The Divine Comedy: Dante’s Vision of Human Existence

(Faith Seeking Artistic Embodiment)
Florence
Barbarossa’s Empire

Italy in the 12th Century
The Sword &
TheCrook
The Aeneid
Dante meets Beatrice
Dante amidst hell, purgatory, and earthly paradise
Virgil & Dante in the Inferno
Hell:
Despair
Stagnation
Absolute
Isolation
Purgatory: Preparation for Heaven
Cleansing
Return to “original innocence”
Solidarity & communion
Heaven: Bliss Total fulfilment Perfect communion
### Organization of Purgatory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circle</th>
<th>Sinners</th>
<th>Penance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The Excommunicate</td>
<td>Detention for 30 times period of contumacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Indolent</td>
<td>Detention for period equal to that of earthly life</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Unshriven</td>
<td>(Guardian Angels of the Valley)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Preoccupied</td>
<td>(Guardian of the Church)</td>
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**Peter's Gate:** The Seven P's are inscribed on the Pilgrim's forehead.

**Lower Purgatory**

- **Terrace 1:** The Proud
  - (Superbia or Vana Gloria - Pride or Vainglory)
  - Heavy Stones

- **Terrace 2:** The Envious
  - (Invidia - Envy)
  - Sealed Eyes

- **Terrace 3:** The Wrathful
  - (Ira - Wrath)
  - Smokes

**Middle Purgatory**

- **Terrace 4:** The Slothful
  - (Acedia - Sloth or Accidie)
  - Running

- **Terrace 5:** The Covetous
  - (Avaritia - Avarice)
  - Prostration

- **Terrace 6:** The Gluttonous
  - (Gula - Greed)
  - Starvation

- **Terrace 7:** The Lustful
  - (Luxuria - Lust)
  - Fire

**Upper Purgatory**

- **Terrace 8:** Excessive Love of Secondary Goods
  - (Voices of penitents)

**Heavenly Paradise:**

- **Pageant of the Sacrament**
- **Beatrice**

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This Table is arranged in 'reading order', from top to bottom.

For the geographical arrangement of the Ascent of the Mountain, see the Diagram on page xxi.
1. ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION

“To elucidate, then, what we have to say, be it known that the sense of this work is not simple, but on the contrary it may be called polysemous, that is to say, “of more sense than one”; for it is one sense which we get through the letter, and another which we get through the thing the letter signifies; and the first is called literal, but the second allegorical or mystic. And this mode of treatment, for its better manifestation, may be considered in this verse: “When Israel came out of Egypt, and the house of Jacob from a people of strange speech, Judea became his sanctification, Israel his power.” For if we inspect the letter alone the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt in the time of Moses is presented to us; if the allegory, our redemption wrought by Christ; if the moral sense, the conversion of the soul from the grief and misery of sin to the state of grace is presented to us; if the anagogical, the departure of the holy soul from the slavery of this corruption to the liberty of eternal glory is presented to us. And although the mystic senses have each their special denominations, they may all in general be called allegorical, since they differ from the literal and historical...
1. **ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION (Continue)**

When we understand this we see clearly that the subject round which the alternative senses play must be **twofold**. And we must therefore consider the subject of this work as literally understood, and then its subject as allegorically intended. The subject of the whole work, then, taken in the **literal** sense only, is *'the state of souls after death'*; without qualification, for the whole progress of the work hinges on it and about it. Whereas if the work be taken **allegorically**, the subject is *'man', as by good or ill deserts, in the exercise of the freedom of his choice, he becomes liable to rewarding or punishing justice.*”

“The end of the whole and of the part may be manifold, to wit, the proximate and the ultimate, but dropping all subtle investigation, we may state briefly that **the end of the whole and of the part** is to **remove** those living in this life **from the state of misery** and lead them **to the state of felicity**.”

(Selections from the *Letter to Can Grande*)
Why Dante?

❖ T. S. Eliot: ongoing influence; *(Seven)*
❖ Vernacular
❖ Medieval Synthesis
❖ Separation of Church and State...
Basic Items

❖ Title, Author...
❖ Basic story line, D, V, B,
❖ H,P,T-P, C-P,H as symbols
❖ P and H
❖ Allegorical method
❖ Five areas of interest
❖ Soul /Society
HISTORY (linear)

human and individual

• From *Earthly Paradise (Eden)* to *Celestial Paradise (Paradiso)* via *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*

• Creation-Fall- Law/Prophets-Redemption-Consummation

• Understanding the past (*Inferno*)
  Attention to the present (*Purgatorio*)
  Expectation towards the future (*Paradiso*)
Linear history (ctd.)

• **Existential** perspective: Dante’s own life and conversion

• **Four human conditions**: innocence – fallen – redeemed - glorified (or damned)

• Dynamic process **from slavery to freedom via faith** (Beatrice) and **reason** (Virgil), determined by **human free will /love** [everyone gets what s/he chooses/loves]

• “**Know Thyself**” necessarily involves knowing your **place** in **human history** as well as understanding your own **personal history**
LOVE

natural, rational, divine

• Natural = instinctive, not free, no praise or blame
• Rational = based on reason, free, accountable
• Divine = God’s love experienced by the human
  o restores human innocence / freedom (Adam/Eve)
  o empowers rational love to achieve desired human project
  o Freedom increases responsibility and the possibility of more radical constructive as well as destructive impact (the use or abuse of “divine” power is the heart of ‘heavenly’ and ‘hellish’ human life)
"SEVEN"

**SINS**

- Love *perverted*
  - Pride
  - Envy
  - Wrath

- Love *defective*
  - Sloth *(indifference to others)*

- Love *excessive*
  - Avarice *(money)*
  - Gluttony *(food)*
  - Lust *(sex)*

**VIRTUES**

- Love *authentic* *(Caritas)*
  - Humility *(free servant of all)*
  - Generosity *(admiration)*
  - Meekness *(strength under control)*

- Zeal *(commitment /active concern for all)*

- Liberality *(money to serve humanity)*

- Self-control *proper love of food and sex*

- Chastity
CARITAS
the fulness of authentic Love

• AGAPE = God’s love for the human
• EROS = human love desiring self-fulfillment
• CARITAS = agape fulfilling eros
  – Giving eros the right ‘spirit’ (humility protecting against pride)
  – Giving eros the right ‘perspective’ (clarifying the true value/hierarchy of ‘goods’). Example: authentic love is superior to intellectual prowess; ordinary humans can be more fulfilled than philosophers, mystics...
Caritas(authentic love) ctd.

- CARITAS summarizes the project of human life: a concrete way of living / relating (not a search for purely self-centered actualization and satisfaction).
- CARITAS comprises the optimal balance of all human capacities (intellectual, artistic, socio-political...).

Virgil and Beatrice
HUMAN EXCELLENCE (fulfilment)

Theological Virtues

- FAITH (access to full wisdom)
- HOPE (gives motivation to courage)
- LOVE (caritas) (motivation for self-control)

Natural Virtues

- GOODNESS
  - JUSTICE
  - WISDOM
  - COURAGE
  - SELF-CONTROL

Faith, Hope, and Love provide fully human spirit to Goodness
71st BECKHAM TO PLAY SOCCER IN LOS ANGELES