

# From Urban Barbarity to Divine Order: Dante's Dream of a New Civic Disposition for Europe

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## ABSTRACT

In *Canto* 31 of the *Paradiso* Dante likens his amazement upon entering the Emyrean and beholding the heavenly citadel, laid out in the form of a white rose, to the awe that the Barbarians must have felt when they first gazed on the majesty of the great monuments of Rome. He goes on to contrast the just and sane people who dwell in the heavenly realm with himself, who has journeyed from time to eternity, from the human to the divine, from Florence to the city of the saints, thus implying that his native city represents all that is not just, all that does not respect the divine order, all that is barbaric.

In fact, this contrasting of the Heavenly Jerusalem with Florence is part of a wider programme in the *Commedia* in which Dante vividly portrays the corruption, avarice and internecine strife that has brought the once great cities of Italy low, and sets forth his vision for a new civic disposition when Rome will once again rule over a new Christian Empire. This is essentially the same vision that Dante sets forth in his *Monarchia* where he proposes that the dual roles of Christ as King and High Priest be divided on earth between Pope and Emperor, the latter holding absolute sway in the civic realm and guaranteeing the peace in which citizens can flourish and lead an upright moral life, the former determining all matters spiritual.

This paper explores how Dante's complex portrayal of infernal and heavenly cities in the *Commedia* is the principal vehicle whereby he sets forth his political and ethical vision for a Christian civilisation, just as important in its own way as the spiritual message of the poem.

**KEY WORDS:** Dante, political, *Monarchia*, city, emperor, pope.

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# 從野蠻的都市到神聖的秩序： 但丁對歐洲新公民社會的美麗構想

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## 摘 要

在「天堂樂園」的第31篇裡，但丁把他對於進入至高殿堂以及天堂堡壘的體驗幻化成一朵白色玫瑰的形體，並把此譬為野蠻人最初看到冠冕堂皇的羅馬時的敬畏。再者，他繼續把住在仙堂境地裡正直理智的人跟他自己做對比，而他——一位從現世走往永恆，從人間走往神界，他從佛羅倫斯遊走到聖人城市。由此，他暗示：他土生土長的城市代表了所有不公平正義，一切不遵守神聖次序，凡是野蠻的事物。

事實上，把天上的耶路撒冷跟佛羅倫斯對比，這只是一個較廣計畫當中的一小部分。在「神曲」當中，但丁生動地描繪著腐敗、貪婪、互相殘殺的鬥爭，這些已使得那曾經宏偉的義大利城市變成低級不堪。當羅馬再一次地統治著一嶄新的基督教帝國，他想要開始實踐他的新公民佈署的理想。這在根本上跟但丁在「君主制」一書提倡的理念一般，他建議道，耶穌同時為國王與祭司的身份，在人間分別託付給教宗和帝王。後者對公民的領域有絕對的統治權並保證和平給所有的城民，讓他們在正直的道德生活中欣欣向榮，而前者要求所有的事情處決於心靈層面。

這篇論文旨在探討，但丁對於地獄與天堂的複雜描寫在「神曲」當中如何成為他的主要的傳播媒介，於此他開始了他對基督文明政治與道德的夢想，此點跟他如何以自己特有的手法表達心靈性的訊息有同樣的重要性。

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**關鍵詞：**但丁、政治的、君主制、城市、帝王、教宗。

*Se i barbari, venendo da tal plaga  
che ciascun giorno d'Elice si cuopra,  
rotante col suo figlio ond' ella è vaga,  
veggendo Roma e l'ardüa sua opra,  
stupefaciensi, quando Laterano  
a le cose mortali andò di sopra;  
ïo, che al divino da l'umano,  
a l'eterno dal tempo era venuto,  
e di Fiorenza in popol giusto e sano,  
di che stupor dovea esser compiuto!*

[If the barbarians, coming from that region which Helice covers every day, wheeling with her son, in whom she takes delight, were dumbstruck at the sight of Rome and her majestic monuments, when the Lateran surpassed all other works of man, I, who had come to things divine from man's estate, to eternity from time, from Florence to a people just and sane, with what amazement must I have been filled!] *Paradiso* 31: 31-40<sup>1</sup>

In *Canto* 31 of *Paradiso* Dante likens his amazement upon entering the Empyrean and beholding the heavenly citadel, laid out in the form of a white rose, to the awe that the Barbarians must have felt when they first gazed on the majesty of the great monuments of Rome. He goes on to contrast the just and sane (that is, morally and spiritually healthy) people who dwell in the heavenly realm with himself, who has journeyed from time to eternity, from the human to the divine, from Florence to the city of the saints, thus implying that his native city represents all that is not just, all that does not respect the divine order, all that is barbaric.<sup>2</sup>

This contrasting of the Heavenly Jerusalem with Florence is part of a wider programme in the *Commedia* in which Dante vividly portrays the corruption, avarice and internecine strife that has brought the once great cities

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<sup>1</sup> The Italian text of the *Commedia* is cited from Giorgio Petrocchi's edition. Translations of *Paradiso* are John Sinclair's, while those of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* are Hollander's, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> I thus intend "barbarian" (βάρβαρο) in its original Greek sense of someone who is not part of the πόλις (polis), the civilised, well-ordered realm of the city state, but also in the Aristotelian and Aquinian sense of contrasting with natural justice or law (*δικαιον φυσικον, ius naturale*). See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. V, ch. 6-7; *Politics*, Bk. III, ch. 16, and, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I:II, qq. 90-108.

of Italy low,<sup>3</sup> and sets forth his vision for a new civic disposition when Rome will once again rule over a new Christian Empire. This is essentially the same vision that he sets forth in his *Monarchia* where he proposes that the dual roles of Christ as King and High Priest be divided on earth between Pope and Emperor, the latter holding absolute sway in the civic realm and guaranteeing the peace in which citizens can flourish and lead an upright moral life, the former determining all matters spiritual.

This article will explore how Dante's portrayal of infernal cities in the *Commedia* is one of the principal vehicles whereby he sets forth his political and ethical vision for a Christian civilisation, just as important in its own way as the spiritual message of the poem. I shall attempt to show how this message is essentially the same as that of the *Monarchia*, though directed to a different audience and delivered in a rather more oblique manner.<sup>4</sup> We shall begin by examining Dante's treatment of a selection of cities in the *Inferno*, which, I shall suggest, is intended to illustrate the barbarity and moral degradation that has resulted from the absence of imperial rule and the ill-conceived attempts of the papacy to encroach on the temporal realm. We shall then briefly consider some passages in the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* which point to Dante's belief that only the restoration of a universal monarchy and the redressing of the balance between papal and imperial power will ensure the establishment of a social and moral order without which humanity cannot fulfil its God-given end. The article will conclude with some brief remarks on Dante's more exhaustive treatment of these same issues in the *Monarchia*. In such a short space it will not be possible to deal with anything like the entirety of Dante's political philosophy (indeed, I do not consider such matters as the citadels and circles of Hell, the procession and the symbolism of the Griffin in *cantos* 30 and 31 of *Purgatorio*, and the Eagle's explanation of Divine Justice

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<sup>3</sup> On Dante's treatment of Italian cities see De Vito.

<sup>4</sup> Joan Ferrante, has argued in her article "Why Did Dante write the *Commedia*?", and more extensively in *The Political Vision* that Dante's principal purpose in writing the *Commedia* was to deliver a political message of the need for the divided and feuding states, cities and kingdoms of Christendom to be united under the rule of a single Emperor who would ensure the temporal well-being of humanity independently of, but in co-operation with the Pope who, stripped of all worldly wealth and power, would care for the spiritual health of his flock. That Dante promotes this vision in the *Commedia*, and with even greater clarity in the *Monarchia*, is beyond dispute, though that it constitutes the primary message of the former is something that many Dantists, myself included, would vigorously dispute. However, that is a discussion for another day. See also the various contributions of Barolini, especially her article "Bertran de Born and Sordello", which deals with the relationship between poetry and politics.

in *Paradiso* 29),<sup>5</sup> but the essential lineaments and remarkable daring of his vision for a new Earthly Paradise should become clear.

The political message of the *Commedia* is evident from the outset, not least in the figure of Virgil, the first of three guides (all of whom will bear a political message)<sup>6</sup> that accompany the Pilgrim on his journey towards “*quello imperador che là sù regna*” (“that emperor who reigns above”) (*Inf.* I: 123), as the Roman poet – not accidentally – refers to God in the opening *canto*. Indeed, when Virgil first appears in Hell he does so not only in the guise of Dante’s favourite poet, but also as author of the *Aeneid*, the great political poem of the Latins, the masterpiece whose narrative set out to legitimise the right of Rome to rule the known world. Nor is it accidental that Virgil immediately afterwards refers to the Empyrean – Heaven – as a city:

“[P]erch’ i’ fu’ ribellante a la sua legge,  
non vuol che ’n sua città per me si vegna.  
In tutte parti impera e quivi regge;  
quivi è la sua città e l’alto seggio:  
oh felice colui cu’ ivi elegge!”

[“[He] wills not, because I was a rebel to His law, that I should make my way into His city. In every part He reigns and there He rules. There is His city and His lofty seat. Happy the one whom He elects to be there!”] *Inferno* 1: 125-129

In an ironic reversal of history Virgil, once one of the most honoured citizens of the Empire, is now excluded, like a barbarian, from the heavenly citadel because he did not recognise Christ. And this is an important message to remember in the discussion that follows, for no matter how great Dante’s admiration of the Romans, and despite his enthusiastic embrace of all things classical,<sup>7</sup> whether it be in the realms of literature, philosophy, law, etc., in his eyes all these manmade cultural and social constructs were ultimately devoid

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<sup>5</sup> For an in-depth study of the relevant *canti* see Armour’s *Dante’s Griffin*.

<sup>6</sup> Beatrice gives several political speeches, the last of which we shall consider below. Dante’s final guide, Bernard of Clairvaux, as well as being a mystic and a Marian devotee, was deeply involved in the political and ecclesiastical issues of his time as Botterill has shown in his *Ideals*.

<sup>7</sup> From the vast bibliography on Dante and classical literature, Picone is a useful place to begin.

of meaning and purpose if they were not animated by Christian grace. But equally, Christendom needed to learn the lessons of history, to take on board all that was legitimate in the classical world. Thus, since God ordained that a single person should rule over the Roman world for good reason,<sup>8</sup> Christendom should now follow that paradigm. Instead, the lack of a supreme ruler has led to the degeneracy, corruption, and strife that are bringing low the once noble cities of Italy.<sup>9</sup>

For those who are not familiar with Italian history of the time a brief parenthesis is necessary at this point. In the thirteenth century Florence, and many of the cities of Northern Italy, were divided into two factions, the Guelphs, who upheld the right of the Pope to rule in matters temporal as well as spiritual, and the Ghibellines, who championed the right of the Holy Roman Emperor to hold sway in the temporal realm. What is not widely known is that this split into pro-papal and pro-imperial factions actually had its origin in an incident far from the realm of politics that took place in Florence between 1215 and 1216 involving the Donati family, several of whose members feature prominently in the *Commedia*. The episode, which Dante's ancestor Cacciaguada briefly recounts in *Paradiso* 16 (136-150), began when Gualdrada Donati persuaded Buondelmonte dei Buondelmonti to jilt his betrothed in favour of her daughter resulting in a feud that ultimately involved in excess of sixty prominent families (Boitani 1-2). Only later did the two factions take on opposing political causes. By Dante's time the dispute had extended far beyond his native city, resulting in widespread chaos and strife throughout Northern Italy. Dante himself was originally a supporter of the Guelph cause (unsurprisingly since his wife and his best friend were both members of the Donati family) until he was exiled from Florence as a result of papal scheming. When the Guelphs split into the Blacks and Whites (who respectively supported and opposed a Florentine alliance with Pope Boniface VIII), Dante sided with the Whites, and briefly became prior (mayor)

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<sup>8</sup> We do not have space here to discuss Dante's ideas on why it was necessary for Christ to be born as a citizen of the Roman empire and to die under its laws, but essentially he argued that Rome represented the whole of humanity and that if Jesus were to pay the ransom for the sin of the whole human race he had to be both a member of that race and to be put to death by an authority that represented the whole of that race. This argument is closely linked to Anselm's explanation of the Incarnation in *Cur Deus homo?* See *Mon.* II, xii, 6 and *Par.* 6: 82-93.

<sup>9</sup> Or rather Northern Italy since Dante mentions no Southern cities, with the exception of Rome, a city which he never portrays in a negative light (other than describing it as widowed), since it is the divinely ordained seat of Empire and Church.

of the city. Exiled from Florence on false charges of corruption when the Black Guelphs took power Dante eventually became disillusioned with the self-interested political manoeuvrings of both Guelphs and Ghibellines and declared a plague on both houses, famously proclaiming that he was a party unto himself (*Par.* 17: 69).

In the *Inferno* Dante explores with extraordinary vividness the impact on the individual and society of the breakdown of moral order that occurs in what we would these days term “failed states”. The Somalias and Yemens of the Italian twelfth century were city-states such as Pistoia, Bologna, Lucca, Genoa, and, of course, Florence, which, in Dante’s view, found themselves in such a parlous state owing to the lack of a single, unifying ruler – a Holy Roman Emperor. The barbarity of the denizens of these cities – represented by a variety of characters encountered in Hell – easily matches that of the barbarian assailants of the Roman Empire, but with the important difference that there are now no external enemies - it is the lack of just rule and the consequent moral degeneracy of the citizens that are destroying the prospect of a Christian Roman empire.

In *Inferno* 15 Dante apostrophises Pistoia, exemplified by Vanni Fucci, son of a nobleman and partisan of the Black Guelphs as well as a notorious criminal, whose deeds included the plundering of a church treasury:

*Ahi Pistoia, Pistoia, ché non stanza  
d'incenerarti sì che più non duri,  
poi che 'n mal fare il seme tuo avanzi?  
Per tutt' i cerchi de lo 'nferno scuri  
non vidi spirto in Dio tanto superbo,  
non quel che cadde a Tebe giù da' muri.*

[Ah, Pistoia, Pistoia, why won't you resolve to burn yourself to ashes, cease to be, since you exceed your ancestors in evil? Through all the gloomy rounds of Hell I saw no soul so prideful against God, not even him who toppled from the walls at Thebes.] *Inferno* 25: 10-15

As elsewhere in the poem, the allusion to the ancient city of Thebes reminds us that the destructive rivalry between Guelphs and Ghibellines which plagued the city states of Northern Italy mirrors the strife that beset the poleis

of ancient Greek, just as it does the circles of Hell. As recorded in Statius' Thebaid and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the dispute between Eteoles and Polynices, sons of Oedipus, which led to the disastrous war of the Seven against Thebes, resulted in the death of many, including the brothers themselves. Capaneus, one of the seven kings who besieged Thebes, met his end when struck by a thunderbolt as he scaled the walls of the city declaring that not even Jupiter could stop him, just as Vanni is not even afraid of plundering a church. Here Dante points to the loss of respect for both civil and ecclesial authorities that has resulted from the lack of imperial rule. For Dante, as we shall see more clearly in the *Monarchia*, civic order is a necessary prerequisite for moral rectitude, and in the absence of a moral life a recognition of one's right relationship with God is not possible.

Another denizen of a city that we encounter is Venèdico Caccianemico, former inhabitant of Bologna, who now resides among the pimps and seducers in the first *bolgia* of the penultimate circle of Hell. The Bolognese, Venèdico himself admits, are famed for their greedy disposition, which is what led him to pimp his own sister to the Marquis Opizzo of Este, in the hopes of currying favour with him:

*“E non pur io qui piango bolognese;  
anzi n'è questo loco tanto pieno,  
[...]  
e se di ciò vuoi fede o testimonio,  
rècati a mente il nostro avaro seno.”*

["I'm not the only Bolognese here lamenting. This place is so crammed with them [...]. And if you'd like some confirmation, bring our greedy dispositions back to mind."]

*Inferno* 18: 58-59 and 61-62

Just as in the case of Vanni Fucci plundering the church, Dante here uses an extreme example in order to shock the reader into realising the extent of the depravity that is ailing a rudderless society.

Dante, however, does not confine himself to shock tactics. In one of the more grimly humorous passages of the *Inferno* he portrays the attempts of the grafters to outwit their demonic guardians, the Malabranche, as they attempt to thrust their heads out of a sea of boiling tar only to be ducked under again

by the demons. One of the demons declares the inhabitants of Lucca to be swindlers to a man, the most corrupt of them all being Bonturo, whom Dante ironically excludes from the general condemnation:

... “*O Malebranche,  
ecco un de li anzian di Santa Zita!  
Mettetel sotto, ch’i’ torno per anche  
a quella terra, che n’è ben fornita:  
ogn’uom v’è barattier, fuor che Bonturo;  
del no, per li denar, vi si fa ita.*”

[“O Malebranche, here is one of Santa Zita’s Elders. Thrust him under, while I head back for more to that city, where there’s such a fine supply. There, money turns a No into a Yes.”]

*Inferno* 21: 37-42

This scene, like all of Hell, is one of chaos and lawlessness. Sin, we are to understand, does not confine itself to damaging the individual soul, but has ramifications in broader society. Indeed, Hell is what society ultimately becomes when it is filled with creatures (human and demonic) who have lost all trace of the design that God originally had for them: “*Le cose tutte quante / hanno ordine tra loro, e questo è forma / che l’universo a Dio fa simigliante*” (“All things created have an order in themselves, and this begets the form that lets the universe resemble God”) (*Par.* 1: 103-105). Whenever creatures reject the natural order that derives from the “*re de l’universo*” (“King of the universe”) (*Inf.* 5: 91), following the trajectory of their own will rather than God’s, barbaric chaos ensues because they are incapable of interacting with their fellow creatures in anything but a self-centred and destructive way.

The degeneracy to which vice and a lack of good rule has reduced the city-states of Northern Italy is perhaps best illustrated in what must be the most gruesome *canto* of the entire *Commedia*, *canto* 33 of *Inferno*, which tells the awful tale of the Pisan count Ugolino della Gherardesca whose life of intrigue and treachery has earned him a place in Antenora, a division of the tenth circle of Hell where those who have been traitors to their country or their party are punished. Ugolino, the most powerful figure in Pisa in his time, became head of the Guelphs, but after having intrigued with the Ghibellines he was betrayed by their leader, Ruggieri degli Ubaldini, archbishop of Pisa,

who had him, along with his sons and grandsons locked up and deprived of food so that they all starved to death. As Dante spies Ugolino he is gnawing the head of Ruggieri, who is in the division just below him where those who have betrayed their associates are confined. Dante's Ugolino tells a story that goes beyond even the horror of the historical facts. Ugolino's children are described as young (in reality they were all adults and he a man past sixty), and knowing that they will die before he does, they urge him to eat them once they are dead. Although it is never explicitly stated that he did so, the reader is led to assume that Ugolino did indeed cannibalise his children.

Aside from the parodying of the Eucharist and Christ's self-sacrifice on the Cross in this episode (Freccero 156-57) the most striking feature here is the total breakdown of any civic order and the complete collapse of moral values that has resulted from the continuous civil strife between Guelphs and Ghibellines in the absence of any overarching authority that could prevent it.

As Ugolino prepares to resume his meal he bitterly condemns Pisa as the "shame" (*vituperio*) (79) of people who speak the Italian tongue and wishes that the city along with its entire population might drown beneath the waters of the Arno:

*Ahi Pisa, vituperio de le genti  
del bel paese là dove 'l sì suona,  
poi che i vicini a te punir son lenti,  
muovasi la Capraia e la Gorgona,  
e faccian siepe ad Arno in su la foce,  
sì ch'elli annieghi in te ogne persona!*

[Ah Pisa, how you shame the people of that fair land where 'si' is heard! Since your neighbours are so slow to punish you, may the islands of Capraia and Gorgona move in to block the Arno at its mouth and so drown every living soul in you!]

*Inferno* 33: 79-84

A little later in the same *canto* Pisa is called "*novella Tebe*" ("the new Thebes") both because of its legendary foundation by the Theban princess and because of its reputation for fraternal strife. This savage *canto* concludes in an encounter with Branca d'Oria, a Genoese nobleman, who treacherously murdered his father-in-law, allowing Dante to end with yet another invective

against a corrupt city:

*Ahi Genovesi, uomini diversi  
d'ogne costume e pien d'ogne magagna,  
perché non siete voi del mondo spersi?*

[O men of Genoa, race estranged from every virtue, crammed  
with every vice, why have you not been driven from the earth?]

*Inferno* 33: 151-153

But the city that receives greatest attention from Dante in the *Commedia* is, of course, his native Florence, the “flower city” whose florin has been one of the principle corrupters of the Roman Church, as we shall see later. Although savagely condemned on numerous occasions in the poem for its many vices, and implicitly put in contraposition to that other flower city, the “*candida rosa*” (“white rose”) (*Par.* 31: 1) of the Heavenly Jerusalem, Dante cannot but display his affection for his birthplace on occasion, sometimes couched in the warm glow of an idealised glorious past, sometimes expressed in terms of the great vocation it is called to fulfil if only it will abandon its nefarious ways.

The first major episode involving Florence is Dante’s encounter with Ciaccio, a glutton, in *Inferno* 6, who is quick to condemn the city as being filled with envy (“... *La tua città, ch'è piena / d'invidia*”) (49-50). In the ensuing conversation Dante asks him if he can shed any light the future fate of the “riven city” (“*città partita*”) (61) and its citizens. Ciaccio then foretells the defeat of the Whites and Dante’s exile, attributing the root of the conflict to the three gravest of the seven mortal sins: “Pride, envy, and avarice are the sparks / that have set the hearts of all on fire.” (“*superbia, invidia e avarizia sono / le tre faville c'hanno i cuori accesi*”) (74-75). At this Dante makes a further enquiry as to the fate of five prominent Florentines of an earlier generation whom he considers to have been good men who contributed to the good of the city, only to learn that he will encounter all of them in the lower reaches of Hell. Here we already see something of the ambiguity with which Dante treats his birthplace, on the one hand bitterly condemning it, on the other nostalgically recalling a time when the city was not yet torn by division, yet apparently contradictorily indicating that its leading citizens in those days as were vice-ridden as later generations. The explanation, perhaps, is that such vice, while lamentable, did not have major public consequences because it

was not fanned by the flames of papal scheming and factional rivalry, as would later be the case when the Blacks ousted the Whites. Dante, in fact, is realistic enough to realise that moral rectitude in leaders, while desirable, is not the norm, and that political virtue, an interest in the common good, may stand alongside personal vice. The problem arises when personal vice extends into the public domain and infects the body politic.

In *Inferno* 15, Dante encounters Brunetto Latini, a prominent figure in literary and political circles of Florence in the generation before Dante. Brunetto attributes the woes of Florence to the mixing of the original Roman population with the nearby “greedy, envious and proud”) (“*avara, invidiosa e superba*”) (68) people of Fiesole whom the Florentine nobility have foolishly allowed to enter the city. This is a view that in part reflects Dante’s own opinion that the ancient values of Florence have been corrupted by the crass commercialism of the *nouveau riche* who have set up shop in the city, but he does not adhere in the slightest to Brunetto’s belief that this is due to the sully of noble Roman blood through interbreeding with the *fiesolani*. Nobility, as Dante repeatedly asserts in his writings, most notably in the *Vita nuova* and in the fourth book of the *Convivio*, is not inherited but depends on the nature and comportment of the individual (Trovato).

In *Inferno* 16 the theme of Florence’s current moral decline compared to its former uprightness is taken up once again when the Pilgrim meets three of the Florentine’s whom Ciaccio had told him resided in a lower circle, amidst the sodomites. Once again, as in his encounter with Brunetto, Florence’s woes are attributed in great part to “new money”:

*‘La gente nuova e i sùbiti guadagni  
orgoglio e dismisura han generata,  
Fiorenza, in te, sì che tu già ten piagni.’*

[“The new crowd with their sudden profits have begot in you,  
Florence, such excess and arrogance that you already weep.”]

*Inferno* 16: 73-75

This time it is Dante Pilgrim himself who utters the words, confirming that this is indeed his opinion. The use of the name *Fiorenza* may also be intended to remind us of the gold florin, which Florence began to mint in 1252, initiating the economic boom which Dante is convinced has led to the moral

decline of the city. Even worse, perhaps, the close ties between the bankers and the Pope have corrupted the papacy and augmented its interference in temporal matters, not least in the politics of Florence. This is a matter which Dante will address more directly in *Paradiso* 10 when Cunizza credits Lucifer with the foundation of Florence and blames the city's currency for corrupting of the papacy thus leading the faithful astray:

*[Essa] produce e spande il maladetto fiore  
c'ha disviate le pecore e li agni,  
però che fatto ha lupo del pastore.*

[[It] puts forth and spreads the accursèd flower that has led astray both sheep and lambs, for it has made a wolf out of its shepherd.] *Paradiso* 10: 130-132

*Inferno* 26, the Ulysses *canto*, opens with Dante's most savage invective against Florence:

*Godi, Fiorenza, poi che se' sì grande  
che per mare e per terra batti l'ali,  
e per lo 'nferno tuo nome si spande!  
Tra li ladron trovai cinque cotali  
tuoi cittadini onde mi ven vergogna,  
e tu in grande orranza non ne sali.  
Ma se presso al mattin del ver si sogna,  
tu sentirai, di qua da picciol tempo,  
di quel che Prato, non ch'altri, t'agogna.  
E se già fosse, non saria per tempo.  
Così foss'ei, da che pur esser dee!  
ché più mi graverà, com' più m'attempo.*

[Take joy, O Florence, for you are so great your wings beat over land and sea, your fame resounds through Hell! Among the thieves, I found five citizens of yours who make me feel ashamed, and you are raised by them to no great praise. But if as morning nears we dream the truth, it won't be long before you feel the pain that Prato, to name but one, desires for you.

Were it already come, it would not be too soon. But let it come, since come indeed it must, and it will weigh the more on me the more I age.] *Inferno* 26: 1-12

Though similar in tone to the invectives against other cities we have considered this one differs in at least two respects. Firstly it contains a prophecy that Florence will soon pay for its degeneracy – Dante seems to be particularly fond of making prophecies about his own city as we have already seen – and secondly, the Poet expresses his shame at his fellow citizens and his pain at the fate that awaits his birthplace, justified and necessary though it is. At first sight the invective also seems misplaced since it refers to the five Florentine thieves of the previous *canto* rather than the famed encounter with Ulysses that is about to occur, but the mention of Florence’s “wings” may be a clue to the fact that there is an underlying connection. Ulysses and his companions make their oars into wings (“*de’ remi facemmo ali*”) (125) in their attempt to reach the shores of Mount Purgatory without the aid – indeed against the express will – of God, while Dante *Alighieri* is on a divinely sanctioned journey whose purpose is “to remove those living in this life from a state of misery, and to bring them to a state of happiness”, as he states in the *Letter to the Can Grande* (39, [15]).<sup>10</sup> Dante may be intending to tell us that Florence, like Ulysses, is blindly following a trajectory that entirely ignores God, and that will lead to its own destruction.

We next come across mention of Florence in *canto* 6 of *Purgatorio* when Dante and Virgil encounter the Italian troubadour Sordello, whose colourful life involved him in many a tangled political web.<sup>11</sup> It is here that we find one of the most sustained political discourses of the *Commedia*. It begins with a lament for “enslaved” Italy’s woes, which is likened to a ship adrift, a brothel, and a riderless horse because the seat of Justinian – that is, of the Emperor, has been left vacant. Next comes an apostrophe of the Church, whose leaders should have left the Emperor to his own devices and not meddled in temporal affairs. This is followed by a condemnation of the weakness and greed of the Emperor (Albert d. 1308) who entirely failed to

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<sup>10</sup> For an English translation of the *Letter to the Can Grande*, which most scholars now take to be genuine, see Paget Toynbee. On Dante’s use of the wings motif, based in part on his surname, *Alighieri*, see Hugh Shankland’s two articles, and Reynolds 29.

<sup>11</sup> On Sordello see Barolini, who also provides an extensive bibliography on this episode.

succour his Italian subjects. He is urged not to leave Rome “widowed” i.e. without a temporal ruler, and to have mercy on the people of Italy who are suffering grievously because of his absence. As Dante’s passion rises he even questions God himself as to why he has abandoned Italy to its fate. Dante concludes his apostrophe with a heavily sarcastic sideswipe at his beloved Florence which believes itself so perfect that it is in no need of improvement, while the reality is that it is completely bereft of peace, stability, and political virtue. Here, in condensed form, are many of the arguments he deals with in the *Monarchia*.

In *cantos* 15 to 17 of *Paradiso* we find Dante in personal mode as he uses the encounter with his great-great grandfather, Cacciaguیدا, to rake over his own plight as well as the current woes of Florence, to take a nostalgic and highly idealised look at the city of yesteryear, and once again to foretell his own future:

*Fiorenza dentro da la cerchia antica,  
ond' ella toglie ancora e terza e nona,  
si stava in pace, sobria e pudica.  
Non avea catenella, non corona,  
non gonne contigiate, non cintura  
che fosse a veder più che la persona.*

[...]

*L'una vegghiava a studio de la culla,  
e, consolando, usava l'idioma  
che prima i padri e le madri trastulla;  
l'altra, traendo a la rocca la chioma,  
favoleggiava con la sua famiglia  
d'i Troiani, di Fiesole e di Roma.*

[Florence, within the circle of her ancient walls from which she still hears tierce and nones, dwelled then in peace, temperate and chaste. No bracelet, no tiara did she wear, no embroidered gown, no waistband more striking to the eye than was its wearer. [...]. One kept eager watch upon the cradle, using sounds and words that first delight fathers and mothers when they soothe

their child. Another, while drawing the wool from its spool, would delight her household with the tales would delight her household with the tales of Troy, Fiesole, and Rome.]

*Paradiso* 15: 97-102; 121-126

The image of Florence as presented by Cacciaguida here recalls both the wholesome values of ancient Rome and the prelapsarian innocence of the Garden of Eden. The prominence of women in this portrait is particularly striking and contrasts forcefully with the violent and corrupt male-dominated cities of the *Inferno* (although one should not forget Dante's harsh portrait of the women of his day in *Purgatorio* 23). The men of Florence past (represented in the first place by Cacciaguida himself who had participated and died in the second crusade) are loyal to the Emperor and defend the Church. The question here arises as to whether Dante can really have believed in such an idealised past for Florence and whether he was truly so naïve as to think that there could be a return to such pristine innocence? The answer to both questions, I think, must be a qualified yes. In the first place the myth of the civic virtues of ancient Rome exerted a very powerful influence in Dante's day. Moreover, Dante makes it clear in the *Monarchia* that he believes in the possibility of happiness in this life. The political vision as set out in the *Monarchia* envisages a virtuous universal monarch who will ensure that all can live upright and peaceful lives – an Earthly Paradise – and argues that only thus can the development of the spiritual virtues necessary to reach the Heavenly Paradise be effectively fostered.

He is realistic enough, mind you, to make all such hopes contingent on the return of an emperor who is truly virtuous, an event that seemed increasingly less likely as possible candidates either failed to live up to expectations or died. One of the possible candidates, Dante's last, best hope, was Henry VII of Luxemburg, who reigned as Emperor from 1308-1313. He initially had the support of Pope Clement V who feared the power of the French kings and, unlike his immediate predecessors, he decided to go to Rome to be crowned. The emperor crossed the Alps in late 1310 and was initially welcomed by both the Guelphs and Ghibellines in Lombardy. Matters, however, soon began to go downhill as revolts began to break out. In May 1312 Henry eventually arrived in Rome only to undergo the humiliation of being crowned without ceremony in the Lateran rather than at the Vatican which was in the hands of the Guelphs. Henry's next act was to lay siege to

Florence which had continued to defy him, much to Dante's shame. However, the siege proved ineffective and he was forced to abandon it within a month. Meanwhile Pope Clement had secretly swapped sides and was now scheming against him. As opposition to him grew he was forced to abandon his policy of neutrality and side with the Ghibellines. In August of the following year he set out from Pisa, where he had based himself, with the intention of subduing Naples, but he fell ill and died on his way south, near Siena.

By the time Dante was writing the *Paradiso*, then, Henry was already dead, although Dante's fictional date of 1300 for his journey meant that in the poem he could prophesise the events outlined above as if they were in the future, which is precisely what he does in *Paradiso* 30:

*E 'n quel gran seggio a che tu li occhi tieni  
per la corona che già v'è sù posta,  
prima che tu a queste nozze ceni,  
sederà l'alma, che fia giù agosta,  
de l'alto Arrigo, ch'a drizzare Italia  
verrà in prima ch'ella sia disposta.  
La cieca cupidigia che v'ammalia  
simili fatti v'ha al fantolino  
che muor per fame e caccia via la balia.  
E fia prefetto nel foro divino  
allora tal, che palese e coverto  
non anderà con lui per un cammino.  
Ma poco poi sarà da Dio sofferto  
nel santo officio; ch'el sarà detruso  
là dove Simon mago è per suo merto,  
e farà quel d'Alagna intrar più giuso.*

[And in that great seat which draws your eyes for the crown already set above it, shall sit the soul of noble Henry, who on earth, as emperor, shall attempt to set things straight for Italy before she is prepared. to set things straight for Italy before she is prepared. Blind cupidity, bewitching you, has made you like the infant, dying of hunger, who shoves his nurse's breast away. At that time the prefect of the sacred court will be a man who will not make his way on the same road by daylight as he will

by night. But short shall be the time God suffers him in holy office, for he shall be thrust in holy office, for he shall be thrust down there where Simon Magus gets what he deserves, and push that fellow from Anagni deeper down.]

*Paradiso* 30: 133-148

At first sight it may seem curious, indeed discordant, that Dante should deal with such an earthly subject now that he has arrived in the Empyrean, the light-filled realm of beatitude, which is utterly detached from contingent reality. When we realise that these harsh words (which end in an almost gloating prophecy that Clement V will get his just deserts for having betrayed Henry, joining his fellow simoniac, Pope, Boniface VIII in Hell)<sup>12</sup> come from the mouth of Dante's beloved Beatrice and that they are the last words he will ever hear her utter, we may be even more discomfited. Surely this outburst, coming as it does in the midst of some of the most spiritually lyrical passages of the *Commedia*, is a serious lapse of judgement on Dante's part? Yet perhaps it is precisely Dante's intention to shock us out of our complacency, to remind us of his belief that the human person should pursue two ends, happiness in this life as well as in the next, to awaken us to the fact that his journey will not end here in the Empyrean when he beholds the Beatific Vision, but that his divinely sanctioned mission is to return to the world and write a poem that will have the potential not just to transform lives but to reform politics. He is telling us that there is no contradiction between the highest spiritual contemplation here in the Heavenly Jerusalem, realm of the Church Triumphant, and the harsh condemnation of the Church on earth which is far from being Militant. Likewise, he wishes to remind us of his firm conviction that the consequences of the Church and Empire failing to work together on earth to provide the conditions for people to lead a peaceful, ordered and virtuous existence will also be felt here in the Empyrean, since humanity as a whole will not fulfil its *telos*, which is to be part of the "new heavens and new earth" (Isa. 65.17; Rev. 21.1) that God will bring about at the end of time, while the individual members of the human race will be hindered in their pursuit of holiness.

Of course, there will always remain a gulf between the heavenly city and its earthly counterpart so long as the world lasts. While the squaring of the

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<sup>12</sup> For an excellent analysis of Dante's consignment of these popes to Hell see Foster.

circle (*Par.*33:133-35) is prophetically achieved in the person of Christ who bridges the chasm between the human and the divine,<sup>13</sup> human nature remains fallen even though now open to salvation through the grace unleashed by the Cross. The earthly paradise that Dante envisions must necessarily remain contingent, an ideal, a goal to be fully achieved only in eschatological time, when the world as we now know it will come to an end. Nevertheless, from Dante's viewpoint, this does not mean that one should not aim towards a measure of beatitude already in this life. Indeed, the final vision of the *Commedia* tells us that through grace it is possible while still in our bodies – Dante is still alive and will return to the earth (2 Cor. 2.12; *Par.* 2:37-39) – to go beyond the limitations of human reason, to comprehend something of God and to perceive the movement of love that binds together the whole of God's creation. By ending the poem thus, Dante, I believe, is inviting the reader to take up the challenge of realising this vision in all spheres of human activity, but most particularly in the realm of politics.

Let us turn before we conclude to some key passages of the *Monarchia* which confirm and elaborate on the vision that Dante sets forth in the *Commedia*. The *Monarchia* is comprised of three books which set out to answer three questions, firstly, whether is it necessary for there to be a temporal monarch for the welfare of the world, secondly whether the Roman people received the right to rule over the world by right, and thirdly whether the monarch receives his authority directly from God, or through the mediation of God's vicar (the Pope)?<sup>14</sup> Arguments in favour of humanity being ruled by a single secular monarch include both practical justifications and more philosophical cum theological concerns. One of his first arguments is that just as a man needs peace and quiet in order to gain wisdom then humanity as a whole needs peace in order to achieve beatitude (I, iv, 1-6). Here, one is reminded of the idyllic picture Cacciaguida paints of the Florence of old in *Paradiso* or the peaceful scenes in the Valley of the Princes in

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<sup>13</sup> On Dante's use of the squaring of the circle see Levine, Herzman and Towsley, and Reynolds.

<sup>14</sup> I do not have the space here to elaborate further on Dante's sources for his political ideas, most notably Aristotle, nor can I discuss how his theories relate to the long-running Medieval debate concerning the relationship between Pope and Emperor. On Dante's Aristotelianism see the two exhaustive studies by Boyde. Among the more useful studies on the sources and context of the *Monarchia*, in addition to the commentaries by Shaw and Kay in their recent translations, are the books by Demaray, and Ferrante, *The Political Vision*, and the articles by Cassell, Davis, Del Vecchio, Sistrunk, and Thompson.

*Purgatorio* 6 and 7. He goes on to argue, using inductive reasoning, that in all circumstances there must be one and only one who commands. Thus it is that the intellect rules over the various parts of the body, the head of the household decides for the family, the city-state is governed by a single government, the kingdom by a king. Therefore, he concludes, it is also necessary for humanity as a whole to be ruled over by a single monarch (I, v, 3-9). The implication is clear: the cities of Italy that are riven by internecine strife and the attempts of the popes to hinder the emperors go directly against God's design, since a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand (Matt. 12.25). Moreover, humanity should reflect its Creator, who is One, in order to be in his image and likeness (Gen. 1.26):

*(2) De intentione Dei est ut omne causatum divinam similitudinem representet in quantum propria natura recipere potest. Propter quod dictum est: "Faciamus hominem ad ymaginem et similitudinem nostram"; quod licet 'ad ymaginem' de rebus inferioribus ab homine dici non possit, 'ad similitudinem' tamen de qualibet dici potest, cum totum universum nichil aliud sit quam vestigium quoddam divine bonitatis. Ergo humanum genus bene se habet et optime quando, secundum quod potest, Deo assimilatur. (3) Sed genus humanum maxime Deo assimilatur quando maxime est unum: vera enim ratio unius in solo illo est; propter quod scriptum est: "Audi, Israel, Dominus Deus tuus unus est". (4) Sed tunc genus humanum maxime est unum, quando totum unitur in uno: quod esse non potest nisi quando uni principi totaliter subiacet, ut de se patet. (5) Ergo humanum genus uni principi subiacens maxime Deo assimilatur, et per consequens maxime est secundum divinam intentionem: quod est bene et optime se habere.*

(2) It is God's intention that every created thing should show forth His likeness in so far as its own nature can receive it. For this reason it is said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"; for although "in our image" cannot be said of things lower than man, "after our likeness" can be said of anything, since the whole universe is simply an imprint of divine

goodness. So mankind is in a good (indeed, ideal) state when, to the extent that its nature allows, it resembles God. (3) But mankind most closely resembles God when it is most a unity, since the true measure of unity is in him alone; and for this reason it is written: “Hear, o Israel, the Lord thy God is one”. (4) But mankind is most a unity when it is drawn together to form a single entity, and this can only come about when it is ruled as one whole by one ruler, as is self-evident. (5) Therefore mankind is most like God when it is ruled by one ruler, and consequently is most in harmony with God’s intention; and this is what it means to be in a good (indeed, ideal) state.

*Monarchia* I, viii, 2-5<sup>15</sup>

He goes on to discuss the question of justice, arguing, amongst other things, that only a supreme monarch can judge objectively and with authority in a dispute between two kingdoms, both of whom have equal sovereignty (I, x, 1-3), a concept very close to the role of various UN bodies today. Another crucial argument that he puts forward in this first section is that monarchy maximises freedom. Judgement, he states, is free if it is not forestalled by appetite. Therefore those whose appetites are under control are freest. Good government offers people the opportunity to judge correctly whereas bad government perverts moral order so that bad judgement is deemed good and vice versa. Placing his own interpretation on what Aristotle states in his *Politics* (3.4-5, 1276b16-1278b5), he affirms: “in bad government the good man is a bad citizen, whereas in good government the good man and the good citizen are one and the same thing” (“*in politia obliqua bonus homo est malus civis, in recta vero bonus homo et civis bonus convertuntur*”) (I, xii, 10). This then is his diagnosis of the moral degeneracy that we have witnessed in the *Inferno*: because of the lack of upright rulers to implement justice people have become slaves to their passions. However his solution for the lack of such just rule is perhaps his most utopian: he argues that only a ruler who has absolute power can be untainted by greed and desire since he would already have everything, and would therefore be capable of ruling justly.

Since the second question, the right of the Romans does not concern us

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<sup>15</sup> Latin text from the edition by Pier Giorgio Ricci, English translation by Prue Shaw. I have also consulted the translation by Richard Kay.

here, let us pass directly to the third, the all important matter of the relationship between the Pope and the Emperor. Leaving aside some of the more obscure and technical arguments, I shall concentrate on the last chapter. He begins by presenting an argument which I would suggest is fundamental to his entire life's work namely the quest for a right relationship between our spiritual and corporeal natures, our body and soul, whether the realm be politics, poetry, philosophy or love. He points out that man is in an intermediate position between the angels who are pure intellect and the animals who do not possess a rational soul. We alone of God's creatures, then, possess two natures, one corruptible and one incorruptible. And, coming to the nub of the argument, he continues in a series of points which sum up more effectively than I ever could, the political argument that he presents, albeit in a very different form, in the *Commedia*:

(6) *Et cum omnis natura ad ultimum quendam finem ordinetur, consequitur ut hominis duplex finis existat: ut, sicut inter omnia entia solus incorruptibilitatem et corruptibilitatem participat, sic solus inter omnia entia in duo ultima ordinetur, quorum alterum sit finis eius prout corruptibilis est, alterum vero prout incorruptibilis. (7) Duos igitur fines providentia illa inenarrabilis homini proposuit intendendos: beatitudinem scilicet huius vite, que , in operatione proprie virtutis consistit et per terrestrem paradisum figuratur; et beatitudinem vite eterne, que consistit in fruitione divini aspectus ad quam propria virtus ascendere non potest, nisi lumine divino adiuta, que per paradisum celestem intelligi datur. (8) Ad has quidem beatitudines, velut ad diversas conclusiones, per diversa media venire oportet. Nam ad primam per phylosophica documenta venimus, dummodo illa sequamur secundum virtutes morales et intellectuales operando; ad secundam vero per documenta spiritualia que humanam rationem transcendunt, dummodo illa sequamur secundum virtutes theologicas operando, fidem spem scilicet et karitatem. (9) Has igitur conclusiones et media, licet ostensa sint nobis hec ab humana ratione que per phylosophos tota nobis innotuit, hec a Spiritu Sancto qui per prophetas et agiographos, qui per coeternum sibi Dei filium Iesum Cristum et per eius discipulos supernaturalem veritatem ac nobis*

*necessariam revelavit, humana cupiditas postergaret nisi homines, tanquam equi, sua bestialitate vagantes “in camo et freno” compescerentur in via. (10) Propter quod opus fuit homini duplici directivo secundum duplicem finem: scilicet summo Pontifice, qui secundum revelata humanum genus perduceret ad vitam eternam, et Imperatore, qui secundum philosophica documenta genus humanum ad temporalem felicitatem dirigeret. (11) Et cum ad hunc portum vel nulli vel pauci, et hii cum difficultate nimia, pervenire possint, nisi sedatis fluctibus blande cupiditatis genus humanum liberum in pacis tranquillitate quiescat, hoc est illud signum ad quod maxime debet intendere curator orbis, qui dicitur romanus Princeps, ut scilicet in areola ista mortalium libere cum pace vivatur.*

(6) And since every nature is ordered towards its own ultimate goal, it follows that man’s goal is twofold: so that, just as he alone among all created beings shares in incorruptibility and corruptibility, so he alone among all created beings is ordered to two ultimate goals, one of them being his goal as a corruptible being, the other his goal as an incorruptible being. (7) Ineffable providence has thus set before us two goals to aim at: i.e. happiness in this life, which consists in the exercise of our own powers and is figured in the earthly paradise; and happiness in the eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of the vision of God (to which our own powers cannot raise us except with the help of God’s light) and which is signified by the heavenly paradise. (8) Now these two kinds of happiness must be reached by different means, as representing different ends. For we attain the first through the teachings of philosophy, provided that we follow them putting into practice the moral and intellectual virtues; whereas we attain the second through spiritual teachings which transcend human reason, provided that we follow them putting into practice the theological virtues, i.e. faith, hope and charity. (9) These ends and the means to attain them have been shown to us on the one hand by human reason,

which has been entirely revealed to us by the philosophers, and on the other by the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets and sacred writers, through Jesus Christ the son of God, coeternal with him, and through his disciples, has revealed to us the transcendent truth we cannot do without; yet human greed would cast these ends and means aside if men, like horses, prompted to wander by their animal natures, were not held in check “with bit and bridle” on their journey. (10) It is for this reason that man had need of two guides corresponding to his twofold goal: that is to say the supreme Pontiff, to lead mankind to eternal life in conformity with revealed truth, and the Emperor, to guide mankind to temporal happiness in conformity with the teachings of philosophy. (11) And since none can reach this harbour (or few, and these few with great difficulty) unless the waves of seductive greed are calmed and the human race rests free in the tranquillity of peace, this is the goal which the protector of the world, who is called the Roman Prince, must strive with all his might to bring about: i.e. that life on this threshing-floor of mortals may be lived freely and in peace.

*Monarchia* III, xvi [xv], 6-11

Dante’s bitter experience of political intrigue, papal scheming, dashed hopes, betrayal, exile, and above all of human weakness, convinced him that the majority cannot escape from the dark wood by attempting the same path that he has taken. This is the sense of the warning he gives to his readers at the opening of the *Paradiso* to turn back lest the journey is too arduous for them and they become “*smarriti*” (lost), the same term that he applied to himself in the opening *terzina* of the *Inferno*:

*O voi che siete in piccioletta barca,  
desiderosi d’ascoltar, seguiti  
dietro al mio legno che cantando varca,  
tornate a riveder li vostri liti:  
non vi mettete in pelago, ché forse,  
perdendo me, rimarreste smarriti.*

[O you, eager to hear more, who have followed in your little

bark my ship that singing makes its way, turn back if you would see your shores again. Do not set forth upon the deep, for, losing sight of me, you would be lost.] *Paradiso* 2: 1-6

Most people are not like Dante. They lead ordinary, not exceptional lives. They are not capable of resisting their lower nature or dragging themselves out of the mire without the benefit of a just and ordered society. This is evidenced again and again in history just as it is true of the present day: it is sufficient, as I mentioned before, to look at failed states such as Somalia, or to consider the role of the United Nations, and recent developments in the area of international law (The International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court) to understand how Dante's insistence on the need for an overriding political authority is more relevant than ever in the context of the current need for supranational justice. People need to be guided by good rulers in the temporal just as much as in the spiritual domain. Otherwise they will be reduced to less than beasts both in this life and the next, as is evidenced by the barbaric behaviour of the damned in *Inferno*. Dante's vision of a civilised world, both in the *Commedia* and the *Monarchia* is novel, radical and challenging. It demands great things of both civic and ecclesiastical authorities, and insists that they work in tandem for the good of humanity. A pipedream? Perhaps. But the alternative, at least from Dante's point of view, is to end up like Ugolino, eternally devoured and devouring but never sated.

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