning round on his right side.’¹⁰¹ Virgil turns on his right in order to call up their means of passage—Geryon—from the plane of the violent to the Malebolge. This ‘turning’ accompanies a free consent of the will, as has been examined. Virgil has one prior instance of turning to the right in Canto XV. “*Lo mio maestro allora in su la gota destra si volse in dietro, e riguardommi,*” (From above my master then turned his right cheek backward and looked at me).¹⁰² The significance of this rightward turning emerges in the lines surrounding it. Just prior we read “I am ready for Fortune as she desires.”¹⁰³ The invocation of Fortuna* is effectively

* Cf. C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 139-40. Lewis notes that Dante augments the medieval notion that the heavenly spheres are guided by divine intelligences, by suggesting that Earth was guided in the same fashion by Fortuna. He says, however, “Fortune, to be sure, does not steer the Earth through an orbit; She fulfills the office of an intelligence in the mode proper to a stationary globe.” (Ibid., 139).

Dante's assent to the will of something beyond himself, something divine in nature. Moreover, the words of Virgil after he turns to look at Dante are conciliatory, encouraging Dante to 'listen well' (*Bene ascolta*)¹⁰⁴ again highlighting an acquiescence to an external will. Thus, this 'turning' is characterized by a surrender of the will of man to something higher than himself.

Dante also has two instances within the entire journey through Hell in which he turns to the right, though, these are more structural features along the way. Nevertheless, they are not detached from free will. James C. Nohrnberg suggests as much: "The only two places where Dante turns to the right, in the course of the otherwise left-turning *Inferno*, are on the two thresholds of force and fraud: suggesting the power of will, at the two crucial points."¹⁰⁵ The first is at the end of Canto IX when Dante and Virgil pass through the wall "and then turning to the right,"¹⁰⁶ make their way into the City of Dis. Properly speaking, this is the moment when they cross the boundary between the sins of incontinence and the sins of violence. While all sins that merit an eternity in Hell involve a willful action, the placement of this rightward turn seems to highlight an increased gravity of will required of the violent sins. Dante's second rightward turn occurs on another structural boundary, this time further down the pit between the violent and the fraudulent sins. In the Malebolge it reads:

Assai leggermente quel salimmo;
e volti a destra su per la sua scheggia,
da quelle cerchie etterne ci partimmo.¹⁰⁷

Geographically speaking, Dante and Virgil have turned to the right along one of the ridges that cross the pouches of the Malebolge, which are much like spokes on a wheel. This rightward turn then is actually a turn toward the center, which is their fated destination within this canticle. Further, this moment foreshadows their departure from Hell, as this 'turning' accompanies a departure from the 'eternal circles.'

At the close of the first canticle, the pilgrim and his guide come to the center of Hell and the deepest place within the abyss. Satan, who “was surely beautiful as he is now ugly,”¹⁰⁸ sits frozen at the center of the earth (i.e. the nodal point to which all material things gravitate). This point appears to be the proper end of the sinister spiral; however, Dante describes a peculiar phenomenon as he and Virgil descend further down Lucifer’s back.

Poi uscì fuor per lo foro d’un sasso,
e puose me in su l’orlo a sedere;
appresso porse a me l’accorto passo.
Io levai li occhi, e credetti vedere
Lucifero com’io l’avea lasciato;
E vidili le gambe in su tenere;
e s’io divenni allora travagliato,
la gente grossa li pensi, che non vede
qual è quell punto ch’I avea passato.¹⁰⁹

As he descends upon the back of Satan through a hole in the rock, Virgil places him on a ledge so he may sit. But as Dante sits he raises his eyes, expecting to see ‘Lucifer as he left him.’ Instead he sees his legs suspended in the air—that is, he has passed the center of the earth and gravity has reversed its pull. One can imagine the momentum of the spiral he has traversed culminating in this center point. As it descends and approaches the center, it reaches “the point, from every part, to which all weights are drawn,”¹¹⁰ and the spiral inverts. What was leftward turning in its descent, now finally begins to climb and travel to the right.

Chapter III: *Purgatorio* – The Circular Image Internalized in the Pilgrim

A. The Organization of Purgatory – Consecutive and Complete Circles

At the beginning of the second canticle, Dante the pilgrim arrives in the realm of Purgatory, which is a mountain that rises out of the ocean in the southern hemisphere, directly opposite the conical abyss through which he just passed.

e canterò di quel secondo regno
dove l'umano spirito si purga
e di salire al ciel diventa degno.¹¹¹

Purgatory is the place where ‘the human spirit purges itself and becomes worthy of an ascent to Heaven.’ The reflexive verb ‘*si purga*’ is significant here because it signals again an act of the will in atoning for one’s sins. This realm is organized and predicated upon a different structure than that of the *Inferno*, for as the poem reads, “I turned myself to the right and set my mind to the other pole.”¹¹² Dante’s motion is now reversed, and his goal is no longer the antithetical object of man’s sin (i.e. Satan, who resides at the center of Hell). Rather, he now strives toward an image of sinless man: the Edenic paradise created for man before his fall from grace, which is located at the peak of the mountain.

A clear picture of how Dante the pilgrim traverses this second kingdom rests not only on a proper examination of the motion through it, but also an examination of its structure. Returning for a moment to the final lines of Canto XXXIV in the first canticle, Virgil offers an explanation for Purgatory’s existence. The passage is lengthy, though valuable to the present inquiry:

E se’or sotto l’emisferio giunto
ch’è opposto a quel che la gran secca
coverchia e sotto’l cui colmo consunto
fu l'uom che nacque e visse senza pecca:
tu hai i piedi in su piccola spera
che l'altra faccia fa della Giudecca.
Qui è da man, quando di là e sera:
e questi, che ne fà scala col pelo,

fitto è ancora sì come prim'era.
Da questa parte cade giù dal cielo;
e la terra, che pria di qua si sporse,
per paura di lui fè del mar velo,
e venne all'emisperio nostro; e forse
per fuggir lui lasciò qui luogo voto
quella ch'appar di qua, e su ricorse.¹¹³

Virgil recounts in these lines the damnation of Lucifer and how when he was cast down from Heaven and affixed at the center of Hell, the land, in fear of him, fled to the northern hemisphere and left an empty space. Further, he suggests that when the chasm of Hell was rent in the earth the matter expelled from the other side (i.e. on the southern hemisphere) 'rushed upward' and formed the mountain of Purgatory.

Where before it was established that Hell was made as an act of the just love of God, here we come to find that Purgatory is similarly shaped, *per accidens*, by that Divine Love. Dante acknowledges this notion further when he writes, "The lovely planet that consoles with love made all the east laugh."¹¹⁴ Dante the poet invokes Venus, as the archetypal symbol of love, and draws attention to its influence over the realm of Purgatory; for it is by Love that the souls here are purged and it is Love whose organizing image is again circular. "The circle represents God," Stratford Caldecott explains, "and the diameter creation, or the 'distance' between the divine persons, within which all things exist."¹¹⁵ All creation is a but a point upon the line that is that 'distance' between God the Father and God the Son. And the Love that proceeds from both and revolves around to encompass the whole is God the Holy Spirit. Love as expressed through man, is properly unity with God, or Sovereign Goodness, in whom man finds his end. Aquinas affirms this accordingly: "Now the last end of the human will is the Sovereign Good, namely, God."¹¹⁶ Here in Purgatory, Dante the poet outlines the working out of that human will which seeks unity with God; man rightly 'purges himself' upon the mount, and his love is refined by divine grace.

Indeed we see upon the slope those souls whose sins were various distortions of the Divine Love, and to varying degrees. In Canto VIII, Malaspina supports this notion saying, “to my own I bore the love which here is refined.”¹¹⁷ Hence Purgatory stands between Heaven and Hell as a path unto itself where human love is rightly ordered toward Divine Love, by the act of man’s will toward his end. Aquinas reminds his readers, though, that man’s will—being still imperfect—yields to a degree of intensity:

In regard to both the act, and the intention of the end, we may consider a twofold quantity: one, on the part of the object, by reason of a man's willing or doing a good that is greater; The other, taken from the intensity of the act, according as man wills or acts intensely; And this is more on the part of the agent.¹¹⁸

Dante’s Purgatory addresses this very intensity of will by placing the repentant soul upon the mount in varying and concentric circles, according to the intensity of their love and will toward the Sovereign Good. Setting aside the Ante-Purgatory—that vestibule reserved for those whose repentance was delayed in life—a series of circular terraces comprise the structure of Purgatory proper, each one smaller around and higher up than the one prior. Stated explicitly, the length of the radii of each circle (i.e. terrace) is inversely proportionate to the intensity of love, such that greater intensity (i.e. love that is less distorted) resides in a smaller circle and is situated higher on the mountain.

The first three circles house the proud, the envious, and the wrathful, respectively; these can be collectively thought of as perturbations of Love. Virgil expands upon this notion in his oration on Love in Canto XVII, which occurs, not by accident, in the middle of the *Purgatorio*.*

* Virgil’s miniature treatise on Love not only occurs in the exact middle of the *Purgatorio*, but since it occurs in the second canticle it properly occupies the geographic center of the whole. If Dante then conceives of his *Commedia* on the whole as a circular reflection of God and the “in-Godding” of man (Charles Williams, *The figure of Beatrice*, 158), Love then occupies the center point of that circle.

È chi per esser suo vicin soppresso
 spera eccellenza, e sol per questo brama
 ch'el sia di sua grandezza in basso messo;
 è chi podere, grazia, honore e fama
 teme di perder perch'altri sormonti,
 onde s'attrista sì che'l contrario ama;
 ed è chi per inguria par ch'aonti,
 sì che si fa della vendetta ghiotto,
 e tal convien che il male altrui impronti.¹¹⁹

In each of these instances Love is perturbed by a selfish desire. In pride the sinner 'hopes for excellence' at another's expense; in envy he fears the loss of 'power, grace, honor, and fame' when he witnesses another surpass him in these; in wrath the sinner is 'disgraced by insult' and becomes bent on vengeance.

Acting as a central terrace is the circle of the slothful. This is precisely an ineffective Love.

Se lento amore in lui veder vi tira,
 o a lui acquistar, questa cornice,
 dopo giusto pentir, ve ne martira.¹²⁰

Sloth is a love inadequate to move man to the object of his desire, or that is ineffective in causing him to see the Good which is his end. "Pusillanimity makes a man fall short of what is proportionate to his power, by refusing to tend to that which is commensurate thereto," Aquinas writes.¹²¹ Man may see or desire his end, but sloth causes him to lack an attainment to that Good.

The last three circles are in order reserved for the avaricious, the gluttonous, and the lascivious, and these are examples of intemperance: Love in excess. "*L'amor ch'ad esso troppo s'abbandona, di sovr'a noi si piange per tre cerchi,*" (the love which abandons itself to that [i.e. other goods which are not the Sovereign Good] above us is wept for in three circles).¹²² These seven terraces are complete circuits, and their design is fitted to the circular motion that they facilitate. Each soul must endure the purgation of its circle as they atone for their sins and ascend

the mount; and further, their will must be unceasing in this aim. If they should waver in their resolve the process must begin anew, just as the angel at the lower gate warns, “He who looks back, returns outside.”¹²³ The admonition echoes of Christ’s own words in The Gospel of Luke: “Remember Lot’s wife.”¹²⁴ The implication is grave in the sense that man may only advance upon his path of purification if his forward progress maintains its trajectory. Boethius echoes this notion in *The Consolation of Philosophy*: “This story is for you, for those who wish to lead the mind into the upper day. Since, whoever, having been weakened, turns back a gaze to Tartarus’ chasm—whatever excellence he has gained, looking back, he loses.”¹²⁵ ‘Turning’ becomes qualified in the *Purgatorio*, and the order of the circular terraces becomes apparent, in that, man must continue on the way toward the Good and only turn through each terrace in the sense that he also looks toward the Good. If his ‘turning’ results in him looking away, his progress is lost.

B. The Mountain of Purgatory and Dante’s Motion – Circular Order as a Reordering of Man

The mountain of Purgatory must order man’s ascent by turning his focus toward the center of the circle (i.e. the peak). In turn, it must also reorder man himself so that his will becomes ordered toward Divine Love. The implication of circular organizations within this realm gains further significance when examining the gradient of the mountain itself. One of the primary descriptions of the mountain comes in the midst of Canto IV: “*Questa montagna è tale, che sempre al cominciar di sotto è grave; e quant’uom più va su, e men fa male.*” (This mountain is such that always at the start below it is hard; and as much as man goes higher it does him less harm).¹²⁶ From this we apprehend that the mountain is in a sense steeper the further down one is on its slope, but as one ascends, it becomes easier to do so—“it will be easy for you,” Virgil says, “as going downstream in a boat.”¹²⁷ This is a peculiar idea, since most often one thinks of a mountain getting steeper the higher up it goes. The mountain of Purgatory is, however,

intentionally structured to align with the lessening severity of sins upon the climb.* It has at its essence the overall structure that is informed by the circular path that Dante the pilgrim has already traced (i.e. through Hell), but also which acknowledges the spherical structure of the Heavens that will follow—namely, the spheres of the *Paradiso*. Properly speaking, the mountain that is steepest at its base is shaped like a dome, or a hemisphere. Ptolemy’s observations may be helpful in elucidating this idea. He suggests as much when he posits that the earth is spherical.

His justification from the *Almagest* reads as follows:

Yet the more we advance toward the north pole the more the southern stars are hidden and the northern stars appear. So it is clear that here the curvature of the earth covering parts uniformly in oblique directions proves its spherical form on every side. Again, whenever we sail towards mountains or any high places from whatever angle and in whatever direction, we see their bulk little by little increasing as if labor rising from the sea, whereas before they seem submerged because of the curvature of the water’s surface.¹²⁸

Ptolemy’s proof rests on the geometry of optics, since those things on the horizon disappear from sight (i.e. below the horizon) the higher one progresses toward the north pole. The aspect angle—which is the angle of the slope between the object observed and the observer—cannot remain the same for all observers in various positions on the spherical globe, and the slope must decrease the closer one gets to the pole. Even so, the aspect angle cannot decrease below the horizon for an object to be observed, thus, the minimum aspect angle is limited to the slope of the line tangent to the hemisphere which touches the hemisphere at the point of the observer. Simon A. Gilson observes that in his *Convivio* “Dante explicitly refers to the idea that vision takes place along a straight line,” which further “gives evidence of his understanding of the entire process of

* *Accord*. Susan E. Blow, “Dante’s Purgatorio,” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (1885). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25668046> (accessed October 10, 2021): 71. “Evidently, therefore, we must expect to find upon the ascending terraces diminishing degrees of sin and increasing degrees of participation in the divine life. The process is not one in which the soul is ‘left empty and garnished,’ but one wherein evil is crowded out by expanding good.”

vision.”¹²⁹ Dante gives the sense of the linear quality of vision when he describes how Purgatory and Mount Zion, though on opposing hemispheres, share the same horizon.¹³⁰ What this means is that a celestial object can only be seen from both hemispheres if it is on the horizon, which means that the slope of its aspect angle is equal for both observers. As one moves further from either pole the altitudinal angle of the celestial object increases and in a sense the slope of the horizon from the new observation point is ‘steeper’ than it was at the pole.* Dante confirms this phenomenon when at the beginning of the *Purgatorio* his gaze rests higher in the sky,[†] since he is at the base of the mount and the aspect angle of his observation is dictated by what is visible above the mountain. By the end of the ascent, however, he will have shifted his focus toward the rising sun on the eastern horizon,[‡] and the slope of his line of sight will have leveled off.

The dome shaped mountain is rightly suited toward the nature of Purgatory, for it houses those souls who have fled the threat of eternal torment, and just as the land rushes upward, so too

* Cf. Ptolemy, “Almagest,” in *Great Books of the Western World*, (1989), 1.5 “As to the second position where the earth would be on the axis but farther advances towards one of the poles, one could again object that, if this were so, the plane of the horizon in each latitude would always cut into uneven parts the sections of the heavens below the earth and above, different with respect to each other and to themselves for each different deviation. And the horizon could cut into two even parts only in the right sphere. But in the case of the inclined sphere with the nearer pole ever visible the horizon would always make the part above the earth less and the part below the earth greater with the result that also the great circle through the center of the signs of the zodiac [ecliptic] would be cut unequally by the plane of the horizon, but this has never been seen, for six of the twelve parts are always in everywhere visible above the earth, and the other six invisible; And again when all these last six are all at once visible, the others are at the same time invisible.” Ptolemy’s argument is meant to support his geocentric model though it is also relevant to the idea of perceived slope and angular distance upon a hemispherical mountain. Where it ultimate falls short in proving the former, it dovetails nicely with the idea of the latter.

† Cf. *Purgatorio*, I.13-25. Dante surveys the heavens of the southern hemisphere; his sight is ultimately drawn to the four stars of the southern cross as he focuses his gaze toward the pole.

‡ Cf. *Purgatorio*, XXXII.16-18, and *Purgatorio*, XXXIII.103-5, and *Purgatorio*, XXX.1-10. The latter refers to the ‘seven stars’ which are the Pleiades. Dante says they never rise or set, though this is perhaps a reference to the notion that the Pleiades can be seen in both hemispheres during different times of the year. Further they appear in the southeastern sky and their motion is from east to west.

these souls strive heavenward. Their nature, however, has not yet been purified; “there is, in a word, still indwelling sin, but there is no longer a consent of the will to sin,” Susan E. Blow observes.¹³¹ Further, Dante the poet affirms the skyward ascent via the circular mountain, suggesting that love of itself is insufficient and that only the Love which is ordered toward the Sovereign Good leads man to his redemption.* The potential for love to be misleading is apparent, given what Dante the pilgrim has witnessed in Hell. The very existence of the infernal realm is predicated upon love of sin, or love of self before God. Virgil offers further explanation:

Or ti puote apparer quant'è nascosa
la veritate alla gente ch'avvera
ciascun amore in sé laudabil cosa,
però che forse appar la sua matera
sempre esser buona; ma non ciascun segno
è buono, ancor che buona sia la cera.¹³²

The suggestion here is that the wax (*cera*) represents love as an appetitive state of the soul, and the stamp (*segno*) is the particular which is love's object. Only if the particular is an image of the Good, can that love find merit. Dante qualifies further, saying, “If love is offered from without, and the soul does not move by any other foot, whether straight or curved, it has no merit.”¹³³ So then the order of the path is irrelevant if it is itself not ordered by Love. The circular hierarchy on the mount, which reflects divine order, only has value insofar as man desires his own fellowship with God. This desire must, moreover, form his will. Charles Williams suggests too that this movement in ascending the mountain (i.e. following successively smaller circles in the ascent toward the central apex) is a gradual revealing of the divine quality of Love, and this is done by purging oneself of the particular itself—the ‘phantasm’ (φάντασμα) of Aristotle, the ‘thought’ (διάνοια) of Plato.

* Cf. *Purgatorio*, XVIII

The quality of eternity is discoverable by man only by two capacities— ‘repentance and faith.’ These, in action on the Way of Affirmation of Images, mean the purging of the Images; or, more strictly, of the mind that sees the Images. Those Images are not properly seen until the stars are reached [...] the mount of recollection and of reconciliation is on earth always before the soul that wills. It must cease to know the Images as it chooses; it must know them as they are; [...] that is, it must (in its degree) know them as God knows them in their union with him [sic].¹³⁴

Repentance and faith require an external act and man must ultimately ascend the mount and not turn back; those who stagnate are at worst confined to Hell, and at best must wait upon the shores of Ante-Purgatory for their time appointed to begin their ascent. Susan E. Blow offers further insight; “Against his own will and without his own effort, no man can be made holy or wise.”¹³⁵ The path of Dante upon the mount requires that his will become rightly ordered.

The mountain of Purgatory, moreover, occupies a geographical point that is significant in the path of the pilgrim. Beyond the eternal dark of the *Inferno* and not yet in the resplendent light of the *Paradiso*, Dante now walks through a realm that has both day and night; in the sunlight he must move and ascend the mountain in the fashion of those committed there organized in their circles just as in the heavenly realms above. Yet, at night he must halt his motion—“and to go up by night is not possible.”¹³⁶ Those upon the mount at night are in a sense participatory in the stasis of the damned, each doomed to toil in his circle for the duration of eternity; nevertheless, the souls in Purgatory are not eternally bound. By the sunlight those souls, along with Dante the pilgrim, may continue on the path around and up the mountain. This way is necessary and good, as Dante says, “I am in the first life, yet so traveling, I may acquire the other.”¹³⁷ The circular motion of Dante, and of the those that he meets along the way, possesses a different quality—and in a sense it is opposed to the motion through Hell—for it is in this realm, as has been observed, that they travel toward the right. “*A man destra per la riva con noi venite, e troverete il passo possibile a salir persona viva.*”¹³⁸ In this passage, Dante is on the first terrace where the prideful

suffer their purgation and carry heavy stones upon their backs. The pilgrim also says he feels the “weight of Adam’s flesh.”¹³⁹ These souls, and Dante for that matter, being closest to the base of the mount are perhaps residually affected by the gravitation of Hell’s center. Yet, as Dante follows these souls to the right, he finds the passage by which he can, though weighed down, continue the climb.

Upon the second terrace, there is also evidence of a rightward rotation, and its circumstance is affixed further to the affliction of the envious who reside there.

Poi fissamente al sole li occhi porse;
fece del destro lato a muover centro,
e la sinistra parte di sè torse.¹⁴⁰

In this instance Virgil is the one ‘turning,’ yet his rightward motion is in conjunction with the fixing of his gaze upon the sun. The presence of light (i.e. from the sun), which was absent in the *Inferno*, seems to be the motive force now in the *Purgatorio*. It is, after all, by the light of day that Dante may ascend through the circular terraces. Rightward motion is justly associated with an ascent if it harkens toward the light. Further, those souls on the second terrace, whose affliction for the sin of envy is to have their eyes sewn shut, observe that Dante possesses the quality of sight. At the start of Canto XIV they cry out:

Chi è costui che’l nostro monte cerchia
prima che morte li abbia dato il volo,
e apre li occhi a sua voglia e coverchia?¹⁴¹

Sight intensifies the significance of Dante’s motion through Purgatory, and these souls seem to envy his ability, yet they are properly without a body with which to sin further. The implication of Dante’s sight is later expressed in Canto XVII: “Light moves you, which is informed by Heaven, either of itself or by a will which directs it downward.”¹⁴² Divine Light, which orders his will ultimately leads the pilgrim along the rightward and circular path. Vision is what those

souls in the pit of Hell had been deprived of, and it is what now is present upon the mount of Purgatory to inform man's ascent toward the heavenly realm. "Turn your eyes," Virgil urges Dante, "toward the lure that the Eternal King turns with the great wheels."¹⁴³ Vision itself is not enough to propel man forward, for this is merely appetitive. The Sovereign Good must enlighten that vision. One may recall further that Plato, in describing how the soul 'turns' toward the Good, evokes the analogy of vision in the body.¹⁴⁴ In fact, the whole concept of a circle and circular order is predicated upon the ability to see and observe that order.

C. The Earthly Paradise and the Eastward Procession

Upon the summit of Purgatory, beyond the seventh terrace, lies the earthly paradise—the Garden of Eden. Once souls have made their journey up the mountain it is here, at the place where man was first created, that they return skyward to the heavens. It is also here where rightward revolution reaches its ultimate refinement. In Canto XXXII Dante looks upon the light of the sun too long and is stricken with a momentary blindness;* when he regains his ability to see he describes the following scene:

Vidi'n sul braccio destro esser rivolto
lo glorioso essercito, e tornarsi
col sole e con le sette fiamme al volto.¹⁴⁵

As the army, 'turning on the right,' looks toward the rising sun, the scene evokes an image from the book of Baruch: "Look about thee, O Jerusalem, towards the east, and behold the joy that

*This moment appears antithetical in that Dante has placed prior significance on the faculty of sight having been restored in the realm of Purgatory. Even so, the intention of this passage is to further that significance given the vision that follows. Cf. *Paradiso* XXVI where Dante's sight is restored at the intoning of the *Sanctus*.

cometh to thee from God.”¹⁴⁶ Vision, which was newly attributed to this second kingdom, now finds its apex in a ‘rightward turn’ toward the east.*

The whole of the wheeling pageant reaches its climax as they come to the tree in the midst of the garden—the tree which is properly located at the southern pole, and which becomes the focal point of the final Canti:

Io senti’ mormorare a tutti ‘Adamo’;
poi cerchiaro una pianta dispogliata
di fiori e d’altra fronda in ciascun ramo.¹⁴⁷

The evocation of the name of Adam redoubles the conviction that this is that very “tree which is in the midst of paradise,”¹⁴⁸ the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In this passage Dante depicts it as being ‘despoiled’ of its fruit, which is to say that man has already robbed it (i.e. original sin). Here, now barren it is the centerpiece of the rotational ascent toward the top of the mountain; it is the last terrestrial image along the way to the salvation of man; it is the image of wisdom which so eluded Dante in the dark wood. Moreover, Dante witnesses this tree renewed and becoming resplendent with light. He has not reached his end in this moment, however, as this tree infused with color and light, “less than the rose and more than the violet,”¹⁴⁹ is only the highest image of wisdom and not Wisdom itself. “See how much your way is distant from the divine,” warns Beatrice, “as much as the earth is discordant with the highest and quickest of heavens.”¹⁵⁰ The tree is a symbol of divine love and justice,¹⁵¹ though Dante must rightly purge himself of even this symbol, since it is not his final end. As Augustine says, “this, though created, is likewise called wisdom: there is much difference between the Wisdom which creates and the wisdom which is created as between Light which gives light and the light that is so only

* In addition, the seven flames, echo of the seven lamps from John’s Apocalypse: “And from the throne proceeded lightnings, and voices, and thunders; and there were seven lamps burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God.” (Rev. 4:5)

by reflection.”¹⁵² Man in following the way of affirmation must recall the Good which informs the images along the way, just as Dante recalls the Good by drinking from the river Eunoe.¹⁵³ Having reached the height of the earthly paradise Dante purges himself of this last image and is made pure. What remains is for him to leave the earthly plane behind and ascend toward that Good, that Love, that Wisdom, which has informed the circular images along the way.

Chapter IV: Paradiso – The Perfection of Image and the Rediscovery of The Path

A. The Spherical Structure of Paradise – Images of Increasing Perfection

The ascent to heaven takes on a different nature than what has already been observed in the prior canticles. As the poet notes, “to transcend humanity cannot be put forth in words.”¹⁵⁴ Dante the pilgrim in this last realm crosses a definite threshold from what was corporeal to now, what is a distinctly incorporeal realm. To cite an earlier discussion, the path now embarks upon the upper portion of Plato’s divided line.* But unlike Plato’s distinction, where the segments of ‘thought’ and ‘intellect’ are species of the invisible, Dante’s Heaven is pervaded with the visible and what is seen overwhelms human intellect.

La gloria di colui che tutto move
per l'universo penetra e risplende
in una parte più e meno altrove.
Nel ciel che più della sua luce prende
fu'io, e vidi cose che ridire
nè sa nè può chi di là su discende;
perché appressando sè al suo desire,
nostro intelletto si profonda tanto,
che dietro alla memoria non può ire.¹⁵⁵

In these opening lines Dante recalls the light that was present as a motive force in the *Purgatorio*, though now it is the Light of ‘Him who moves all things’ and not a mere image of that light (i.e. the sun). Moreover, in looking upon this Light, man’s intellect fails him and ‘it sinks so low that memory cannot follow behind.’ In this realm Dante the pilgrim must look upon the Divine and in so doing, envisage its structure, which is precisely spherical.

What is perhaps paradoxical in this final kingdom is that Dante the poet must still work through images. Beatrice explains that, “one must speak as such to your (i.e. Dante’s) reason, for only by sensing does it apprehend that which it makes fit for the intellect.”¹⁵⁶ Yet the images in

* See Ch. I, A – What is Required of Image?

Paradise are not particulars as before in the other realms; in Heaven what Dante sees is Divine order, which is that very order “which makes the universe resemble God.”¹⁵⁷ Consequently, Dante the poet organizes his Heaven according to the Ptolemaic model of the universe since, as he suggests, its order is derived from the Divine order witnessed in the Empyrean. C. S. Lewis summarizes the model in the following way:

The central (and spherical) Earth is surrounded by a series of hollow and transparent globes, one above the other, and each of course larger than the one below. These are the ‘spheres,’ ‘heavens,’ or sometimes ‘elements.’ Fixed in each of the first seven spheres is one luminous body. Starting from Earth, the order is the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn; the ‘seven planets.’ Beyond the sphere of Saturn is the *Stellatum*, to which belong all those stars that we still call ‘fixed’ because their positions relative to one another are, unlike those of the planets, invariable. Beyond the *Stellatum* there is a sphere called the First Movable or *Primum Mobile*. This, since it carries no luminous body, gives no evidence of itself to our senses; Its existence was inferred to account for the motions of all the others.¹⁵⁸

Ptolemy himself justifies the spherical structures of the heavenly bodies, examining their physical makeup:

[T]he fact that nature has built all earthly and corruptible bodies wholly out of rounded figures but with heterogeneous parts, and all divine bodies in the ether out of spherical figures with homogeneous parts, since if they were plane or disc-like they would not appear circular to all those who see them from different parts of the earth at the same time. Therefore it would seem reasonable that the ether surrounding them and of a like nature be also spherical, and that because of the homogeneity of its parts it moves circularly and regularly.¹⁵⁹

His analysis recalls the dichotomy of Self and Other, which was discussed in chapter two. In this case, however, the makeup of the Heavens relies on their homogeneity (i.e. their self-same quality) and those things in the sublunar realm are composed of heterogenous parts. The *Paradiso* demonstrates this relationship in that, now Dante is the ‘Other’ who seeks a return to God; he must travel through the heavenly spheres, which poses the quality of ‘Self’ by nature of their self-same rotation. Further, Dante organizes the *Paradiso* in what is a hierarchy of proximity to God. He qualifies this, however, by noting that the souls that appear to him as he

traverses the spheres of Heaven are not properly located within the spheres themselves, but rather that their appearance in those spheres communicates their position within the Empyrean.* This qualification gives credence to the idea suggested in the opening lines of the *Paradiso*: the Light of God shines brighter on some parts and less on others.† Thus, there are some souls who appear to have a diminished blessedness, and others who appear to have a fuller one: “*e differentemente han dolce vita, per sentir più e men l’eterno spiro,*” (and they have the sweet life, but differently, feeling more and less the eternal breath).¹⁶⁰ Dante’s Heaven, moreover, exemplifies the ordering of the whole *Commedia* according to the Divine order in this hierarchy (i.e. circular images which increase in their perfection as Dante moves further along the way). As the successive spheres of Heaven progress toward the Empyrean, each becomes more resplendent, more magnanimous—this is reflective of man’s overall ascent toward God. Dante makes explicit mention of this hierarchy when he says, “all things have order among themselves, and this is the form by which the universe is similar to God. Here the higher creatures see the footprint of the eternal quality, which is the end for which the regulation was made.”¹⁶¹ Divine order informs the universe, and the observation of this order brings man closer to God’s thought, which made all of creation.

Considering the order delineated in the *Paradiso*, the lower three spheres—the Moon, Mercury, and Venus—are all spheres in which the Light of God is diffused in a way, and their proximity to the sphere of the Earth influences their character.

Parev’a me che nube me coprissi
 lucida, spessa, solida e pulita,
 quasi adamante che lo sol ferisse.¹⁶²

* Cf. *Paradiso*, IV.37-9

† Cf. *Paradiso*, I.1-3.

The Light is by no means absent here as it was in the *Inferno*, and it is still a degree of the true Light and not an image of that Light as in the *Purgatorio*. Yet, it appears as if ‘covered by a cloud.’ From the sphere of the Sun onward, this cloud has dispersed, and the Light becomes more apparent. The hierarchy of these spheres mirrors the hierarchy of the seven virtues: Temperance, Fortitude, Justice, Prudence, Faith, Hope, and Love.* As Dante ascends through these spheres, each one gains in perfection and each corresponds, in turn, to a higher order of virtue. The correspondence is stated here in brief: In the sphere of the Sun we meet St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Francis, two saints whose examples of chastity and poverty serve as apt exemplars of Temperance. The sphere of Mars houses those whose blessedness was wrought through martyrdom—which is the height of Fortitude. In Jupiter’s sphere Dante witnesses the souls arrange themselves to spell out the first line of the book of Wisdom: “*Diligite iustitiam qui iudicatis terram*”—‘Love justice, you that are the judges of the earth.’¹⁶³ Thus, Justice is portrayed there.† In the sphere of Saturn, Dante meets St. Benedict and the other contemplatives who serve as examples of Prudence. In the Eighth Heaven, the field of the Fixed Stars, the three cardinal virtues are present in turn. St. Peter examines Dante on his Faith; further, Faith is affirmed in this sphere “because this kingdom has made its citizen through the true faith.”¹⁶⁴ St. James again examines Dante on Hope, and finally, the arrival of St. John yields an examination

* Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, specifically Q.26 which outlines Charity (Love) as the highest of virtues. Each of the theological virtues are in turn subordinate to Charity, and further, the cardinal virtues are subordinate to the theological virtues. The entire hierarchy is then as stated where Temperance is lowest among the virtues and Charity is the highest (cf. *Purgatorio*, XXXI.104-131). Dante references in this passage the four women who are representative of the cardinal virtues and the ‘three who are superior,’ which are properly the theological virtues.

† Cf. *Purgatorio*, XXXII.112. The ‘bird of Jove’ as it strips the tree of its bark depicts the persecution of the church. The image in the *Purgatorio* is desirous of Justice, while the correlating eagle seen in *Paradiso*, XVIII–XX speaks of ‘eternal judgment’ (*Paradiso*, XIX.99).

of Dante on Love. The spheres are not secondary to this trajectory of virtue but rather are partnered with them, since man's perfection through virtue is mirrored in the perfection represented in circular order.

B. The Pilgrim's Ascent – The Reemergence of the Straight Path

At the height of the Eighth Heaven, Dante looks back toward the earth and, at the behest of Beatrice, he contemplates his path and his own mortality—"Adima il viso, e guarda come tu se' volto," (Look down and see how you have revolved).¹⁶⁵ The evocation of the noblest motion (i.e. revolution) is significant and recalls the path of the pilgrim thus far. Dante's path through Hell and Purgatory was rightly governed by 'revolving' through their circular realms, however, the character of his path through Heaven has appropriately changed. Dante's ascent in the *Paradiso* is often described as the swiftest of motions, like an arrow shot from a bow: "as an arrow that finds its mark before the string is quiet."¹⁶⁶ The pilgrim in this sense has regained the *via smarrita* (lost way) and he finds himself again on the straight and narrow path.

His path being straight as he ascends through the spheres does not, however, negate the significance of the circular path.

E come, per sentir più diletta
bene operando, l'uom di giorno in girono
s'accorge che la sua virtute avanza
sì m'accors'io che'l mio girar dintorno
col cielo insieme avea cresciuto l'arco,
veggendo quel miracol più adorno.¹⁶⁷

Dante acknowledges that his revolution has become an 'internal revolution,' one that coincides with the turning of the heavenly spheres—not unlike the spinning of an arrow as it flies toward its mark. Canto XIX further evidences this idea that the straight is qualified by the circular, as Dante describes the *roteando* (rotating)¹⁶⁸ of the eagle which calls its gaze toward higher things. Dante

observes, moreover, that the motion of rotation is a vehicle for greater perfection: “and every turn made them more beautiful.”¹⁶⁹ James T. Chiampi suggests that in the *Paradiso* the motion of Dante the pilgrim has become akin to Augustine’s *exercitatio animi*, “the exercise of the mind that leads it from the material to the intelligible.”¹⁷⁰ The ascent in this kingdom is the soul’s exercise, coming away from the tangible and toward the eternal and intangible; we should restate that circular order exemplifies this idea, in that the circumference of a circle is itself tangible, yet, it rests upon the existence of an intangible center. As man progresses from the tangible to the intangible his virtue advances and the Light increases. “The pilgrim sees everything in Paradise in the form of light which is gradually intensified to the point of blindness. Light has the unique attribute of being the source of all vision though itself shapeless and invisible outside the object it illuminates.”¹⁷¹ This insight from Marguerite Mills Chiarenza encapsules the very idea of God that Dante has been moving toward: an imageless and eternal *punto* Who man must rightly see, but in Whom his intellect becomes blinded.

C. The Primum Mobile and The Empyrean as Both Cosmic Circumference and Center

So how must man comprehend that Point which begins to unfold its nature in the Ninth Heaven of Dante’s *Paradiso*? Dante himself expresses uncertainty about this idea:

E io a lei: ‘Se’l mondo fosse posto
 con l’ordine ch’io veggio in quelle rotte,
 sazio m’avrebbe ciò che m’è proposto;
 Ma nel mondo sensibile si pote
 veder le volte tanto più divine,
 quant’elle son dal centro più remote.
 Onde, se’l mio disio dee aver fine
 in questo miro e angelico templo
 Che solo amore e luce ha per confine,
 udir convenni ancor come l’esemplo
 e l’esemplare non vanno d’un modo,
 chè io per me indarno a ciò contemplo.¹⁷²

Dante's perplexity arises out of the structure that has thus far been described; insofar as Dante observes, the center is the Earth and as one progresses outward from it, only then does blessedness increase. His problem is that he cannot reconcile this structure with the idea of the Divine Point that orders the whole of the circular cosmos, which decidedly, is not the center from which he has already come. Beatrice explains that "on that Point [i.e. God] the heavens and all nature depend." She urges him further to "[l]ook at that circle that is closest to it; and know that its movement is so swift because of the inflamed love by which it is driven."¹⁷³ C. S. Lewis clarifies stating, "The *Primum Mobile* is moved by its love for God, and, being moved, communicates motion to the rest of the universe."¹⁷⁴ Dante, strictly speaking, is perplexed because he is observing the tangible aspect of the universe. Beatrice calls him to observe the intelligible universe. Lewis again states this idea eloquently:

All this time we are describing the universe spread out in space; dignity, power and speed progressively diminishing as we descend from its circumference to its centre [sic], the Earth. But I have already hinted that the intelligible universe reverses it all; there the Earth is the rim, the outside edge where being fades away on the border of nonentity [...] this is the intelligence of the *Primum Mobile*, superior to all the rest [i.e. the spheres] in love and knowledge. The universe is thus, when our minds are sufficiently freed from the senses, turned inside out.¹⁷⁵

Lewis references *Paradiso*, XXVIII.16–39 in which Dante the poet elucidates this phenomenon. In these lines Dante speaks of "a point [...] that radiated an acute light."¹⁷⁶ This is the Divine Point and about it turn the nine angelic circles. Dante further observes that an angelic circle moves slower, the greater the distance it is from this point. The one that is closest (i.e. the *Primum Mobile*) is brightest and moves the fastest: "and that which had the sincerest flame, which was least distant from that pure spark, because, I believe, it takes its truth most from it."¹⁷⁷ The proximity of these circles to this point, is a 'nearness' proper to the intelligible universe, to which Lewis refers. So the image that arises in the *Primum Mobile* reflects the heavenly spheres

and the Earth below: God is at once the periphery that encircles the cosmos with Love and Light, and He is also the motionless Point about which wheel the nine orders of angels and the created order of things becomes the external circumference furthest from Him, save for nonentity.*

D. The Circular Nature of the Divine

In the last Heaven—the Empyrean—Dante’s vision reaches its supernal height. He sees the Divine Point which he has observed in varying degrees of intensity, and which he saw from the *Primum Mobile* shining brightly as the center of all else, now unimpeded.

Lume è là su che visibile face
lo creatore a quella creatura
che solo in lui vedere ha la sua pace.
E’si distende in circular figura,
in tanto che la sua circonferenza
sarebbe al sol troppo larga cintura.¹⁷⁸

The shape of that light is circular, and in this moment the entire motion of Dante the pilgrim is conceived of and informed by that luminous center of all Being: God Himself. “The amazement of the modern reader must arise from the abstractness, the geometrical nature, of the vision of God that terminates so long a journey,” James T. Chiampi observes.¹⁷⁹ This vision of God is hardly humanlike as one might expect; rather Dante’s depiction abandons all vain anthropological notions of God and instead purports that His image is an image of perfection (i.e. a circle). Dante reevaluates the lines from Genesis—“And God created man to his own image: to the image of God he created him: male and female he created them”¹⁸⁰—reinterpreting God’s image, not as reflected in tangible man (i.e. his body), but instead reflected in intelligible man.

* Cf. *Paradiso*, XXX.11-12. “*al punto che mi vinse, parendo inchiuso da quel ch’elli ’nchiude.*” (of the point that overcame me, seeming enclosed by that which it encloses.)

Man's nature that comes from God and desires a return to Him—which traces a circular path—is the image which God bestowed upon him on the sixth day of creation.

Though beyond a singular, circular point, however, the poem reaches for the apex of Christian theology calling it “*Oh trina luce*,” (Oh threefold light).¹⁸¹ This circular Light is in fact, a Trinity, which suffuses all else with existence and who is the agent of the Love which moves the whole cosmos; and so Dante identifies three circles within the One. Some contemporary scholars even suggest that “Dante’s depiction of the ‘three-in-oneness’ of the Holy Trinity, while alluded to earlier in the *Commedia* [...] is one of the very last imagistic puzzles used to express God’s ineffability in the poem.”¹⁸² In these three circles he expounds upon Trinitarian relationships.

e l’un dall’altro come iri da iri
parea riflesso, e’l terzo pareo foco
che quinci e quindi igualmente si spiri.¹⁸³

The two circles which are reflections of each other are God the Father and God the Son, and the third—which is ‘on fire’—is the Holy Spirit ‘who proceeds from the Father and the Son.’ Arielle Saiber and Aba Mbirika note that “Dante chose to depict the three persons of the Trinity as geometric ‘roundnesses’ [sic] rather than anthropomorphically or with other common iconographic conventions. Such a decision seems a natural extension of his belief that the circle was the most perfect of forms.”¹⁸⁴ The final aspect of this vision comes when Dante focuses in on the circle that “seemed painted with our own effigy.”¹⁸⁵ Precisely, he sees Christ in His two natures (i.e. human and divine). In seeing Christ, Dante beholds the archetypal image of intelligible man. He affirms this, moreover, as he says the effigy appeared “within itself, of its own color,”¹⁸⁶ yet, in this line the image gains greater depth. It appears as if the *giro*, that in Dante’s vision is Christ, compounds the ‘in-imaging’ of man with the incarnation: precisely, God

becomes that which was made in His own image. For this reason, Dante writes, “*Quella circolazione che si concetta parvea in te come lume reflesso*” (that circulation which conceived itself appeared in You as light reflected).¹⁸⁷ Christ is, then, the last focal point and the perfect iteration of man enjoined to his maker. This moment when the circular path finds its source recalls, in part, both the very beginning in the ‘dark wood’ (i.e. when wisdom was lost), and the last moment in the Earthly Paradise when he witnesses the tree of knowledge renewed. At the beginning Dante is searching for wisdom that was lost; in Eden he comes to the image of wisdom, however, imperfect; Christ Himself comes at the end of Dante’s ‘wheeling’ since He is Wisdom incarnate. It is here that Dante, “wishes to see how that image was fitted to the circle,”¹⁸⁸ though this ultimately proves as perplexing and elusive as ‘the squaring of the circle’ is to the geometer. The poem ends with Dante rejoining his source, but “power failed the high fantasy”¹⁸⁹ and he is cast back into the wheeling motion caused by the Love of the creator. The cautionary tale that emerges is that, while God perpetuates the revolving motion of the cosmos, and while He ultimately facilitates man’s return to Him, man’s will alone cannot sustain the rejoining of the circle. Man must willfully cooperate with divine grace if he hopes to return to God.

Conclusion: “Yoking the End to its Source” – Circular Image and Man’s Reunion to God

Dante the poet in his *Commedia* crafts a contiguous whole that embodies the path of man toward the Divine. As has been observed, this ‘way’ begins as relational to exterior things. Man must acknowledge himself in relation to the Other, just as for Plato the path toward understanding begins with a trust in external phenomena. Dante outlines this primary mode of ‘the way’ in what is properly a descent, since external things, while sometimes signs of higher things, are not, of themselves, God. Acknowledging the mutability of images, Charles Williams purports a balance between the way of affirmation and the way of negation: * image, whatever it may be, must be carefully discerned and utilized either as a way toward God (i.e. affirmation) or as a detractor from God (i.e. negation). This idea is echoed in the pages of Tomaso Campanella’s

Il Città del Sole:

Onorano il sole e le stelle come cose viventi e statue di Dio e tempîi celesti; ma non l’adorano, e più onorano I sole. Nulla creatura adorano di latria, altro di Dio, e però a lui servono solo sotto l’insegna del sole, ch’è insegna e volto di Dio, da cui viene la luce e’l calore e ogni altra cosa.¹⁹⁰

The people of Campanella’s utopic circular city recognize that there is a hierarchy in the created order and that some images rightly point to God, yet, nothing or no one deserves worship apart from God alone. Dante’s path through Hell reflects what is required of man in an examination of these things external to him. His circular motion in this realm represents an ingathering of these things to him, which he must further discern.

Dante’s path then follows an earthly ascent in the *Purgatorio*, which is properly wheeling in the opposite direction, not down and to the left but up and to the right. The ascent of the mount of Purgatory is for Dante a purgation through introspection, and an intensification of the will

* Cf. Charles Williams, *The Figure of Beatrice*, 13; 21.

toward the Good. As he ascends from one terrace to the next, he must examine the nature of each sin in relation to its purgation; the external image of this purging comes when another “P,” i.e. *peccato* (sin), is stricken from his forehead. Man’s introspection and surmounting of sin is essentially a refinement of images. In the *Purgatorio* this sin “is described variously as mist, slough, scum, blindness, and smoke, and as paralysis, languor, malady, weight, crookedness, and knot,” Susan E. Blow notes.¹⁹¹ Each is either an impediment to vision or to motion, both are necessary in man’s return to God; for Dante, both have their refinement in circular order. Yet, man cannot rightly end here, as perhaps is the danger with a strictly Platonic outlook; man cannot ‘attain’ to the divine simply by contemplating the Form of things. Boethius’ *Lady Philosophy* cautions thusly, “You too, earthly creatures, dream of your origin, although only in faint images.”¹⁹² Man must not supplant the Sovereign Good for the images which imitate it.

The final motion in man’s return, as described in the *Paradiso*, is rightly the ‘re-finding’ of the straight path, which is qualified by circular perfection. It is also a coming into proximity with God. Stratford Caldecott states that, “proximity to or representation of the divine determines the graduated structure of the whole, with a central point being the axis that connects all-that-is with its origin.”¹⁹³ The center Point is that which defines the circle of the whole. And the axis, which is the ‘distance’ from God to Man is rightly conceived of in the ‘in-Godding’ of man, the perfect image of which is found in Christ Himself. As it says in the *Paradiso*, “[t]his is the Wisdom and the Potency that opened the roads between heaven and earth, for which there was long since such desire.”¹⁹⁴ Dante descended down to witness that point which is the material opposite of God, and then reemerged to ascend the mountain, purging those material images, in a refinement of his desire for God. Lastly, Dante truly returns to God upon that road ‘which was opened between Heaven and earth,’—the road that was wrought through the incarnation, passion,

and resurrection of Christ. The words of Boethius again ring true in correlation to what has been said:

Each thing finds its return and rejoices!
Nothing continues its way
Unless the end is yoked to the source—
Making the circle eternal.¹⁹⁵

Just as for Dante, man must rediscover the path that was lost if he is to find his rightful end. Though this rediscovery does not affect a change in direction upon a line between Being and non-Being. Properly speaking, man must return again to his source by way of the noblest of motions and by way of an image that is most suited to this return—an image of Divine Love, Wisdom, and of the Highest Good: a perfect circle.

¹Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Scott Goins and Barbara H. (Wyman. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), Bk. III, metrum 2. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent quotations of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* are from this edition.

²Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, 1:Inferno* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939) *Inferno*, X.4-6. (O highest virtue, who directs me through the unholy circles," I began, "as it pleases you, speak to me, and satisfy my desires.) Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent translations of Dante's *Commedia* in this thesis are those of the author.

³ *Inferno* I.1-3. (In the midst of our walk of life I found myself in a dark wood because the straight way was misplaced.)

⁴ *Ibid.* 10-13. (I cannot well retell how I entered there, so full I was of sleep at that point that I abandoned the true way.)

⁵ G. H. McWilliam, "Dante's Smooth Beast: A Commentary on the Opening Canto of the 'Commedia.'" *Hermathena*, no. 113 (1972): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23040252>, 16. (accessed November 13, 2021). McWilliam notes that the first canto of *Inferno* is distinct from the rest of the work by virtue of this lack of motion.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, 2 ed. trans. F. J. Sheed, ed. Michael P. Foley. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), 2.18. "I went away from Thee, my God; in my youth I strayed too far from thy sustaining power, and I became to myself a barren land." Augustine's words here recall the parable of the prodigal son from the Gospel of Luke (cf. Luke 15:17 "And returning to himself, he said: How many hired servants in my father's house abound with bread, and I here perish with hunger?") Of note in this passage is the self-reflective state in which the prodigal son finds himself. He has squandered his wealth and has lost everything, and not unlike Dante in the dark wood, or Augustine in the barren land, his way forward and out of sin requires that he first stop and examine himself.

⁸ *Inferno* I.51. "*molte gente fè già viver grame.*"

⁹ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, 10.27.

¹⁰ Sir. 4:19-20, Douay-Rheims version (Charlotte, NC: Saint Benedict Press, 2009) Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent quotations of the Bible in this thesis are from this version.

¹¹ *Inferno* I.82-84. (O honor and light of other poets, the long study and great love that has caused me to search your volume refines me.) The verb here is *vagliare* which translated literally means "to sift." The imagery that this evokes is poignant, to say the least, and it is perhaps an allusion to Dante's approaching task, recalling the chaff to be separated from the wheat and burned in the fire (cf. Matt. 3:12: cf. *Paradiso*, XII.118-20.)

¹² Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, 1:Inferno* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), 30. The quotation comes from the translators summative note on Canto I on the *Inferno*.

¹³ *Inferno* I.16-18. "*Guardai in alto, e vidi le sue spalle vestite già de'raggi del pianeta che mena dritto altrui per ogni calle.*"

¹⁴ *Inferno* I.78. "*ch'è principio e cagion di tutta gioia?*"

¹⁵ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, 11.39.

¹⁶ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Bk. I, prosa 6.

¹⁷ *Inferno* I.91.

¹⁸ Austin, Kevin, "*I know why you drew this Image (of me):*" *The Education of Man qua the Image of the Divine* (Essay, University of Dallas, 2020) In this sub-section of the first chapter, I

borrow from my prior work concerning image and its role in education. While the end of this former argument seeks to establish image as integral in the process of education and is thereby distinct from the present argument concerning circular imagery, the analysis and definition of image is of significance in the current work.

¹⁹ Charles Williams, *The Figure of Beatrice*, (Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press, 2005), 8. Note: Williams refers to the way of negation as the way of “rejection.”

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11. According to Charles Williams, “What we can say about Dante, and almost all that we can say about him, is that he had the genius to imagine the Way of Affirmation wholly—after a particular manner indeed, but then that is the nature of the way of the Images.”

²¹ Aristotle, *De Memoria*, 449b31.

²² Aristotle, *De Anima*, 427b15-20.

²³ *Ibid.*, 428a1-4. Imagination for Aristotle is a faculty that is independent of discernment, though it is that faculty which is essential to discrimination; within discrimination, he notes, are the faculties of sense, opinion, science, and intelligence.

²⁴ Plato, *The Republic*, 510a.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 509d-510a. “Now, in terms of relative clarity and obscurity, you’ll have one segment in the visible part for images. I mean by images first shadows, then appearances produced in water and in all close-grained, smooth, bright things, and everything of the sort.”

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 510b.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 511b.

²⁹ Plato, *The Republic*, 518c.

³⁰ *Inferno* I.77

³¹ Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Peter Kalkavage (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2016), 42B. Cf. C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 53. Lewis cites Chalcidius’ commentary on the *Timaeus* as evidence to suggest that Plato (in 42B) argues that man becomes more animalistic the more he indulges his passions. Further, this change in man happens in his present life and not (as the text, however, suggests) as a punitive measure affecting his reincarnation.

³² Plato, *The Republic*, 518e. Socrates furthers the distinction between the changed and the changeless when he inquires of Cebes about “the many beautiful particulars.” Cebes concedes that, “they are never in the same state.”

³³ *Ibid.*, 79a.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 510e.

³⁵ Williams, *The Figure of Beatrice*, 7.

³⁶ Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth’s Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009, 47.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Augustine of Hippo, “The Teacher,” in *Augustine: Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, trans. Peter King, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1995), 9.25.2-4.

³⁹ *Inferno*, IX.61-3. (O, you who possess healthy intellects, observe the teaching which is concealed beneath the veil of these mysterious verses.)

⁴⁰ Peter S. Hawkins, “Divide and Conquer: Augustine in the *Divine Comedy*.” *PMLA* 106, no. 3 (1991): <https://doi.org/10.2307/462780>, 472. (accessed November 13, 2021) cf. Marguerite Mills Chiarenza, “The Imageless Vision and Dante’s Paradiso.” *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 90 (1972): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40166128>, 77. (accessed

November 19, 2021). Both authors observe the correlatives between Augustine's three modes of vision and the trinitarian structure of Dante's *Commedia*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 474.

⁴² *Inferno*, I.88. (See the beast for which I turned.)

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁴ G. H. McWilliam, "Dante's Smooth Beast," 18-19.

⁴⁵ Euclid, *Elements*, trans. Thomas L. Heath, ed. Dana Densmore, (Santa Fe: Green Lion Press, 2002), 1. Definition 15 reads as follows: "A *circle* is a plane figure contained by one line such that all the straight lines falling upon it from one point among those lying within the figure are equal to one another." See note 65.

⁴⁶ Livio Pestilli, "'The Noble Sense of the Curve' from Antiquity through Borromini," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 58 (2013): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24616454>, 19. (accessed November 6, 2021).

⁴⁷ Plato, *Timaeus*, 33B.

⁴⁸ Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth's Sake*, 85.

⁴⁹ Sean Chorney, "Circles, Materiality and Movement." *For the Learning of Mathematics* 37, no. 3 (2017)<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26548471>, 46. Chorney is, however, appealing to the circle itself as the eternal entity and his analysis is perhaps not concerned with the Divine. The appeal is, however, significant with respect to Dante since, at the apex of his poem (see *Paradiso* XXX.103-5, *Paradiso* XXXI.46-8, and *Paradiso* XXXIII.114-20) the circular and the Divine appear to be one and the same.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Plato, *Timaeus*, 34A.

⁵² Ptolemy, *Almagest*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 16. (New York: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1989), 1.3.

⁵³ Copernicus, "Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres," in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 16. (New York: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1989), 1.4 [2b].

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.1, Copernicus qualifies by stating that "the courses of the planets and the revolutions of the stars cannot be determined by exact calculation and reduced to perfect knowledge unless, through the passage of time and with the help of many prior observations, they can, so to speak, be handed down to posterity." (*Ibid.*) He is willing to accept that Ptolemy advanced the science of astronomy to its highest degree given the knowledge available to him in his time. Copernicus admires the perfection of circular forms—and he uses them extensively in his work—though, his theories will begin to rely on observations above and beyond calculations to extend Ptolemaic thought and refine his theories. Namely, Copernicus shifts to a heliocentric model; as Dante antedates Copernicus, his cosmic structure (cf. *Paradiso*) still adheres to the Ptolemaic model.

⁵⁵ Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth's Sake*, 80.

⁵⁶ Euclid, *Elements*, 2002, 1.

⁵⁷ *Inferno*, I.3.

⁵⁸ *Paradiso*, XXXIII.144.

⁵⁹ Lynne Ballew, "Straight and Circular in Parmenides and the 'Timaeus.'" *Phronesis* 19, no. 3 (1974): 189–209. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4181940> (accessed October 9, 2021).

⁶⁰ *Inferno*, III.8. "io eterna duro"

⁶¹ *Inferno*, II.141-2. (And then as he had been so moved, I entered upon the deep and wild way.)

⁶² Ibid., I.6. “*nel pensier rinova la paura!*” (within thought the fear was renewed.)

⁶³ Ibid., III.21. (he led me into secret things)

⁶⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, q.21, a.4.

⁶⁵ Kurdzialek, Marian, and Hugh McDonald, “Mediaeval Doctrines on Man as Image of the World,” *Roczniki Filozoficzne / Annales de Philosophie / Annals of Philosophy* 62, no. 4 (2014). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43410543> (accessed October 9, 2021): 207. Cf. Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth's Sake*, 50. Caldecott notes, “In medieval terms, which can be traced back at least to Pythagoras through Philo and others, man is not only an image of God, but an image of the ordered cosmos, a “microcosm” or world miniature, possessing a balance ...” (ibid.). The idea of cosmic order resulting from heterogenous relationships extends further to man himself, as he is a body-soul composite—the commingling of the material and the immaterial. Expressed in circular terms, man’s body is the material limiting element—the visible circumference which encompasses the whole—and his soul is that unseen center upon which the whole rests.

⁶⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 58.

⁶⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 7.23.

⁶⁸ *Inferno*, III.1-9. (Through me, you go to the sorrowful city, through me, you go to the eternal pain, through me, you go among the lost people. Justice moved my High Artificer: divine power, supreme wisdom, and primal love made me. Before me, there was nothing created except eternal things, and I endure eternally. Abandon all hope, you who enter.)

⁶⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.2.

⁷⁰ Ecc. 12:14

⁷¹ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Bk.III, met.2.

⁷² *Inferno*, IV.42. “*che sanza speme vivemo in disio*”

⁷³ Bert Hornback, “Dante’s Universe: How to Find It, and Why.” *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 83, no. 1 (2000). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41178938>, 212-13. (accessed November 19, 2021).

⁷⁴ *Inferno*, XIV.124-6.

⁷⁵ Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. “sinister,” <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=sinister> (accessed November 20, 2021). The entry suggests that in Latin, *sinister* – meaning “left” or “to the left,” was often used in the practice of augury to describe a motion of birds that was foreboding or a bad omen.

⁷⁶ *Inferno*, XIV.127-9. (You are not yet turned round the whole circle: as such, if something appears new, it mustn’t prove marvelous to your face.)

⁷⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, 614c-d.

⁷⁸ Bert Hornback, “Dante’s Universe,” 213.

⁷⁹ *Inferno*, XVI.61-3. (I am leaving the gall and continuing on for the sweet fruits promised to me by the true Leader; but I must first go down to the center.)

⁸⁰ Ibid., XXVIII.46-8. “*Nè morte’l giunse ancor, nè colpa’l mena [...] a tormentarlo; ma per dar lui esperienza piena, a me, che morto son, convien menarlo per lo’nferno qua giù di giro in giro.*”

⁸¹ Ibid., XXX.133-6. “*Quand’io’l senti’a me parlar con ira, volsimi verso lui con tal vergogna, ch’ancor per la memoria mi si gira.*”

⁸² Plato, *Timaeus*, 35B.

⁸³ Ibid., 36C.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 39B.

⁸⁵ Rev. 3:16

⁸⁶ *Inferno*, III.40-2. (The heavens expel them not to be less beautiful, neither do the depths of hell receive them, that any of the guilty might have glory over them.)

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* III.52-4. (And I, as I watched, I saw a banner, that whirling ran so fast that it seemed to me unworthy of every pause.)

⁸⁸ J. A. Scartazzini and Thekla Bernays, “On the Congruence of Sins and Punishments in Dante’s *Inferno*.” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 22, no. 1/2 (1888), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25668155>. (accessed October 10, 2021): 26.

⁸⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, I.1.

⁹⁰ *Inferno*, VII.22-4. (As do the waves there above Charybdis, one shatters with that into which it crashes, so here must the people dance in the round.)

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 58-9. “*Mal dare e mal tener lo mondo pulcro ha tolto loro, e posti a questa zuffa.*”

⁹² *Ibid.*, XXVIII.37-42. (A devil is there behind that rends each cruelly, putting each of that kind to the edge of the sword, when we have gone round the road of pain; but the wounds have closed up before any comes again before him.)

⁹³ *Inferno*, XVII.3. “*che tutto ’l mondo appuzza*”

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹⁵ James C. Nohrnberg, “The Descent of Geryon: The Moral System of *Inferno* XVI-XXXI.” *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 114 (1996), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40166599>. (accessed October 10, 2021): 136. Nohrnberg suggests a correlation between both the Leviathan of Job 40:20 and the Behemoth of Job 40:10. Both bear resemblances to Geryon.

⁹⁶ *Inferno*, XVI.111.

⁹⁷ Job 40:20.

⁹⁸ *Inferno*, XVII.97-8.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 106-14. (A greater fear, I don’t believe, there was when Phaeton abandoned the reigns and the sky, as it still appears, was scorched; neither when miserable Icarus felt his kidneys plucked out by the heated wax, his father crying to him: ‘you take the wrong way!’, such was my fear when I saw that I was in the air on every side and I saw every way out lost except the beast.)

¹⁰⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, IX.1.

¹⁰¹ *Inferno*, XVI.112.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, XV.97-8.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 92. “*che alla Fortuna, come vuol, son presto*”

¹⁰⁴ *Inferno*, XV.99.

¹⁰⁵ James C. Nohrnberg, “The Descent of Geryon: The Moral System of *Inferno* XVI-XXXI.” 131.

¹⁰⁶ *Inferno*, IX.132. “*E poi ch’alla man destra si fu volto*”

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, XVIII.70-2. (Rather lightly we ascended this; and turned to the right along its splinter, from those eternal circles we departed.)

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, XXXIV.34. “*fu sì bello com’elli è or brutto*”

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 85-93. (Then he passed out through a hole in the stone, and placed me on the edge to sit; then he placed near me his wary step. I raised my eyes and expected to see Lucifer as I had left him; but I saw his legs held up; and if I now became troubled, the masses may think it, for they do not see that, which is the point that I had passed.)

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 110-1. “*l punto al qual si traggon d’ogni parte i pesi*”

¹¹¹ *Purgatorio*, I.3-5. (and I will sing of that second kingdom where the human spirit purges itself, and becomes worthy of an ascent to heaven.)

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 22-3. “*I’ mi volsi a man destra, e puosi mente all’atro polo*”

¹¹³ *Inferno*, XXXIV.112-26. (And you have now arrived beneath that hemisphere opposite that which covers the great doldrums, and under whose height was consumed the Man who was born and lived without sin: you have your feet upon the little sphere which forms the other side of Judecca. Here it is morning when there it is evening: and he, that made for us a ladder with his hair, is still fixed as he first was. From this part he fell down from Heaven, and the land, which before protruded from here, for fear of him made a veil of the sea and came to our hemisphere; and perhaps to escape from him it left here an empty space, and that which appears here rushed upward.)

¹¹⁴ *Paradiso*, I.19-20. “*Lo bel pianeta che d’amar conforta faceva tutto rider l’oriente*”

¹¹⁵ Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth’s Sake*, 83.

¹¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, 19.9. (cf. Ia IIae, 1.8 “God is the last end of man and all other things”)

¹¹⁷ *Purgatorio*, VIII.120. “*a’ miei portai l’amor che qui raffina*”

¹¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, 19.8.

¹¹⁹ *Purgatorio*, XVII.115-23. (It is he who hopes in excellence through suppressing his neighbor, and it is only through this longing that he might be brought low from his grandeur. It is he who fears to lose power, grace, honor, and fame because another surpasses, that he is so aggrieved that he loves the contrary. And it is he who by insult feels himself disgraced, and becomes greedy of vengeance, and such that he must influence the harm of another.)

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 130-2. (If love is slow in him that draws him to see it or in him to gain it, this terrace, after right penance, martyrs you for that.)

¹²¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, 133.1.

¹²² *Purgatorio*, XVII.136-7.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, IX.132. “*che di fuor torna chi’n dietro si guata*”

¹²⁴ Lk. 16:32

¹²⁵ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, bk. V, metrum 12.

¹²⁶ *Purgatorio*, IV.88-90.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 92-3. “*ti fia leggero com’a seconda giù andar per nave*”

¹²⁸ Ptolemy, *Almagest*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, (1989), 1.4

¹²⁹ Simon A. Gilson, “Dante and the Science of ‘Perspective’: A Reappraisal,” *Dante Studies*, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society, no. 115 (1997), <http://www.jstor.com/stable/40285141> (accessed October 19, 2021): 193.

¹³⁰ *Purgatorio*, IV.61-75.

¹³¹ Susan E. Blow, “Dante’s *Purgatorio*,” 66.

¹³² *Paradiso*, XVIII.34-9. (Now it may appear to you how hidden is the truth to those people who affirm that any love in itself is a praiseworthy thing, perhaps because its matter always is good; but not every stamp is good, even if the wax is good.)

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 43-5. “*chè s’amore è di fuor a noi offerto, e l’anima non va con altro piede, se dritta o torta va, non è suo metro*”

¹³⁴ Williams, *The Figure of Beatrice*, 146.

¹³⁵ Susan E. Blow, “Dante’s *Purgatorio*,” 66.

¹³⁶ *Purgatorio*, VII.44. “*e andar su di notte non si puote*”

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 59-60. “*sono in prima vita, ancor che l’altra, sì andando, acquisti*”

¹³⁸ Ibid., XI.49-51. (Come with us to the right along the bank, and you will find a pass where it is possible for a living person to ascend.)

¹³⁹ Ibid., 45. “*lo ncarco della carne d’Adamo*”

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., XIII.13-5. (then he placed his eyes steadfastly toward the sun; he made of his right side a center of motion, and his left part he twisted round.)

¹⁴¹ Ibid., XIV.1-3. (Who is this person that circles our mountain before death has given him flight, and opens and shuts his eyes at his will?)

¹⁴² Ibid., XVII.17-8. “*Moveti lume che nel ciel s’informa, per sè o per voler che giù lo scorge.*” Cf. *Paradiso*, XXVIII.109-10. “*si fonda l’esser beato nell’atto che vede,*” (Blessedness is founded on the act of seeing)

¹⁴³ Ibid., XIX.61-3. “*li occhi rivolgi al logoro che gira lo rege eterno con le rote magne*”

¹⁴⁴ see note 29.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., XXXII.16-8. (I saw the glorious army was turned on its right side and was returning with the sun and with the seven flames at its face.)

¹⁴⁶ Bar. 4:36

¹⁴⁷ *Purgatorio*, XXXII.37-9. (I heard from all a murmuring of “Adam.” Then they circled a tree despoiled of its flowers and of its fronds on every branch.)

¹⁴⁸ Gen. 3:3

¹⁴⁹ *Purgatorio*, XXXII.58. “*men che di rose e più che di viole*”

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., XXXIII.88-90. “*e veggi vostra via dalla divina distar cotanto, quanto si discorda da terra il ciel che più alto festina*”

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 70-72. Dante refers to the tree and the ‘moral sense’ which, scripturally speaking, requires a submission to the will of God. cf. *Purgatorio*, XXXII.49-51, in this passage the tree further signifies divine love. Dante describes how the chariot is tied to the tree and in so doing the tree resembles the cross of Christ, which is the archetypal figure of divine love and justice.

¹⁵² Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, XII.20.

¹⁵³ cf. *Purgatorio*, XXXIII.127-9.

¹⁵⁴ *Paradiso*, I.70-1. “*Trasumanar significar per verba non si poria*”

¹⁵⁵ *Paradiso*, I.1-9. (The glory of Him that moves all things penetrates the universe and makes it resplendent, in one part more and in another less. I was in the Heaven that most receives His light, and I saw things that for one who descends from there, one neither knows nor can retell. Because our intellect, itself approaching its desire, sinks so deep that memory cannot follow behind.)

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., IV.40-2. “*così parlar conviensi al vostro ingegno, però che solo la sensato apprende ciò che fa poscia d’intelletto degno*”

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., I.105. “*che l’universo a Dio fa simigliante*”

¹⁵⁸ C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 96.

¹⁵⁹ Ptolemy, *Almagest*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 16. (1989), 1.3.

¹⁶⁰ *Paradiso*, IV.35-6.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., I.103-8. “*le cose tutte quante hanno ordine tra loro, e questo e forma che è l’universo a Dio fa simigliante. Qui veggion l’arte creature l’orma dell’eterno valore, il qual è fine al quale è fatta la toccata norma.*”

¹⁶² Ibid., II.31-3. (I seemed to me that a cloud there covered us, bright, dense, solid and smooth, as a diamond is struck by the sun.)

¹⁶³ Wis. 1:1, (cf. *Paradiso*, XVIII.91-3).

¹⁶⁴ *Paradiso*, XXIV.43-4. “*perchè questo regno ha fatto civi per la verace fede*”

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- ¹⁶⁵ Ibid., XXVII.77-8.
- ¹⁶⁶ Ibid., V.91-2. “*sì come saetta che nel segno percuote pria che sia la corda queta*”
- ¹⁶⁷ Ibid., XVIII.58-63. (And as from feeling more delight in doing well, day by day man becomes aware of his advancing virtue, so I became aware that my turning inside together with the heavens had grown the arc, seeing this miracle greater adorned.)
- ¹⁶⁸ Ibid., XIX.97.
- ¹⁶⁹ Ibid., XXI.138. “*e ogni giro le faceva più belle.*”
- ¹⁷⁰ James T. Chiampi, “Dante’s Paradiso from Number to Mysterium,” *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 110 (1992) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40166460>. (accessed October 19, 2021): 255.
- ¹⁷¹ Marguerite Mills Chiarenza, “The Imageless Vision and Dante’s Paradiso,” *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 90 (1972). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40166128> (accessed October 19, 2021): 83.
- ¹⁷² *Paradiso*, XXVIII.46-57. (And I to her: ‘if the world was positioned with the order that I see in these wheels, I should be satisfied with what you have proposed; but in the sensible world it can be seen that the orbits are much more divine the farther they are from the center. Thus, if my desire is to have my end in the wondrous temple of the angels that only has light and love as its boundaries, I must hear still how the example and the copy don’t have the same mode, because I contemplate these things in vain.)
- ¹⁷³ Ibid., 41-5. “*da quel punto dipende il cielo e tutto la natura. Mira quel cerchio che più li è congiunto; e sappi che ’l suo muovere è sì tosto per l’affocato amore ond’elli è punto.*”
- ¹⁷⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 113.
- ¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 116.
- ¹⁷⁶ *Paradiso*, XXVIII.16-17. “*un punto [...] che raggiava lume acuto*”
- ¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 37-9. “*e quello aveva la fiamma più sincera cui men distava la favilla pure, credo, però che più di lei s’invera.*”
- ¹⁷⁸ Ibid., XXX.100-6. (Light is there [above] that makes visible the Creator to those creatures, that only in seeing Him, have their peace. And it spreads out in the figure of a circle, so much that its circumference would be too great a girdle for the sun.)
- ¹⁷⁹ James T. Chiampi, “Dante’s Paradiso from Number to Mysterium,” (1992): 255.
- ¹⁸⁰ Gen. 1:27
- ¹⁸¹ *Paradiso*, XXXI.38.
- ¹⁸² Arielle Saiber and Aba Mbirika, “The Three ‘Giri’ of ‘Paradiso’ 33.” *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 131 (2013) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43490498> (accessed April 9, 2021): 238.
- ¹⁸³ *Paradiso*, XXXIII.118-20. (and the one from the other, as a rainbow from a rainbow, seemed to be reflected, and the third seemed on fire and it was breathed equally from one and from the other.)
- ¹⁸⁴ Arielle Saiber and Aba Mbirika, “The Three ‘Giri’ of ‘Paradiso’ 33.” (2013): 242.
- ¹⁸⁵ *Paradiso*, 131. “*parva pinta della nostra effige*”
- ¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 130. “*dentro da sè, del suo colore stesso.*”
- ¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 127-8.
- ¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 137-8. “*volea come si convene l’imago al cerchio*”
- ¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 142. “*all’alta fantasia qui mancò possa*”
- ¹⁹⁰ Tommaso Campanella. *La Città del Sole: Dialogo Poetico*. Translated by Daniel J. Donno (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 108. (They honor the sun and the stars as

living things and images of God, and as celestial temples; but they do not adore them, though they honor the sun greatly. No creature do they honor with *latria*, other than God, and even though they serve him under the sign of the sun, which is a sign and face of God from whom light, and color, and every other thing comes.)

¹⁹¹ Susan E. Blow, *Dante's Purgatorio*, 61.

¹⁹² Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Bk.III, prosa 3.

¹⁹³ Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth's Sake*, 127.

¹⁹⁴ *Paradiso*, XXIII.37-9. "*Quivi è la sapienza e la possanza ch'apri le strade tra'l cielo e la terra, onde fu già lunga disianza.*"

¹⁹⁵ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Bk. III, metrum 2.

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