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# Aristotle in the *Convivio* and in the *Commedia*

Time is number of motion with respect to before and after.
(Aristotle's *Physics* IV; *Cv*. IV. II.5).

The figure of Aristotle looms large over Dante's works from the *canzoni* to the *Vita Nuova*, from the *Convivio* and *Monarchia* to the *Commedia*. Sometimes the reference is clear when Dante quotes him directly, sometimes he only alludes to his works, at other times the reference is not even there.[1] While Aristotle, or "lo filosofo", as Dante refers to him after Aquinas, is a dominant presence in Dante's early works, references to him are minimal in the *Commedia*.[2] Commentators have explained the discrepancy in terms of the notion of happiness which, according to Aristotle in the *Convivio*, can only be achieved in this life, whereas in the *Commedia* true happiness is only possible in the afterlife, and through the contemplation of God. Although this is certainly the case, it does not explain the continued interest in Aristotle in *Monarchia* but also in the *Commedia*. My aim in the paper is to characterize how Aristotle resurfaces in Dante's works Before and After the *Convivio*.

Barolini points out that references to Aristotle in Italian lyric poetry are as early as the 1280s with Dante da Maiano in the sonnet "savere e cortesia," where the poet joins courtly values to knowledge which is identified with Aristotelian scholasticism, "as we see from the verse "vertute naturale od accidente" ("inborn or accidental virtue") (B 171).[3] Barolini refers also to Guittone d'Arezzo as the other major poet who alludes indirectly to Aristotle in the canzone "Vergogna ho, lasso, ed ho me stesso ad ira." In this lyric Guittone praises the pagan philosophers for their "onestas": "Già filosofi, Dio non conoscendo, né poi morte sperando guiderdone, ischifar vizi aver tutta stagione, seguendo sì vertù, ch'onesta vita fu lor gaudio e lor vita." ("The philosophers of old, who did not know God, nor hoped for any reward from death, had such contempt for vice at

[1] See Crouse 1988. 88.
[2] See Aristotle 1941. On the presence of Aristotle within the context of Italian literature see Gentili 2005.
[3] Barolini 2014. Here and elsewhere the English translations are Barolini's. Quoted as B and page number.

all times, and so followed virtue, for a righteous life was their delight and their commitment.") She suggests that these lines are echoed in Dante's verses in Limbo: "onesta vita / fu lor gaudio e lor vita." (B 172). She also mentions Guittone's canzone "Degno è che che dice omo el defenda" where the poet argues that virtue is found not just in fellow Christians but "in others" (in altroi), and gives the example of the virtuous pagan philosophers, "honored philosophers" ("filosofi orrati") who did not pursue a life of the senses but of the intellect. Guittone mentions "'l saggio Aristotel" on what makes man happy: "segondo che 'l saggio Aristotel dice / e mostra omo felice / vertù ovrando" ("according to what the sage Aristotle says when he shows that man is happy in the operation of virtue") (B 172). She suggests that Dante echoes this Aristotelian definition of happiness in "Le dolci rime," "vertute, dico, che fa l'uom felice / in sua operazione" ("meaning by virtue that which makes a man happy in his actions") (B 172).[4]

The first direct reference to Aristotle in Dante is in the *Vita Nuova* in the sonnet "Oltra la spera che più larga gira," ("the sphere that turns most widely"). In the prose gloss, Dante cites Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: "e ciò dice lo Filosofo nel secondo de la Metafisica" (and this is what the Philosopher says in the second book of the *Metaphysics*" (VN XLI.6). The other reference to Aristotle in the *Vita Nuova* is at VN XXV.2 (B 171).[5] But by far the most extensive use of Aristotle is in the *Convivio*.[6] In this treatise the model is Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor* an encyclopedic work intended for those who cannot devote themselves to the study of philosophy and, principally, of Aristotle who at the time was very popular and whose works were translated into Latin, and even in volgare, from the Greek and the Arabic.[7] It is probably for this reason that Dante refers to him as "lo mio maestro."[8] Unlike the *Tresor*, the *Convivio* is not an exposition of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* but Dante makes use of the work as it suits his purpose which is to make it "useful" ("utile"), "as much as possible," ("quanto é possible"), for a discussion of human happiness and the sweetness it brings: "cioé ragionare dell'umana felicità e della sua dolcezza" (*Cv*. IV. xxii.1). Dante prefers Aristotle's opinion to that of Zeno and Epicurus, and he begins the *Con-*

[4] Barolini emphasizes the importance of "misura" in Guittone that Dante uses in the canzone "Doglia mi reca." (See B 172, note 18). She also mentions Guido Cavalcanti's "Donna me prega" as an Aristotelian poem "although not an ostentatious citation of the "Etica" by name" (B 174).

[5] The translations of the lyrics of the *Vita Nuova* are by Barolini.

[6] Alighieri 1989.Translation modified.

[7] See Rafferty on the reception of Aristotle in the Middle Ages.

[8] See Ours Vitiello 2009, and also Holloway 1993 who believes that Dante used Latini's translation of the *Ethics* for the *Convivio* but Dante makes clear that his source is the Italian translation by Taddeo Alderotti as he acknowledges: "come fece quelli che trasmutò il latino dell'Etica, ciò fu Taddeo Ippocratista" (*Cv*. I. x. 10). References to Holloway are H plus page number.

*vivio* establishing his authority with a quote from *Metaphysics* I. 1,980a that all men naturally desire to know: "Sì come dice lo Filosofo nel principio de la Prima Filosofia, tutti li uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapere." He explains that, "ciascuna cosa, da providenza di propria natura impinta è inclinabile a la sua perfezione; onde, acciò che la scienza è ultima perfezione de la nostra anima, ne la quale sta la nostra felicitade, tutti naturalmente al suo desiderio semo subietti" ("each thing is impelled in its own nature by a force which moves it towards its own perfection, and since knowledge is the ultimate perfection of our soul, in which our supreme happiness resides, we are all by our very nature subject to desire it") (*Cv.* I. i. 1).

The *Convivio* is based on the premise that every man is infused at birth with a natural appetite that develops differently in every man but only one way leads to peace and happiness. If it happens that one has not inherited the right tendency at birth, the seed can be induced with proper correction and culture: "per molta correzione e cultura": "ché là dove questo seme dal principio non cade, si può inducer al suo processo, sì che perviene a questo frutto" ("where this seed does not fall at the beginning, it can be induced in the process, so that it attains this fruit") (*Cv.* IV. xxii. 12). Man has no excuse: he can acquire it either by correction, "graft" ("insetazione"), or by education, by reading the *Convivio*.

Aristotle is the philosopher who is needed to bring man on right road to virtue and happiness. Dante values his philosophy above that of the other pagan philosophers because his definition of the moral virtues is the best: "E queste diversamente da diversi filosofi sono distinte e numerate; ma però che in quella parte dove aperse la bocca la divina sentenza d'Aristotile da lasciare mi pare ogni altrui sentenza" ("Different philosophers have distinguished and classified these in many ways. However, since it seems to me that in matters where Aristotle gave his divine opinion the opinions of others should be set aside") (*Cv.* IV. xvii. 3). Dante quotes Aristotle throughout the *Convivio* but mostly in support of his own arguments. Instead of giving the reasons why the earth does not move and is at the center of the universe, he just refers to his authority: "perché assai basta a la gente a cu' io parlo, per la sua grande autoritade" ("because his great authority is more than enough for the people to whom I am speaking") (*Cv.* III. v. 7). But he does not hesitate to correct him when Aristotle is wrong: when he claims in *De Caelo et Mundo* that there are eight heavens, whereas Ptolemy said there were nine; but he also excuses him by saying that Aristotle saw his mistake and made amends: "Veramente elli di ciò si scusa nel duodecimo de la Metafisica, dove mostra bene sé avere seguito pur l'altrui sentenza." ("However, in the twelfth book of the *Metaphysics* he excuses himself where he makes clear that he was following the opinion of others") (*Cv.* II, iii. 4). Dante disagrees with Aristotle when he says that what seems true to the majority cannot be entirely false: "Quello che pare a li più impossibile è del tutto essere falso." For Dante, instead, the opinion of the many because it is based on the senses is always false:

"Il parere sensuale è molte volte falsissimo" (*Cv*. IV. viii. 6). But he excuses Aristotle because he was only referring to rational opinion: "e però se io intendo solo a la sensuale apparenza ripruovar non faccio contro la 'ntenzione del Filosofo, e però né la reverenza che a lui si dee non offendo" ("and since I meant to disprove a judgment formed by the senses, I am not going against the opinion of the Philosopher, and in no way I offend the respect which is due to him") (*Cv*. IV. viii. 8). In another instance, Dante has a laugh with Aristotle when he relates the popular belief that if Adam was noble everyone is noble, while those who are base will always be base. Aristotle would laugh if he heard it: "E senza dubbio riderebbe Aristotele udendo fare spezie due dell'umana generazione…che perdoni lui Aristotele, asini si possono dire coloro che così pensano" (*Cv*. IV. xv.5).

The *Convivio* was left incomplete after the Fourth Treatise without explanation and commentators have speculated that the main reason was that Aristotle's notion of happiness as the ultimate perfection of man was no longer acceptable within the Christian universe of the *Commedia* where true happiness is possible only in the contemplation of God.[9] For these commentators it follows that in the *Commedia* Dante abandons Aristotle and philosophy to embrace theology symbolized by Beatrice.

Dante's "use" of Aristotle is not limited to the *Convivio* but extends to the political treatise of *Monarchia*.[10] The idea for the work was already sketched in the Fourth Treatise where Dante argued for the importance of a Monarchy and a monarch to maintain the peace, but the main reason for a Monarch is to free the community of greed. Dante believed that since the Monarch or the Emperor already possessed everything, they had no need to acquire more wealth. They were free of greed and could devote themselves to free the community of this calamity that thwarted true happiness: "essere Monarchia, cioè uno solo principato, e uno prencipe avere; lo quale, tutto possedendo e più desiderare non possendo, li regi tegna contenti ne li termini de li regni, sì che pace intra loro sia… lo qual preso, l'uomo viva felicemente; che è quello perche esso è nato" ("there should be a Monarchy, that is, one principality and one prince who possessing everything and having nothing to desire, he would keep the kings content within the boundaries of their kingdoms and keep peace among them… so that man could live happily, which is the end for which he is born.") (*Cv*. IV. iv. 4). With the authority of Aristotle from *Politics*, Dante explains that what the Emperor says is law and he should be obeyed by everyone: "così abbiamo un Imperatore e quello che dice è legge e deve da tutti essere ubbidito e quello che comanda prende vigore e autoritade" ("we have an Emperor and what he says is law and he must be obeyed by all, and what he commands has force and authority.") (*Cv*. IV. iv.7). The indirect reference is to the Pope who should also obey the Emper-

[9] See Weinrib 2005.
[10] Alighieri 1999; English translation Alighieri 1904.

or and not vice versa, as claimed by the Papal Bull which gave the Pope powers over secular matters and the Emperor. For Dante, the rule of the Emperor, even if he came to power by force, is always willed by God, and the Pope should be subservient to him, since he is only the authority in divine matters. The Emperor is the guarantor of man's happiness on earth while the Pope is the guarantor of man's spiritual happiness.

The aim of the *Monarchia*, as is in the fourth treatise of the *Convivio*, is to identify and stamp out greed. In order to do this a Monarch should rule with the advice of a philosopher. Imperial authority by itself without philosophy is dangerous while the latter without imperial authority is powerless. When political power is united with philosophy they acquire great power and are of great utility to the community: "l'autoritage del filosofo sommo… non repugna a la imperial autoritade, ma quella sanza questa è pericolosa, e questa sanza quella è quasi debile, non per sé, ma per la disordinanza de la gente; sì che l'una con l'altra congiunta utilissime e pienissime sono d'ogni vigore" (*Cv*. IV. vi. 17). The present political situation lacks completely rational advice: "Oh miseri che al presente reggete! E oh miserissimi che retti siete! Ché nulla filosofica autoritade si congiunge con i vostri reggimenti né per proprio studio né per consiglio." ("You wretches who rule now! and you wretched who are ruled! For no philosophical authority operates in accordance with your governments, whether by virtue of your own study or by the counsel of others") (*ibid*. 19). Dante addresses directly Charles D'Anjou and Frederick II and the other princes and tyrants whose advisors make decisions based on greed and not for the good of the community: "guardate chi a lato vi siede per consiglio, e annumerate quante volte lo die questo fine de l'umana vita per li vostri consiglieri v'è additato!" ("Beware who sits by your side and offers advice and count how many times a day your counselors call your attention to this end of human life") (*ibid*. 20). In *Monarchia*, Dante reiterates these themes by stressing the importance of the Emperor's authority over all secular matters, who, under the guidance of a philosopher, can guarantee people's happiness and eliminate greed. In the *Convivio*, Dante described the dangers of wealth which promises to satisfy man's desires but never does: "Promettono le false traditrici sempre, in certo numero adunate, rendere lo raunatore pieno d'ogni appagamento; e con questa promissione conducono l'umana volontade in vizio d'avarizia" ("These false traitors always promise that if they are amassed to a certain amount they will make the person fully satisfied, and with this promise they lead men to the vice of avarice") (*Cv*. IV. xii. 4-5).[11] In *Monarchia*, Dante echoes that idea that there is no limit to the pursuit of money,

[11] Dante also quotes from Boethius from *The Consolation of Philosophy* who writes that wealth is dangerous and that "la dea della ricchezza quanto più largisce tanto più l'umanità piangerà" (the goddess of wealth the more she lavishes the more humanity will lament) (*Cv*. IV. xii. 6–7); and from Cicero's *De Paradoxo* who denounces wealth and writes that the "la sete de la cupidità non si sazia mai, né il desiderio di accrescerle o la paura di perderle" (the

that no amount can satisfy those who pursue it. He quotes Aristotle from *Ethics* V that greed is particularly pernicious because it is the vice most opposed to justice: "the thing most contrary to justice is greed, as Aristotle states in the fifth book of the Ethics, when greed is entirely eliminated, nothing remains which is opposed to justice" ("iustitie maxime contrariatur cupiditas, ut innuit Aristotiles in quinto ad Nicomacum. Remota cupiditate onmino, nichil iustitie restat adversum;") (*Mon*. 1.11.11). The cure for greed is a Monarch of superior intellect, capable to rule ethically and "in conformity with the teachings of philosophy" ("secundum phylosophica documenta genus humanum ad temporalem felicitatem dirigeret.") (*Mon*. 3.15.10).[12]

At the outset of *Monarchia* Dante expresses his wish that the work may bear fruit and benefit the public good even though it may go contrary the desire of the individual who does not care for the common good and whose greed is "a destructive whirlpool which forever swallows everything and never gives back what it has swallowed." ("perniciosa vorago semper ingurgitans et nunquam ingurgitata refundens") (*Mon*. 1. 1. 3). Dante is aware that very little has been written on the subject of Monarchy but the reason is that it is not profitable: "propter se non habere immediate ad lucrum, ab omnibus intemptata" (*Mon*.1.1.5). The reason that moved Dante to write on the subject was to shed light on a topic that was not well-known but also to benefit mankind: "in proposito est hanc de suis enucleare latibulis, tum ut utiliter mundo pervigilem," He also wanted to be the first, for his own glory: "tum etiam ut palmam tanti bravii primus in meam gloriam adipiscar" (*ibid*.).

Dante believed that in writing a treatise on Monarchy he could make the difference since political issues are under the control of the people, and this being the case, we can change the conditions to better serve the community. In a monarchy man enjoys freedom of action, "existens sub Monarcha est potissime liberum," so man is "supremely free" and free to act "for his own sake and not for another," as Aristotle teaches in *Metaphysic*s I, "'sui met et non alterius gratia est', ut Pylosopho placet in hiis que *De simpliciter ente*" (*Mon*. 1.12.8). Referring to the later books of *Politics* where Aristotle discusses the role of money in relation to governments, Dante states that only under the rule of the monarch man is secure from bad forms of government, "which force mankind into slavery" ("que in servitutem cogunt genus humanum") (*Mon*. 1.12.9). Just governments guarantee freedom so that "men can exist for themselves. Citizens do not exist for the sake of consuls, nor the people for the sake of the King." ("scilicet ut homines propter se sint. Non enim cives propter consules nec gens propter regem,

thirst of cupidity is never quenched or satisfied; neither the desire to increase them nor the fear to lose them).

[12] On the issue of wealth and greed, see Hittinger 2016. For an account of the implications of Dante's concept of imperium in relation to medieval political thought, see Nardi 1967; Mancusi-Ungaro 1987; and Sasso 2002.

sed e converso consules propter cives et rex propter gentem;") (*Mon*. 1.12.11). The laws are there for the sake of the common good, not for the disordered ends of the authorities and the monarch is necessary to prevent any escalation of conflict between the interests of parties, motivated by greed: "either this situation will continue ad infinitum… or else we must come to a first and supreme judge, whose judgment resolves all disputes either directly or indirectly, and this man will be the Monarch or the Emperor." ("Et sic aut erit processus in infinitum, quod esse non potest, aut oportebit devenire ad iudicem primum et summum de cuius iudicio cuncta litigia dirimantur sive mediate sive inmediate: et hic erit Monarcha sive Imperator") (*Mon*. 1.1.10). The people who live under a Monarch live in a state of perfection, "therefore the Monarchy is necessary to the well-being of the world" ("Ergo genus humanum sub Monarchia existens optime se habet; ex quo sequitur quod ad bene esse mundi Monarchiam necesse est", *Mon*. 1. 12.13). In conclusion, Dante clarifies that the Emperor does not have absolute rule over the Pope, since earthly happiness is in many ways related to eternal happiness, "cum mortalis quodammodo ad immortalem felicitatem ordinetur" (Mon.3.15. 18) Instead, the Emperor ought to turn to the Pope for guidance, "ut luce paterne gratie illustrates virtuosius orbem terre irradiet" (*ibid*.). Emperor and Pope should work together for the good of the community.

The importance of *Monarchia* in determining Dante's continued reliance on Aristotle's philosophical advice is clear from the generally accepted dates for this work which was probably written between 1310 and 1313. These are the years when Henry VII of Luxemburg was in Italy, and Dante was writing or had completed the *Paradiso* to which there are many references in *Monarchia*.: "as I have already said in the *Paradiso* of the *Commedia*" (sicut in Paradiso *Comedie* iam dixit") (*Mon*. 1.12.5; *Par*. V.19–24).[13] Most likely, Dante wrote the treatise to ingratiate himself to the Emperor and to outline a program for his future work which came to nothing with his sudden death. In any case, for our purposes, it is clear from the many references to Aristotle, especially to *Politics*, that Dante continued to rely on his work, albeit for political advice, especially as it relates to greed and the way it undermines the political and social fabric: "as the Philosopher teaches in the books that he has left us on the topic [of laws and government]" ("ut etiam Phylosopho placet in his que de presenti materia nobis ab eo relicta sunt"] (*Mon*. 1.12.11).

Evidence of the continued presence of Aristotle even in the *Commedia* can be seen in the cantos of Brunetto Latini and Ulysses where they are punished for their greed. Latini's emphasis on wealth and on greed as a political expedient is

[13] The reference to the vacant seat of Arrigo VII is in *Par*. XXX, almost at the end of the poem. See the notes in Sanguineti's edition of *Monarchia* for the many references to Paradiso but also to Inferno and Purgatory. For the dating of *De Monarchia* see Sanguineti, x, in Alighieri 1999.

clear from his choice of title for his major work, *Tresor*. The work wants to be not only a treasure of knowledge for readers to treasure, but also literally a treasure for Charles d'Anjou to whom the work was dedicated and given as a gift: "Questo libro è intitolato Tesoro. Perché, così come il signor che vuole accumulare in poco spazio cose di grandissimo valore, non soltanto per il proprio piacere" ("The title of this book is Tesoro. Just as the man who wants to accumulate in little space things of great value, not only for his own pleasure") (*Tresor*, 1–4). Latini presented the work to Charles d'Anjou encrusted in gold.[14] As Holloway points out, Charles was very greedy and "Brunetto openly, in the book's dedication, at the beginning, presented it as bribery and corruption, with gold and gems, as a treasure chest, for Charles" (H 235).

Although Brunetto dedicated the *Tresor* to Charles d'Anjou, the future king of Naples, his sympathies were not monarchic. In his translation of Aristotle's *Ethic*s, as Holloway tells us, "he subverted what was dangerous to use it for the good, in his case not the Empire or the Church but the Florentine commonwealth, the commune, to make it republican" (H 230). He paraphrased and at times even rewrote the text of the *Ethics* when it contradicted his republican ideas. (H 231) He changed Aristotle's statement concerning forms of government from his condemnation of democracy in favor of monarchy, to communal democracy in opposition to rule by monarchs or oligarchies. "He falsified the text for communal ends and gave the altered text to Charles who was a monarch" (H 233). After his translation of Cicero's Rhetoric, he wrote a section on *Politica* where he gave an account of the State's self-rule by means of a *podestà*, and he went on to discuss the perversions of kingship as a tyranny. (H 231) Holloway speculates that Latini knew that Charles would not read the work to the end, if at all. (H 233).

Cary Nederman has shown that in the *Tresor* Latini advocated a conception of politics based upon a totally perverse reading of Aristotle that supports the idea that "increasing wealth may serve as a positive blessing to the city" and that "politics and justice in the city are concomitant with the good desire for personal profit."[15] Latini wrote that seeking money and personal advantage is a natural thing to do: "Among them [citizens], there is a common thing that is loved, through which they arrange and conform their business, and that is gold and silver" (*Tresor* 2.5.2, Nederman 2009. 148). Latini's republican views and his emphasis on wealth and greed as a political stratagem are one of the reasons that Dante puts him in Hell.[16] Latini's parting words to Dante, "sieti raccomandato il mio Tesoro/ nel qual io vivo ancora, e più non chieggio" ("I recommend my

[14] Holloway writes: "In order to seduce influential readers [mostly wealthy nobles] these manuscripts [like Latini's *Tresor*] were frequently richly illuminated, a few even to the extent of using lavish gold and silver leaf" (H 234–35).

[15] Nederman 2009. 143.

[16] For a reading of *Inf.* XV., see Verdicchio. Ch. 9.

Treasure to you where I still live, and I ask nothing more") (*Inf.* 119–120), could not be more ironic.

If wealth and greed, are essential political expedients for Brunetto Latini to the point of falsifying the writing of a great philosopher, the other major example of greed is Ulysses who did not desire to accumulate wealth but knowledge. The famous lines with which he persuades his companions to go to certain death to gain virtue and knowledge are a perversion of Dante's promise of happiness in the *Convivio*:

> Considerate la vostra semenza:
> fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
> ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.
> (*Inf.* XXVI. 118–120)

> (Consider your origin:
> you were not made to live as brutes,
> but to pursue virtue and knowledge)

Ulysses' attempt to go beyond the pillars of Hercules has often been compared to Dante's journey which has a similar goal.[17] However, Ulysses' "folle volo, as Dante describes it in *Par.* XXVI. 82–83, "sì ch'io vedea di là da Gade/ il varco/ folle d'Ulisse" (82–83) is not Dante's. Dante's "greed" or blind ambition is checked in *Inf.* I by the she-wolf, the "lupa," when he attempts to go up the Mount of Purgatory. The episode triggers another in *Inf.* II when the pilgrim has second thoughts on undertaking the journey with Virgil: "temo che la venuta non sia folle" ("I fear least my going be folly") (*Inf.* II. 35). Virgil's account that he was sent by Beatrice who was sent by the "donna gentile" is meant to establish that the authority which makes Dante's journey possible is the "donna gentile," reason or wisdom. Virgil is only her representative in the Inferno and Purgatory, just as Beatrice represents her in the Paradiso. Once the authority of Dante's journey under the aegis of wisdom is established the poem can begin.[18]

The story of Ulysses is retold in the episode of the "femmina balba" in *Purg.* XIX. The pilgrim dreams of transforming a monstrous creature into a beautiful siren, "com' amor vuol, così le colorava" (*Purg.* XIX. 13–15). She sings that she is the siren who fills sailors with desire and she is the one who deflected Ulysses from his journey:

[17] See Baranski–Cachey 2009.
[18] For a reading of *Inf.* II., see Verdicchio. Ch. 4.

"Io son", cantava, "io son dolce serena,
che ' marinari in mezzo mar dismago;
tanto son di piacere a sentir piena!
*Io volsi Ulisse del suo cammin vago*
*al canto mio;* e qual meco s'ausa,
rado sen parte; sì tutto l'appago!
(*Purg.* XIX. 19–24, *italics mine*)

("I am," she sang, "I am the sweet Siren who leads mariners astray in mid-sea, so full of pleasure I am to hear. *I turned Ulysses from his vague journey to my canto*, and anyone who hears me rarely leaves, so fully I satisfy him.")

Commentators are baffled by the siren who says that she turned Ulysses to her "canto" because it contradicts the events in Homer's *Odyssey*. But the point of Dante's allegory is that Ulysses himself is the siren who lured his companions to certain death for his own ambition and he is the victim of his own rhetoric, and "greed". This is Dante's "contrapasso" to punish the fraudulent Ulysses and to send him to the Inferno, to "canto" XXVI.[19]

After the *Convivio* and *Monarchia*, Aristotle's role in the *Commedia* appears minimal.[20] Dante puts him in Limbo with the other pagans and his *Ethics* is mentioned once by Virgil in *Inf.* XI when he explains the structure of the Inferno.

Non ti rimembra di quelle parole
con le quali *la tua Etica* pertratta,
le tre disposizion che 'l ciel non vuole,
incontinenza, malizia, e la matta
bestialitade?
(*Inf.* XI. 79–83, *italics mine*)

(Do you not remember the words with which your Ethics treats the three dispositions which Heaven condemns: incontinence, malice and mad bestiality?)

Commentators agree that by "la tua Etica" Virgil is referring to Aristotle.[21] Barolini adds that the claim is followed by an even more precise material reference

[19] For the "femmina balba" episode, see Verdicchio. Ch. 4.

[20] Barolini suggests than the infernal wind of *Inf.* V. 31–33. is another reference to Aristotle's discussion of compulsion in *Nicomachean Ethics* III, and that the example contributes to the construction of the contrapasso in the canto. (B 164 ff.)

[21] See the *Commento Baroliniano* online: "As with «la tua Etica» in verse 80, Virgilio again prefaces the philosopher's title with the pronoun «tua»: *your* Ethics, *your* Physics. By attaching the pronoun «tua» first to Aristotle's *Ethics* and then to his *Physics*, Dante indicates the profound personal connection — affective and intellective — that binds him to the great philosopher's thought" (B 36).

to the physical "carte" in which Dante read the *Physics:* "se tu ben la tua Fisica note, / tu troverai, non dopo molte carte" (if you note well in your Physics, you will find, after not many pages" (*Inf.* XI. 101–102). These lines occur in Virgil's speech on philosophy where he says that Nature takes its course from the divine intellect which man imitates in his art: "sì che vostr'arte a Dio quasi è nepote" ("so that your art is almost the grandchild of God") (*Inf.* XI. 105), and from which also Genesis has its beginning: "Da queste due, se tu ti rechi a mente/ lo Genesi dal principio, convene/ prender sua vita ed avanzar la gente" (By these two, if you recall/ Genesis, mankind takes its beginning and its history) (*Inf.* XI. 106–108).

For Barolini Dante is promoting a theory of art as imitation. The *Commento Baroliniano*[22] to *Inf.* XI points out that "Dante's grasp of the concept of mimesis does not come from Aristotle's *Poetics*, a work that was not yet available in the West, but from Aristotle's *Physics* 2.2.194a from where the scholastics extracted the ide a that was distilled in medieval anthologies as follows: "ars imitatur naturam in quantum potest" — literally, art imitates nature as much as it can." This very plausible explanation does not account for the last stanza on the usurer which appears to be unrelated to the previous three:

> E perché l'usuriere altra via tene,
> per sé natura e per la sua seguace
> dispregia, poi ch'in altro pon la spene.
> (*Inf.* XI. 109–111)
>
> (But because the usurer takes another way, he dislikes nature and her follower, since he places his hopes elsewhere.)

The *Commento Baroliniano* explains the discrepancy by supposing that the pilgrim asks Virgil how usury can be construed as a form of violence against God: "Virgilio therefore tells him to read Aristotle's *Physics*, sending him to yet another Aristotelian text: "la tua Fisica" (your Physics) (*Inf.* 11.101)". According to this version, "Virgil apparently has read and knows the *Physics* very well" so he specifies that Dante will find the passage he needs after not too many pages: "non dopo molte carte" ("not many pages from the start" [*Inf.* 11.103]). And the passage referred to is in Book 2 of the *Physics."*

Yet things are not what they seem. Virgil's speech is accompanied by a formula already employed by Dante in *Inf.* II at a moment that requires on the part of the reader special understanding:[23] "«Filosofia», mi disse, «*a chi la 'ntende*, /

[22] See https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/.

[23] For instance, *Inf.* II, 36, when the pilgrim doubts that he is not worthy to undertake the journey, he asks Virgil for understanding: "Se' savio; intendi me' ch'i' non ragiono" ("You are wise; you understand better than I reason").

nota" ("Philosophy," he said to me, for those who understand," italics mine). In fact, Virgil's reference to *Physics* is to *Cv*. II, i. 13, to a paragraph where Dante explains how the literal meaning must come before the allegorical. He quotes from Aristotle's *Physics* I that Nature demands that in our learning we proceed in due order: from what we know to what we do not know. The order is innate in us, so we must proceed from what is understood by the senses to what is not, from the literal to the allegorical. It is necessary to quote the entire passage:

Onde, sì come dice lo Filosofo nel primo de la Fisica, la natura vuole che ordinatamente si proceda ne la nostra conoscenza, cioè procedendo da quello che conoscemo meglio in quello che conoscemo non così bene: dico che la natura vuole, in quanto questa via di conoscere è in noi naturalmente innata. E però se li altri sensi dal litterale sono meno intesi – che sono, sì come manifestamente pare – inrazionabile sarebbe procedure ad essi dimostrare, se prima lo litterale non fosse dimostrato. Io adunque, per queste ragioni, tuttavia sopra ciascuna canzone ragionerò prima la litterale sentenza, e appresso di quella ragionerò la sua allegoria, cioè la nascosa veritade; e talvolta de li altri sensi toccherò incidentemente, come a luogo e a tempo si converrà. (*Cv*, II. i. 13–15)

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

Virgil's speech in *Inf.* XI is almost a replica of this example where Virgil explains the order we find in Nature and how man imitates it in his art. A similar order is followed in the prose narratives of philosophy, which Virgil addresses in his speech, and Genesis. But the usurer follows another way:

> e perché l'usuriere altra via tene,
> per sé natura e per la sua seguace
> dispregia, poi ch'in altro pon la spene.
> (*Inf.* XI. 109–111)

> (But because the usurer takes another way, he despises Nature and her follower and places his hopes in other.)

The usurer does not follow Nature, that is, the ways of mimetic art ("la sua seguace"), but places his hopes "in altro," that is, in allegory (from "alleon", other). When we read the stanza literally, it refers to how the usurer does not follow the natural ways of men who desire happiness but places his hopes in accumulating wealth. But when the lines are read poetically or allegorically, they refer to Dante the pilgrim in *Inf.* I who was hindered by the she-wolf in his desire to go up the Mount of Purgatory and who weeps and is saddened by his loss, just as the usurer does when he loses the wealth he has accumulated:

> E qual è quei che volentieri acquista,
> e giugne 'l tempo che perder lo face,
> che 'n tutti suoi pensier piange e s'attrista.
> (*Inf.* I. 55–57.)
>
> (And like one who willingly accumulates [wealth] and the time comes that he loses it all, he weeps and he is saddened.)

The episode is an allegory of Dante's decision not to continue writing the *Convivio*, a prose work that deals with vices and virtues based on Aristotle's *Ethics*, but to take another way, the way of allegory, which is the way of poets, as Ovid says of Orpheus who with his lyre tamed wild beasts and made trees and rocks move toward him, "lo savio uomo con lo strumento de la sua voce fa[r]ia mansuescere e umiliare li crudeli cuori, e fa[r]ia muovere a la sua volontade coloro che non hanno vita di scienza e d'arte" ("the wise man with the instrument of his voice makes cruel hearts grow tender and humble and moves to his will those who do not devote their lives to knowledge and art") (*Cv.* II. i.3.). This is Cacciaguida's advice to Dante in *Par.* XVII. 121–142: to choose examples of famous people, "di fama note," whose vices and virtues are not apparent ("ch'aia/ la sua radice incognita e ascosa"), and to be as harsh with them as he needs to be, in order to make his entire vision known: "Ma nondimen, rimossa ogne menzogna,/ tutta tua vision fa manifesta; / e lascia pur grattar dov'è la rogna." For if at first they find his words offensive they will receive great benefit later: "Ché se la voce tua sarà molesta/ nel primo gusto, vital nodrimento/ lascerà poi, quando sarà/ digesta." Dante's new way to defeat greed is by exposing the evils that are related to it, or, allegorically, by chasing the "lupa," or she-wolf, which is the symbol of greed, with the Veltro, or Hound, to Hell from where she came:[24]

[24] For a reading of this episode see Verdicchio. Ch. 3.

> Questi [the Veltro] la caccerà per ogne villa,
> fin che l'avrà rimessa ne lo 'nferno,
> là onde 'nvidia prima dipartilla.
> (*Inf.* 1. 109–111.)
>
> (He shall hunt her through every city till he has sent her back to Hell whence envy first generated it.)

Virgil's speech of *Inf.* XI is a warning to readers not to take this episode, or those of the *Commedia*, literally or mimetically, the way we read a prose work like the *Convivio*, but poetically or allegorically. As the pilgrim is hindered by ambition from pursuing the Mount Purgatory, so we will be hindered in understanding the hidden meaning of Dante's allegories. For these reasons, "la tua Etica" and "la tua Fisica" cannot be said to refer to Aristotle's *Ethics* or *Physics* but to Dante who makes these works his own.

The "la tua Etica" and "la tua Fisica" are markers for how we should understand Aristotle's "poeticized" presence in the *Commedia*. A similar example is *Par.* XXVIII, the Heaven of the Primum Mobile, which according to Thomas Aquinas corresponds to Moral Philosophy, since the Primum Mobile governs all other heavens, like Moral Philosophy the other sciences: "secondo che Tommaso dice nell' Etica II che dà ordine alle alter scienze in tutte le loro parti" (*Cv.* II. xiv. 14). In the Paradiso this order changes, Aristotle is no longer the center of the Heavens, just as Moral Philosophy is no longer the Heaven that moves the other Sciences. In Aristotle's place, at the center, there is God from which everything originates and around whom all heavens rotate:

> Non altrimenti il triunfo che lude
> sempre dintorno al punto che mi vinse,
> parendo *inchiuso da quel ch'elli 'nchiude.*
> (*Par.* XXX. 9–12, *italics mine.*)
>
> (The triumph that always plays around the point overcame me, seeming enclosed by that which encloses.)

However, as commentators have indicated, Beatrice's explanation of the point as first mover is a paraphrase of the same notion in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.[25] While Aristotle is no longer there his works are.

If Aristotle is displaced as the Primum Mobile, Dante gives him a similar place in Limbo with other philosophers and pagans in a castle surrounded by

[25] See Singleton's commentary to *Par.* XXVIII in Alighieri 1973. 41–42 refers to Aquinas on this passage of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. XII, 7, 1072b.

seven walls and protected by a small river: "sette volte cerchiato d'alte mura, / difeso intorno d'un bel fiumicello" (*Inf.* IV. 107–108). The philosophers share with the other pagans their isolation from God, as Virgil says: "sanza speme vivemo in disio" ("without hope we live in desire") (*Inf.* IV. 42). In Limbo Aristotle is portrayed with the other philosophers as one big family, but this family portrait is not idyllic. In the *Convivio*, Aristotle's moral philosophy holds universal sway, is taught everywhere, and his doctrine "may almost be called universal opinion" because it is the only one that can lead mankind to happiness: "Per che vedere si può Aristotile essere additatore e conduttore de le genti a questo segno" (*Cv.* IV. vi. 16). The other pagan philosophers, instead, not only do not adhere to his philosophy, but Aristotle's fame obscures theirs: not just the Stoics' and Epicureans', but also Socrates's and Plato's: "E però che la perfezione di questa moralitade per Aristotile terminate fue, lo nome de li Academici si spense" ("Since it was Aristotle who brought this moral doctrine to its final perfection, the name "Academics" was eclipsed") (*Cv.* IV. vi. 16). While Aristotle had few friends among the philosophers, he himself was indifferent to anyone except his own philosophy: "Aristotile, d'altro amico non curando, contra lo suo migliore amico, fuori di quella, combatteo" ("Aristotle paying attention to no other friend, fought against his best friend Plato, except his own philosophy") (*Cv.* III. xiv. 8). Between Aristotle and the other pagan philosophers there is hardly any friendly or intellectual rapport, as there is no relation between Moral philosophy and the other Sciences. The definition of Aristotle as "'l maestro di color che sanno" is ironic since "those who know," or believe that they know, do not acknowledge him as their "maestro, or he them. In the *Convivio*, Dante had envisioned a celestial Athens where Stoics and Peripatetics and Epicureans were united with Aristotle as one harmonious will. "Per le quali tre virtudi si sale a filosofare a quelle Atene celestiali, dove gli Stoici e Peripatetici e Epicurii, per la l[uc]e de la veritade etterna, in uno volere concordevolmente concorrono" (Cv. III. xiv. 15). In the Athens in Limbo, Aristotle and the other philosophers are together but are not united in a single will. They are a dysfunctional family, and not a very happy one.

Dante did not share Dante da Maiano or Guittone D'Arezzo's view that pagan philosophers "followed virtue, for a righteous life," as Barolini suggests (see note 2). On the contrary, their place in Limbo is a punishment because, as Beatrice says in *Par.* XXIX, they chose to follow their own way rather than follow Aristotle's who alone is "degnissimo di fede e d'obedienza" ("entirely worthy of being trusted and obeyed") (*Cv.*IV.vi. 5).

Voi non andate giù per un sentiero
filosofando; tanto vi trasporta
l'amor de l'apparenza e 'l suo pensiero!
(*Par*. XXIX. 85–87.)

(You do not go along one path philosophizing: so much is the love of appearances and their thoughts that carry you away!)

These philosophers are motivated by self-love and ambition, believing in appearances which they take for the truth. When the pilgrim lifts his brow and sees Aristotle surrounded by the other philosophers admiring him and honoring him, the gesture is an ironic commentary on ancient philosophy and pagan philosophers:

Poi ch'innalzai un poco più le ciglia,
vidi 'l maestro di color che sanno
seder tra filosofica famiglia.
Tutti lo miran, tutti onor li fanno.
(*Inf*. IV. 130–133.)

(When I raised my eyes a little higher, I saw the Master of those who know, seated in a philosophic family. They all admire him and honor him.)
This is Dante's 'contrapasso' of Aristotle and of his fellow pagan philosophers.

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Dante's philosophy is not Aristotle's, it is a practical philosophy of life based on the teachings of Boethius and Cicero whom he credits for introducing him to philosophy, and calls them "movers" ("movitori"): "li quali con la dolcezza di loro sermone inviarono me, ne lo amore, cioé ne lo studio, di questa donna gentilissima Filosofia" ("who through the sweetness of their writings, guided me on the path of love, that is, the study of this most gentle lady Philosophy") (*Cv*. II. xv. 1). They were instrumental (with Pythagora) in making Dante fall in love with the "donna gentile" whom Boethius first introduced as consolation after the death of Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*. "dico e affermo che la donna di cu'io innamorai appresso lo primo amore (Beatrice) fu la Bellissima e onestissima figlia de lo Imperadore de lo universo, a la quale Pittagora pose nome Filosofia" (*Cv*. II. xv. 12). For Dante philosophy is philo-sophia, that is, "amistanza a Sapienza," love of wisdom: "Filosofia non è altro che amistanza a Sapienza, o vero a sapere; onde in alcun modo si può dire catuno filosofo secondo lo naturale amore che in ciascuno genera lo desiderio di sapere" ("philosophy is nothing other than love of wisdom or knowledge; consequently in a certain sense everyone can be called a philosopher, on account of the natural love which is generated in everyone

by their desire to know" (*Cv*. III. xi. 6–7). This is not the love of knowledge of Ulysses, which is fraudulent and serves to further his ambitions, or of the pilgrim who wants to head to Mount of Purgatory directly. It is the love that enables one not only to live virtuously but also to choose reason over passion and self-interest.

In the *Commedia*, the figure of Dante's philosophy is the "donna gentile" who replaces Aristotle as the figure of reason, as she is defined in the *Convivo:* "Per donna gentile s'intende la nobile anima d'ingegno, e libera ne la sua propia potestate, che è la ragione." ("By donna gentile is meant an intellectual soul both noble and free in the exercise of its own power, which is reason." (*Cv*. III. xiv. 9) In *Inf*. II, she is called "movitore." together with Lucy the light of reason, who moves Beatrice and Virgil to help Dante on his journey. Aristotle, however, is not too far behind, as in "la tua Etica" and "la tua Fisica," or in Dante's reflections on greed and power throughout the poem.

In the *Convivio* Dante believed that by simply "mirando la Sapienza ogni vizio tornerà diritto e buono" ("by gazing on Wisdom every vice will be made right and good") (*Cv*. III. xv. 15). In the *Commedia* Dante is no longer so optimistic or willing to explain the meaning of his allegories. In reading the allegories of the *Commedia* we do not have the benefit of the bread of Dante's commentary to help us discover the truth hidden beneath his beautiful fictions. In this paper, to determine the impact of Aristotle's philosophy on Dante's writings, I have tried to distinguish the Aristotle before the *Convivio* and after. Before, Aristotle is the authority by which means Dante teaches man's final goal of happiness and virtue. After, the "donna gentile" takes over the role of Aristotle as Dante's poetic wisdom to represent examples of virtue and vice for the benefit of those readers who can uncover the meaning concealed in his allegories. Before and After mark the time which elapses between the *Convivio* and the *Commedia*, between philosophical prose and poetry, the literal and the allegorical.

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