

The Notions of Space and the Other World: Comparisons between Dante's Comedy and Jewish Medieval Thought

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My lecture aims to point out the similarities between Dante's notion and the medieval Jewish concept of space and the Other World. I mostly choose passages from Hebrew mystical literature and Immanuel Romano's description of Heaven and Hell.

The word *maqom* (מקום 'place', 'space') appears in the Hebrew Bible over 300 times and in the Torah, over a hundred. It is first mentioned in Genesis, chapter I, when God creates the world and collects all water to one "place" (I,9). The location of two basic elements is the subject of Dante's *Questio de Aqua et Terra*. Spatial determination has a primary importance not only in the biblical texts, but also in later Jewish thought. In the rabbinic literature we find three names of God in Hebrew related to space: *samayim* (שמים 'heavens'), *sekinah* (שכינה 'presence') and *maqom*. *Maqom* as a name of God illustrates his omnipresence. From the works of Philo, we are well aware of the difference between God and men also regarding this quality: "When a person comes down he must leave one place and occupy another. But God fills all things ... [and is] everywhere ..." (*De confusione linguarum*, 134-139). The omnipresence of God is the notion the Dantean *Paradise* starts with (*La gloria di colui che tutto move / per l'universo penetra, e risplende / in una parte più e meno altrove*) and is explained in detail by mostly biblical and Aristotelian citations in the Letter to Can Grande della Scala (288-411).

In the *Corpus Hermeticum* (IIB1-10) the world is presented as a great human body. And since everything is moved by something else, something greater, stronger and of opposite nature, the place in which the world is must be moved by something incorporeal, and even greater, the divine. This idea can be found in the *Guide for the Perplexed* of Moses ben Maimon (I. LXXII) – so is determining medieval Jewish theology – and later became the pillar of Robert Durling's and Ronald Martinez's analysis of the structure and the cosmology of the *Divine Comedy*.

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