

Convivio

(The Banquet)

Dante Alighieri

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Book I

Chapter I: The Nature of the Banquet

As Aristotle states at the commencement of his *Metaphysics*, all men by nature desire to know. The reason for this is that everything, impelled by the force of its own nature, inclines towards perfection of itself; therefore, since knowledge is the ultimate perfection of our spirit, in which our ultimate happiness lies, we are all by nature bound to desire it. However, many are deprived of this most noble of perfections for various reasons lying within man, and outside him, which prevent him from forming the habit of seeking knowledge.

Within man there exist two defects and impediments: one appertaining to the body, the other to the spirit. The defect of body occurs when its parts do not function correctly, so that it cannot receive anything, as with the deaf, the dumb, and such like. That of the spirit occurs when evil conquers it, so that it follows vicious pleasures, by which it is so deceived that through it everything becomes vile. Similarly two causes outside of man can be identified, one of which condemns him to duty, the other to idleness. The first is domestic and civic responsibility, which properly engages most men, so that they have no time for contemplation. The other is the defect arising from the location where someone is born and raised, which often not only lacks all places of learning, but is distant from educated people.

Two of these defects, the first within man and the first outside him, are not a reason for criticism, but are deserving of excuse and pardon; the other two merit our censure and scorn, though one more than the other. Anyone who reflects deeply can plainly see that there are few who can attain to that habit of knowledge desired by all, while those who live deprived forever of this nourishment are innumerable. Oh, blessed are the few who sit at that table where the bread of angels is eaten! And wretched are those who must graze along with the sheep!

But since every man is by nature a friend towards every other, and every friend is grieved by a defect in one he loves, those who are fed at so noble a table are not without pity for those they see grazing on grass and acorns where the animals pasture. And since pity is the mother of generosity, those who have knowledge always give freely of their great riches to the truly impoverished, and are like a living fountain with whose waters the natural thirst referred to above is quenched. So I who do not sit at the table of the blessed, I who have fled the common pasture, and merely gather a part of

what falls at the feet of those who do sit there, and know the wretched life of those I have left behind by the sweetness I taste in what I gather piecemeal, and am moved by compassion for all, including myself, I then have reserved for the wretched those poems which I set before their eyes a while ago to stimulate their desire.

Wishing to lay the table, I intend to present a communal banquet of what I showed them, with the bread of commentary that must accompany such poetic meat, and without which it could not be eaten. And this banquet, deserving of such bread, offers meat which I do not intend to serve in vain. And therefore I'd have none there whose organs are badly served because they lack teeth, tongue or palate; nor any addicted to vice, with stomachs so full of poisonous and unbalanced humours that they would be unable to retain my meat. But come all whose hunger arises from domestic or civic duty, and sit at the table with those similarly affected; and let all those sit at their feet who are not worthy through idleness of a higher place; and let both eat of my meat and bread, for I wish them to both taste and digest it. The meat at this banquet will be prepared in fourteen ways, in fourteen *canzoni* that is of love and virtue, which lacking bread were to some degree obscure, so that for many their beauty pleased more than their goodness. But the bread, that is, the present explanation, will be a light to make visible ever shade of their meaning.

If the matter is treated more maturely, as I wish, in this work, the *Convivio*, than it was in the *Vita Nuova*, I do not wish to disparage the latter in any way, but to give it greater support by this work; seeing that it was appropriate for it to be ardent and passionate, and for this to be mature and temperate. It is right to speak and act differently according to one's age, since certain manners are laudable and fitting at one age that are blameworthy and inappropriate at another, as I will show later in the fourth book. I wrote the former work at the threshold of youth, and this when I had passed beyond it. And since aspects of my true meaning were other than that which the canzoni I mentioned show, I intend to reveal them by allegorical exposition, after giving a literal account; so that both may be savoured by those invited to this feast. I ask all for whom this banquet fails to match the splendour of their desire, to attribute every defect to my capability and not to my will; since it is my wish to be wholly and lovingly generous.

Chapter II: Speaking about Oneself

At the commencement of every well-run banquet the servants normally take the bread set out, and cleanse it of any impurity. So I, who play their role in the present work, intend first of all to remove two impurities from this exposition, which forms the bread I am serving. The first is that to speak of oneself seems impermissible; the second that to expound things in too much depth seems unreasonable; and the knife of my argument must remove both the impermissible and the unreasonable.

The rhetoricians forbid anyone to speak of themselves except of necessity, and the reason for this restriction is that one cannot avoid praising or criticizing the person about whom one speaks, and such things are coarse, when spoken of self, on anyone's lips. And to dispel a doubt that arises here, I say it is worse to criticize than to praise, though neither should be indulged. The reason is that anything blameworthy in itself is worse than something which is so only by accident. To disparage oneself is blameworthy in itself, since one should tell a friend of his faults in private, and no one is a greater friend than a man is to himself; so that one should reprimand oneself and sorrow over one's defects in the chamber of one's own thought, and not publicly.

Then, a person is not usually blamed for being unable or ignorant of how to behave properly, but always for being unwilling to do so, because good and evil are judged by our willingness or unwillingness; therefore he who criticizes himself shows that he endorses his faults, endorses his lack of virtue: thus criticizing oneself is, of itself, to be rejected. Praising oneself is to be avoided only as an accidental ill, since one cannot praise oneself without it being mostly blame. It is surface praise, but blame to him who looks beneath: for words are made to reveal what is unknown; and he who praises himself shows that he does not think himself valued, which implies a bad conscience, which he discloses in praising himself, and by disclosing it criticizes himself.

Then, self-praise and self-criticism are to be avoided for the same reason as giving false testimony; since no one can truly take their own measure truly and justly, so greatly does self-love deceive. Everyone measures themselves like a dishonest trader who buys with one measure and sells with another; since everyone uses a large measure for his bad deeds, and a short measure for his good ones, so that number, weight and size of the good seem greater than if a true measure was used, and lesser in the case of the bad. So, in speaking of oneself, with praise or its opposite, one either speaks falsely concerning the matter one talks of, or falsely regarding its

importance, which covers both cases. And then, since silence signifies consent, he who praises or blames someone to their face acts discourteously, since the person addressed can neither agree or disagree without falling into the error of self-blame or self-praise: except when punishment is merited, and it cannot be exercised without reproofing the error to be corrected, or when honour and praise are deserved, and they cannot be given without mention of virtuous deeds and honours virtuously won.

To return, however, to the main topic, I say that, as touched on above, speaking of oneself, of necessity, is allowed: and among the cases of necessity two are obvious. One is when great infamy or danger cannot be avoided except by doing so; and then it is permitted, because to follow the lesser of two evils is equivalent to following the good. This necessity is what moved Boethius to speak of himself, so that under the guise of his *Consolation* he could defend himself against the endless infamy of his exile, and show it to be unjust, since no other defender presented himself. The other is when, by speaking of oneself, great benefit accrues to another by way of education; and this is what moved Augustine in his *Confessions* to speak of himself, because through the progress of his life from bad to good, good to better, and better to best, he provided an example and instruction which only true testimony such as his could give.

Now, if these two reasons provide a justification, the bread from my wheat is sufficiently cleansed of the first impurity. Fear of discredit moves me, and a desire moves me to give that instruction which others truly cannot give. I fear discredit for having yielded to the great passion, which anyone who reads the canzoni mentioned above will see as having once ruled me; which infamy will cease utterly if I speak of myself and show that the driving force was not passion but virtue. I intend to show also the true meaning of the canzoni, which none will see if I do not reveal it, because it is hidden beneath a veil of allegory: and doing so will not only bring delight to the ear, but useful instruction concerning this mode of speech and the understanding of similar works.

Chapter III: Detailed Exposition: Fame's Effect

That action is deserving of severe censure which introduces the defect it seeks to remove; as if one sent to end a quarrel begins another before doing so. And now my bread has been cleansed on one side, I must cleanse it on the other to escape such censure, since this writing, which can almost be called a commentary, is intended to eliminate the defect of obscurity in the canzoni mentioned above, and this may prove in part somewhat difficult. The difficulties are intentional in order to avoid a greater defect, and are not due to lack of thought. Ah, if only it had pleased the Maker of the Universe for the cause of my apology never to have existed! Since others would not have sinned against me and I would not have suffered an unjust punishment: that of exile and poverty.

Since it pleased the citizens of Florence, the most beautiful and famous daughter of Rome, to cast me from her sweet bosom – where I was born and nurtured to maturity, and where, with her goodwill, and with all my heart, I desire to rest my weary mind, and end the span of life given to me – I have wandered, like a beggar almost, through virtually all the regions where our language holds sway, displaying against my will the wounds of fate, for which the wounded man is often unjustly held accountable. Truly, I have been a ship without sail and without rudder, carried to various harbours, bays and shores by the dry wind of grievous poverty; and I have been seen by many who perhaps because of some report imagined me as other than I am, such that not only was my person held in low esteem, but all my works were valued less, those done as well as those yet to come. The reason why this happens – not just to me, but to everyone – I wish to touch on briefly: it is firstly because fame alters things with respect to their truth; and then because proximity diminishes them in the same respect.

A fine reputation is principally created by fine thoughts in the mind of a friend, and is first born from them; for the mind of one inimical, though it receives the seed, does not conceive. The mind which first gives it birth, to make its gift fairer, and out of love for the friend who will receive it, does not keep within the confines of truth, but goes beyond them. When the mind exceeds them so as to embellish what it says, it acts against conscience; when it exceeds them in an error arising from love, it does not act so. A second mind, receiving what has been said, is not content merely with the excesses of the first, but seeks to embellish it in report, as if it were of its own making; and so much so that through this action and the error born of love, it swells a reputation beyond what it first was, like the first mind, whether in accord or discordant with conscience. A third mind receiving it

does the same, and a fourth, and so it is endlessly inflated. And so, by taking the opposite motive to that mentioned above, one sees the cause of poor reputation, which is distorted in the same manner. Thus Virgil says, in the fourth book of the *Aeneid*, that Fame thrives on movement and gains by circulation. Anyone can clearly see that the image formed by fame is always greater, no matter what kind of fame it is, than the true state of the thing imagined.

Chapter IV: Detailed Exposition: Proximity's Effect

Having shown the reason why fame extends good and evil beyond their true dimensions, it remains for this chapter to present reasons to show why proximity by contrast diminishes them; and having shown them, to move swiftly to the back to the main topic, that is, my excuse for the defect mentioned above.

There are three reasons why a person's presence makes him seem less worthy than he truly is: the first of these is immaturity, not of age but of mind; the second is envy – and these two reside in the one making the judgement – the third is human imperfection, and this is an attribute of the one being judged.

The first, immaturity, can be discussed briefly as follows. The majority of men live through the senses, like children, and not according to reason; as such they understand things only simply, by their exterior, and the goodness within things, which is ordained to a proper end, they do not see, because the eye of reason is closed which penetrates to sight of it. Thus they quickly see all that they can, and judge according to their sight. And since they only form their opinion of another's fame by hearsay, which opinion clashes, in that person's presence, with their imperfect judgement, since it judges by the senses only and not by reason, they regard what they have previously heard as a lie and disparage the person they previously valued. So for these people, who, alas, comprise almost all humanity, proximity diminishes every quality. Such people are quickly charmed and quickly sated, are often happy or sad in brief delight or sorrow, quick to make friends, and quick to become enemies; doing everything like children, without the aid of reason.

The second, envy, can be dealt with in this way: that in the vicious apparent equality causes envy, and envy is a cause of poor judgement, because it prevents reason from arguing on behalf of whoever is envied, and the power of judgement is then like a judge who only hears one side. So when people like these meet a famous person, they are immediately envious, because they see similar limbs and faculties to their own, and fear, because of the excellence of that person, that they will be less valued. And not only do those filled with passion judge badly but, by denigrating those they judge, cause others to judge badly too; so for these people proximity diminishes the good and bad in everyone presented to them; and I say bad, because many people, delighting in bad deeds, are envious of wrongdoers.

The third is human imperfection, which applies to the person who is judged, and is not apparent without some familiarity and intimacy with him.

As evidence of this, we know that humanity is imperfect in many respects, and, as Augustine says, no one is without imperfection. Sometimes a man is marked by a passion he cannot withstand; sometimes by some physical deformity; sometimes by a stroke of misfortune; and sometimes by the notoriety of his parents or someone close to him. Fame does not carry these things about with it, but proximity does, revealing them by intimacy. And these blemishes cast a shadow on the brightness of virtue, so that they make it seem duller and less worthy. That is the reason every prophet is honoured less in his own country; that is the reason why a virtuous man should allow few into his presence, and be intimate with still fewer, so that his name is known, but not devalued. This third cause applies to evil as well as good, if each stage in the argument addresses that opposite. So it is clearly seen, that through imperfection, which no one is free of, proximity diminishes the good and bad in everyone more than truth warrants.

Thus, as I said above, I have met nearly everyone of note in Italy, so that I have made myself appear less than the truth warrants, not only to those who were already aware of my fame, but others also, so that doubtless my works as well as my person are made light of. Therefore it is appropriate for me to add weight to this present work, by means of a nobler style, so that it may evidence greater authority. And this should be enough to excuse the difficulties of my commentary.

Chapter V: The Vernacular: Sovereignty

Now the bread is cleared of its accidental impurities, it remains to excuse one of substance; that is, its being in the vernacular and not in Latin; speaking metaphorically, that it is made of oats and not of the finest wheat. Briefly it is excusable for three reasons, which led me to choose the one language rather than the other: the first arises from caution, in not creating an inappropriate relationship; the second from zealous generosity; and the third from natural love of the native tongue. And I intend to comment on these three points individually and in turn, so as to counter any objection made on the above basis.

What most adorn and commend human action, and lead it to a good end by the most direct route, are habitual traits of character directed to the intended end, as, for example, boldness of mind and strength of body directed towards chivalry. And thus anyone who is set to serve another must have traits directed to that end, such as submissiveness, understanding and obedience, without which a man is not equipped to serve well. For if he is not submissive in all his functions, he will always carry out his service with effort and strain and will rarely persist in it; and if he fails to understand his master's needs and is not obedient, he will serve only in accord with his own will and judgement, which is to serve rather as a friend than as a servant. So, to avoid an inappropriate relationship, it is right that this commentary, which plays the role of a servant to the *canzoni* which follow later, should be subject to them in all its functions and recognise the needs of its superiors and obey them.

These traits would be lacking if it were in Latin and not the vernacular, since the *canzoni* are in the vernacular. In the first place it would not have been subject to them but sovereign over them, due to its nobility, virtue and beauty. Nobility: because Latin is everlasting and incorruptible, while the vernacular is unstable and corruptible. Thus in the ancient Latin tragedies and comedies, which cannot alter, we find the same Latin as we have now; this is not the case with the vernacular, which, fashioned to our liking, undergoes change. So, in the last fifty years, in the cities of Italy, if we care to look closely, many words have become obsolete, been created, or been altered; if such a short time can alter things, what can a longer time not do. Thus I say that if those who departed this life a thousand years ago were to visit their city again, they would consider it under foreign occupation, the language would be so different from their own. This will be discussed elsewhere in a book I intend to write on *Eloquence in the Vernacular*.

Then, Latin would have been not subject but sovereign because of its virtue. All is virtuous in nature which fulfils the purpose towards which it is directed; and the better it does this the more virtuous it is. So we call a man virtuous who lives the contemplative or active life to which he is naturally ordained; we say a horse has virtue which runs fast and far, and is constituted so to do; and we say a sword has virtue which is so constituted as to cut through hard objects easily. Thus language, which is constituted so as to express human thought, has virtue when it does this, and the more completely it does so the more virtue it possesses; therefore, since Latin expresses many things that the mind conceives while the vernacular cannot, as those conversant in both languages know, its virtue is greater than that of the vernacular.

And then, Latin would have been not subject but sovereign because of its beauty. Men call a thing beautiful when its parts correspond fittingly, since their harmony results in beauty. So a man appears beautiful when his limbs are in proportion; and we call a song beautiful when its voices harmonise according to the rules of art. And it follows that the most beautiful language is that in which the words agree most perfectly; and they agree more perfectly in Latin than in the vernacular, because while the vernacular is established through usage, Latin follows art; consequently we deem Latin more beautiful, more virtuous and nobler. This concludes my main point: that is, that Latin would have been not subject to my *canzoni* but sovereign over them.

Chapter VI: The Vernacular: Understanding

Having shown how the present commentary would not have been subject to the vernacular *canzoni* if it had been in Latin, it remains to show how it would not have comprehended them nor have been responsive to them; so that we can reach conclusion that it was essential to use the vernacular to avoid creating an inappropriate relationship. I say that Latin would not have served a vernacular master with comprehension for the following reason. The servant is required to comprehend two things perfectly.

The first is the nature of his master. Now there are masters of so stupid a nature that they request the opposite of what they desire, and others who expect to be understood without uttering a word, and others who do not wish the servant to act as necessary unless ordered to so. I don't intent to explain now why there are these differences among men (as it would form too long a digression) except to say that in general such men are like the beasts, who gain little from use of reason. If the servant does not understand his master's nature, it is clear that he cannot serve him effectively.

The second is that the servant must understand his master's friends, since otherwise he could not honour or serve them, and in consequence could not serve his master perfectly; for friends are like parts of the whole, since wholeness consists in willing as one and not willing as one.

The Latin commentary could not have comprehended those things which the vernacular does. That Latin does not understand the vernacular and its allies is demonstrated as follows. He who knows something in general does not know it perfectly, just as someone who identifies a creature from a distance recognises it imperfectly since he does not know if it is dog, wolf, or goat. Latin comprehends the vernacular in general, but not in particular, for if it understood it in particular it would recognise each of the vernaculars, having no reason to recognise one more than another. Thus anyone having perfect knowledge of Latin would be able to understand any particular vernacular. But this is not the case, since a person with perfect knowledge of Latin cannot thereby distinguish, if he is from Italy, the English vernacular from the German; nor if he is a German, the Italian vernacular from the Provençal. Thus it is clear that Latin does not comprehend the vernacular.

Furthermore it does not comprehend its allies, since it is impossible to understand someone's friends without understanding that person; thus, if Latin does not comprehend the vernacular, as shown above, it cannot know its allies. And then, without familiarity and intimacy it is impossible to know people, and Latin is employed less between people in any one country than

is the vernacular, with which all are allied; consequently it cannot comprehend all the friends of that vernacular. There is no contradiction in stating, as one might, that Latin nevertheless is allied with certain friends of the vernacular; since, that still does not give it familiarity with all of them, and so its friends are not comprehended perfectly, and it is perfect and not defective knowledge that we require.

Chapter VII: The Vernacular: Obedience

Having demonstrated why a Latin commentary would not have been an understanding servant, I will say why it would not have shown obedience. He is obedient who possesses that favourable disposition which is called obedience. True obedience requires three things without which it cannot exist: it should show sweetness, and not bitterness; should be wholly subservient and not wilful; and should be measured and not beyond measure. These three things a Latin commentary could not have possessed, and therefore it could not show obedience. That this would have been impossible for Latin, as has been said, is clarified by the following argument.

Everything that progresses inversely is disagreeable, and consequently tastes bitter and not sweet, such as to sleep during the day and lie awake all night, or to walk backwards and not forwards. For the subject to command the sovereign is to progress inversely (since the correct process is for the sovereign to command the servant); thus it tastes bitter and not sweet. And since it is impossible to obey a bitter command sweetly, it is impossible for the sovereign to obey sweetly if the subject commands. Thus, if Latin is sovereign over the vernacular, as has been shown variously above, and yet the *canzoni* which play the commanding role are in the vernacular, it is impossible for Latin to show sweet obedience.

Then obedience is entirely subservient and in now way wilful when the person obeying would not have acted without being commanded to do so, wholly or in part. Thus if I am ordered to don two robes, and wear only one without being so commanded, I would say that my response is not wholly the result of being commanded but partly wilful. Such would the response of a Latin commentary have been, and consequently it would not have been wholly the result of being commanded. That such would have been the case is apparent from this: that without being so directed by its master, Latin would have exposed many alternative meanings – and it does so, as he who carefully examines works in Latin knows – which the vernacular in no way contained.

Then, obedience is measured and not beyond measure when it acts within the bounds of what is commanded and not beyond them, just as individual nature obeys universal nature when it endows a man with thirty-two teeth, neither more nor less; and man obeys the nature of justice when he makes a wrongdoer pay his debt to society, to the degree, neither more nor less, that justice demands. Latin would not have done this, and would have sinned not only through deficiency or excess, but through both; and so

its obedience would not have been measured, but beyond measure, and consequently it would not have been perfectly obedient.

That Latin would not have fulfilled its master's command, and would have exceeded it is easily shown. The masters that is the *canzoni* to which this commentary plays the role of servant, command and desire that their meaning be explained to all who can comprehend it, so that when their words are heard they will be understood. And there is no doubt that if they made their command heard, this is what it would be. Latin though would not have explained them except to the learned, since no one else would have understood. Therefore, since the unlearned are far more numerous than the learned among those who desire to understand them, it follows that Latin would not have fulfilled their desire as well as the vernacular, which is understood by the learned and unlearned alike.

Then, Latin would have explained them to people of other countries, such as the Germans, English and others, and here it would have exceeded what was commanded; for it would have been wilful (speaking broadly) for their meaning to be explained when their beauty could not be conveyed with it. Thus all should know that nothing harmonised according to the rules of poetry can be translated from its native tongue into another without destroying its original sweetness and harmony. That is the reason why Homer has not now been translated from Greek into Latin as other Greek writings have. And this is the reason why the verses of the Psalter lack sweetness of music and harmony; for they were translated from Hebrew into Greek, and from Greek into Latin, and in the first translation all their sweetness was lost. Thus I have dealt fully with what was promised in the preceding chapter.

Chapter VIII: The Vernacular: Generosity

Now it has been sufficiently demonstrated that, in explaining the *canzoni* mentioned above, a commentary in the vernacular and not in Latin was necessary to avoid an inappropriate relationship, I intend to show also how perfect generosity made me choose the former and forego the latter. Now perfect generosity may be noted in three characteristics of the vernacular which would not have been consequential on the use of Latin. The first is that of giving to many people; the second is that of giving things of use; the third is that of giving without being asked.

To give to and assist one person is good, but perfect goodness is to give to and assist many in that this resembles the beneficence of God, who is the universal benefactor. Then, to give to many people without helping individuals is impossible, since the individual is included in the many, though it is quite possible to give to one without giving to the many. Thus he who helps many acts well in both ways; he who helps one person does good in only that case; hence we see that lawmakers keep their eyes fixed on the common good in the main when making law. Then, to give things that are not of use to the recipient is good, in that he who gives at least shows that he is a friend; but it is not perfectly good, and so is not complete, as, for example, a knight were to give a doctor a shield, or a doctor to give the knight a copy of Hippocrates' *Aphorisms* or Galen's *Art*. Thus the wise say that the nature of a gift should reflect the nature of the recipient, that is to say, it should be appropriate and useful to him; and in this way the generosity of one discerning in his gifts is said to be complete. But since a discussion of moral concepts usually creates a desire to understand their rationale, I intend to indicate briefly, in this chapter, four reasons why a gift should be useful to the person who receives it in order for it to display complete generosity.

Firstly, virtue should be joyful and not sorrowful in its actions: so that, if the gift is not joyous in the giving and in the receiving, its virtue is neither complete nor perfect. This joyousness is given only by usefulness, which accrues to the giver through giving, and which is transferred to the receiver in receiving. The giver, therefore, must have the foresight to act so that on his side lies the usefulness of integrity, which is above all usefulness, and so that the usefulness of the thing given passes to the recipient; in this way both will be joyful, and thus generosity will be the more complete.

Secondly, virtue must always work towards the better: for, just as it would be reprehensible to turn a good sword into a spade, or a beautiful lute into a decent bowl, so it is reprehensible to transfer something from a place

where it is useful to one where it will be less so. And just as it is reprehensible to work in vain, it is reprehensible to place it where it is equally useful, not merely where it is less useful. So, for a change of place to be praiseworthy, it must always be for the better, because it should aim to be in the highest degree praiseworthy, and it cannot be so unless the gift increases its value through its transfer, and it cannot increase its value unless it is more useful to the recipient than the giver. From this we conclude that the gift must be useful to the person who receives it, if the giving is to display complete generosity.

Thirdly, the exercise of virtue should of itself aim to acquire friends, since our life requires them and the end of virtue is to make ourselves content. For a gift to stimulate friendship in the recipient, it must be useful to him, since usefulness stamps the gift's image in his memory, which nurtures friendship, and does so the more strongly the greater the usefulness is. So the scholar says: 'The gift he gave me will never fade from my mind.' Thus, for the gift to have virtue, and display generosity, and for it to be complete, it must be useful to the person receiving it.

Finally, virtue must be exercised freely and not under compulsion. Action is free when a person moves in a certain direction willingly, evidenced by his turning his gaze in that direction; while action is exercised under compulsion when a man acts against his will, shown by his not gazing in the direction where he is going. Now a gift directed towards the needs of the recipient is turned in his direction. Since it cannot be so directed if it is not useful, it must be the case that in order for it to be transferred freely, virtue must accompany the gift as it moves in that direction, which is towards the recipient: thus the gift must be useful to the recipient in order for it to reveal complete generosity.

The third trait, mentioned at the start of this chapter, which reveals complete generosity, is giving without being asked; because what is requested is a subject of commerce not of virtue, since the recipient buys even though the giver does not offer for sale. That is why Seneca says in *De Beneficiis* that: 'Nothing is so dearly purchased as that which is paid for with prayers.' In order for a gift to manifest complete generosity, it must be free from every taint of commerce: the gift must be unasked. Why what is prayed for costs so dearly, I do not intend to discuss here, since it will be discussed adequately in the final book of this work.

Chapter IX: The Vernacular: Generosity Displayed

Latin would have failed to meet all of the three conditions mentioned above, all of which must be met for a gift to display complete generosity, and this can be clearly shown, as follows. Latin would not have served many, for, recalling what was previously said, the learned to whom the Italian language is foreign, being unable to read the *canzoni*, would not have availed themselves of this service; while if we consider those who are natives of the Italian language, we will find that not one in a thousand would indeed have been served in any rational manner, because they would not have accepted this gift, being deprived of all nobility of mind, which desires this food above all, by their proneness to avarice. I say that, to their shame, they should not be considered learned, since they do not acquire learning for its own sake but only in order to gain wealth or honour; just as we should not consider someone a lute player who keeps a lute in his house in order to rent it out, rather than play it.

Returning to the main proposition, I say it may clearly be seen that Latin would have benefited few, while the vernacular will be of service to many. For goodness of mind, which this work addresses, is found in those who, because of the sinful world's neglect of good, have abandoned literature to those who have turned her from a lady to a whore; and these noble persons comprise princes, barons, and knights as well as many others, women as well as men, who know only the vernacular of this language, and are not learned.

Then, Latin would not have been the giver of a useful gift as the vernacular is, since nothing is useful unless it is used, nor does goodness lie in its potential, which is not a perfected state of being, just as with gold, pearls or other treasure that lie buried; and what is in the hands of avarice is buried deeper than hidden treasure. This commentary's true gift is the meaning of the *canzoni* for which it was made, a meaning which is intended to lead men to knowledge and virtue, above all, as will be seen in the full course of their analysis. This meaning can only be of use to those in whom true nobility is seeded, in the manner that will be described in the fourth book; and virtually all these people only know the vernacular, like the noble men and women I referred to above. Even if there are some learned ones among them, there is no contradiction; for as my master Aristotle says in the first book of the *Ethics*: 'One swallow doesn't make a summer.' It is thus evident that the vernacular offers something useful which Latin would not have provided.

Then, the vernacular gives the gift without being asked, which Latin would not, because it offers a commentary, which none have asked for; while this cannot be said of Latin, which is often requested to provide a commentary and a gloss on many writings, as can readily be seen in the preface to many of them. And so it is clear that I was moved to employ the vernacular rather than Latin by complete generosity.

Chapter X: The Vernacular: Love of the Native Tongue

At a banquet so noble in its fare, and so distinguished by its guests, a full apology is necessary for serving bread made of oats and not wheat; and the reason for departing from what has long been established practice, namely the use of Latin in commentaries, should be made evident. The reason should be made clear thus because the fate of new things is uncertain, since the experience is lacking though which things long observed and in use are measured, as to the progress they represent and their aim. That is why the Digest of Roman Law was moved to command that a man should enter a new path with care, since: 'when establishing something new the reason for departing from established custom should be made evident.'

So, no one should be surprised if the digression I have made, in order to present my apology, proves lengthy; and since it is necessary let them suffer its length patiently. Pursuing my apology further, now that I have shown how I was moved to employ the vernacular and not Latin firstly in order to avoid an inappropriate relationship, and secondly for reasons of complete generosity, I now need to show, thirdly and lastly, how I was moved to do so through innate love of my native tongue. I say that innate love moves the lover to do three things above all: firstly to enhance the beloved object; secondly to be solicitous on its behalf; and thirdly to defend it, which happens continually as anyone can observe. These three motives made me adopt the vernacular, which I love and have loved both innately and contingently. I was moved firstly to enhance it, and the way in which I do so can be seen by the following argument.

Now things can be enhanced, that is made greater, by many kinds of greatness, and nothing makes them as great as through their own goodness, which is the mother and preserver of all other kinds of greatness, for man can possess no vaster greatness than that of virtuous action, which is his own proper excellence, by means of which the greatnesses of true dignity, true honour, true power, true wealth, true friends, and true and glorious fame are acquired and preserved; and this greatness I endow this friend, the vernacular, with, since what it possesses of latent and potential goodness I make it express, actively and openly by means of its own proper activity, which is to make manifest the meaning conceived.

Secondly, I was moved by solicitousness on its behalf. Solicitousness on a friend's behalf makes a man anxious to provide for future events. Thinking that the desire to comprehend the *canzoni* might induce some unlearned person to initiate a translation of a Latin commentary into the vernacular, and fearing that the translation might have been carried out by

someone who would have made the vernacular appear crude, as did Thaddeus the Hippocratist who translated Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* from the Latin, I decided to carry it out myself, trusting my own skill more than another's.

I was moved also to defend the Italian vernacular from its numerous detractors who disparage it, while commending other vernaculars, especially the language of *oc*, calling it better and more beautiful than this one, and thereby deviating from the truth. For by means of this commentary the great goodness of the language of *sì* will be evident, because its virtue will be displayed, namely how it expresses the noblest and freshest concepts almost as fittingly, fully and gracefully as Latin. This virtue could not be displayed as effectively in verse, since verse has the contingent adornments of rhyme and metre bound to it, just as a woman's beauty cannot be effectively displayed when her adornments of dress and cosmetics do more to make her admired than she herself. Thus, if one wishes rightly to assess a woman's beauty, look at her when her natural beauty alone attends her, unaccompanied by any contingencies of adornment; and likewise with this commentary, in which the flow of its syllables, the appropriateness of its construction, and the smoothness of its oration will be noted, such that whoever studies it deeply will find it to be filled with the sweetest and most exquisite beauty. But since the best way to reveal the defects and malice of an accuser is to probe his intentions, I will explain why they are moved to disparage the Italian language, so as to confound them, and I will now write a separate chapter on this matter, so that their infamy can be rendered even more obvious.

Chapter XI: The Vernacular: Its Detractors

I say that the motive which leads these contemptible men of Italy to praise the vernacular of others, and disparage their own, to their perpetual shame and humiliation arises from five vile causes. The first is blindness in discernment; the second the making of disingenuous excuses; the third, desire for glory; the fourth reasoning rooted in envy; and the fifth and last, baseness of mind, that is pusillanimity. Each of these faults is committed so widely that few are free of them all.

Of the first we may argue as follows. Just as the sensory part of the mind has a faculty of sight, by means of which it apprehends the difference between things with respect to their external colour, so the rational part has a faculty by which it apprehends the difference between things with respect to how they are directed to some aim: and this is discernment. And just as he whose eyes are blind always follows where others lead him for good or ill, so he who is blind to the light of discernment always follows the popular cry in his judgement, whether true or false. So whenever the one who cries out is blind, he and the others who depend on him, being likewise blind, must come to a sad end. That is why it is said that: 'if the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the ditch.'

This popular cry has long been directed against the vernacular, for reasons which will be discussed further below. And so the blind, mentioned above, almost infinite in number, their hands placed on the shoulders of these deceivers, have fallen into the ditch of false opinion from which they are unable to escape. The common populace especially lack the use of this light of discernment because, occupied with some trade or other from their youth, they direct their minds to it by force of necessity, so that they are concerned with little else. Since virtuous habits, whether moral or intellectual, cannot be acquired suddenly but must be gained through practice, and since their practice is devoted to some craft, and they do not trouble themselves by perceiving other things, it is impossible for them to possess discernment. As a result they often follow the cries of, 'Long live their name!' and 'Death to their memory!' if someone but begins them. This is the most dangerous aspect of their blindness. Thus Boethius in the *Consolation* judges popular approval to be idle, because he sees that it lacks discernment. These people are to be called sheep and not men, since if a sheep throws itself from a thousand-foot high cliff, all the flock will follow; and if one sheep leaps while crossing a road for some reason, the rest will leap too though there is nothing there to leap over. I have seen many vanish into a well after one leapt in, thinking perhaps that they were leaping a wall,

even though the shepherd, weeping and shouting, tried to check them with his arms and his body.

The second group who disparage our vernacular are disingenuous in the excuses they make. There are many who love to be thought masters even when they are not, and to avoid the contrary, that is not being so considered, they always blame the materials provided for their craft, or their tools. For example, a poor blacksmith criticises the iron supplied, and a bad lutanist criticises his lute, seeking to blame the bad knife-blade or the poor music on the iron or the lute, and deflect it from himself. In the same way there are quite a number who wish to be considered authors; and who, to excuse their not writing at all, or writing badly, accuse and blame their material, that is their own vernacular, and praise some other which they are not required to use. Whoever wants to know whether the iron deserves blame should look at what the fine craftsman makes of it, and he will then recognise the disingenuousness of the man who seeks to lay the blame on it, and thereby excuse himself. Cicero cries out against men of this sort, at the start of *De Finibus*, because in his day men found fault with Latin and praised Greek, for reasons similar to those men who judge Italian vile and Provençal beautiful.

The third group who disparage our vernacular are possessed by an empty desire for glory. Many think they will be admired more for describing things in another language, and for praising it, than by doing so in their own. Certainly ability in learning a foreign language well is not unworthy of praise; but it is wrong to praise it beyond all truth in order to glory in its acquisition.

The fourth group are driven by envious reasoning. As was said above, envy always arises from apparent equality. Among men sharing the same language there is common use of the vernacular; and because one man cannot deploy it as another does, envy arises. The envious man then blames that which provides the medium of his work, rather than his lack of ability in not knowing how to write, so that by disparaging the work on that basis he may deprive the poet of honour and fame; just like a man who blames the iron of the sword-blade in order to find fault not merely with the iron but with the craftsman's entire labour.

The fifth and last group are motivated by baseness of mind. The pretentious man always magnifies himself in his own eyes, and, conversely, the pusillanimous man always considers himself less than he really is. Because magnifying and diminishing are always relative to something compared to which the pretentious man deems himself great and the pusillanimous small, the pretentious man always deems others less than they

are, and the pusillanimous greater. Since a man rates himself as he rates his possessions, which are almost a part of himself, the pretentious man's belongings always seem better than they are, to him, and those of others worse; the pusillanimous always believes his belongings to be worth little, and those of others to be worth much. Likewise many disparage their own vernacular, by devaluing it in this way, while praising that of others.

All these groups taken together comprise the vile Italian wretches who despise this rich vernacular, which, if it is base in any way, is base only insofar as it issues from the meretricious lips of these adulterers, by whom the blind are lead, whom I mentioned in discussing the first group.

Chapter XII: The Vernacular: How Love of it is Engendered

If flames were seen issuing from the windows of a house, and one man asked if there was a fire inside, and another answered ‘yes’, I could not say which of the two more deserved ridicule. The question and answer would be just as ridiculous if someone were to ask me whether love of my native tongue resides within me and I answered ‘yes’, and for the same reason. Nevertheless, in order to demonstrate that not merely love but perfect love for the vernacular resides within me, and to censure its adversaries once more by demonstrating this to anyone who rightly understands, I will say how I became its adherent and how that adherence was strengthened. I say then, as Cicero writes in *De Amicitia*, agreeing with Aristotle’s opinion expressed in the eighth and ninth books of the *Ethics*, that closeness and virtue are the natural causes that engender love, while benefit, harmony of purpose, and familiarity are the causes of its increase. All these were present to engender and strengthen my love of the vernacular, as I will show briefly.

A thing is said to be closest when, of all of its kind, it is most nearly related to another thing: so, the son is closest of all men to the father; the doctor adheres most closely to medicine of all the arts, and the musician to music, because their practice relates most closely to those arts. And so a man’s vernacular is closest to him, since it is the first and sole language in his mind before any other; and it is not only related to him *per se* but also contingently, since it is connected to those nearest to him, his kin, his fellow citizens, and his people. Such is one’s own vernacular, which is not merely close but supremely close to all. Therefore, if closeness is the seed of friendship, as has been said above, clearly it has been a cause of my love of my language, which is closer to me than others. The cause mentioned above, namely that what exists first and alone in the mind is most nearly related to it, led people to make the firstborn their heirs by custom, since they are the closest, and being closest the most loved.

Then, the vernacular’s virtues make me its friend. Here it should be noted that every virtue proper to something is worthy of love, as a full beard in a man and a face devoid of hair in a woman, as keen scent in a foxhound and turn of speed in a greyhound. The more appropriate to it, the more it is deserving of love; so, though every virtue in man is deserving of love, that which is most human is the most deserving, which is justice, residing in the rational or intellectual part, that is in the will. It is so deserving of love that, as Cicero says in *De Officiis*, even its enemies, such as thieves and robbers, love it; and therefore we see that its opposite, injustice, is most hated, for

example as displayed in treachery, ingratitude, lying, deceit, petty theft, larceny, and the like. All of these are such inhuman sins, that to avoid being disgraced by them age-old custom allows a man to speak about himself, as has been mentioned earlier, in order to declare that he is true and loyal. Of this virtue I will speak more fully in the fourteenth book; and leaving it for now, I return to my subject.

It has thus been shown that there is a virtue most fitting to a thing; and that what is most loved and praised in it is this virtue. Now we see that in all things relating to speech what is most praised is the fitting expression of thought: therefore this is its prime virtue. Since this virtue is found in our vernacular, as has been shown clearly in an earlier chapter, then this is a cause of the love I bear it, since virtue, as has been said, is the thing that engenders love.

Chapter XIII: The Vernacular: How Love of it is Strengthened

Having described the two characteristics of my native tongue which had made me adhere to it, that is its closeness to me and its proper virtue, I will say how that adherence is strengthened and increased through its benefits, through harmony of purpose, and through a sense of benevolence born of long familiarity. Firstly I affirm that I have myself received great benefit from it. We know that among benefits, the greatest is that most precious to the recipient; and nothing is as precious as that for which all else is desired, and all else is desired for the perfection of him who desires it. Thus, since man has two perfections, one primary and one secondary, the first causing him to exist, the second causing him to be virtuous, then, if my native tongue has been the cause of both, I have received great benefit from it. That my native tongue has been the cause of my existence and of my being virtuous, unless I should fail through my own fault, may be shown briefly.

According to Aristotle, in the second book of his *Physics*, it is possible for things to have several efficient causes, though one among them is the principal; so fire and hammer are efficient causes of the forged blade, though the blacksmith is the principal one. This vernacular of mine brought my parents together, since they conversed in it, just as the fire prepares the iron for the smith who forges the blade; and thus it is evident that it contributed to my generation, and was the cause of my being. Moreover, this vernacular of mine was what led me into the path of knowledge, which is our ultimate perfection, since through it I entered upon Latin and through its means Latin was taught me, which then formed the path to my future progress. So it is clear that the vernacular has been of great benefit to me, and this I acknowledge.

Then, it had the same purpose as I, and this I can show as follows. Everything by nature seeks its own preservation; thus if the vernacular could seek anything itself, it would seek this; that is to secure itself greater permanence, and it could only achieve greater permanence by binding itself to metre and rhyme. This has so clearly been my aim that it needs no proof. Thus, its purpose and mine have been one and the same, and through this harmony my adherence has been strengthened and increased. Also, there has been a sense of benevolence born of familiarity; for from childhood I have looked on it with benevolence and been intimate with it, and have utilised it in order to think, explain and question. Thus, if friendship increases through familiarity, as seems obvious to the senses, it is clear that it has greatly increased in me, since I have used it all my life. So we see that all the causes

that engender and increase friendship have united in this friendship, from which we must conclude that what I ought to show, and do show for it, is not simply love but perfect love.

Looking back then, and gathering together all the reasons noted, we can see that this bread, with which the following *canzoni* should be eaten, is adequately cleansed of its impurities, and excused for being made of oats. Thus it is time to think of serving the meat. This commentary is the bread made of finest wheat with which thousands shall be satiated, and my basket shall be full to overflowing with it. This shall be a fresh light, a fresh sun that will rise where the old sun sets, and give light to those who lie in shadow and darkness since the old sun no longer sheds its light on them.

End of Book I

Book II

Canzone Prima (Original Italian Text)

Voi, che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete,
udite il ragionar ch'è nel mio core,
ch'io nol so dire altrui, sì mi par novo;
e 'l ciel che segue lo vostro valore,
gentili creature che voi sète,
mi tragge ne lo stato ov'io mi trovo.
Onde 'l parlar de la vita ch'io provo
par che si drizzi degnamente a vui:
però vi priego che lo mi 'ntendiate.
Io vi dirò del cor la novitate,
come l'anima trista piange in lui
e come un spirto contr'a lei favella,
che vien pe' raggi de la vostra stella.

Suol esser vita de lo cor dolente
un soave penser, che se ne già
molte fiate a' pie' del nostro Sire,
ove una donna gloriär vedìa
di cui parlav'a me sì dolcemente
che l'anima dicea: 'Io men vo' gire.'
Or apparisce chi lo fa fuggire
e signoreggia me di tal virtute,
che 'l cor ne trema, che di fuori appare.
Questi mi face una donna guardare,
e dice: 'Chi veder vuol la salute,
faccia che li occhi d'esta donna miri,
sed e' non teme angoscia di sospiri.'

Trova contrario tal che lo distrugge
l'umil pensiero che parlar mi sole
d'un'angela, che 'n cielo è coronata.
L'anima piange, sì ancor len dole,
e dice: 'Oh lassa a me, come si fugge
questo piatoso che m'ha consolata!'
De li occhi miei dice questa affannata:
'Qual ora fu che tal donna li vide!
e perché non credeano a me di lei?
Io dicea: "Ben ne li occhi di costei
de' star colui che le mie pari ancide!"
E non mi valse ch'io ne fossi accorta
che non mirasser tal, ch'io ne son morta.'

'Tu non se' morta, ma se' ismarrita,
anima nostra, che sì ti lamenti'
dice uno spiritel d'amor gentile;
'ché quella bella donna, che tu senti,
ha transmutata in tanto la tua vita,
che n'hai paura, sì se' fatta vile!
Mira quant'ell'è pietosa e umile,
saggia e cortese ne la sua grandezza,
e pensa di chiamarla donna, omai!
Ché, se tu non t'inganni, tu vedrai
di sì alti miracoli adornezza,
che tu dirai: "Amor, signor verace,
ecco l'ancella tua; fa che ti piace."'

Canzone, io credo che saranno radi
color che tua ragione intendan bene,
tanto la parli faticosa e forte.
Onde, se per ventura elli addivene
che tu dinanzi da persone vade
che non ti paian d'essa bene accorte,
allor ti priego che ti riconforte,
dicendo lor, diletta mia novella:
'Ponete mente almen com'io son bella!'

The First Canzone (English Translation)

You whose intellect moves the third sphere,
Hear now the debate within my heart,
That seems so new I cannot speak to others.
The heaven that is driven by your power
Oh, noble creatures that you are,
Led me to this state where I now find me.
Hence these words about the life I live
Should rightly be said, it seems, to you:
And so I pray that you will hear me.
I will speak of the new thing in my heart,
How the sad soul weeps therein,
And how a spirit disputes with it,
Descending with the rays from your star.

The life of my grieving heart was once
A tender thought that often would find
Its way to the feet of your Lord,
Where it saw a lady bright with glory
Of whom it spoke to me so sweetly
That my soul said: 'I would go there.'
Now one appears who makes it flee,
And lords it over me with such power
That my heart trembles visibly.
One that makes me look upon a lady,
And says: 'Who wishes to see bliss,
Let his eyes on this lady gaze,
If he does not fear anguished sighs.'

The humble thought that used to speak
Of an angel who is crowned in heaven,
Meets now an enemy that destroys it.
The soul weeps, for this must grieve her,
And says: 'Oh woe is me, how he flees,
The compassionate one who consoled me!'
This troubled one says now of my eyes:
'Sad hour when such a lady saw them!
Why were my words about her not believed?'
For I'd said: "Now, surely, in her eyes
Must dwell the one who slays the likes of me!"
Yet my awareness was worth nothing,
For they gazed on him, and I am slain.'

Then a noble spirit of love replies:
'You are not dead but only led astray,
Soul of ours, who so grieve yourself.
This lovely lady whose power you feel,
Has so transmuted your whole life,
That you are made afraid, and a coward!
See how compassionate she is and humble,
Wise and courteous in her grandeur,
Resolve to call her your lady, now!
Unless you deceive yourself, you'll see
The beauty of such high miracles,
That you'll say: "Love, my true lord,
Behold your handmaid; do what you wish.'"'

Canzone, I think there will be few
Who'll rightly understand your speech,
So complex and difficult the words.
So, if it should chance to pass
That you find yourself with those
Who seem not to understand you well.
Then I beg you to take courage,
Saying to them, my fresh delight:
'At least reflect how beautiful I am!'

Chapter I: Four Kinds of Meaning

Now that I have served up my preface, and my bread has been prepared adequately in the preceding book, time summons me and demands that my ship leave harbour; so that, having set the sail of my reason to the breeze of my desire, I enter the open sea with hopes of a fair voyage and a safe and worthy harbour at the end of my feast. But before it appears, in order that this food of mine may be more beneficial, I wish to show, how the first course should be eaten.

I say, as was recounted in the first chapter, that this exposition must be both literal and allegorical. And to explain what this means, it is needful to know that writing can be understood and should be expounded in four main ways. The first is termed the literal, and this is the meaning that, in poetic fables for instance, does not delve beneath the surface of the words. The next is termed the allegorical, and this meaning is concealed beneath the cloak of the fables, and is a truth hidden beneath a lovely fiction. So Ovid says that with his lyre Orpheus tamed wild beasts, and made the trees and rocks come to him at his call, which is to say that the wise man with the instrument of his voice makes harsh hearts tender and humble, and moves at will those who do not devote their lives to knowledge and art; and that those who have no rational life at all are almost like stones. Why this kind of concealment was devised by the wise will be shown in the penultimate book. Indeed theologians treat this meaning differently to the poets; but since it is my intention to follow the methods of poetry here, I shall treat the allegorical meaning in the manner of the poets.

The third meaning is the moral one, and this is the meaning that teachers should seek to uncover throughout the scriptures, for their own and their pupils' benefit; so, for example, in the Gospels we may see that Christ took with him only three of the Apostles when he climbed the mount to be transfigured, the moral sense of which is that in matters of great secrecy we should have few companions.

The fourth meaning is termed anagogical, that is to say beyond the senses; and is revealed when writings are expounded in a spiritual sense which, although they are true in the literal sense also, signifies by means of symbols an aspect of the divine glory of eternal things, as can be seen in the Psalm of the Prophet which reads that when the children of Israel went out of Egypt, Judea was rendered whole and free. For though it is clearly true according to the letter, what is intended to be taken spiritually is no less true, namely that when the soul departs from sin it is made whole and free in its

powers. In this kind of explanation, the literal should always be treated first, as being the meaning in which the others are enclosed, and without which it would be impossible and illogical to treat the other meanings, especially the allegorical. It would be impossible because with regard to all that has an outside and an inside, it is impossible to arrive at the inside without first arriving at the outside; thus, given that, in what is written, the outside is always the literal meaning, it is impossible to arrive at the other meanings, especially the allegorical, without first arriving at the literal.

Moreover, it would be equally impossible because with every natural or artificial thing it is impossible to arrive at the form unless the material on which the form is to be imposed is first prepared, as it is impossible for a piece of jewellery to acquire its form if the material, subject to it, is not first ordered and prepared, or a chest to acquire its form if the material, the wood, is not first ordered and prepared. Thus, since the literal meaning is always the material of the other meanings, and subject to them, especially the allegorical, it is impossible to understand them without first understanding this literal meaning. Then again, it would be equally impossible because with every natural or artificial thing it is impossible to make progress unless the foundation is first laid, as in house-building or in education; thus, since explanation is the building of knowledge, and the literal explanation is the foundation for the others, especially the allegorical, it is impossible to understand the other meanings without first understanding the literal meaning.

Further, even if it were possible, it would be illogical, that is to say out of sequence, and would therefore be performed with great labour and much confusion. This is why Aristotle says, in the first book of his *Physics*, that Nature wills that we proceed in order with our learning, that is, from what we know well, to what we know less well; I say that Nature wills it because this method of learning is naturally innate in us. Therefore if the meanings other than the literal are less well understood, which it is apparent they are, it would be illogical to proceed to explain them if the literal meaning had not been explained first. For these reasons, therefore, I shall first discuss the literal meaning of each canzone, and then its allegorical meaning, that is its concealed truth, touching at times on the other meanings, as time and place require.

Chapter II: The First Canzone – Origin and Structure

To commence then, I say that after the passing of that blessed Beatrice, who lives in heaven with the angels and on earth in my soul, the planet Venus had twice revolved in that orbit of hers, which at different times of year makes her apparent in the evening or in the morning, when the noble lady, whom I mentioned at the end of the *New Life*, first appeared before my eyes, accompanied by Love, and occupied a place in my mind.

As I have recounted in that little book, I consented to be subject to her because of her gentleness rather than of my own choice; for she showed herself possessed of so great a pity for my bereaved life that the spirits of my eyes became most friendly towards her. Being thus, they then formed her image so within me, that I was pleased to wed myself to that image. Yet because love is not born, and does not grow or achieve perfection, in an instant, but needs time and nourishment in the mind, especially where opposing thoughts impede it, before this new love could become perfect much strife was needful between the thought that nourished it and the thought that opposed it, which still held the citadel of my mind on behalf of that glorious Beatrice. For the one was continually supported by the faculty of vision, before me, while the other was supported by the faculty of memory, behind me; and the support before me, hindering me from turning my gaze backward, increased each day, which the other had no power to do; so that it seemed so full of awe, and so hard to bear, that I could not endure it. And so, almost crying aloud to excuse myself for this change of mind, in which I seemed to show lack of purpose, I directed my voice to that sphere from which emerged that victorious new thought, which was as powerful as celestial virtue; and I began by saying: '*You whose intellect moves the third sphere.*'

To understand the meaning of this canzone fully, it is first needful to know its structure, so that it will be easier afterwards to construe its meaning. And to avoid setting these same words at the head of each exposition of a *canzone*, I intend to maintain the order of treatment of this book in all the other books.

I therefore state that the *canzone* before us is composed of three main sections. The first section comprises the first stanza: here certain Intelligences, or Angels as we are accustomed to call them, who, being its movers, preside over the revolutions of Venus' heaven, are invited to hear what I propose to say. The second section comprises the three succeeding stanzas: here is revealed the dialogue of the different thoughts within. The third section comprises the fifth and last stanza: here the work itself is

addressed, as if to encourage it. And all these three sections will be explained in order, as stated above.

Chapter III: The First Canzone – The Nature of the Heavens

In order to understand the literal sense of the first section, as defined above, more clearly, which is our present concern, we must know who it is who is summoned to hear me, and how many of them there are, and what this third heaven is which I say they move. I will speak first of this heaven, and then of those whom I address. According to Aristotle's opinion expressed in his work *On Animals*, though we can know little of the true reality of these things, the part of them that human reason sees gives more delight than the certainty and plenitude of things we know more fully,

I say then, that varying opinions are held concerning the number and position of the heavens, though the truth has finally been discovered. Aristotle, simply following the longstanding ignorance of the astrologers, believed that there were only eight heavens, of which the outermost, namely the eighth sphere containing the rest, was that of the fixed stars, and that there was no other beyond it. Also he thought that the sphere of the Sun was contiguous to that of the Moon, that is to say, second from us. Anyone who wishes can find this erroneous opinion of his in the second book of his *On Heaven and Earth*, which is in the second of the books about Nature. However he apologises for this in the twelfth book of the *Metaphysics*, where he shows clearly that he was simply following others' opinion when obliged to speak about astrology.

Ptolemy, later, realising that the eighth sphere moved with a complex motion, seeing that its circle deviated from the true circle, which turns everything from east to west, and constrained by the principles of philosophy, which demanded the simplest *primum mobile*, proposed that another heaven existed beyond that of the fixed stars which make this revolution from east to west, a revolution I say completed in about twenty four hours, roughly speaking in twenty-three hours and fourteen fifteenths of an hour. So that, according to Ptolemy and the received opinion in astrology and philosophy since the time this motion was first perceived, there are nine moving heavens; and their position is visible and determined by the science of perspective, and by arithmetic and geometry, as perceived by the senses and by reason, and by other sensory data. Thus during an eclipse of the Sun, the Moon appears to our sight to be nearer than the Sun, and this is the testimony of Aristotle, who, as he tells us in the second book of *On Heaven and Earth*, saw the half Moon, with his own eyes, eclipse Mars, the Moon's dark side leading, and Mars remaining hidden till it appeared from the other bright side of the Moon, which faced West.

The order of the heavens is as follows. The first is that of Mars; the second Mercury; the third Venus; the fourth that of the Sun; the fifth Mars; the sixth Jupiter; the seventh Saturn; the eighth that of the fixed stars; the ninth being imperceptible to the senses except for its anomalous motion mentioned above, and which many call the Crystalline sphere, that is one which is diaphanous or completely transparent. Moreover, beyond these, the Catholics place the Empyrean, which is to say the heaven of flame, or luminous heaven; and they consider it to be unmoving, because it holds within itself, that which its matter in every part desires. This is why the Primum Mobile has the swiftest motion. Because of the fervent desire that every part of the ninth heaven has to be united with every part of that tranquil and divine heaven, with which it is contiguous, it revolves within it with such desire that its speed is almost incomprehensible. Stillness and peace are the qualities of that region of Supreme Deity, who alone beholds himself entire. It is the region of the blessed spirits, according to the will of Holy Church, who cannot speak a lie: and Aristotle appears to agree, to those who rightly understand him, in the first book of *On Heaven and Earth*. This is the outermost framework of the universe within which all the world is enclosed, and beyond which is nothing; it is not itself in space but was formed solely in the Primal Mind, which the Greeks call *Protonoe*. This is that magnificence of which the Psalmist spoke when he addressed God: 'Your magnificence is exalted above the heavens.' And to summarise what has been said, it is clear that there are ten heavens, of which that of Venus is the third, being mentioned in that section of the *canzone* which I now intend to expound.

It should be known that each sphere beneath the Crystalline has two fixed poles, fixed in respect of itself; and they are firm and fixed in the ninth, and immutable in every way. Each one, the ninth included, sweeps out a circle which may be called the equator of its proper sphere and is equidistant from the poles in its revolution, as can be seen from experience by spinning an apple or other round object. In each sphere this equatorial circle moves more swiftly than any other part of the heaven, as can be seen upon careful consideration. Every region of the sphere has a swifter movement the nearer it is to the equator, and a slower the further it is away and the nearer it is to the poles, because its turning circle is smaller there, yet must of necessity be completed in the same period of time as the larger. I say, also, that the closer a region is to the equatorial circle the nobler it is compared to the poles, because it has greater motion, actuality, life and form, and approaches the characteristics of the sphere which encloses it and in consequence possesses

more virtue. Thus the stars of the Starry Heaven possess more virtue, one with another, the nearer they are to this circle.

In the sphere of Venus, which we are currently discussing, on the outer edge of this equatorial circle, there is a small sphere which revolves of itself in that heaven, whose circle the astrologers call an epicycle. And just as the great sphere revolves about two poles, so does this smaller one; and it possesses its own equatorial circle, and its regions are nobler the nearer they are to this equator; and on the arc or outer edge of this circle is fixed the brightest planet Venus. Although we have said that strictly there are only ten heavens, this number does not comprise them all; for the one just mentioned, namely, the epicycle on which the planet is fixed, is a heaven or sphere in its own right, and is not at one with that which bears it, although it shares its nature more than that of others, and both are spoken of as if there was one heaven, named after the planet. The structure of the other heavens with their other stars and planets is not my subject at present; let what truth has been told of the third heaven with which I am at present concerned be sufficient, about which all that is needful at present has been fully explained.

Chapter IV: The First Canzone – The Intelligences or Angels

Now that I have shown in the preceding chapter the nature of the third heaven and how it is structured, it remains for me to explain who it is that moves it. We must firstly know that its movers are of substance other than matter, namely Intelligences, whom the common people call Angels. Various people have held various opinions about these creatures just as they have about the heavens, though the truth is now known. There are certain philosophers, among whom it would appear is Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*, though in his first book *On Heaven* he seems, in passing, to think otherwise, who believed that there were just as many of these beings as there are circular motions in the heavens, and no more, saying that any others would have been idle for all eternity, lacking any activity, which would be impossible since their being consists of activity. There are others like the eminent Plato who maintain that not only are there as many Intelligences as there are spheres in heaven, but also as many as there are species of things, for example one for men, another for gold, another for dimension, and so on. He held that just as the heavenly Intelligences each brought their sphere into being, so other Intelligences brought into being all other things and exemplars, each in its own species; and Plato called them *Ideas*, that is to say universal forms and natures.

The pagans called them God and Goddesses, though they did not conceive of them in a philosophical sense as Plato does, and they worshipped images of them, and built vast temples to them, for example to Juno whom they called goddess of might, Pallas or Minerva goddess of wisdom, Vulcan the god of fire, and Ceres goddess of harvest. These things and these beliefs are evident from the testimony of poets, who variously describe pagan customs, their sacrifices and their creeds, and they are also evident in the many surviving ancient names for places and buildings, as anyone can easily discover if they will.

Though the beliefs mentioned above were products of human reason and copious observation, the pagans nevertheless failed to perceive the truth, though inadequate reasoning and a lack of knowledge; for by reason alone it can be seen that the creatures mentioned above are more numerous than the effects men can apprehend. Here is one reason: no one, whether philosopher, pagan, Jew, Christian, or a member of some sect, doubts the blessedness of these Intelligences, all or the majority of them, or that they are in the most perfect state of being. Consequently, since human nature is blessed not only in one way but in two, namely in the active and the contemplative life, it would be illogical for such beings to be blessed with an active life, that is the

civil governance of the world, and not a contemplative one, more excellent and divine. Since those who are blessed with governing, cannot also be contemplative, since their intellect is everlastingly one, there must be others who live by contemplation alone. And since this contemplative life of theirs is more divine, and the more divine a thing is the more it is like God, it is clear that such a life is more beloved of God; and if it is more beloved, the more is its blessedness made bountiful; and if it is more bountiful the more living beings are committed to it than to the active life. From this we conclude that the number of these creatures is much greater than the effects reveal.

This is not opposed to what Aristotle appears to say in the tenth book of the *Ethics*, that the contemplative life alone befits souls without bodies (separate substances). Though the contemplative life alone befits them, the circular motion of the heavens, which governs the world, is allotted to the contemplative life of a specific number of them, and is a kind of active civil order conceived within the contemplation of its movers.

Another reason is that no effect is greater than its cause, because the cause cannot generate what it does not already possess; consequently, since the divine intellect is the cause of everything, above all the human intellect, it follows that the human intellect cannot transcend the divine, but is transcended by it, out of all proportion. So, if from these reasons and many others we see that God could have created innumerable spiritual creatures, it is obvious that he has created this greater number of them. Many other reasons can be provided, but let this suffice for the present.

No one should be surprised if such reasons have not been fully demonstrated; nevertheless we should admire the excellence of these creatures, an excellence which transcends the human mind, as Aristotle says in the second book of the *Metaphysics*, and we should affirm their existence. For though we cannot perceive them with the senses, which are the source of our knowledge, some light from their living being shines within our intellect, inasmuch as we understand the arguments above and many others, just as someone whose eyes are closed can assert that the air is filled with light, because some speck of radiance, or whole ray of light, such as passes through the eyes of a bat, reaches him: for the eyes of our intellect are closed in just such a way, as long as the soul is bound and imprisoned within the organs of our body.

Chapter V: The First Canzone – The Angelic Orders

It has been said that the ancients, because of lack of knowledge, did not realise the truth concerning spiritual creatures, even though the children of Israel were educated by their prophets: ‘through whom, by many manners of speech and in many ways, God had spoken to them,’ as the Apostle says. But we have been told this by him who came from Him, by him who created them, by him who preserves them, that is the Emperor of the Universe, who is Christ, son of the sovereign God and son of the Virgin Mary, a woman in truth, and daughter of Joachim and Adam: by him, a man in truth, who was crucified by us, through which means he brought us to life. ‘He was the light that shines for us in darkness,’ as John the Evangelist says; and he told us the truth of those things which we could not know or truly perceive without him.

The first thing, the first secret, he revealed to us was one of the creatures previously mentioned, his great ambassador who came to Mary, a thirteen-year old girl, on behalf of the Heavenly Healer. Our Saviour said, with his own lips, that the Father provided him with many legions of angels; when he was told the Father had ordered the angels to minister to him and serve him, he did not deny its truth. So it is clear to us that these creatures exist in extraordinary numbers, for his spouse and secretary, the Holy Church – of which Solomon says: ‘Who is this that comes from the desert, laden with those things that give us delight, leaning upon her friend? – Holy Church affirms, believes and preaches that these noblest of creatures are almost uncountable. And she divides them into three hierarchies, that is to say three holy or divine principalities, each hierarchy composed of three orders, so that the Church holds and affirms that there are nine orders of spiritual creatures. The first is that of the Angels, the second Archangels, the third Thrones; and these three orders make up the first hierarchy: not first in order of nobility or creation, for the others were nobler and created together, but first in order of ascent from us to their degree of elevation. Then come Dominations, Virtues and Principalities, forming the second hierarchy. Above these are the Powers and the Cherubim, and above all are the Seraphim, these last three orders forming the third hierarchy.

The numerical position in which the hierarchies and orders reside determines the principal object of their contemplation. Since the Divine majesty exists in three persons with one substance, it is possible to contemplate them in a threefold way. The supreme power of the father can be contemplated, on which the first hierarchy gazes which is first in nobility, and which we count highest. Then the supreme wisdom of the Son can be

contemplated, on which the second hierarchy gazes. And finally the supreme and most fervent love of the Holy Spirit can be contemplated, on which the last hierarchy gazes which is nearest to us and bestows the gifts it receives on us. Since each person of the threefold Trinity can be considered in a threefold manner, the three orders in each hierarchy contemplate their principal object in different ways. The Father can be considered in regard to Himself alone, and this contemplation the Seraphim perform, who perceive more of the First Cause than any other angelic beings. The Father can also be considered in relation to the Son that is in his separation from Himself and his union with Himself, and this contemplation the Cherubim perform. Finally the Father can be considered in respect of how the Holy Spirit emanates from Him, and in respect of its separation and union with Him, and this contemplation the Powers perform. In a similar manner the Son and the Holy Spirit can be contemplated in three different ways, and thus there are nine types of contemplative spirits, to gaze on the Light that only its own self can behold completely.

One thing must not be left unsaid. A certain number, perhaps a tenth, of all these orders fell soon after they were created, for the restoration of which number human nature was afterwards created. The nine moving heavens declare the numbers, orders and hierarchies, and the tenth proclaims the unity and stability of God's being. Thus the Psalmist says: 'The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.' It is therefore reasonable to believe that the movers of the Moon's sphere belong to the order of Angels, of Mercury's sphere to the Archangels, and of the sphere of Venus to Thrones; all these, their nature characteristic of the love of the Holy Spirit, performing the activity innate in them, namely the movement of the heaven filled with love, from which that heaven derives a potent ardour, by which the souls below are kindled to love, according to their disposition. The ancients, recognising that this sphere was the cause of love here below, said that Love was the son of Venus, as Virgil attests in the first book of the *Aeneid*, where Venus says to Love: 'My son, my power, son of the supreme father, who heeds not Typhoeus' darts'; and Ovid in the fifth book of the *Metamorphoses*, where Venus says to Love: 'My son, my arms, my power.'

The Thrones, assigned to governing this sphere, are not great in number, though the philosophers and astrologers have estimated it variously depending on their estimate of its rotations, though all are agreed on this point: that there are as many of them as there are independent motions of the sphere. According to the best estimate of the astrologers, summarised in the book of the *Constellations of Stars*, these movements are threefold: one by

which the planet moves in its epicycle; a second by which the epicycle moves with the whole sphere, equally with that of the Sun; a third by which the whole sphere moves, following the movement of the starry heaven, from west to east, one degree every hundred years. So corresponding with these three movements, there are three movers. Then, the whole of this sphere moves and revolves with its epicycle from east to west once a day. Whether this movement derives from some intelligence or the pull of the *Primum Mobile*, only God knows; it would seem presumptuous to judge on this point.

The movers generate the rotation of that which they each move, by intellect alone. That most noble form, the heavenly sphere, which contains within itself the principle of natural passivity, revolves at the touch of the motive force which comprehends it; and by touch I mean contact, though not in a physical sense, with the power that is directed towards it. Such are the movers to whom my speech in the *canzone* is addressed, and of whom I make my request.

Chapter VI: The First Canzone – The Influence of Venus

As was said in the third chapter above, it was necessary to speak of the spheres and those who move them, in order to understand fully the first section of the canzone before us, and this has been done in the preceding three chapters. I say then, in the first section, to those whom I have shown to be the movers of the sphere of Venus: *You whose intellect, that is whose intellect alone, as was said above, moves the third sphere, hear now the debate*; and I do not say *hear* as if they perceived sound, for they lack sense perception, but so that they may listen with what hearing they do have, which is intellectual perception. I say: *Hear the debate within my heart*, within, that is, because it has not yet appeared beyond. And it should be known that throughout this entire *canzone*, the *heart* is to be taken, in all senses, as the private space within, and not as a specific part of mind and body.

After I have summoned them to hear what I wish to say, I give two reasons why it is appropriate for me to speak to them. One is the newness of my state, which, not having been experienced previously by other men, could not be understood by them as well as by those beings who understand the effects of their operations; and this I touch on when I say: *That seems so new I cannot speak to others*. The other reason is when someone receives a benefit or an injury he should first relate it to whoever caused it, if possible, rather than to others; thus he who receives a benefit should show his gratitude to his benefactor, and if he receives an injury should move the wrongdoer to noble pity with gentle words. I touch on this reason when I say: *The heaven that is driven by your power, oh, noble creatures that you are, led me to this state where I now find me*, that is to say, your operations, that is your revolutions, have led me to my present state. Thus I end by stating that my speech must be directed at them, as has been said; and I say this in the words: *Hence these words about the life I live, should rightly be said, it seems, to you*.

After giving this justification, I ask them to listen to me: *And so I pray that you will hear me*. But, because the speaker in any kind of discourse should be intent above all on persuading, that is charming, his audience to listen, since this is the means to all other kinds of persuasion, according to the rhetoricians, and since the most effective way of rendering the listener attentive is to promise to tell new and momentous things, I set this after my petition for a hearing, by announcing my intention to them to speak of something new, that is the division in my spirit, and something momentous, that is the influence of their planet. And I say this in the final words of the

first section: *I will speak of the new thing in my heart, how the sad soul weeps therein, and how a spirit disputes with it, descending with the rays from your star.*

To explain fully the meaning of these words, this new spirit is none other than the oft-repeated thought of praise for and adornment of the new lady; and the sad soul is the thought, accompanied by assent, which, opposing the former, praises and adorns the memory of that glorious Beatrice. And since the ultimate judgement of my mind, its assent, was still attached to this thought my memory reinforced, I call the one soul and the other spirit, just as we call those who hold a place the *city*, and not those who attack it, even if both are its citizens. Further, I say that this spirit descends with the rays from the star, because the rays from each sphere are the paths along which their influence descends on things here below. Since rays are none other than the passage of light through the air from the light-source to the thing illuminated, and since the light comes only from the body of the star, as the rest of the sphere is diaphanous, that is transparent, I say that the spirit, that is the thought, comes not from the sphere as a whole but from the star. This planet, due to the nobility of its movers, is so powerful that it has a vast influence over our spirits, and all things appertaining to us, notwithstanding that its distance to us at perigee is 167 times and more the radius of the earth, which is 3250 miles. This ends the literal explanation of the first section of the *canzone*.

Chapter VII: The First Canzone – Conflicting Thoughts

The literal meaning of the first section of the *canzone* can be understood from the above, so the second may now be treated, revealing the conflict I felt within. And this section is further sub-divided. In its first stanza I relate the nature of the conflicting thoughts within me to their source; then I relate what each conflicting thought said; beginning with the second stanza, and what the defeated thought said.

To clarify then the meaning of this initial sub-division, we first observe that things should be denoted by their highest nobility of form, for example Mankind by reason and not the senses, or anything less noble. So, when we say that a man lives, we understand this to mean that he employs his reason which is his individual life and the actualisation of his noblest faculty. Thus he who forgoes his reason and merely utilises his senses lives as a beast and not a man; as the excellent Boethius says: '*He lives like an ass.*' Justly so, because reflection is a facet of reason, and beasts do not reflect, as they have no reasoning powers; and I say this not only of the lesser creatures, but those that have the semblance of man but the mind of a sheep or a fowl beast.

Thus, I say that the life of my heart, my inner life, was once a sweet thought (*sweet* in the sense of charming, gentle, pleasing and delightful), a thought which would rise to the feet of the Lord of those beings I address, namely God; in other words, I contemplated the kingdom of the blessed, in thought. So I swiftly tell the primal cause of my ascent there in thought, saying: *Where it saw a lady bright with glory*, so as to have it understood that it was because I was certain, and am certain, through her gracious revelation, that she is in heaven. Thus I often travelled there, in thought, to the extent of my powers, as if I had been rapt.

Next I describe the effects of this thought, which was so great that, to make its sweetness understood, it made me long for death, so as to go where it had gone, and this I mean by: *Of whom it spoke to me so sweetly, that my soul said: 'I would go there.'* And this was the root of the first of the conflicting thoughts within me. To be clear, what ascended to behold that blessed one is here termed *thought* and not *soul*, because it was a thought unique to that action. By *soul* I mean, as I said in the previous chapter, generalised thinking with assent.

Then I explain the root of the second conflicting thought, saying: *Now one appears who makes it flee*, saying that as the thought, described above, was once my life, now another appears which drives away the first. I say *flee* to show that the second thought opposes the first, since one contrary of its

nature flees another, while the one that flees reveals that it does so through lack of strength to resist. And I say that this new thought has the power to seize me and overcome my whole soul, saying moreover that it rules me in such a way that my heart, my inner self, trembles, and my outward self displays it visibly in a fresh seeming.

Subsequently, I show the power of this new thought by its effect, saying that it directs me to gaze on a lady and speaks seductive words to me (speaking to my gaze of intellectual affection, so as to seduce me, promising me that salvation lies in the sight of her eyes), And the better to convince the mature soul of this, it says that the lady's eyes are not to be looked at by anyone who fears sighs of anguish. It is a fine stroke of rhetoric to make a thing seem lacking in external beauty while making it inwardly truly beautiful. This fresh amorous thought could not seduce my mind to give consent more readily than by speaking so profoundly of the power of the lady's eyes.

Chapter VIII: The First Canzone – Immortality of the Soul

Now I have shown how and why love is born, and the conflict I experienced, it is appropriate to reveal the meaning of the stanza where conflicting thoughts war within me. I affirm that it is fitting to discuss the soul first, that is, the old thought, and then the other, because what a speaker wishes to stress above all should be reserved till the last, because it will remain most in the listener's mind. Since I wish to say more about what those beings I addressed do, than what they undo, it is rational to discuss that which was being destroyed before discussing that which was being brought to birth.

Here, however, a doubt is born, which cannot be passed over without comment. Someone might ask: 'Since the effect of the Intelligences addressed is love, and the previous thought was of love as well as the latter, why does their virtue destroy the one and give birth to the other: it should rather preserve the former, since every cause loves its own effect, and in loving it should preserve it?' This question can readily be answered. Their effect is love as has been said; but since they cannot preserve it except in those subjects that come under the influence of their sphere, they transfer love from that region beyond their power to that within it, that is from the soul departed this life to the soul still living; just as human nature transfers itself in human form from father to son, because it cannot preserve its effect forever within the father. I say *effect*, since the soul joined to a body is its effect; for the soul once departed endures eternally in a nature more than human. Thus the question is answered.

Now that the immortality of the soul has been touched on here, I will make a digression to discuss it; as it would be fitting to end with this discussion my comments regarding the blessed ever-living Beatrice, whom I deliberately do not intend to speak of again in this work. I say that the most foolish of follies, the vilest, and most pernicious is the belief that there is no life beyond this one; for if we search the books of the philosophers and other wise men who have written on this subject, they all agree that there is an immortal part of us. Aristotle above all appears to confirm this in his book *On the Soul*; all the Stoics appear to confirm it; Cicero too, especially in his brief work *On Old Age*; every poet of the pagan faith appears to agree; every creed confirms it, whether of the Jews, Saracens, Tartars or whoever else lives according to principles of reason; If all these were wrong, an impossibility would exist that is too terrible even to speak of. All are certain that human nature is the most perfect of natures here below. No one denies it, and Aristotle affirms it in his thirteenth book *On the Animals*, saying that

man is the most perfect creature of all. So, since many living creatures are wholly mortal, for example, the brute beasts, and all are in this life without hope of another, then if ours was a vain hope the error would be greater in us than any other animal, because many people before us have given their life here for the sake of the other life. Therefore the most perfect animal, Man, would be the most imperfect, which is impossible, and reason, which is his greatest perfection, would be the cause of his greatest defect, which is a paradoxical thing to say.

Moreover, it would follow that Nature has placed this hope in the human mind in her own worst interest, since many have hastened the death of the body in order to live in the next life; and for her to do this is, likewise, impossible.

And then, we see continual proof of our immortality in the revelations of dream, which could not obtain unless there was something immortal in us, since, if we consider carefully, the agent of revelation, whether corporeal or incorporeal, must necessarily be immortal – I say *corporeal or incorporeal* because of the diversity of opinion on this point – and that which is moved by, or receives its form directly from, an informing agent must be related proportionately to that agent, while between the mortal and immortal there is no proportional relation.

Moreover the true doctrine of Christ asserts it, which is the way, the truth and the light: the way, because we proceed without obstacle by it to the joy of this immortality, the truth, because it is not subject to error; the light, because it illuminates us in the darkness of mortal ignorance. This teaching, I say, gives us certainty beyond all other reasons, for the one who has granted it to us sees and measures our immortality, which we cannot see perfectly while our immortal part is joined to our mortal part; though we see it perfectly by faith, we see it by reason with a shadow of darkness, because the mortal and immortal are conjoined. This is the strongest argument that both exist in us, and I therefore believe, and affirm with certainty, that I shall pass to another and better life after this, where that lady lives in glory, of whom my soul was enamoured when I was involved in my inner struggle, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter IX: The First Canzone – The Soul Speaks

Returning to the explanation, I say that in the stanza which begins: *The humble thought*, I intended to reveal what my soul said within me, that is the old thought, in opposition to the new. Firstly I briefly reveal the cause of its sorrowful words when I say: *The humble thought that used to speak of an angel who is crowned in heaven, meets now an enemy that destroys it*. This is the special thought of which I said in the first stanza that it was once: *The life of my grieving heart*. Then, where I say that: *The soul weeps, for this must grieve her*, I reveal that my soul is still on the side of this thought, and speaks sadly; and I say that she speaks in lament, almost as if she were amazed at the sudden transformation, saying: *‘Oh woe is me, how he flees, the compassionate one who consoled me!’* She may indeed say *consoled*, for in her great loss this thought, which ascended to heaven, gave her much consolation.

After this, I pardon her of fault in saying that all my thought, my soul that is, which I call the troubled one, begins to speak out against my eyes; and this is made clear by the words: *This troubled one says now of my eyes*. And I tell how the soul says three things about and against them. The first is that she curses the hour when this lady gazed on them. And here it should be known that though many images can enter the eye at once, only those which enter the centre of the pupil in a direct line are truly seen, and stamp themselves on the imagination. This is because the nerve along which the visual spirit runs is directed to that point; and thus the eye cannot look into another eye without being seen by it; for just as the one gazing receives an image in the pupil in a direct line, so its own image proceeds into the one at which it is in turn gazing; and many times is the bow of him against whom all weapons are ineffectual discharged along this extended line. So when I say: *such a lady saw them* it is as much as to say that her eyes and my eyes gazed into one another.

The second thing the soul says is that she reprimands their disobedience, when she says: *Why were my words about her not believed?* Then she proceeds to the third comment, saying that she should not reproach herself, since she had foreseen it, but should reproach them for not having obeyed, for in speaking of the lady she had said that the lady’s eyes would have power over her, if she opened the path to them, and this she says in the words: *For I’d said: ‘Now, surely, in her eyes..’* Indeed it is to be believed that my soul knew that she was pre-disposed to receive the actuality of this lady, and therefore feared her; for the actuality of the agent is apprehended by a patient disposed to receive it, as Aristotle says in the second book *On*

the Soul. Thus if wax was inclined to fear, it would fear encountering the sun's rays more than a stone would, because its disposition receives the sun's rays more effectively.

Finally in her discourse the soul makes it clear that the eyes' presumption put them in danger, where she says: '*Yet my awareness was worth nothing, for they gazed on him, and I am slain.*' She says gazed on *him*, that is, on him whom she had previously called the *one who slays the likes of me*. With this she ends her speech, to which the new thought replies, as will be explained in the next chapter.

Chapter X: The First Canzone – The New Thought Replies

I have explained the meaning of the sub-section in which the soul speaks, that is, the old thought which was destroyed. Now I must explain the meaning of that in which the new opposing thought speaks; and this sub-section is wholly comprised by the stanza which begins: *Then a noble spirit*. To be rightly grasped this stanza must be divided in two: in the first part the opposing thought reprimands the soul for her cowardice; and in the second part, beginning with the words: *See how compassionate she is*, declares what the reprimanded soul must do now.

Continuing from her last words he tells her: it is not true that you are dead; but the reason you feel death is because of the abject confusion into which you have fallen when this new lady appeared. Here it should be noted that, as Boethius says in his *Consolation*, ‘no sudden change can take place without mental disturbance.’ That is the meaning of the reprimand delivered by this thought, which I call a *spirit of love*, to indicate that he attracted my consent; and we can understand and recognise his victory all the more since he already says *soul of ours*, making himself her friend. Then, as I said, he declares what the reprimanded soul must do in order to come to him, and says to her: *See how compassionate she is and humble*, since the correct remedy for fear, by which the soul seems possessed, is twofold, those feelings which, above all when conjoined, cause one to have profound hope, and especially compassion, which makes every other virtue shine with its borrowed light. That is why Virgil, speaking of Aeneas, praises him most of all by calling him compassionate. And compassion is not what people think, that is grief for another’s misfortune, which is merely one of its specific effects, namely pity, an emotion. Compassion, however, is not an emotion, but rather a noble pre-disposition of the mind, a readiness to receive love, pity and other emotions rising from charity.

Next the thought says that she is: *wise and courteous in her grandeur*. Here he speaks of three characteristics, of those which we may acquire, that make a person especially pleasing. He says *wise*: and what is lovelier in a woman than wisdom? He says *courteous*: and nothing is more becoming in a woman than courtesy. And the wretched herd should not be deceived by this word either, thinking courtesy no more than generosity; for generosity is a specific and limited form of courtesy! Courtesy and nobility are one and the same; and because virtue and good manners were practised in the courts in time past, while the contrary is now the case, the word was derived from *court*, and *courtesy* was *the custom of the court*. If the word

were derived anew from the courts of today, especially those of Italy, it would mean only baseness.

He says also: *in her grandeur*. Temporal greatness, which is what is meant here, is most becoming of all when accompanied by the two previous virtues, because it is a light which clearly shows the good or otherwise in a person. How much wisdom and habitual virtue goes unsung for lack of this light! How much foolishness and vice is shown by the possessors of this light! It would be better for the foolish and wretched nobles to live in a humble estate, since they would not be so disgraced then in this world or the next. Indeed it is of them that Solomon speaks in *Ecclesiastes*: 'There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun, namely riches preserved for their owner's ruin.' Then the thought exhorts her, my soul that is, to call this new one her lady, promising her that she will be pleased by this when she becomes aware of her adornment; and this he says in the words: *Unless you deceive yourself, you'll see*. That completes what he has to say in this stanza, and all that I say in addressing the celestial Intelligences in the *canzone*.

Chapter XI: The First Canzone – *The Tornata*

In conclusion, as this commentary stated above when dividing the *canzone* into its principal parts, I address my discourse directly to the *canzone* itself, and speak to it. To clarify, I say that in a *canzone* this is normally called the *tornata*, because the Provençal poets who first employed it did so in order that when the *canzone* was sung they might *return* and repeat a specific part of the melody. But I rarely employ it in that way, and so that others might see this I have seldom composed according to the metrical pattern of the *canzone*, regarding the number of lines required for the melody; rather I have used it to adorn the *canzone* when there was a need to say something external to its meaning, as may be seen in this *canzone* and in my others. Thus I state here that the virtue and the beauty of a discourse are separate things, and differ from one another; for virtue lies in the meaning, and beauty in the adornment of words; and both give pleasure, but virtue is especially pleasing. So, since the virtue of this canzone was hard to perceive, because of the various speakers and the need for distinction between them, while its beauty is easy to perceive, it seemed necessary to me that others should be alive to its beauty before its virtue. And this is what I say in conclusion.

Yet since an admonition may often appear presumptuous, a rhetorician will, in certain circumstances, speak indirectly to his audience, addressing his words not to the person for whom they are meant, but some other. This method is adopted here, in fact, since the words are addressed to the *canzone*, but their meaning to its audience. Thus I say: *Canzone, I think there will be few, few indeed, who'll rightly understand your speech.* And I give the twofold reason. Firstly because your speech is *complex*, and I say complex for the reasons mentioned; and secondly, because your speech is *difficult* to understand, difficult by virtue of the novelty of its meaning. Then I admonish it and say: if you chance to find yourself with those who are perplexed by your argument, don't be dismayed, but say: Since you do not see my virtue, at least consider my beauty. I mean by this only what has been said above: you who cannot understand the meaning of this *canzone*, do not reject it on that account; instead consider its beauty, which is great through its composition, the concern of the grammarians, its discourse the concern of the rhetoricians, and the rhythm of its verses, the concern of the musicians. These elements of its beauty can be seen by anyone who looks closely.

This completes the literal meaning of the first canzone, which as indicated above constitutes the first course of the banquet.

Chapter XII: The First Canzone – Allegorical Meaning

Now the literal meaning has been adequately explained, I must proceed to a true allegorical exposition. And so, beginning again from the first stanza, I say that when I lost that noblest delight of my soul, whom I mentioned above, I was pierced by such sorrow that no comfort availed me. Yet, after a while, my mind, which was trying to heal itself, decided to resort to a method (since neither my own consolation nor that of others helped) which a certain disconsolate individual had adopted in order to console himself: I began to read that book of Boethius, known to few, in which, while in captivity and exile, he had found consolation. And hearing moreover of another book of Cicero's, where in discussing *Friendship*, he addressed consoling words to Laelius, a man of the highest merit, on the death of his friend Scipio, I set about reading it. Though I found it hard at first to penetrate the meaning, I finally succeeded in doing so as far as my command of Latin and limited intellect allowed: which intellect had shown me many things before, as in a dream, as can be seen in the *New Life*.

And just as it may happen that on looking for silver a man contrary to his intentions finds gold, which some hidden cause reveals, perhaps through divine ordinance, so I who sought to console myself not only found a remedy for my tears but also the words of authors, books and sciences. Reflecting on these, I soon realised that Philosophy, who was the lady of these authors, books and sciences, was someone of the highest. I imagined her formed as a noble lady, and I could not conceive of her in any attitude except one of compassion, and the part of my mind that perceives truth gazed at her so willingly that I could barely turn it from her. I began to frequent the places where she was truly seen, namely the schools of the religious orders and the disputations of the philosophers, so that in a relatively short time, perhaps two years and a half, I began so to feel her sweetness that love for her dispelled and erased every other thought.

For that reason, feeling myself elevated from thoughts of the former love to recognition of the virtues of this one, I opened my mouth to utter the words of the *canzone* before us, revealing my state under the cover of other things, because no verse in any vernacular was worthy of treating in an overt manner the lady of whom I was enamoured; and the audience was not well-enough prepared to be able to understand such an overt meaning easily; nor would they have believed that true meaning, as they did the fictional, because they believed indeed that I was well-disposed towards the new love, and not the former. I therefore commenced with: *You whose intellect moves the third sphere*. Since this lady, most noble and beautiful Philosophy, is, as

has been said, the daughter of God, and queen of all things, we must consider who the movers are and the nature of this third heaven. And firstly I will speak of that sphere, in the manner already employed. Here I will not need to sub-divide and explain the text word for word, since by interpreting the literal words, the allegorical meaning will be sufficiently clear, from the exposition already given.

Chapter XIII: The First Canzone – The Spheres and Sciences I

To see what the third heaven, or sphere, means, we must first understand what I mean by the word *heaven* itself; and then it will be obvious why it was needful to speak of this third heaven. I say that by heaven I mean *science*, and by the heavens, *the sciences*, because of three kinds of similarity these heavens bear to the sciences, and because they seem to agree in order and number, as will be seen in speaking of the *third*.

The first similarity consists in the revolution of each around something motionless with respect to it. For each moving sphere turns on its centre, which is unmoved by the motion of the sphere; while each science moves around its subject, without moving it, because no science creates its own subject, but rather presupposes and reveals it.

The second similarity is the illuminating power of each; since each sphere illuminates visible things, and likewise each science illuminates intelligible things.

The third similarity consists of bringing perfection to those things so disposed. As far as the first perfection, substantial generation, is concerned, all philosophers agree that the heavens are the cause, though they explain it differently, some imputing it to the movers, as do Plato, Avicenna, and Algazel; some to the planets themselves, especially as regards human souls, as do Socrates, and again Plato and Dionysius the Academician; and some to celestial virtue in the natural heat of the seed, as do Aristotle and the Peripatetics. Equally the sciences bring about the second perfection, by means of which we contemplate the truth, and this is our ultimate perfection, as Aristotle says in the sixth book of the *Ethics*, where he says that truth is the good of the intellect. Because of these as well as other similarities, the sciences may be called *heavens*.

Now it remains to be understood why I say the *third* sphere. For this we must compare the order of the heavens to that of the sciences. As was said above, the seven heavens nearest to us are those of the Sun, Moon, and planets; next come the two moving heavens beyond them, and the one beyond them all which is unmoving. To the first seven the seven sciences of the Trivium and Quadrivium correspond, namely: Grammar, Dialectics, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Music, Geometry and Astrology. Natural science, which is called Physics, and the supreme science, called Metaphysics, correspond to the eighth Sphere, the Starry Heaven; Moral Science to the ninth sphere; and the Divine Science, Theology, to the unmoving heaven. The rationale for this should be considered briefly.

I say that Grammar may be compared to the heaven of the Moon which it resembles; for if the Moon is examined carefully two things will be observed which are not observed of the other lights: one are the shadows in it, which are due to variations of density in its substance whereby the rays of the Sun cannot terminate and so be reflected back to us, as they are from its denser parts; the other thing is the source of its light, which shines now from the waxing side and now the waning, according to its position relative to the Sun. These two characteristics Grammar also displays; for because of its infinite scope the rays of reason are not terminated, especially in the region of vocabulary; and it shines now on one side, now the other, insofar as certain words, declensions, and constructions, are now in use which once were not, and many were formerly used which may be used again, as Horace says at the beginning of the *Poetics*, where he says: ‘Many words will be re-born that fell out of use long ago.’

Dialectics may be compared to Mercury’s sphere, for two reasons: Mercury is the smallest planet, because its diameter is not more than 232 miles according to Alfraganus, who claims it is one twenty-eighth of the diameter of the Earth, which is 6500 miles. The second reason is that its course is veiled by the Sun’s rays more than any other planet. These two properties are also found in Dialectics, for Dialectics is less in substance than other sciences, since it comprises and is entirely confined to the texts of the old Art and the new; and its course is more veiled than that of other sciences, since it proceeds by a more sophisticated and polemical mode of argument.

Rhetoric may be compared to the sphere of Venus because of two characteristics: the first is the brightness of the planet’s aspect, which is sweeter to view than any other, the second its appearance sometimes in the morning and sometimes the evening. And these two characteristics are found in Rhetoric, since Rhetoric is sweeter than the other sciences, as that is its principal aim, and it appears in the morning when the rhetorician speaks to his hearer’s face, and in the evening, that is behind him, when the rhetorician speaks through writing, at a distance.

Arithmetic may be compared to the sphere of the Sun for two reasons: one is that all the planetary spheres are illuminated by its light; the other is that the eye cannot gaze on it. And these two properties are true of Arithmetic also; for by its light all the sciences are illuminated, since all their subjects are treated under some numerical aspect, and in treating of them we always work by numbers. For example, in Natural Science, the subject of study is bodies in motion, and a body in motion obeys the principle of continuity, and this contains the principle of infinite division;

also the science's prime consideration is the principles of natural things, which are threefold, namely matter, absence of usual qualities, and form, in which we perceive this numerical aspect. Number exists not only in all of them together, but also, on careful reflection, in each individually; for this reason Pythagoras, as Aristotle says in the first book of the *Physics*, declared even and odd to be the principles of natural things, considering all things as having a numerical aspect. The other property of the Sun is also seen in number, of which Arithmetic is the science: in that the eye of the intellect cannot gaze on it, because number is in itself infinite, and this infinity we cannot comprehend.

Music may be compared to the sphere of Mars because of two properties: one is the planet's beautiful relationship with the other heavens, since in counting the moving spheres, wherever we begin, whether with the nearest or the farthest, the sphere of Mars is the fifth and most central, that is of the first, second, third and fourth pairs. The second is, as Claudius of Ptolomea says in the *Quadripartitus*, that Mars dries and incinerates things because of its burning heat; and this is why it appears fiery in colour, to a varying extent, according to the density or rarity of its accompanying vapours which often ignite spontaneously as is established in the first book of Albertus Magnus' *Meteorics*. This is why Albumassar says that the ignition of these vapours signifies the death of kings and the mutation of kingdoms, because such are the effects of Mars' lordship, and why Seneca says that he saw a ball of fire in the sky at Augustus' death. This is also why in Florence, at the commencement of its ruin, a vast quantity of the vapours that accompany Mars was seen in the shape of a cross. These two properties are also found in Music; for it consists wholly of relationships between sounds, as we hear in harmonised words and songs, where the harmony is sweeter the more beautiful the relationship, and these relationships are the principal beauty of the science, being its chief aim. Moreover, Music attracts the human spirits within us, which are, as it were, in the main, vapours of the heart, so that the heart almost ceases its activity; this happens to the entire soul, likewise, when it hears music, and the virtue of all the spirits, as it were, flows to the spirit of sensation which receives the sound.

Geometry may be compared to Jupiter's sphere for two reasons: one is that it turns between two heavens antithetical to its sweet temperance, namely those of Mars and Saturn; thus, Ptolomea, in the book referred to above, says that Jupiter is a planet of temperate constitution, between the cold of Saturn and the heat of Mars: the other reason is that among the planets it appears white, almost silver. And these characteristics are true of Geometry also, which operates between two things antithetical to it, namely

the point and the circle, and I mean circle in the general sense of anything round, whether surface or solid; for as Euclid says, the point is Geometry's beginning and the circle its most perfect figure, therefore to be thought of as its end. Geometry thus operates between the point and circle, its beginning and end, and these two are antithetical to its exactness; since the point cannot be measured because of its indivisibility, and the circle cannot be squared because of its arc, and so cannot be measured precisely. Geometry is moreover akin to whiteness in that it is without taint of error, and most exact both in itself and in its handmaid Perspective.

Astrology may be compared to the sphere of Saturn in two ways: one is in the slowness of its movement through the twelve zodiacal signs, for according to the writings of the astrologers it requires more than twenty-nine years for its revolution; the other is that it is far distant from the other lights. And Astrology shows these two characteristics: for to complete its circle, that is to master the science, a very large span of time must pass, both because of its handmaids which are more numerous than those of the above-mentioned sciences, and because of the experience required before making correct use of its knowledge. Furthermore it is far above the other sciences, since as Aristotle says at the beginning of *On the Soul*, a science is noble due to the nobility of its subject and its exactness; and this one, more than those mentioned above, is high and noble because of its high and noble subject, the movement of the heavens, and because of its exactness, which is flawless, as deriving from perfect and regular principles. If any believe it is flawed, it is not due to the science, but, as Ptolomea says, it arises through our negligence, and must be attributed to that.

Chapter XIV: The First Canzone – The Spheres and Sciences II

Having made these comparisons regarding the first seven spheres, we must proceed to the remaining ones, which are three, as previously stated several times. I say that Physics may be compared to the Starry Heaven for three reasons, and Metaphysics for three others: since the Starry Heaven displays two things to us, the multitude of stars and the Galaxy, the white band that the populace call St Jacob's Way; and it reveals one pole to us while the other is hidden; and reveals its motion from east to west to us, while keeping the other which it makes from west to east virtually hidden. Proceeding in order we will first consider the comparison to Physics and then to Metaphysics.

The Starry Heaven shows us many stars, for according to the observations of the learned Egyptians, they count 1022 starry bodies, including the star appearing last to them in the south, and it is of these that I speak. In this respect it bears an analogy to Physics, if we consider the three numbers, two, twenty and one thousand. For by two we understand localised movement, which is from one point to a second point. By twenty is signified movement through alteration, for since we cannot go beyond ten without modifying ten itself by means of itself or the other nine lesser numbers, and since the most beautiful modification it undergoes is modification by itself, and since the first modification of that kind is at twenty, it is reasonable to signify the movement mentioned above by this number. By a thousand is signified movement by growth, since a thousand is the largest number that has a unique name at this time, and there can be no further growth except by multiplying it. Physics displays these three movements only, as is proved in the fifth book of the first group of Aristotle's books.

Metaphysics bears a strong resemblance to this sphere because of the Galaxy. Here it should be known that philosophers have held different opinions regarding the Galaxy. The Pythagoreans held that the sun once strayed from its path, and passing through regions unsuited to its fiery heat, it ignited the regions through which it passed, leaving those traces of the conflagration. I believe they were influenced by the myth of Phaeton, which Ovid recounts at the start of the second book of the *Metamorphoses*. Others, for example Anaxagoras and Democritus, held that the Galaxy was a region of reflected sunlight, and refuted other opinions by demonstrative reasoning. What Aristotle thought cannot be known with certainty since his opinion differs between translations, and I believe this to be due to some translator's error; for in the new translation he appears to say that the Galaxy is a cloud of vapour below the stars in that region which continually attracts them, and

this appears to have no foundation in truth. In the old translation he says the Galaxy is nothing but a multitude of fixed stars in that region, so small that we are unable to distinguish them from Earth, though the brightness we call the Galaxy emanates from them; and it may be that the heaven in that region is denser and therefore retains and reflects this light. Avicenna and Ptolemy appear to share this opinion with Aristotle. Thus since the Galaxy is an effect of stars which we cannot see, other than in their effects, and since Metaphysics treats of the primal substances, which we likewise cannot comprehend except by their effects, Metaphysics bears a clear resemblance to the Starry Heaven.

Then, the pole which we see signifies material things, which Physics treats of, taken as a whole; while the pole we cannot see signifies non-material things, which are not visible, of which Metaphysics treats; and therefore the two sciences individually resemble aspects of that sphere. And furthermore, its two motions signify the two sciences. For its diurnal circuit signifies the corruptible things of nature, which complete their course from day to day, their matter altering from form to form; and these Physics deals with. The well-nigh imperceptible motion which the sphere makes from west to east, at the rate of a degree per hundred years, signifies the incorruptible things which God created and which are without end; and these Metaphysics deals with. This movement thus signifies the incorruptible things, because it has a beginning but no end, for the end of a circuit consists in its return to the beginning, which this heaven, given its motion, will never achieve. Since the beginning of the world it has completed little more than a sixth of a revolution, and yet we are already in the last age of the world and await the consummation of celestial movement. Thus it is clear that Physics and Metaphysics can be compared in many ways to the Starry Heaven.

The Crystalline Heaven, or Primum Mobile, is analogous to Moral Philosophy; since Moral Philosophy, as Saint Thomas says in commenting on the second book of the *Ethics*, directs us towards the other sciences. For, as Aristotle says in the fifth book of the *Ethics* 'legal justice lays out the sciences to be learnt, and directs that they be learnt and taught in order that they are not neglected'; and likewise by its motion the Crystalline Heaven governs the diurnal revolution of the others, by means of which they each day transmit and receive here below the influence of all their component parts; for if the revolutions of this heaven did not govern in this way, little of their influence would be felt here, and we would have little sight of them also. For if we suppose the ninth heaven fixed, a third of the starry heavens would not yet have been seen from anywhere on Earth; and Saturn would be hidden for periods of fourteen years and a half from any given place on

Earth, and Jupiter for six years, and Mars for almost a year, and the sun for 182 days and 14 hours per year (by *days* and *hours* I mean those lengths of time as currently measured, by means of the sun's motion), and Venus and Mercury would be hidden almost as long as the sun, and the Moon would be hidden for periods of fourteen and a half days. There would in truth be no generation here below neither of creature nor plant; night or day, week or month, would not be as now, but rather all the universe would be disordered, and the movement of the other heavens would be in vain. Likewise if Moral Philosophy ceased to exist, the other sciences would be hidden for some time, and there would be no generation or happiness in life, and the bodies of knowledge discovered and written down long ago would be in vain. Thus Moral Philosophy is analogous to this sphere.

And then the Empyrean resembles the Divine Science, Theology, which is full of peace and tolerates no diversity of opinion or sophistical reasoning because of the supreme certainty of its subject, which is God. Christ says of this science to his disciples: '*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you,*' being his teaching, which is the science of which I speak. Solomon, speaking of this science, says: '*There are threescore queens and fourscore concubines; and virgins without number: my dove, my undefiled, is but one.*' He calls the sciences queens and concubines and virgins, but this one he calls *choice* because it allows us to know perfect truth, in which our souls find rest.

Now that the analogies between the spheres and the sciences have been discussed, it is clear that by the third sphere I mean Rhetoric, which is analogous to the third heaven, as was shown above.

Chapter XV: The First Canzone – The Allegorical Exposition

From the analogies discussed above, it is obvious who those movers are whom I address: they are the movers of that heaven, such as Boethius and Cicero, who guided me by the sweetness of their discourse along the path of love, that is in pursuit of the most gentle lady Philosophy, with the rays of their star, that is their writings of her; because the written word is in every science a star filled with light that reveals that science. Understanding this, we can then perceive the true meaning of the first stanza of the *canzone* before us, by way of the literal meaning. By means of that exposition, the second stanza may also be adequately addressed, as far as: *One that makes me look upon a lady*.

Let us observe here that this lady is Philosophy, truly a lady full of sweetness, adorned with honour, marvellous in wisdom, glorious in freedom, as will be shown in the third book, which will treat of her nobility. And when I say: *Who wishes to see bliss, let his eyes on this lady gaze*, then this lady's eyes are her proofs by reason, which directed into the eyes of the intellect enamour the soul freed from confusion. Oh sweet and ineffable look, captivating the human mind, that appears in the eyes of Philosophy when she speaks with her lovers! Truly salvation lies in you, so that he who gazes on you is blessed and saved from the deathliness of vice and ignorance. When I say: *If he does not fear anguished sighs*, I mean, provided he does not fear the strain of study, nor the veils of doubt that spring from this lady's first glances, and then vanish like morning cloud before the sun's face as her light continues to fall, so that the intellect grows accustomed to her, and is left free and filled with certainty, like air purged and illuminated by the rays of noon.

The third stanza can likewise be understood by means of the literal reading to the point where I say: *The soul weeps*. Here we must be mindful of a certain moral contained in these words: that a man should not forget the services rendered by a lesser friend, for the sake of a greater one; yet if he must forsake one and follow the other, he should follow the better, abandoning the other with honest expressions of regret, so as to give the one he does follow cause for greater love. Next, where I say: *now of my eyes*, it means that it was a harsh hour in which this lady's first proofs entered the eyes of my intellect, which was the instant cause of this love. Where I say: *the likes of me*, I mean souls free from wretched base pleasures and vulgar pastimes, and endowed with intellect and memory. Where I say: *slays, and am slain*, which seems contrary to what was said above of the lady's power to save, it should be noted that first one side speaks and then the other, the

two being in contention, as has been made clear previously, and it is therefore no surprise if the one says yea and the other nay, if we observe which is in the ascendant and which wanes.

Next, in the fourth stanza, where I say: *a noble spirit of love*, it means a thought born of study. In this allegory, it should be known that love always means that study which is the application of the mind to the thing beloved. Then when I say: *You'll see the beauty of such high miracles*, I declare that the beauty of these miracles shall be perceived through her; and I say true, for to see the beauty of marvels is to perceive their cause, which she reveals, as Aristotle appears to say at the start of the *Metaphysics*, where he writes that at the sight of this beauty men first fell in love with this lady. We will speak more fully of this word marvel in the next book. The rest of the *canzone* has been adequately explained by the previous exposition.

Thus, in completing this second book, I affirm that the lady of whom I became enamoured after my first love, was the most beautiful and honourable daughter of the Emperor of the universe, whom Pythagoras named Philosophy.

Here ends the second book, whose aim was to explain the *canzone* which was served as the Banquet's first course.

End of Book II

Book III

Canzone Seconda (Original Italian Text)

Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona
De la mia donna disiosamente,
Move cose di lei meco sovente,
Che lo 'ntelletto sovr'esse disvia.
Lo suo parlar sì dolcemente sona,
Che l'anima ch'ascolta e che lo sente
Dice: "Oh me lassa! ch'io non son possente
Di dir quel ch'odo de la donna mia!
E certo e' mi conven lasciare in pria,
S'io vo' trattar di quel ch'odo di lei,
Ciò che lo mio intelletto non comprende;
E di quel che s'intende
Gran parte, perché dirlo non savrei.
Però, se le mie rime avran difetto
Ch'entreran ne la loda di costei,
Di ciò si biasmi il debole intelletto
E 'l parlar nostro, che non ha valore
Di ritrar tutto ciò che dice Amore.

Non vede il sol, che tutto 'l mondo gira,
Cosa tanto gentil, quanto in quell'ora
Che luce ne la parte ove dimora
La donna di cui dire Amor mi face.
Ogni Intelletto di là su la mira,
E quella gente che qui s'innamora
Ne' lor pensieri la truovano ancora,
Quando Amor fa sentir de la sua pace.
Suo esser tanto a Quei che lel dà piace,
Che 'nfonde sempre in lei la sua vertute
Oltre 'l dimando di nostra natura.
La sua anima pura,
Che riceve da lui questa salute,
Lo manifesta in quel ch'ella conduce:
Ché 'n sue bellezze son cose vedute
Che li occhi di color dov'ella luce
Ne mandan messi al cor pien di desiri,

Che prendon aire e diventan sospiri.

In lei discende la virtù divina
Sì come face in angelo che 'l vede;
E qual donna gentil questo non crede,
Vada con lei e miri li atti sui.
Quivi dov'ella parla si dichina
Un spirito da ciel, che reca fede
Come l'alto valor ch'ella possiede
È oltre quel che si conviene a nui.
Li atti soavi ch'ella mostra altrui
Vanno chiamando Amor ciascuno a prova
In quella voce che lo fa sentire.
Di costei si può dire:
Gentile è in donna ciò che in lei si trova,
E bello è tanto quanto lei simiglia.
E puossi dir che 'l suo aspetto giova
A consentir ciò che par meraviglia;
Onde la nostra fede è aiutata:
Però fu tal da eterno ordinata.

Cose appariscon ne lo suo aspetto
Che mostran de' piacer di Paradiso,
Dico ne li occhi e nel suo dolce riso,
Che le vi reca Amor com'a suo loco.
Elle soverchian lo nostro intelletto,
Come raggio di sole un frale viso:
E perch'io non le posso mirar fiso,
Mi conven contentar di dirne poco.
Sua bieltà piove fiammelle di foco,
Animate d'un spirito gentile
Ch'è creatore d'ogni pensier bono;
E rompon come trono
Li 'nnati vizii che fanno altrui vile.
Però qual donna sente sua bieltate
Biasmar per non parer queta e umile,
Miri costei ch'è essempro d'umiltate!
Questa è colei ch'umilia ogni perverso:
Costei pensò chi mosse l'universo.

Canzone, e' par che tu parli contraro
Al dir d'una sorella che tu hai;
Che questa donna che tanto umil fai
Ella la chiama fera e disdegnosa.
Tu sai che 'l ciel sempr'è lucente e chiaro,
E quanto in sé, non si turba già mai;
Ma li nostri occhi per cagioni assai
Chiaman la stella talor tenebrosa.
Così, quand'ella la chiama orgogliosa,
Non considera lei secondo il vero,
Ma pur secondo quel ch'a lei pareo:
Ché l'anima teme, a,
E teme ancora, sì che mi par fero
Quantunqu'io veggio là 'v'ella mi senta.
Così ti scusa, se ti fa mestero;
E quando poi, a lei ti rappresenta:
Dirai: "Madonna, s'ello v'è a grato,
Io parlerò di voi in ciascun lato".

The Second Canzone (English Translation)

Love, that speaks to me within my mind,
So passionately, of my lady,
Often stirs such thoughts of her,
They lead my intellect astray.
Love's speech sounds in me so sweetly,
That my soul which feels and hears him,
Says: 'Alas, that I lack power
To speak what I hear of my lady!
And if I would say what I hear,
Surely I am forced to leave aside
What intellect cannot comprehend,
As well as much of what I understand,
Since I have no way to express it.
Thus, if my verses are defective
Which enter on their praise of her,
Blame then my weak intellect
And our speech, that lacks power
To echo everything that Love says.

The Sun, that circles the whole world,
Sees nothing nobler than that hour,
When it shines where that lady lives,
The lady of whom Love makes me speak.
Those Intelligences above admire her,
And folk down here who are in love
Ever find her in their thoughts,
When Love makes his peace felt there.
Her being pleases God so, who made her,
He endlessly instils His virtue in her,
Beyond the powers of our nature.
That pure soul of hers,
Which receives such bliss from Him,
Reveals Him then in what she brings:
For in her beauty such things are seen
That the eyes into which she shines
Send messages of longing, to the heart,
That mix with air and turn to sighs.

Divine virtue descends in her,
As into the Angels that see Him;
And if any noble lady disbelieves it,
Let her walk with her and note her gestures.
Here where she speaks, a spirit
Descends from heaven to bear witness
That this high worth she possesses
Exceeds what appertains to us.
The graceful gestures she displays
Vie with each other, calling on Love
In that voice which makes him hear.
Of her indeed it can be said:
Noble in woman, what we find in her,
And beauty, what most resembles her.
And her countenance it may be said
Allows belief in what seems a marvel;
By which our own faith is strengthened:
For such, by eternity, she was ordained.

Such things appear in her aspect
As show the joys of Paradise,
I mean in her eyes and her sweet smile,
For Love draws them there as to his place.
They overwhelm this intellect of ours,
As a ray of light does weak vision;
And since I cannot fix my gaze on them,
I am forced to say little of them.
Her beauty rains flamelets of fire,
Kindled by a noble spirit
That is the creator of all fine thoughts;
And like lightning they dispel
The innate vices that make men base.
So let those ladies who know her beauty,
Those blamed for not being calm, humble,
Gaze at her, humility's exemplar!
This is she who humbles haughtiness:
Conceived by Him who moves the universe.

Canzone, you seem to contradict
The words of a sister of yours;
This lady, whom you say is humble,
She calls proud and disdainful.
You know the sky, ever bright and clear,
Is such, in itself, it is never clouded;
Yet our eyes, for many reasons,
Will say that a star appears dim.
Likewise, when she is called proud,
She is not seen according to the truth,
But only in accord with what she seems.
For my soul was full of fear,
And still fears, such that all I see
Of her seems proud, when she looks at me.
So excuse yourself should need arise;
When you can, present yourself to her,
Saying: 'My lady, if it pleases you,
I will speak of you everywhere.'

Chapter I: Love of the New Lady

As I explained in the previous book, my new love took its beginning from the compassionate countenance of a lady. This love, finding my life pre-disposed towards ardour, blazed like a fire from small flames to great, so that her light penetrated my mind, waking and sleeping. The intensity of the desire to see her which Love inspired in me can neither be told nor understood. I was full of desire, in this way, not only for her but for all those close to her, whether acquaintances or kin. How many were the nights when my eyes gazed intently on my love's dwelling-place, when those of others were closed in sleep! Just as a spreading fire cannot remain hidden, but must show itself abroad, the desire to speak of love, which I was not wholly able to restrain, overcame me. Though I was unable to exercise enough control over my own mind, nevertheless several times I so nearly achieved it, either through Love's purpose or my own boldness, that on reflection I realised that no speech was lovelier or more profitable in speaking of love, than that which praises the person loved.

Three reasons led me to this conclusion: the first of which was my own self-love, which is the root of all other love, as all can see. For there is no more gracious or fitting way for a person to honour himself than by honouring a friend; since there cannot be friendship between those who are wholly unlike, wherever friendship is seen a likeness is understood to exist; and praise and blame are bestowed in common on whatever shares a likeness. From this two great lessons should be learned. The first is that one should not desire anyone prone to vice as a friend, because no good opinion is formed of those they befriend; the second is that no one should criticise a friend publicly, since, if the foregoing is considered closely, he is thrusting his finger into his own eye.

The second reason was a desire for this friendship to endure. Understand that, as Aristotle says in the ninth book of the *Ethics*, that in order to preserve a friendship between persons of unequal rank a relationship must exist that transforms dissimilarity into similarity, such as that for example between master and servant. Though the servant on receiving a benefit from his master cannot return a like benefit to him, he must nevertheless render what best he can spontaneously and with solicitude such that what is in itself dissimilar will become similar by a display of goodwill. Once goodwill is displayed, the friendship is strengthened and preserved. Thus, considering myself inferior to the lady and finding myself indebted to her, I resolved to praise her, according to the extent of my power, which if

not similar to hers, at least might reveal my zealous desire. If I were able to do more, I would do so. In this manner my power becomes similar to that of this noble lady.

The third reason was an argument due to foresight. As Boethius says 'It is not sufficient to see only what lies before our eyes,' that is, the present time: thus, we are given foresight, which looks forward to what may happen in the future. I thought I might be criticised by posterity for inconstancy of mind, when they saw that I had turned from my first love. To dispel this there was no better course than to explain who the lady was who brought about this change in me. By her obvious excellence an idea can be formed of her virtue, and by comprehending her great virtue, it would be perceived how the steadfast mind might nevertheless be changed by it, which would temper the judgement that I was inconstant and not steadfast. I therefore decided to praise this lady, and if not adequately, at least to the degree that I was competent; and I began, saying: *Love, that speaks to me within my mind.*

The *canzone* has three main sections. The first consists of the whole first stanza which acts as a preface. The second consists of the three succeeding stanzas, which are concerned with what is to be said, namely, the praise of this noble one, of which the first begins: *The sun, that circles the whole world.* The third section consists of the fifth and last stanza which addresses the canzone itself, and resolves a certain confusion arising from it. These three sections will be discussed in order.

Chapter II: Soul and Mind

Beginning with the first section, devised as a proem to the *canzone*, I say that it in turn should be sub-divided into three parts. Firstly, it touches upon the ineffable quality of the theme. Secondly, it describes my inability to handle the theme perfectly, and this part begins: *Surely I am forced to leave aside*. Finally, I excuse this inadequacy whose fault does not lie in me, and this part begins: *Thus, if my verses are defective*.

I say, then: *Love, that speaks to me within my mind*. Firstly I must say who the speaker is, and what place he speaks from. Love, truly understood and subtly considered, is no other than the spiritual union of the soul and the beloved, which union the soul hastens swiftly or slowly towards, according to whether it is free or impeded. The reason for this natural tendency is as follows: every substantial form proceeds from its first cause, which is God, as stated in the book *On Causes*, and the forms are diverse not because of their cause, which is simple, but from secondary causes, and from the matter into which that cause descends. Thus, in the book referred to, where it treats of the infusion of divine goodness, the following words appear: ‘And the goodness and the gifts are diverse, according to the involvement of the thing that receives them.’ So, since every effect retains something of the nature of its cause (as Alpetragius says, affirming that where the cause is a spherical body, the effect must in some way be spherical) every form absorbs to some degree the divine nature; not that the divine nature is divided and apportioned between them, but that it is shared in almost the same way that the nature of the sun is shared by the other lights. The nobler the form the more of this nature it retains; thus the human soul, which is the noblest form generated beneath the heavens, receives more of the divine nature than any other. And since the will to exist is most natural in God, for as we read in the book cited above: ‘Being is the first thing, before which there is nothing’, the human soul naturally desires, with all its will, to exist; and since its being depends on God and is preserved by Him, it naturally yearns and longs to be united with God, in order to strengthen its being.

Because divine goodness reveals itself in the goodness of nature and reason, the human soul readily unites with them in a spiritual manner, and does so the more swiftly and surely the more perfect they appear, an appearance determined by the degree to which the soul’s power of recognition is free or impeded. This union is what we call love, through which we are able to know the qualities of the soul within, by viewing those things which it loves beyond itself. This love, that is the union of my soul with this noble lady in whom so much of the divine light was revealed to

me, is the speaker whom I talk of, for thoughts were continually being born of his gazing and reflecting on the worth of this lady, who spiritually was made one with my soul.

The place in which I say he speaks is the mind; but in saying mind we gain no better understanding than before, and so we must see what *mind* properly signifies. I say then that Aristotle, in the second book of *On the Soul*, asserts that the soul has three principle powers, which he distinguishes as life, sensory perception, and reason; he also mentions motion, but this may be included with sensory perception, since every soul that perceives with one or all of its senses also has motion, such that motion is a power united with sensory awareness. As he says, it is clear that these powers are interrelated so that one is the basis of the next; the former can exist separately, but the latter since it is based upon it cannot; Thus, the vegetative power, by which life is sustained, is the basis upon which the senses, namely sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch depend; and the vegetative power can exist as a spirit by itself, as we see in all the plants, while the sensory spirit cannot exist without it, since nothing has sensation but what is alive. This sensitive power is the base for the intellectual power, that is, of reason. Thus in mortal living beings the rational power is not found without the sensory power, while the sensory power may be found without the rational, as we see in beasts, birds, fish, and every brute animal. The spirit that comprehends all these powers, and is the most perfect of all, is the human soul, which through the nobility of its highest power, reason, participates in the divine nature as eternal intellect. For the soul is so ennobled and divested of matter in this supreme power, that the divine light shines in it, as in an angel; and therefore man is called a divine animal by the philosophers. Many powers exist in the noblest part of the soul, as Aristotle says, in the sixth book of the *Ethics* in particular, where he notes that there is a scientific power within that part, as well as a power that is ratiocinative or deliberative, a power of invention and a judicial power. And all of these noble powers, and others within the supreme power, are called collectively by the word whose meaning we wished to know: that is, *mind*. Thus, plainly, by mind is meant the highest and noblest part of the soul.

And it is obvious that this is its meaning, for mind is predicated only of man and the divine substance, as is clearly seen in Boethius, who first predicates it of men when he says to Philosophy: 'You and God, who placed you in the minds of men', and then predicates it of God when he says to God: 'You produce all things from the supernal exemplar, you, most beautiful, bearing the lovely world in your mind.' Not only has mind never been predicated of brute animals, but in fact it seems impossible or incorrect

to predicate it of those men who seem deficient in this most perfect part; and so in Latin they are termed *demented*, that is, without mind. So we see now the meaning of the word *mind*, it is that noble and most precious part of the soul that participates in the divine. The mind is the place in which I say Love speaks to me about my lady.

Chapter III: The Ineffable Nature of the Theme

It is not idly, but for a good reason, that I say love operates in my *mind*, namely that by speaking of the place where it operates, the nature of this love might be understood. Know that everything, for the reason shown above, has its own unique love. Just as simple bodies, the elements, have within them a natural love for their proper place, which is why earth is always drawn to its centre, and why fire has a natural love for the sphere above, below that of the Moon, and so always rises towards it, just so the lowest of compound bodies, the minerals, have a love for the place where they are created, and where they accumulate and acquire strength and power; thus we find that a lodestone always acquires its power from the place where it is created. Plants which are the lowest living things, have a clear liking for certain places, according to their needs, so that we find certain plants almost always rooting near water, others on mountain tops, others on slopes and at the foot of hills, all of which either perish or live a melancholy existence if transplanted, being separated from what is favourable to them. Brute animals have a more obvious love, not only for places but moreover for one another. Men have proper love for things that are perfectly virtuous. And since man, though his whole form consists of a single substance, through his nobility has in himself the nature of all these, he has the power to love in all these ways, and does so.

For by virtue of his first nature, that of the simple body, which predominates in the individual, he naturally loves to move downward; and so when he moves upward he grows weary.

By virtue of his second nature, that of the compound body, he loves the place and the season in which he was born. Everyone is therefore naturally stronger in body in the place and season where he was born, than in any other. So we read, in the tales of Hercules, in Ovid, Lucan and others, that whenever the giant Antaeus grew weary in his fight with the hero, and stretched his body on the ground, by choice or being thrown by Hercules, his strength and vigour returned in a surge from the earth, from which and in which he had been generated. Hercules, seeing this, ultimately seized him and gripping him fast lifted him from the ground then held him aloft so long, without touching the earth that he defeated and slew him by superior force. This battle took place in Africa according to the testimony of these writings.

By virtue of his third nature, that of the plants, man has a love for certain foods, not as the objects of his senses, but because they are nutritious. Such foods perfect this nature's working, while others do not, and render it imperfect. Thus we find that certain foods render men well-built,

strong of limb, and healthy of complexion, while others produce the opposite.

By virtue of his fourth nature, that of the animals, namely the senses, man has another love, according to which he loves through his sense perception, like the beasts; and in man this love has the greatest need of being controlled, because of its overwhelming strength, brought about especially by the pleasure arising from taste and touch.

By virtue of his fifth and highest nature, namely the truly human, or to be more precise, angelic, that is to say, rational nature, man possesses a love of truth and virtue; and from this love springs true and perfect friendship, derived from whatever is honourable, of which Aristotle speaks in the eight book of the *Ethics*.

Then, since this highest nature is called mind, as explained above, I say in the *canzone* that: Love speaks *within my mind*, to make it clear that it is the love that springs from the noblest nature of truth and virtue, and to counter any false opinion regarding myself that my love was aimed at sensual delight. I then say: *so passionately*, to make its steadfastness and fervour known. And I say that it: *often stirs such thoughts of her, they lead my intellect astray*. I say truly, for in speaking of her my thought often desired to reach conclusions about her that I could not grasp, and I was so bewildered that outwardly I almost appeared beside myself, like someone who gazes in a straight line, and first of all sees clearly the things nearest to him; then looking further away, sees things less clearly; and then further way still is left in a state of doubt; and finally, gazing at the furthest point of all, his vision, unable to discriminate, sees nothing.

Such is the first ineffable aspect of what I take for them in the *canzone*; and then I speak of the other when I say: *Love's speech*. I say that my thought, that is Love's word, *sounds in me so sweetly* that my soul, that is my affection, is on fire to speak it with my tongue; and because I cannot, I write that the soul therefore laments, saying: *Alas, that I lack power*. This is the second ineffable aspect of my theme: that is, that the tongue cannot reproduce completely what the intellect perceives. And I also say: *my soul which feels and hears him*; that is hears the words, and feels the sweetness of the sound.

Chapter IV: The Inadequacy of its Treatment

Now that I have discussed the two ineffable aspects of my theme, I must proceed to discuss the words that explain my own inadequacy. I say then that my inadequacy arises from a twofold source, just as that lady's grandeur possesses a twofold transcendence, as noted. For due to the poverty of my intellect I am forced to leave aside much that is true about her, and shines, as it were, into my mind, which receives it without arresting it like a transparent body; and this I say in the clause: *Surely I am forced to leave aside*. And when I say: *As well as much of what I understand*, I affirm that my inadequacy extends even to what I understand not simply to what my intellect fails to grasp, because my tongue lacks the eloquence to express what is spoken about her in my thoughts. Thus it will be apparent that what I say of the truth will be quite limited. And this, when examined closely, adds to her praise, which is my main purpose; and a speech in which every part contributes to its main purpose can be said to have come from the workshop of the true rhetorician. Then, when I say: *Thus, if my verses are defective*, I go on to excuse myself for a fault, which I should not be blamed for, even though others can see that my words are far inferior to this lady's worth. So, I say that if fault mars my verses, that is the words composed about her, the blame is due to the weakness of our intellect and the inadequacy of our power of speech, which is so overwhelmed by a thought that it cannot fully pursue it, especially when the thought springs from love, because the soul is then stirred more profoundly than at other times.

Some might say: 'You accuse yourself in the same breath', since the excuse given is proof of a fault and not the erasure of it, for the blame is laid at the door of my own intellect and speech; and just as I should be praised if they are excellent, to the extent of that excellence, I should be blamed if they are found to be defective. My reply to this is that I do not accuse myself, and do excuse myself. Firstly, we should know that, according to Aristotle's opinion given in the third book of the *Ethics*, man deserves praise or blame only for those things he has the power to do or not do; and where he has not the power, he deserves neither praise nor blame, since both must be attributed elsewhere, even though they are a part of the man himself. Thus, we should not blame a man because he was born ugly, since it was not in his power to make himself attractive; rather we should blame the ill form of the matter of which he is made, the source of this natural fault. Similarly, we should not praise a man for the attractiveness of the body he possesses from birth, since he was not its maker; rather we should praise the artisan, namely human nature, which creates such beauty in matter when it is not impeded

by it. This is why the priest spoke fittingly to the Emperor, who had laughed and mocked the ugliness of his body: '*The Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves.*' Those are the Prophet's words, in the lines of the Psalter, no more or less than the priest answered. So, let those ill-born wretches who devote their attention to adorning their person and not perfecting their character, which is alone of worth, realise that they are merely ornamenting the work of another, and neglecting their own.

Returning to the subject in hand, I say that our intellect, through a defect in that faculty by means of which it extracts what it perceives, which faculty is an organic power, namely imagination, cannot grasp certain things, for example substances separate from matter, because imagination cannot assist it, lacking the means. And if we can conceive of such substances, still we can neither apprehend nor comprehend them wholly. Man is not to blame for this, since he is not the source of this defect; rather it is universal nature, that is, God, who willed that we be deprived of light in this life; and why He should do this, I cannot presume to say. So, if contemplation has transported me to a realm where imagination has failed the intellect, I am not at fault for failing to understand. And, there is a limit set to our intellect, to each of its processes, set not by us but by universal nature; and we should realise that the scope of our intellect is wider in thought than in speech, and wider in speech than in gestures. Therefore, since our thought exceeds our speech, not only in that which does not achieve perfect understanding but in that which does, we cannot be to blame for our inadequacy, because it is not of our making. And so I excuse myself in saying: *Blame then my weak intellect, and our speech that lacks power to echo everything that Love says*; since my good intent, which is what we must consider in judging human worth, should be clearly visible. And this is the sense in which the first main section of the canzone, which we are considering, should be understood.

Chapter V: The Circuit of the Sun

Having discussed the first section and revealed its meaning, we can now proceed to the second, which, for clarity, will be sub-divided into three parts, corresponding to the three stanzas it contains. In the first part I praise the lady in general, in her entirety, body and soul; in the second I praise the soul specifically, and in the third her body. The first part begins: *The Sun, that circles the whole world*; the second begins: *Divine virtue descends in her*; the third begins: *Such things appear in her aspect*; and the three parts will be treated in order.

I say then: *The Sun, that circles the whole world*; and to understand this clearly, we should understand how the world is so circled. Firstly, by the term *world* I do not mean the whole Universe, but only what commonly comprises land and sea, as in the customary phrase '*he has seen the whole world*'. Pythagoras and his followers maintained that this world was one of the planets, and that there was another identical one opposite to it called Antichthon. He claimed that both were on a single sphere that turned from west to east; and that because of this revolution the Sun circled round us, and was alternately visible and not visible. He also claimed that between the two masses lay fire, saying it was nobler than water and earth, and that since the centre was the noblest position of the four simple bodies, fire while seeming to rise was in reality descending towards its centre. Later, Plato differed, writing in *Timaeus* that the earth with the seas was the centre of everything, but that its whole globe circled its centre, following the primary movement of the heavens, but very slowly because of its dense mass and extreme distance from that movement. These opinions are repudiated in the second book of *Heaven and Earth*, by that glorious philosopher, Aristotle, to whom nature revealed her secrets more profoundly; there, he proves that this world, the Earth, stands still and is forever fixed. I do not intend to give Aristotle's proofs here, which refute those men and affirm the truth, since it is enough to know on his great authority that the earth is fixed and does not rotate, and that with the sea it is the centre of the heavens.

The heavens revolve continuously about this centre, as we observe; and this revolution must have, of necessity, two fixed celestial poles, and a great circle equidistant from them that rotates with the greatest speed. Of these the northern celestial pole is visible to almost all the known lands, while the southern is hidden from almost all of them. The part of the heavens with which the Sun revolves when it is specifically in Aries and in Libra, lies on the circle that lies midway between them, the celestial equator. So, if a stone was dropped from the north celestial pole it would fall to the ocean's

surface at a point such that if an observer were present there the pole star would always be above their head – and the distance from Rome to this place in the ocean, moving due north, would, I believe, be 2600 miles or a little less.

In order to visualise this more clearly, let us imagine that a city, named Maria, lay on the spot I mentioned. I say that if a stone was dropped from the other pole, the south celestial pole, it would fall to a point on the ocean's surface exactly opposite Maria on this globe – and the distance from Rome to the place where this second stone fell, moving due south, would, I believe, be 7500 miles or a little less. Here let us place a second city, called Lucia. The direct distance between them, by whichever route, would be 10200 miles – half the circumference of the entire globe, so that the inhabitants of Maria would stand with their feet directly opposite those of Lucia. Let us imagine the great circle on this globe, which is at every point equidistant from Maria and Lucia. This equatorial circle, I believe – based on my understanding of the astrologers' teachings, and those of Albertus Magnus in his book *On the Nature of Places and the Properties of Elements*, and also from the testimony of Lucan in his ninth book – divides the known lands from the ocean in the south, along the entire extremity of the first climatic zone where among others the Garamantes dwell, who almost always go naked, to whom Cato came, with people from Rome, when he fled Caesar's rule.

Having marked out these three places on the globe, the terrestrial poles and equator, we can see clearly how the sun makes its circuit. I say then that the sphere of the Sun revolves from west to east, not directly aligned counter to the diurnal movement of day and night, but obliquely to it; so that this ecliptic, equidistant between the poles of its sphere, on which the body of the Sun is situated, cuts the celestial equator between the celestial poles, into two opposing regions, that is at the first point of Aries and the first of Libra, and diverges from it along two semicircular arcs, one towards the celestial north and the other towards the south. The points marking the centres of these arcs are at equal distances from the celestial equator on each side, and at an angle of twenty three and a half degrees to it; the one point is the first point of Cancer, and the other the first point of Capricorn. So, when the sun intersects the celestial equator of the celestial poles, Maria must see it at the first point of Aries, circling the world, on the horizon of earth or rather ocean, like a millstone not more than half of whose mass can be seen; and she sees this circuit rise progressively like the screw of a press, until 91 revolutions, that is 3 months, have been completed. At

this stage, its elevation appears to Maria much the same as it does to us, at a point on Earth between the two cities, at the equinox.

If a man stood upright at Maria, facing the Sun continuously, he would see it move clockwise. Then its circuit seems to descend for another 91 revolutions and a little more, until its circuit is on the horizon of earth, or rather the ocean, only partially visible; then the circuit is hidden, and becomes visible to Lucia, and is seen rising and descending around Lucia in the same progression of revolutions as Maria saw. And if a man stood upright at Lucia, facing the sun continuously, he would see it moving anti-clockwise. Thus it can be seen that these poles have a six month day each year, and a night of similar length; and when one has day the other has night.

It is also the case, as has been said, that the circle on this globe on which the Garamantes dwell, must see the sun circling directly above it, as it passes through Aries, not like a millstone but like a wheel, only half of which it can see from any given point. It sees the Sun's circuit moving away from itself and approaching Maria for a little more than 91 days, and then returning in the same period; and when it has returned, the Sun is in Libra, and its circuit again moves away and approaches Lucia for a little more than 91 days, and returns again in a similar number. The equator, which traverses the whole globe, always sees equal day and night, whether the sun's circuit passes on this or that side of it; and twice a year it has periods of extreme heat, and twice of mild winter.

It is further the case that the two regions which lie between the two imaginary cities must see the Sun differently, depending on whether they are further from or closer to these poles, as will by now be evident to anyone of true intellect, of which it is right to demand a little effort. Thus we see that through divine providence the world is so ordered that when the sphere of the Sun has returned in its circuit to the start, the globe on which we live has everywhere experienced an equal period of light and darkness.

Oh, ineffable Wisdom, that ordained it so, how poorly does our mind grasp you! And you, for whose benefit and pleasure I write in what blindness do you live, if you raise not you eyes to these things, but drown them rather in the mire of ignorance!

Chapter VI: General Praise of the Lady

In the preceding chapter we saw how the Sun makes its circuit, and now I may continue the explanation of the second section of the *canzone*. I say then that in this first part I begin my praise of the lady with respect to other things, and I say that the Sun in its circuit sees nothing so noble as she, and thus she is, according to these worlds, the noblest of all things down here. I use the words: *in that hour*, and here it should be understood that the word *hour* is understood in two senses by the astrologers. One is where the day and night each have twelve hours, regardless of whether the day is long or short; and the hours of daylight or night are longer or shorter according as day and night wax and wane. The church uses these hours in speaking of Prime, Tierce, Sext and Nones, and they are known as temporal hours. The other sense is where in allotting hours for day and night, the day at times has fifteen hours and the night nine, or the night has sixteen and the day eight, according to how day and night wax and wane, and these are called equal hours. At the equinox, when day and night are equal in length, these hours and the temporal hours are one and the same.

Then where I say: *Those Intelligences above admire her*; I praise her without reference to anything else. I say that the Intelligences of heaven admire her, while those down here who are noble think of her, in order to possess that which delights them. Here it should be understood that according to what is written in the book *On Causes* all the Intelligences above are aware of what is higher than them and lower. They therefore know God as their cause, and what is lower than them as their effect; and since God is universal cause of all things, by knowing Him they know all things, according to the degree of their intelligence. Thus all the Intelligences know the human form insofar as it is determined by intent of the divine mind. The Intelligences who move the spheres know it most profoundly as they are the most immediate cause of it, and of all generated forms, and they know the perfect divine form as their paradigm and exemplar, insofar as it can be known. If the human form is not perfect in individual living beings, it is not the fault of the exemplar but of the material which produces individuality. So when I say: *Those Intelligences above admire her*; I mean simply that she is created intentionally as an exemplar of the human essence in the divine mind, and thus in all others, above all in the angelic minds which with the heavens create things here below.

To confirm this, I say in addition: *And folk down here who are in love*. It should be understood that everything desires its own perfection, and in perfection satisfies all its desires, and things desired are so for this reason. It

is this desire for perfection that makes all our delights seem lacking, for in this life no delight is so profound as to be able to quench our thirst such that we consider our desire for perfection has been assuaged. Since this lady is indeed perfect, I say that those who know the greatest delight here below when they are most at peace find this lady then in their thoughts, for she is, I affirm, as supremely perfect as the human essence can be. Thus, when I say: *Her being pleases God so, who made her*, I attest that not only is this lady the most perfect in the human realm, but more perfect than most in that she receives more of the divine goodness than what is due to mankind. And then, it is reasonable to believe that just as every craftsman loves his best work more than any other, so God loves the finest human being more than any other. Since his generosity is not limited by any bounds, his love ignores what is due the recipient, but exceeds it through the gift and benefaction of virtue and grace. That is why I state here that God himself, who grants her being for love of her perfection, infuses part of his goodness into her beyond the bounds of what is due our human nature.

Next, where I say: *That pure soul of hers*, I give proof of what I say by the testimony of the senses. Here it should be understood that the presence of soul actualises the body's potential, as Aristotle says in the second book of *On the Soul*; and if it actualises the body, it is its cause. Since every cause, as stated in the book *On Causes* cited previously, has a part of the goodness received from its own cause infused into its effect, the soul infuses the body with a part of the goodness of its own cause, which is God. Thus, since marvellous things, as regards the body, are seen in her, such that they make all who look on her desire to see such marvels, it is clear that her form, that is, her soul, which as its true cause directs the body, miraculously receives the goodness of God's grace. So her outward appearance provides proof that this lady has been endowed and ennobled by God beyond what is due our nature, which is most perfect in her as was said previously. This is the whole literal meaning of the first part of the second main section of the *canzone*.

Chapter VII: Praise of the Lady's Soul

Having praised this lady generally with regard to her soul and body, I now proceed to praise her specifically in regard to her soul, and firstly I praise her according as her goodness is great in itself, and then I praise her according as it greatly affects others and benefits the world. This second part begins with: *Of her indeed it can be said:* but I commence the first part with: *Divine virtue descends in her.*

Here it should be understood that divine goodness descends into all things, else they could not exist. But though this goodness springs from the simplest source, it is variously received, in greater or lesser degree, by its recipients. So it is written in the book *On Causes*: 'The primal goodness sheds his goodness upon all things in a single flow.' Each thing receives this flow according to the measure of its virtue and being, and we see visible evidence of this in the Sun. The Sun's light, derived from the one source, is variously received by diverse bodies, as Albertus says in his book *On the Intellect*. For certain bodies, because of their high degree of transparency, become so luminous in the sun's light that, by the multiplication of light internally and in their aspect, they shed great splendour on other bodies, as do gold and other precious minerals.

There are other bodies which, being wholly transparent, not only receive light but transmit it to other things, coloured by their own colour, rather than impeding it. And there are others, of such surpassingly pure transparency, that they become radiant enough as to disturb the eye's equilibrium, and so cannot be gazed at without discomfort to the eyesight, as is the case with mirrors. Others, however, are so lacking in transparency that they absorb scarcely any light at all, as is the case with earth. Thus God's goodness is received in one fashion by those separate substances, that is the Angels without material dimension, which are as it were transparent by virtue of their purity of form; and in another fashion by the human soul, which is partly free of matter and partly impeded by it, like a man submerged in water except for the head, who cannot be said to be wholly submerged or wholly not; and in yet another fashion by the animals, whose souls are entirely confined to matter, but are nevertheless somewhat ennobled; and in another by the plants, and another by the minerals; and by earth in a manner different from that of the other elements, because it is the most material, and therefore most remote from and most out of harmony with the first, simplest, and noblest virtue, which alone is of the intellect, namely God.

Though only the main gradations are mentioned here, we can nevertheless specify more detailed gradations: thus, among human souls one may receive goodness directly from another. And since in the intellectual order of the universe ascent and descent are by continuous gradation from the lowest form to the highest, and the highest to the lowest, as we see in the gradations of beings capable of sensation; and just as there is no gradation between the angelic nature, which is intellectual being, and human nature, but rather both form a continuum; and there is equally no intermediary gradation between the human soul and the most perfect of the animals; so we may find many men so vile and base that they appear nothing but beasts. Correspondingly, it may be firmly believed, and asserted, that there are some human beings so noble in nature that they are almost angelic, for otherwise the human species would not lie on a continuum in either direction, which is impossible. Aristotle, in the seventh book of the *Ethics*, calls such human beings divine, and such, I say, is this lady, for the divine virtue descends into her as it descends into the angels.

Next, where I say: *And if any noble lady disbelieves it*, I substantiate this assertion by noting our experience of her in acts proper to the rational soul, where the divine light radiates most freely: that is in speech and in those actions relating to bearing and conduct. Here it should be understood that man alone among the animals speaks and demonstrates rational conduct and gestures, because he alone possess reason within. If any claim the contrary by asserting that certain birds can speak, which may appear to be the case, especially among magpies and parrots, and that certain animals demonstrate bearing and gestures, such as apes and others, I reply that it is untrue that they speak or exhibit bearing, because they lack reason from which these things derive; the principle of these actions is not within them, nor do they know what they do, or signify anything by it, but merely imitate what they see and hear. Just as an image of a body is reproduced in some reflective body, for instance a mirror, displaying a corporeal image which is not real, so this image of reason, the gestures and speech of brute creatures, is not real either.

I say: *And if any noble lady disbelieves it, let her walk with her and note her gestures* – I do not say *any man* because such experience is more decorously acquired by female example than male – and I say what will be heard concerning her, by describing the effect of her speech and bearing. For her speech, by its nobility and sweetness, engenders thoughts of love in those who hear it, and I call love a celestial spirit because its origin is from above, and from above comes its meaning, as has already been related, and such thoughts proceed from the firm conviction that this is a lady of

miraculous virtue. And her gestures, in their sweetness and grace, waken love and cause it to be felt wherever some part of its virtue is seeded in a good nature. This natural seeding is performed as shown in the succeeding book.

In the second part, where I state: *Of her indeed it can be said*, I meant to describe how the goodness and virtue of her soul do good to and benefit others, and firstly how she benefits other ladies, adding: *Noble in woman, what we find in her*, whereby I present a visible example to other women, which they may follow, by gazing upon her, and so make themselves appear noble. Secondly, I relate how she benefits everyone, saying that her countenance aids our faith, which is the greatest benefit to the human race, since by means of it we escape eternal death and gain eternal life. It does so in the following way. Since the principal foundations for our faith are miracles, performed by one who was crucified – who created our reason and willed it to be inferior to his own in power – and by the saints, later, in his name; and since many are so stubborn as to doubt these miracles, owing to their clouded vision, refusing to believe in miracles without visible proof; and since this lady is visibly a miraculous thing, of which men's eyes may have daily proof, making it possible for us to believe in other miracles, it is evident that this lady, by her wonderful countenance, aids our faith. Thus I say, lastly, that: *by eternity*, that is eternally, she was *ordained* in the mind of God, as a testament of the faith to those who live in this age.

So ends the second part of the second main section of the *canzone*, according to its literal meaning.

Chapter VIII: Praise of the Lady's Body

Among the works of divine wisdom, Man is the most marvellous, considering that the divine nature has conjoined three natures (*the vegetative, sensory, and intellectual*) in a single form, and considering how subtly this body must be composed, having within its form organs corresponding to almost all of its powers. And because of the high degree of harmony required for so many organs to be in true accord with each other, there are few men, of the vast number that exist, who are perfect. If this created being is so marvellous, we should certainly approach a discussion of its composition with trepidation, not only in words but also in thought.

The words from *Ecclesiasticus* may stand as a warning: 'Who has sought out the wisdom of God that goes before all things?' as do those words which say: 'Do not seek the things that are too high for you, nor search into things that lie beyond your knowledge, but rather think of the things God has commanded, and do not be curious further as to his works' that is to say, inquisitive. So I, intending in the third section to speak of some of the external aspects of this being, inasmuch as sensory beauty appears in her body by virtue of her soul's goodness, I propose, in fear and trepidation, to begin untying this great knot, if not wholly at least in part. Since the meaning of the part where this lady's soul is praised has been explained, we must now consider how I praise her body, commencing: *Such things appear in her aspect*. I say that in her countenance there appear things which reveal Paradisial delights. Among them, the noblest and the one that is established as the aim of all the others, is to achieve happiness, and this is the same as to be blessed. This delight is truly generated by the lady's countenance, though in a different way; for, seeing her, people become happy, so sweetly does her beauty nourish the gaze of those who behold her, though in a different manner to the happiness of Paradise, that being eternal, which this cannot be.

Since some might ask by which of her features this wonderful delight is generated, I distinguish two, in which the expression of human pleasure and displeasure are most evident. It should be known that wherever the soul most performs its work, those are the features it is most determined to adorn, and in which it works must subtly. So we find that it forms the human face, where it performs its work more than in any other bodily feature, so subtly, that, in refining its material as much as the material will allow, no human face is formed like any other, because the maximum virtue of the material, which is somewhat different in each person, is here actualised. And since the soul operates principally in two features of the face – because there all three

natures hold sway, each in its own way – that is, in the eyes and the mouth, then that is where it strives for most adornment and it directs its whole attention to creating beauty there, as profoundly as it can. Delight, I maintain, is generated by these two features, when I say: *in her eyes and her sweet smile*.

These two features may be called, by way of a pleasant metaphor, the balconies of the edifice of the body, that is, the soul, in which this lady dwells, because there it often reveals itself, though in a veiled manner. It shows itself in the eyes so clearly that the emotion present there may be acknowledged by anyone who gazes at them intently. Thus, there are six emotions proper to the human soul, among those which Aristotle mentions in his book *On Rhetoric*, that is, grace, zeal, pity, envy, love and shame, by which the soul, cannot become impassioned without its aspect becoming visible at the windows of the eyes, unless it is contained within by exercise of great force. For this reason, people in times past have blinded themselves so that their shame should not be visible, as the poet Statius remarks of Oedipus of Thebes, saying that: ‘He freed himself from guilty shame by means of eternal night.’

The soul reveals itself in the lips, like coloration behind glass. What is laughter but a coruscation of the soul’s delight, a visible glow echoing that within? It is thus appropriate that to reveal the soul as moderate in its delight, laughter should only occur in moderation, with a proper reserve and limited movement of the lips, so that the lady who is revealed, as has been said, might appear modest and not wanton. Therefore the *Book of the Four Cardinal Virtues* commands: ‘Let not your laughter be strident,’ that is like the cackling of a hen. Ah, the wondrous laughter of the lady I speak of, perceptible only to the eye!

And I say that Love draws these things to her, as if to his place; Love being considered in two fashions. Firstly, as love of the soul unique to these places; secondly, as universal love which determines the things to be loved, and inclines the soul to adorn these features. Then I say: *They overwhelm this intellect of ours*, excusing myself for appearing to say so little about such great excellence of beauty when treating of it; and I state that I say so little about it for two reasons. One is that what appears in her aspect overwhelms our intellect: that is, human intellect; so I say how the intellect is overwhelmed, that is, in the same way as the sun overwhelms feeble powers of sight, but not strong and healthy vision. The other is that our intellect cannot gaze on it fixedly, because in attempting to do so the soul becomes intoxicated, and is immediately confused in all its operations.

Next, in saying that: *Her beauty rains flamelets of fire* I set out to describe the effect of her beauty, since it is not possible to describe its essence. Here it should be known that all things that exceed our intellect, such that it cannot comprehend them, are best described by means of their effects; thus by treating of God, separate substances, and primal matter in this way, we can gain some understanding of them. That is why I say that this lady's beauty *rains flamelets of fire*, that is, in an ardour of love and charity, *kindled by a noble spirit*, that is, ardour in the form of a gentle spirit, namely right desire, from which and by means of which virtuous thought originates. And not only does it do this, but it also undoes and destroys its contrary, namely the innate vices which are the main enemies of virtuous thought.

Here it should be understood that man is predisposed by nature to certain vices – for example men of choleric temperament are predisposed to anger – and such vices are innate, that is, an element of our nature. Other vices however are the results of habit, and not due to temperament, as for instance excessive drinking; these vices are avoided or overcome by the development of good habits, and in this way people become virtuous and moderation requires no effort, as Aristotle says in the second book of the *Ethics*. However there is a difference between the natural passions and habitual vices: the latter are eliminated by adopting good habits, because their source, the bad habit, is replaced by its opposite; but the natural passions, whose source lies in the temperament of the person experiencing the passion, though they are greatly moderated by adopting good habits are not eliminated at source, but merely rendered impermanent, because habit is not temperament, within which these passions find their source. So the man who controls himself and governs his nature is more praiseworthy than one who, possessed of a good nature, maintains good conduct or returns to the right path after straying from it, just as it is more praiseworthy to control a temperamental horse than one without vices.

I say though that the flamelets which rain from her beauty destroy innate vices, those which are part of our nature, so as to make it clear that her beauty has the power to alter nature in those who gaze on it, which is a miraculous thing. And this confirms what has been said in the chapter above, where I said that she is an aid to our faith.

Lastly, where I say: *So let those ladies who know her beauty*, I reveal the end for which such beauty was fashioned, under the pretence of admonishing others. And I say that any lady who hears her beauty denigrated for some defect or other should gaze at this example of perfection, for it is clear that such beauty was created not only to improve

the good, but to turn even bad to good. At the close, I add: *Conceived by Him who moves the universe*, that is by God, to make it clear that nature produced this effect by divine intent. This completes my explanation of the second main section of the *canzone*.

Chapter IX: Ocular Vision

Having explained the first two sections of the *canzone*, as intended, we proceed in sequence to the third, where I intend to clear the *canzone* of a potentially unfavourable allegation. What I am referring to is my writing of a *ballata* (*'Voi che savete ragionar d'Amore'*), prior to composing the *canzone*, in which I called this lady proud and pitiless, since I felt she had become somewhat haughty towards me, and this appears to contradict what I said of her above. So I turn to the *canzone*, and under the pretext of teaching it how to excuse itself, I in fact make excuse for it; to address inanimate objects in this way is a figure of speech, called *prosopopoeia* (*personification*) by the rhetoricians and often employed by the poets. This third section begins with: *Canzone, you seem to contradict*. In order to clarify the meaning of this section I will sub-divide it into three parts. Firstly I state what requires to be excused; then I proceed to the excuse, where I say: *You know heaven*; and finally I address the *canzone*, instructing it what it should do, when I say: *So excuse yourself should need arise*.

Firstly then, I effectively say: *Canzone, you who speak of this lady with such praise, you seem to contradict one of your sisters*, and I use the word *sister* metaphorically: for just as we call a woman who is born of the same parent as us, our sister, so a work made by the same maker may be so described, for our work is in a sense begotten. Then I explain why the *canzone* seems to contradict the *ballata*, saying: *You depict her as humble, while the other presents her as haughty*, that is to say, *proud and disdainful*, which is the same thing.

Having made this allegation I carry on to excuse the *canzone*, employing an example where the truth is sometimes in conflict with appearances, and at other times is altered by a change of perspective. I say: *You know the sky, ever bright and clear*, that is, always possessing a certain degree of illumination, though for certain reasons we are sometimes permitted to speak of it as being dark. Here it should be understood that correctly speaking only light and colour are visible, as Aristotle states in the second book of *On the Soul*, and in *On Sense and Sensibilia*. Other things are not visible, correctly speaking, for some other sense also perceives them, so that they cannot properly be said to be simply visible, or simply tangible; and such are form, size, number, motion, and state of rest, which we term common *sensibilia*, things perceivable by more than one sense. But light and colour are, properly speaking, visible because we apprehend them by sight alone and no other sense. These visible things, the specific as well as the common, insofar as they are visible, enter the eye – I mean their forms, not

the things themselves – through the diaphanous medium of the atmosphere, as an image not matter, as if through transparent glass. The passage of the visible form through this medium terminates in the fluid of the eye's pupil, because that fluid has a boundary – like a mirror of glass backed by lead – so that it cannot pass through, but is arrested there like a ball that is stopped by being struck, so that the form, which cannot be seen in the transparent medium, appears clearly, here where it is arrested. That is why an image can be seen in lead-backed glass and not in glass alone. The visual spirit, which passes from the pupil to the front of the brain where the principal source of sensory ability resides, immediately reproduces the form, without any lapse of time, and so we are able to see. Thus for vision to be true, that is to say, to be able to see a thing precisely as it is, the medium through which the form reaches the eye must be colourless, and so too the optical fluid; otherwise the visible form would be tinged with the colour of the medium as well as that of the pupil. For this reason, those who wish to tint things a particular shade in a mirror place something with that colour between the glass and the lead, so that the glass is tinted by it. Plato and other philosophers state that our sight is not a result of a visible form entering the eye, but of our visual power extending out to the thing visible: however this opinion is rejected as false by Aristotle in his book *On Sense and Sensibilia*.

Having examined the manner in which vision occurs, it is clear that though stars are uniformly bright and shining, and undergo no alteration but that of local movement, as is proved in the book *On Heaven and Earth*, they may, for a number of reasons, not appear bright and shining. This may be due to the medium which is continually changing. The medium varies in the degree of light it transmits, according to the presence or absence of the Sun; when it is present the medium, which is diaphanous, is so full of light that it conquers that of the stars which no longer seem to shine. The medium also varies in density and moistness, due to the vapours continually rising from the earth. For this reason the medium alters the images of the stars which it transmits, creating darkness when dense, and variations in colour when moist or dry.

Stars may appear less bright also due to illness or fatigue of the eye, the visual organ undergoing change, creating discoloration and dimness, for example when the membrane of the pupil becomes bloodshot due to illness, such that objects appear red, and the stars become coloured. Because the sight is weakened, some deterioration of the visual power occurs, such that objects seem out of focus and blurred, as writing does on damp paper. That is why many people, wishing to read, have to hold the writing some distance away from their eyes, so the image may enter the eye more clearly and

sharply, clarifying their vision. I had experience of stars becoming blurred, in the very year this *canzone* was created, for having greatly strained my vision by close study my visual powers were weakened to such an extent that the stars appeared to me completely veiled in a white haze. However, by extended rest in dark and cool places, and by bathing the surface of my eyes in clear cold water I restored the powers which had deteriorated, and my former state of healthy vision returned. Thus we see that there are many reasons, as noted above, why a star may appear otherwise than it truly is.

Chapter X: Completion of the Literal Meaning

Following that digression, which was required to clarify the truth, I return to the subject and say that just as our eyes sometimes judge a star to be otherwise than in its true state, so this little *ballata* treated of the lady according to her appearance, which did not reflect the truth due to an infirmity of the soul, impassioned by excess desire. I make this clear when I say: *For my soul was full of fear*, so much so that what I saw in her presence seemed frightening to me. Here it should be known that the more closely the agent is united with the subject, the stronger is the passion, as may be understood from Aristotle's comments in his book *On Generation*; thus the nearer the object desired is to one who desires it, the stronger the desire; and the more impassioned the soul, the more closely it is united with the sexual appetite, and the more it departs from reason, so that it judges a person almost as a lower animal rather than a human being, and merely according to appearances, without perceiving the truth. That is why a face which is in truth noble may seem disdainful and proud to us: and the little *ballata* spoke according to this kind of judgement of the senses. Thus it should be clearly understood that the *canzone*, in contrast to the little *ballata*, perceives this lady according to the truth. It is not without reason that I say: *when she looks at me*, and not: *when I look at her*. I wish, in speaking thus, to emphasise the great power her eyes had over me, for their rays passed through every part of me, as if I were transparent. Natural and supernatural reasons might be evinced for this, but let what I say here suffice: I will speak again of this in a more appropriate place.

Then where I say: *So excuse yourself should need arise*, I order the *canzone* 'to excuse itself where necessary', for the reasons mentioned above, that is whenever anyone is in doubt because of the apparent contradiction. That is to say that simply that anyone who is doubtful, because of the conflict between the *canzone* and the little *ballata*, should reflect on the explanation given. A rhetorical figure of this kind is highly praiseworthy and even essential, that is where the words are addressed to one person and the meaning to another; for words of admonition are always praiseworthy and essential, though not always becoming to everyone's lips. So, when a son is ware of vice in his father, or a servant is aware of his master's vice, and when a friend knows that by admonishing him he would increase his shame and diminish his reputation, or knows that his friend will lose patience and become angered when admonished, this figure of speech is extremely beautiful and useful, and may be appreciated as a 'virtuous pretence'. It is akin to the action of an experienced military man who attacks a fortress on

one side in order to draw its defence from the other, since battle is not joined on the side which is the object of the action.

I also order the *canzone* to seek permission from the lady to address her. Here it should be understood that one should not presume to praise another without first ascertaining carefully whether it would please the person praised; for a person often believes they are conferring praise on someone when, through the fault of the speaker or the listener, they are in fact apportioning blame. Thus it is essential to use discretion in such a matter; and this discretion is, as it were, a request for permission, in the same manner in which I order this *canzone* to request it.

That completes the explanation of the literal meaning of the *canzone* in this book. The order of proceeding laid out for this work, now demands that I progress, with truth in mind, to the allegorical explanation.

Chapter XI: The Nature of Philosophy

Returning to the beginning of the canzone as our procedure demands, I say that the lady is that lady of the intellect named Philosophy. But since praise naturally creates a desire to know the person praised; and since to know something means to comprehend what it is, both in itself and with regard to its causes, as Aristotle says at the start of his *Physics*; and since that is not explicit in the name, though it is what the name signifies, as stated in the fourth book of the *Metaphysics* (where it is said that a name signifies the explanation that constitutes a definition), it is necessary, before proceeding to articulate further praise of her, to say what this thing called Philosophy is, that is to say what the name signifies. And after revealing this, the present allegory can be treated more effectively. I will first give the origin of the name, and then proceed to deal with its meaning.

Thus, I say that in ancient Italy, about the time of Rome's foundation, which as Orosius says was around 750 years before the coming of our Saviour, in the days of Numa Pompilius, second King of the Romans, there lived a noble philosopher named Pythagoras. Those who claimed to seek knowledge before his time were termed wise men and not philosophers, men such as the seven sages of antiquity, who are still renowned, namely Solon, Chilon, Pittacus, Periander, Cleobulus the Lindian, Thales, and Bias of Priene. Pythagoras, when asked if he was wise, refused to be called so, and said he was not wise but a lover of wisdom. So after this all those dedicated to the pursuit of wisdom were termed philosophers, since *philos* in Greek means lover, and *sophos* wisdom, hence *philosopher* a 'lover of wisdom', which, we should note, is a term of humility rather than arrogance. From this word the name of its pursuit *philosophy* was derived, in the same manner as friendship derives from the word friend. So we see that philosophy is nothing but love of or friendship for knowledge or rather the seeking of it; thus everyone is in a sense a philosopher, due to the natural love which generates in everyone a desire to know.

However, since the innate tendencies are common to all mankind, we cannot distinguish one person from another on the basis of that commonality. So, when we speak of John as a friend of Martin, we do not simply refer to the natural tendency by which everyone is a friend to everyone else, but the friendship engendered over and above what is natural, and which is specific to and characteristic of individuals. So no one is called a philosopher simply because of the common love of knowledge. According to Aristotle's definition in the eighth book of the *Ethics*, a friend is one whose friendship is not concealed from the person loved, and to whom the

person loved is also a friend, so that goodwill is present on both sides; and this springs from utility, pleasure, or worth. Thus for someone to be termed a philosopher, there must be a love of wisdom which engenders goodwill on the other side also, such that intimacy and a demonstration of goodwill can arise between them. That is why those lacking love and devotion cannot be called philosophers, since both attributes must be present. And just as friendship founded on pleasure or usefulness is incidental and not true friendship, as the *Ethics* demonstrates, so philosophy founded on pleasure or usefulness is incidental and not true philosophy.

We should therefore not call that person a philosopher who is only a friend of wisdom in part, such as the many who enjoy listening to *canzoni*, and devoting time to them, and studying Rhetoric or Music, but who avoid and shun the other sciences, all of which are branches of wisdom. Nor should we call someone a philosopher who is a friend of wisdom for the sake of its usefulness, such as those jurists, physicians, and many members of religious orders, who study to secure financial reward or high office rather than to gain knowledge; and who would not persevere in their study if they were granted what they seek to gain. And just as the friendship that exists for the sake of its usefulness can least of all be called so, those I mention should least be called philosophers. Thus, just as a friendship founded on worth is true, perfect and enduring, so true and perfect philosophy is that engendered by worth alone, free of ulterior motive, by virtue of the loving soul, that is to say by right desire and right reason.

So we may say that as true friendship exists when each loves the other fully, so the true philosopher loves every aspect of wisdom, and wisdom befriends the philosopher in every way, since it draws the philosopher to itself in every way, and prevents his thought straying elsewhere. That is why Wisdom herself says, in the *Proverbs of Solomon*: ‘*I love them that love me.*’ And just as true friendship, abstracted from the mind and considered in itself, takes the knowledge of virtuous action as its subject, and appetite for it as its form; so philosophy, considered in itself apart from the soul, has understanding as its subject, and an almost divine love of what is to be understood as its form. And just as the efficient cause of true love is virtue, so the efficient cause of philosophy is truth; and just as the aim of true friendship is delight in what is good, which arise from living according to what befits humanity, that is according to reason, as Aristotle appears to say in the ninth book of the *Ethics*, so the aim of philosophy is that sheer delight that suffers neither intermission nor imperfection, namely true happiness, acquired in contemplation of the truth. So it is clear now who this lady of

mine must be, according to cause and reason, and why she is called Philosophy, and who is the true philosopher and who is only incidentally so.

Yet since, through some fervour of the mind, the focus of both action and passion is sometimes called by the name of the action or passion itself – as Virgil shows in the second book of the *Aeneid* where Aeneas says to Hector: ‘Oh, light-bearer (*an action*), and hope (*a passion*) of the Trojans’, even though he was neither a light-bearer nor a hope but rather the source from which the light of counsel was emitted, and the object in whom they placed their hopes of salvation; and as Statius shows in the fifth book of the *Thebaid*, where Hypsipyle says to Archemorus: ‘O consolation for my lost estate and fatherland, O honour of my servitude’; and as we show daily when pointing to a friend we say: ‘There is friendship,’ or when a father calls his son: ‘My love’ – so by ancient custom the sciences on which philosophy focuses her gaze most fervently are known by her name, for example Natural Science, Ethics and Metaphysics, the latter, since she gazes on it from profound necessity and with the greatest fervour, being known as the First Philosophy. So we may see how the sciences are also termed Philosophy.

Now that we have seen what the first and true philosophy is in essence – that is the lady of whom I speak – and how her noble name has been customarily extended to the sciences, I will proceed with my praise of her.

Chapter XII: Divine Philosophy

The motive which moved me to compose this *canzone* has been explained so fully in the first chapter of this book, that it requires no further explanation, since it may easily be deduced from the exposition already made. So I will progress through the literal text, according to the subdivisions already made, revealing the allegorical meaning as required.

I write: *Love, that speaks to me within my mind*. By 'Love' I mean the study I applied to acquiring the love of this lady: here it should be known that study may be taken in two distinct ways: one is that study which leads someone to take up and art or science, the other the study they undertake, while making use of their acquired habit. It is the former here which I call 'Love' which stirred my mind with endless, new and deeply profound reflections on this lady who is the subject of the argument above; since that is what study, which sets itself to generating friendship, customarily does, since study from its inception reflects on the noblest attributes of friendship, through desire for it. This is that study and affection which customarily precedes the birth of friendship in human beings, when love has been born on the one side and seeks and desires to engender it on the other, for, as has been said above, Philosophy exists when wisdom and the soul have become such friends that each is wholly loved by the other, in the manner stated above. It is unnecessary to explain the first stanza any further here, as it was explained as a poem in the literal exposition and by means of this first explanation the second allegorical explanation can easily be understood.

Now we proceed to the second stanza, which commences her praise, where I say: *The Sun, that circles the whole world*. Here it should be known that just as it is appropriate to treat of things which are not perceptible by the senses by means of those that are, so it is appropriate to treat of the unintelligible by means of the intelligible. Thus, in the same way as we began to speak, in the literal exposition, of the material and perceptible Sun, so now we must begin to speak of the spiritual and intelligible Sun, which is God.

Nothing that can be sensed is worthier to act as a symbol of God than the Sun. It illuminates with visible light first itself and then all celestial and earthly bodies; so, God illuminates with intellectual light first Himself and then all the celestial and all other intelligent beings. The Sun gives life to all things with its heat, and even if some are destroyed by it this results not from the originating cause but rather as an accidental effect. Similarly God gives life to the virtue in all things, and if any are evil this is not a result of divine intent, but must arise accidentally within the process brought about by that

intent. For, though God made both good and evil angels, he made the good angels alone by intent. The malice of the evil ones arose afterwards, despite his intent, yet not so independent of it that God himself was unable to foresee their malice. Yet so great was his affection in generating spiritual creatures, that the foreknowledge that some must come to an evil end did not and could not deflect God from his act of creation. For Nature would not be worthy of praise if through knowing beforehand that a certain proportion of some trees' blossoms were destined to perish she failed to produce any: and because of a partial barrenness abandoned production of the fruitful ones.

I say, therefore, that God, who knows all (for his encompassing is his knowledge) sees nothing nobler than what he sees when he gazes where Philosophy dwells. For though God, gazing on Himself, sees all things at once, yet they are distinct, inasmuch as the distinction between things exists within Him, in such a way that the effect exists within its cause. He sees then this noblest of things absolutely, inasmuch as he sees her perfectly in Himself and in his essence. For if we recall what was said above, Philosophy is the loving use of wisdom which exists in God in greatest measure, since in Him exist supreme wisdom, supreme love and supreme being; for it could not exist elsewhere if it did not proceed from Him. Divine Philosophy is therefore of divine essence, because in Him nothing can be added to essence; and she is noblest because the divine essence is so; and she exists in Him in a true and perfect manner, as if by eternal marriage. In the other intelligences she exists in a lesser way, like a mistress in whom no lover can find complete joy, though her aspect satisfies their longing. Thus it may be said that God sees, that is knows, nothing as noble as she. I say nothing since he sees and distinguishes all things, as said above, seeing Himself to be the cause of all. O how truly noble and excellent is the heart that knows the Emperor of Heaven's bride, not bride alone, but sister and dearest daughter!

Chapter XIII: Philosophy's Existence in the Intelligences

Having seen how, in commencing this lady's praises, careful consideration shows her to exist primarily within the divine substance, we must go on to note my affirmation of her secondary existence within the created intelligences. Thus I say: *Those Intelligences above admire her*, and note here that I say *above* to establish her relationship to God as mentioned previously; and I exclude those Intelligences exiled from their heavenly home who cannot philosophise as the love in them is wholly extinguished, while to philosophise, as has been said, requires love to be present. So we see that the Intelligences in Hell are deprived of the sight of this beautiful lady, and since she is intellectual blessedness, the state of being deprived of her is bitter and filled with profound sadness.

Next, where I say: *And folk down here who are in love*, I lower my gaze to reveal that she exists in a secondary manner in human intellect, and this human philosophy I pursue through the work, by praising it. Thus I say that those who are in love here, that is, in this life, find her in their thought: not always, but when Love makes them aware of her peacefulness. We must note three things touched upon here. The first is where I say *who are in love*, distinguishing these folk from the rest of the human race; and such a distinction must be made, for as is evident and as I intend to explain further, a large proportion of mankind lives by the senses rather than reason; and those who live by the senses cannot love this lady because they cannot apprehend her.

The second point of note is where I say: *When Love makes*, specifying a distinct time. And this distinction is likewise necessary, for though the separate Intelligences gaze on this lady continuously, the human intellect is unable to do so because human nature needs to sustain itself in many ways, beyond the act of speculation which satisfies intellect and reason; as a result our wisdom is sometimes potential rather than actual, which is not the case with other Intelligences, whose perfection lies in their being solely intellectual in nature. When our mind is not involved in speculation it cannot truly be said to be joined with Philosophy except inasmuch as that it has acquired the habit of philosophising, and the power to awaken her; and therefore she is sometimes found to be with those who are in love here, and sometimes not.

The third point is where I speak of the hour when they are with her, that is, the hour when Love makes them know her peace, which means simply the period of speculation, because study makes this lady's peace known only through the act of speculation. Thus we see that this lady exists

primarily in God, but secondarily in the other discrete Intelligences, through their continuous contemplation of her, and then in the human intellect through its intermittent contemplation. Nevertheless those who take her as their lady should always be termed philosophers, even if they are not always engaged in philosophising, because one is designated principally by one's habitual occupation. So we call someone virtuous who possesses the habit of virtue, not merely when performing a virtuous action; and we call someone eloquent even when they are silent because they possess the facility of eloquence. And so, insofar as human intellect partakes of her, praise of her follows to show how large a part of her goodness is granted to human nature.

Thus I say: *Her being pleases God so, who made her* – from whom it derives as from the primal source – *endlessly, beyond the powers of our nature*, which she renders beautiful and virtuous. Therefore, though some acquire the habit of philosophising, no one attains the true habit because the initial study, though which the habit is acquired, lacks the power to acquire it in a perfect manner. Here she is praised humbly: for, perfect or imperfect, philosophy cannot lose the name of perfection. And because her perfection is limitless I say the soul of Philosophy: *reveals Him then in what she brings*, that is, God instils his light in her forever. Here we must recall what was said above, namely, that love is the form of Philosophy, and therefore is here called her soul. This love is visible in the exercise of wisdom, which brings with it wondrous beauties, namely contentment in every temporal circumstance, and contempt for what others take as their masters. So it may happen that other poor wretches perceiving this, and reflecting on their defects, out of desire for perfection faint under a weight of sighs. This is what I mean by: *That the eyes, into which she shines, send messages of longing, to the heart, that mix with air and turn to sighs.*

Chapter XIV: In Praise of Love

Just as in the literal exposition we descended from general praise to specific, with respect to the soul and then the body, so here too we will descend from general commendation to the particular. As was said above, Philosophy takes wisdom as her material subject, love as her form, and the act of speculation as the combination of the two. So in the stanza that begins: *Divine virtue descends in her* I intend to praise love, which is part of philosophy. Here it must be observed that the descent of virtue or power from one thing into another is simply the latter's taking on the likeness of the former; just as in natural agents we clearly see that when their power descends into receptive things those things take on their likeness to the extent that they can. So we see that the Sun, as its rays shine here below, causes things to take on its likeness, to the degree that they can receive the power of its light.

So, I say that God causes love to adopt his likeness to the extent that it can resemble Him. And I indicate the nature of that causation in saying: *as into the Angels that see Him*. Here it must be known further that the first cause, namely God, instils his virtue into things by means of either direct radiance or reflected light. Accordingly, the divine light shines on the Intelligences without mediation, and is then reflected on to other things by these previously illuminated Intelligences. And since light and reflected light are mentioned here, I will clarify the difference between them according to Avicenna. I say that it is the custom for philosophers to term luminosity *light* as it exists in its original source, *radiance* in the medium between its source and the first body it illuminates, and *reflected light* when it is reflected to some other place which is illuminated.

Now, I say that the divine power, without mediation, causes this love to resemble itself. This can be easily clarified as follows: since divine love is eternal in every respect, so its object must necessarily be eternal, and thus what it loves is eternal; and this love must love in the same way, since wisdom, to which this love relates, is eternal. Therefore it is written of her: '*I was ordained for all time,*' and her eternity may be clearly noted at the beginning of St John's Gospel.

Thus it arises, that where this love shines all others grow faint and are almost quenched, since the eternal object of this love completely exceeds and overwhelms all others. The greatest philosophers have shown this clearly by their actions, thus exhibiting to us their indifference to all except wisdom. So, Democritus, careless of his own person, would not trim his hair, beard, or nails. Plato, careless of worldly goods, was unconcerned with

princely possessions, though he was the son of a prince, and Aristotle, needing no friend but philosophy, disputed with his next best friend after wisdom, namely the aforementioned Plato. Why speak of these only, when there are many others, such as Zeno, Socrates, and Seneca who condemned life in favour of ideas. It is clear therefore that divine virtue descends into men through this love, just as it does into Angels. This is shown later where my text says: *And if any noble lady disbelieves it, let her walk with her and note her gestures.* By noble lady I mean an intellectual soul both worthy and free in the exercise of the powers proper to it, that is of reason. So, other kinds of soul should be called handmaidens and not ladies, since they exist not for themselves, but for others; for as Aristotle says in the *Metaphysics*, that thing is free which exists for its own purpose and not another's.

I say: *Let her walk with her and note her gestures*, that is, accompany this love and see what she may find within it. The text touches on this in part where it says: *Here where she speaks, a spirit descends*, that is to say, where philosophising is in process, a celestial thought descends, which proclaims it a more than human activity; and I say: *from heaven*, to indicate that not only she but her companion thoughts are remote from base earthly things. Subsequently, I explain how she kindles, and intensifies love wherever she appears through the sweetness of her gestures, since all of these gestures are appropriate, gentle and free from excess. As a greater inducement to join her company, I go on to say: *Noble in woman, what we find in her, and beauty, what most resembles her.*

Further I add: *And her countenance it may be said allows belief*, and here it is to be noted that sight of this lady was granted to us, generously, not only so that we might see her face, which she reveals, but in order that we might long to know the things she keeps hidden from us. For just as our reason perceives much through her that becomes comprehensible but would seem miraculous without her, so it is possible to believe through her that every miracle can be seen by superior intellect to have a rational cause and thus the power to exist. Our true faith has its origin here, out of which arises hope that longs for things foreseen; and from this springs the work of charity. By these three virtues, faith, hope and charity we rise, to philosophise in that celestial Athens where Stoics, Peripatetics, and Epicureans combine, in the light of eternal truth, in a single harmony of will.

Chapter XV: In Praise of Wisdom

In the previous chapter this glorious lady was praised according to one of her component parts, namely love. In this chapter I intend to explain the stanza commencing: *Such things appear in her aspect*, and take up essential praise of the other part, namely wisdom. The text then, says that things are revealed in her aspect that manifest some part of the joy of Paradise, and it distinguishes the places where that joy appears, namely in her eyes and in her smile.

Here it should be known that Wisdom's eyes are her proofs, by means of which truth is seen with greatest certainty, and her smiles are her persuasive arguments, in which the inner light of Wisdom is revealed as if from behind a veil; and in each the highest joy of blessedness is felt, which is the greatest good of Paradise. Such joy cannot be found in anything down here except by gazing at her eyes and her smile.

And here is the reason: since everything naturally desires its own perfection, man cannot be happy, that is to say blessed, without this perfection; for even if he possessed everything else, lacking this perfection desire would still exist in him, and desire cannot co-exist with blessedness since blessedness is perfect while desire lacks completeness; for no one desires what he has, but rather what he has not, which is an obvious lack of completeness. It is by means of this gaze alone that we achieve human perfection, that is, the perfection of reason, on which, as our most sublime faculty, all our being depends; while all of our other activities, feeling, nutrition, and the rest, exists only for its sake, and for the sake of no other thing. If reason is perfect, so is humanity, in that man, insofar as he is man, finds all his desire to be at an end, and is thereby blessed. That is why the book of Wisdom says: *'He who casts away wisdom and learning is unhappy,'* for to do so is to deprive the self of the state of happiness. It follows that this state is achieved through the habitual pursuit of wisdom, that is, the state of contentment, according to Aristotle's opinion. Thus we see how some of the attributes of Paradise appear in her countenance. And so we read, in the book of Wisdom, cited above, where it says of her: *'She is the brightness of the eternal light, and the flawless mirror of the majesty of God.'*

So, in saying: *They overwhelm this intellect of ours* I am excusing myself by confessing that I can say little about these things because of their transcendent nature. Here it should be noted that these things dazzle our intellect to some degree in that certain things are affirmed to exist which our intellect cannot perceive, namely, God, eternity and primal matter, things

which certainly are witnessed to, and in profound faith believed to exist, but which we cannot understand because of their nature; and it is only by reasoning negatively about their alternatives that we can approach an understanding of them, and in no other way.

However some may seriously doubt whether wisdom can make men blessed if there are certain things it cannot reveal perfectly to them, for man has a natural desire to know, without satisfaction of which he cannot be blessed. To this we may reply simply that the natural desire in all things is in proportion to its capacity for satisfaction; otherwise desire would operate against itself, which is impossible, and Nature would have created it in vain which is equally impossible. It would operate against itself since while desiring perfection it would desire imperfection, since it would continue desiring endlessly and would never fulfil its desire; and this is the error the wretched miser makes, by failing to understand that his desire must be endless because it seeks to realise an infinite gain. Then too, Nature would have created it in vain, because it would be directed to no specific end. Therefore human desire in this life is in proportion to the wisdom that can be gained here, and its limit is not exceeded except through some error beyond Nature's intent. Equally it is proportionate within the angelic nature, and limited by the quantity of wisdom that the nature of each can apprehend. That is why the Saints are free from envy of one another, because each has attained the limit of their desire, which desire is in proportion to the nature of their goodness. And that is why, since it is not within the capacity of our nature to know God and those other specifics, the desire for such knowledge is not in our nature. In this way the doubt should be dispelled.

Next, where I say: *Her beauty rains flamelets of fire*, I graduate downwards to another joy of Paradise, namely that moral happiness, second in order to the primary happiness, which derives from her beauty. Here it should be known that Philosophy's beauty is morality, for just as the body's beauty derives in its degree from the proper ordering of the members, so the beauty of wisdom, wisdom being the body of Philosophy, as has been said, derives from the ordering of the moral virtues, which enable her to grant pleasures perceptible to the senses. Thus I say that her beauty, that is morality, rains flamelets of fire, that is, right desire, which is created by the pleasure imparted by moral teachings, a desire that turns us away from the natural vices, let alone all the others. From this is born the happiness Aristotle defines in the first book of the Ethics, where he says that it consists of: *'acting in accordance with virtue throughout one's whole life.'* And when I say: *So let those ladies who know her beauty*, I continue in praise of her, begging others to follow her example, by telling them how she may

benefit them, namely that all that follow her become good. So I say that those ladies, that is, souls, who hear their beauty slighted because it does not appear as it should, should gaze on this exemplar.

Here it should be observed that beauty of the soul consists of its good habits, above all its virtues, which may be rendered less beautiful and pleasing by pride or vanity, as will be seen in a later book. Thus I say that to avoid such an effect we should study her, specifically the way in which she exemplifies humility, that is, the part of her termed moral philosophy. And I add that by gazing on that part of wisdom, every person prone to vice will become upright and good. So I say: *This is she who humbles haughtiness*, that is, who gently turns all who stray back to their proper course.

Finally, praising wisdom in the highest, I say that she is the mother of all things, and the origin of each and every motion, by affirming that God created the universe with her, and in particular the motion of the heavens that generates all things, and from which all movement takes its origin and impetus, and in adding: *Conceived by Him who moves the universe*. I mean that she existed in divine thought, which is intellect itself, when He created the universe, from which it follows that she was involved in its creation. That is why Solomon, in the book of Proverbs, speaking in the person of Wisdom, says: *'When he prepared the heavens, I was there; when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: when he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the foundations of the deep: when he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then, I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.'*

Oh worse than dead are you who flee her friendship! Open your eyes and gaze forth! For she loved you before you existed, preparing and ordering your coming; and, after you were made, she came to you in your own likeness to set you on the true path. Though not all of you can enter her presence, yet honour her in the person of her friends, and follow their commands as those who proclaim the will of this eternal Empress – close not your ears to Solomon, who demands this of you with the words: *'the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.'* – follow them, gaze on their works that should be a light to you, in the journey, so swift, of this life.

And here we may complete the true meaning of the present *canzone*. For the last verse, indeed, appended as a *tornato*, may be easily understood from the literal exposition, except insofar as it says I called the lady *proud and disdainful*. Here it should be known that Philosophy seemed proud to me, at the start, as regards her body, that is, wisdom, since she did not smile

at me, for I failed as yet to understand her proofs. The fault in all this was mine. From this, and from what has been explained in the literal exposition, the allegory of the *tornato* is plain, such that it is now time to bring this book to an end, in order to proceed further.

End of Book III

Book IV

Canzone Terza (Original Italian Text)

Le dolci rime d'amor ch'i' solia
Cercar ne' miei pensieri
Convien ch'io lasci; non perch'io non speri
Ad esse ritornare,
Ma perché li atti disdegnosi e feri
Che ne la donna mia
Sono appariti m'han chiusa la via
De l'usato parlare.
E poi che tempo mi par d'aspettare,
Diporrò giù lo mio soave stile,
Ch'i' ho tenuto nel trattar d'amore;
E dirò del valore,
Per lo qual veramente omo è gentile,
Con rima aspr' e sottile;
Riprovando 'l giudicio falso e vile
Di quei che voglion che di gentilezza
Sia principio ricchezza.
E, cominciando, chiamo quel signore
Ch'a la mia donna ne li occhi dimora,
Per ch'ella di se stessa s'innamora.

Tale imperò che gentilezza volse,
Secondo 'l suo parere,
Che fosse antica possession d' avere
Con reggimenti belli;
E altri fu di più lieve sapere,
Che tal detto rivolse,
E l'ultima particula ne tolse,
Ché non l'avea fors'elli!
Di retro da costui van tutti quelli
Che fan gentile per ischiatta altrui
Che lungiamente in gran ricchezza è stata;
Ed è tanto durata
La così falsa oppinion tra nui,
Che l'uom chiama colui
Omo gentil che può dicere: "Io fui
Nepote, o figlio, di cotal valente",
Benché sia da niente.
Ma vilissimo sembra, a chi 'l ver guata,
Cui è scorto 'l cammino e poscia l'erra,
E tocca a tal, ch'è morto e va per terra!

Chi diffinisce: “Omo è legno animato”,
Prima dice non vero,
E, dopo ‘l falso, parla non intero;
Ma più forse non vede.
Similmente fu chi tenne impero
In diffinire errato,
Ché prima puose ‘l falso e, d’altro lato,
Con difetto procede;
Ché le divizie, sì come si crede,
Non posson gentilezza dar né tòrre,
Però che vili son da lor natura:
Poi chi pinge figura,
Se non può esser lei, non la può porre,
Né la diritta torre
Fa piegar rivo che da lungi corre.
Che siano vili appare ed imperfette,
Ché, quantunque collette,
Non posson quietar, ma dan più cura;
Onde l’animo ch’è dritto e verace
Per lor discorrimento non si sface.

Né voglion che vil uom gentil divegna,
Né di vil padre scenda
Nazion che per gentil già mai s'intenda;
Questo è da lor confesso:
Onde lor ragion par che sé offenda
In tanto quanto assegna
Che tempo a gentilezza si convegna,
Diffinando con esso.
Ancor, segue di ciò che innanzi ho messo,
Che siam tutti gentili o ver villani,
O che non fosse ad uom cominciamento;
Ma ciò io non consento,
Ned ellino altresì, se son cristiani!
Per che a 'ntelletti sani
È manifesto i lor diri esser vani,
E io così per falsi li riprovo,
E da lor mi rimovo;
E dicer voglio omai, sì com'io sento,
Che cosa è gentilezza, e da che vene,
E dirò i segni che 'l gentile uom tene.

Dico ch'ogni virtù principalmente
Vien da una radice:
Vertute, dico, che fa l'uom felice
In sua operazione.
Questo è, secondo che l'Etica dice,
Un abito eligente
Lo qual dimora in mezzo solamente,
E tai parole pone.
Dico che nobiltate in sua ragione
Importa sempre ben del suo subietto,
Come viltate importa sempre male;
E vertute cotale
Dà sempre altrui di sé buono intelletto;
Per che in medesimo detto
Convegnono ambedue, ch'en d'uno effetto.
Onde convien da l'altra vegna l'una,
O d'un terzo ciascuna;
Ma se l'una val ciò che l'altra vale,
E ancor più, da lei verrà più tosto.
E ciò ch'io dett'ho qui sia per supposto.

È gentilezza dovunqu'è vertute,
Ma non vertute ov'ella;
Sì com'è 'l cielo dovunqu'è la stella,
Ma ciò non e converso.
E noi in donna e in età novella
Vedem questa salute,
In quanto vergognose son tenute,
Ch'è da virtù diverso.
Dunque verrà, come dal nero il perso,
Ciascheduna vertute da costei,
O vero il gener lor, ch'io misi avanti.
Però nessun si vanti
Dicendo: "Per ischiatta io son con lei",
Ch'elli son quasi dei
Quei c'han tal grazia fuor di tutti rei;
Ché solo Iddio a l'anima la dona
Che vede in sua persona
Perfettamente star: sì ch'ad alquanti
Che seme di felicità sia costa,
Messo da Dio ne l'anima ben posta.

L'anima cui adorna esta bontate
Non la si tiene ascosa,
Ché dal principio ch'al corpo si sposa
La mostra infin la morte.
Ubidente, soave e vergognosa
È ne la prima etate,
E sua persona adorna di bieltate
Con le sue parti accorte;
In giovinezza, temperata e forte,
Piena d'amore e di cortese lode,
E solo in lealtà far si diletta;
È ne la sua senetta
Prudente e giusta, e larghezza se n'ode,
E 'n se medesima gode
D'udire e ragionar de l'altrui prode;
Poi ne la quarta parte de la vita
A Dio si rimarita,
Contemplando la fine che l'aspetta,
E benedice li tempi passati.
Vedete omai quanti son l'ingannati!

Contra-li-erranti mia, tu te n'andrai;
E quando tu sarai
In parte dove sia la donna nostra,
Non le tenere il tuo mestier coverto:
Tu le puoi dir per certo:
"Io vo parlando de l'amica vostra".

The Third Canzone (English Translation)

Those sweet rhymes of love I must forsake,
Those I used to seek within my thoughts,
Not because I lose all hope
Of turning to them once again,
But because the proud disdainful manner
That my lady now bears towards me
Has closed the path
Of customary speech.
And since this time seems one of waiting,
I will set aside the sweet style,
That I used for poems of love;
And speak of worth
That makes one truly noble,
In harsh and subtle rhymes;
Refuting the false and base belief
Of those who contest that wealth
Is the source of true nobility.
And, firstly, I call upon that lord
Who lives within my lady's eyes,
Such that of herself she is enamoured.

A certain ruler thought nobility,
For so it seemed to him,
Lay in ancestral wealth
And perfect manners;
Another, of inferior cast,
Reworked this saying,
Ignored the latter phrase,
Perhaps lacking that perfection!
Behind them came all those
Who think a man noble if his race
Has long been accustomed to great riches;
And now this false opinion
Has so endured among us,
One calls another noble
If he can simply say he is the son,
Or grandson, of some man of note,
Though he himself is nothing.
Yet he's the worst of all, in truth,
Who, shown the road, still goes astray,
And like a dead man walks the earth!

He who says: 'Man is living timber',
Tells an untruth,
And, in what's false, leaves much unsaid;
Though he may see no deeper.
The ruler of the Empire erred likewise
In his definition,
Since its first phrase is false,
And then what follows is defective;
For riches, despite what is believed,
Neither deny nor grant nobility,
For of its very nature wealth is base;
Whoever tries to draw a form
Cannot, if he cannot conceive it,
Nor can an upright tower
Be undermined by a distant river.
It's clear that riches are imperfect,
And are base, for however great
They bring no peace, but rather care;
And so the true and upright mind
Is never troubled by losing them.

Nor will men grant the base-born worth,
Nor grant that one whose father was
Low-born could every qualify as noble;
Or so they claim;
Yet their reasoning seems self-defeating,
Inasmuch as it asserts
That time is needed for nobility,
And thus defines it so.
For, it follows from what was said,
That all are noble or forever base,
Or else that Man had no beginning.
But to this I can not consent,
Nor should they if they are Christians!
So it is clear to all sound minds
That what they say of this is idle,
And thus I say their words are false,
And dissociate myself from them;
And will now, in speaking as I think,
Of what nobility is, and of its source,
Reveal the mark of the noble man.

I say that all virtue at inception
Rises from a single source:
Virtue, I mean, that makes men happy
In every one of their actions.
As stated in the *Ethics*, virtue is
An elected habit,
Which resides only in the mean,
And those are the very words.
I say, nobility, by definition,
Always implies good in its subject,
As baseness always implies the bad;
And virtue, as defined,
Always manifests itself as good;
So that in themselves
The two agree, having one effect.
One then must arise from the other,
Or both from a third;
Yet if the one contains the other's worth
And more besides, it must be the source.
What I have stated here accept as proven.

Thus, where there's virtue there's nobility,
But nobility is not merely virtue,
As where there is a star there is sky;
Though the converse is not true.
And in women and the young,
We perceive this noble state,
Insofar as they show modesty,
Which is itself distinct from virtue.
And just as perse derives from black,
So must virtue flow from nobility,
Or rather the set of virtues, as I said.
Let no one boast then, saying:
'To birth I owe my nobility,'
For almost godlike are they
Who, free of vice, possess such grace;
Since God alone grants it to those spirits
Which he sees in themselves
Truly grounded: and as some know,
It is the seed of happiness infused
By God into the well-disposed soul.

And the soul this goodness adorns
Does not keep its goodness hidden,
But from the time she is wed to the body
She displays it, until the hour of death.
Obedient she is, sweet and modest
In life's early years,
She adorns her body with beauty,
With all her parts in harmony;
In maturity, is firm and temperate,
Full of love and courteous praise,
And solely in honesty takes delight;
Then in old age she's just,
And prudent, and praised as generous,
And is, herself, gratified
To hear and speak of others' worth;
Finally in life's fourth phase
She is wedded once more to God,
Contemplating the awaited end,
While blessing the years that have passed.
See how many now are deceived!

Against-the-errant-ones, my song, go forth;
And when you are
In that place where our lady is,
Do not hide your motive from her,
You may say to her with certainty:
'I speak to you of a friend of yours.'

Chapter I: The Motive for the *Canzone*

Love, according to the unanimous opinion of the wise who have spoken of it, and as we constantly find ourselves by experience, is what joins and unites the lover with the person loved: so that Pythagoras says: *'In Friendship one is formed from the many.'* Since things that are naturally conjoined share the same qualities, such that one is often totally transformed in nature into the other, it follows that the passions of the person loved enter into the lover, so that the love of one is communicated to the other, as are hatred and desire and all the other passions. Hence the friends of one are loved by the other, and their enemies loathed; and hence the Greek proverb: *'Among friends all things are shared.'*

So I, having become the friend of the lady mentioned in the true explanation above, began to love and hate in accord with her loves and hatreds. Thus, I began to love the followers of truth and hate the followers of falsehood and error, as she does. Yet since all things in themselves are worthy of love and not hatred, unless malice overtakes them, it is right and proper to hate the malice within them and not the things themselves, and to seek to rid them of it. If any strives to do this, it is my most excellent lady that strives to do so the most; seeks, that is, to rid things of their malice, which is the reason for their being hated; because all reason is found in her, and she is the source of worth. In accord with her actions as well as feelings, as far as I was able, I sought to despise and scorn the errors of mankind, and to defame and denigrate error, rather than those who err. By criticising errors I tried to render them displeasing, and by rendering them displeasing to rid those persons of them whom I hated because of them.

Among the errors was one I condemned the most, which is dangerous and harmful not only to those who display it but also those who condemn it, to whom it brings pain and suffering. That error was one concerning human goodness, to the extent that it is seeded in us naturally and should be called 'nobility'; an error so entrenched through bad habit and lack of intellect that almost all opinion was thereby rendered false. From false opinion false judgement sprang, and from false judgement inappropriate reverence or disdain, resulting in the good being held in vile contempt and the bad being honoured and exalted. It created the worst of confusions, as is clear to anyone who considers carefully the result of such confusion. Since my lady's looks had altered somewhat in their tenderness towards me, and especially in those features I gazed at while trying to discover whether the primal matter of the elements was contained in God – such that I refrained

from entering the field of her gaze for a while – and living, as it were, in her absence, I began to consider the defect in man reflected by the said error. To avoid idleness, which is the lady's great enemy, and to eradicate that error, which robs her of so many friends, I decided to call out to those treading this evil path, so that they might rediscover the true way. I therefore began a *canzone* with the words: *Those sweet rhymes of love*, in which I intended to return men to the true path with respect to the right conception of nobility, as can be seen by grasping the meaning of the text which I shall now explain. And since I wished to provide an essential remedy in the *canzone*, I thought it more effective not to use figurative language, but to supply the medicine the fastest way, so that health might be swiftly restored where it had been so undermined by poison that it was rushing towards foul death.

So it will not be necessary to unveil allegory in explaining the *canzone*, but simply discuss the literal meaning. By *my lady* I mean that same lady whose symbolic meaning I fully revealed in the previous *canzone*, namely that most virtuous of lights, Philosophy, whose rays make flowers bloom so they might bear the fruit of mankind's true nobility.

Chapter II: The Preface to the *Canzone*

In commencing this exposition, it is convenient to sub-divide the canzone into two sections, in order to better understand its meaning, since the first section acts as a preface, while the second contains the subject in detail. The second section begins with the second stanza, and the words: *A certain ruler thought nobility*. The first section and stanza can be further sub-divided into three parts. The first part explains why I depart from my accustomed style; in the second I define the subject; in the third I ask help from what will most provide assistance, namely truth. The second part begins: *And since this time seems one of waiting*, and the third begins: *And, firstly, I call upon that lord*.

As preface therefore I first say that I must forgo the sweet rhymes of love which my thoughts once sought, and I note the reason, saying that it is not because I no longer wish to write of love, but because my lady's new manner towards me has currently deprived me of matter for loving discourse. Here it should be known that this lady's gestures are disdainful and proud only in appearance, as may be realised from the tenth chapter of the preceding book where I also said that appearance differed from reality. How one thing may both seem sweet yet bitter, or clear yet dark, is made sufficiently obvious in that passage.

Next, in saying: *And since this time seems one of waiting*, I declare, as I said, my intended subject. Here we must not skip too lightly over what I mean by a time of waiting, since that forms the strongest motive for my change of style, but should consider how reasonable it is to wait for the proper moment in all things, and most of all in speech. Time, as Aristotle says in the fourth book of the *Physics*, is '*the measure of motion with respect to before and after*,' and '*the measure of celestial motion*' is that which disposes things here below to receive the formative powers in various ways. For at the start of Spring the earth is disposed to receive the power that forms the grass and flowers in a particular way, while in winter it is disposed differently; and one season is disposed to receive seed differently than another; and likewise our minds, insofar as they bear a relationship to the body which responds differently to the circuit of the heavens at different times. That is why great discretion must be shown in seeking or avoiding the use of words, which are, as it were, the seeds of our actions, so that they may be well-received and fruitful of effect, thereby avoiding any sterility on their part. The right moment must therefore be determined, both with respect to the speaker and the listener; because if the speaker is ill-set his words are often harmful, and if the hearer is ill-set even a good speech will be poorly

received. Thus, in *Ecclesiastes*, Solomon says that there is ‘*a time to keep silence and a time to speak.*’

So, feeling that I was too unsettled in mind to speak of love, for the reason stated in the preceding chapter, it seemed right to wait for a moment that would bring with it the achievement of all desire, and present itself like a benefactor to one not impatient of waiting. Hence, St. James the Apostle says in his Epistle: ‘*Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the late and early rain.*’ All our problems, if we seek diligently for their source, derive in some manner from our not making proper use of time.

I say then, that since it *seems a time for waiting*, I will set aside, that is forgo, *my sweet style*, which I employed when speaking of Love, and will speak of that *worth* that makes a person truly noble. Although worth can be interpreted in many ways, here it is taken to be a natural capacity or rather a goodness instilled by nature, as will be seen below. Next, I promise to handle the material *in harsh and subtle rhymes*. It should be understood here that *rhymes* may be taken in one of two ways, either broadly or narrowly, In the narrow sense it means the concordance employed between the ultimate and penultimate syllables, while in the broad sense it means all speech regulated by rhythm and metre to produce rhymed consonances; and here in this preface the latter sense is to be understood. Thus, the preface says *harsh* in respect of the sounds, which should not be sweet in so weighty a matter as this; and *subtle* in respect of the meaning, which is elicited by subtle reasoning and argument. I then add: *Refuting the false and base belief*, whereby I promise to refute the beliefs of those who are freighted with error; *false*, that is, far from truth, and *base*, that is asserted and promoted by baseness of spirit.

And it should be noted that in this preface I promise firstly to explain what is true, and then to refute what is false, while in the body of the poem I do the opposite, first refuting what is false and then explaining what is true, which seems contrary to my promise. Know then, that though I intend both, I principally wish to explain the truth; and I wish to refute the false only to make the truth clearer. I promise here that my first aim is to explain the truth, my chief concern, which should instil in a listener the desire to listen; in the treatise I first refute what is false so that when false opinion has been put to flight truth may be more freely admitted. This is the method employed by Aristotle, the master of human reason, who always combated the adversaries of truth first, and then having overcome them, demonstrated the truth.

Finally, where I say: *And, firstly, I call upon that lord*, I call on truth to be with me, a lord dwelling in the eyes, that is, in the visible proofs of Philosophy, and truth is a lord, since when wedded to it, the soul is a lady; else she is a servant deprived of all freedom. Then I say: *Such that of herself she is enamoured*, because Philosophy which is the loving use of wisdom, as has been said in the previous book, gazes at herself when the beauty of her eyes is revealed to her, which is no more than to say that the philosophic soul not only contemplates the truth but contemplates its own contemplation, and the beauty of its action, by turning its gaze on itself and becoming enamoured of itself, through the beauty of its initial gaze.

This ends the third part of the text here presented as preface.

Chapter III: The Further Structure of the *Canzone*

Having grasped the meaning of the preface, that of the body of the poem follows; and, to better reveal it, it is necessary to sub-divide it into its three principal parts. The first part treats of nobility according to others' opinion; the second treats of it according to true opinion; while the third addresses the *canzone* itself, adding beauty to what has been said. The second part begins: *I say that all virtue at inception*, while the third begins: *My song, go forth against the errant-ones*. Within these main divisions, other subdivisions must be made, in order to fully analyse the concepts set forth. No one should therefore be surprised at the number of subdivisions so made, because a great and noble undertaking is now at hand, in an area little examined by the authorities, and because the exposition I enter upon is of necessity long and subtle in order to unravel the text fully in respect of the meaning it contains.

So I say that the first part must be subdivided in two: in the first segment the opinions of others are rejected, and in the second they are refuted; the second segment begins: *He who says: 'Man is living timber'*. Then again, the first segment has two sub-sections: the one considers how the Emperor's opinion errs, the second how that of the people, devoid of reason, errs. The second sub-section begins: *Another, of inferior cast*.

I say then, in the first sub-section of the first segment: *A certain ruler thought*, that is to say a ruler who exercised Imperial authority. Note that Frederick of Swabia, the last of the Roman Emperors, that is to say, to the present time, despite the election of the uncrowned Rudolf, Adolf and Albert, after his and his descendants deaths, when he was asked what nobility was, replied that it was ancestral wealth and perfect manners. And I next say that there was *another, of inferior cast*, who, considering and analysing all parts of this definition eliminated the second part, namely *perfect manners* while retaining the first, namely *ancestral wealth*; and considering the text doubtful, perhaps because he lacked perfect manners yet wished to retain his reputation for nobility, he defined the term simply as long-possessed ancestral wealth, merely to suit himself. I claim that this is almost the universal opinion, in saying that there follow behind all who count a man noble if he is simply of a stock that has long-established wealth, since almost everyone sings to this same tune. These received opinions, though the latter does not concern us, seem to have two weighty reasons in support of them. The first is Aristotle's belief that what the majority hold true cannot be entirely false; the second stems from the superior authority of Imperial Majesty. In order that the truth, which outweighs all prior authority,

may be more clearly seen, I intend to discuss the usefulness and validity of these reasons. And since nothing can be known about Imperial authority unless its roots are known, it is first necessary to discuss these roots in a special chapter.

Chapter IV: Imperial Authority

The fundamental root of Imperial Majesty is, in truth, the necessity for human society, which is established to one end, that is the good life, which none can attain alone and without aid from others, since the individual needs many things which no one person can provide. Thus Aristotle states that man is by nature a social animal. And just as the individual needs the domestic companionship of a family for their well-being, so a household requires community, otherwise it would suffer many defects that would impair happiness. And since a community cannot provide for its own well-being completely of itself, a city must provide it.

Furthermore, a city needs mutual relations and friendship with neighbouring cities, for the sake of its arts and defence, and thus kingdoms were created. Since the human mind does not rest content with limited territory but always seeks to achieve glory through conquest, as we know from experience, war and discord must arise between one kingdom and another, leading to disturbances in neighbouring cities, in the city itself, in the community, and in individual households, such that happiness is impaired. Therefore, in order to eliminate these wars and their causes, the whole earth, and all that the human race possesses, should comprise a Monarchy, that is a single principality, with a single prince, who owning all and therefore lacking desire for anything further, would keep the lesser kings satisfied within the boundaries of their kingdoms, and preserve the peace among them, so guaranteeing the cities rest. Through peace, communities would come to love one another, and in this love all households would satisfy their needs, which when satisfied would bring man happiness, for that is the end for which he was born.

With respect to this we can read the words of Aristotle in the *Politics* where he says that if many are directed to a common goal, one should be the governor or ruler, and the remainder the ruled or governed. This is what we see aboard ship, where the different tasks and objectives are directed to a single end, namely that of reaching the desired harbour by a safe passage. Just as each officer directs his activity to its end, so there is one individual who takes account of all these ends and directs them to their final purpose: and that is the captain, whose commands must be obeyed. We see the same in religious orders, and armies, and in all things directed to an end. Thus it is evident, that to perfect the universal social ordering of the human species, there must be one individual, who should possess, like a captain, universal and undisputed authority, in order to direct the various essential offices, addressing the varying conditions of the world. This pre-eminent office is

indisputably the Empire, because it commands all other commands. And so he who holds this office, the Emperor, is the commander of all, and his word is law and should be obeyed by all, while every other command gains strength and authority from his. Thus it is clear that Imperial majesty and authority are supreme in respect to the human race.

Nonetheless, someone might quibble with this, arguing that though the world needs an Imperial office, there is no good reason why a Roman prince should have the supremacy, as I wish to prove, because Rome's power was not gained by reason, decree, or universal consensus, but by force, which appears to be opposed to reason. To this we may simply reply that the election of this supreme officer must derive from that wisdom, namely God, which provides for all men; otherwise the election would not represent all men, for prior to the appointment of the officer named above no one individual addressed the common good. And because, as can be seen from history, no race was ever or will ever be more temperate in the exercise of rule, more adept at preserving it, or more clever in acquiring it, than the Latin race, that sacred people in whom the noble blood of the Trojan race mingled, namely the Romans, therefore God chose this race for the supreme office. For since the office could not be attained without great virtue, and since its exercise demanded the greatest and most humane kindness, this was the race best disposed to fill it. Therefore it was not principally by force that the Roman people attained it but by divine providence, which transcends reason.

And Virgil concurs in this, in the first book of the *Aeneid*, when speaking in Jove's name he says: '*I have fixed no limits or duration to their possessions: I have given them empire without end.*' Force was therefore not the prime mover, as our quibbler supposed, but rather the means, as the blows of a hammer are the means to shape a knife, but the mind of the smith is the efficient and motive cause; and thus not force but reason, and divine reason moreover, was the cause of the Roman Empire. Two distinct reasons may be adduced to prove the city Imperial, and that its origin and development were specially arranged by God. But since the treatment of this subject would make this chapter overlong, and since lengthy chapters are an enemy to memory, I will extend my digression, with profit and delight, into another chapter, in order to set out the reasons indicated.

Chapter V: The Uniqueness of Rome

It is no mystery that divine providence, which wholly transcends angelic and human perception, often proceeds in ways hidden to us, when the meaning of human action is frequently concealed from human beings themselves. But there is reason to marvel when the workings of the eternal counsel are so clearly visible as to be discerned by human reason. At the beginning of this chapter I am in a position therefore to repeat the words of Solomon, who says in Proverbs, in the person of Wisdom: *'Hear; for I will speak of excellent things.'*

The immeasurable divine goodness wishing to bring into conformity with itself the human creature, which had become deformed and separated from God through the sin of the first man's transgression, it was decreed, in the supreme united consistory of the Trinity, that the Son of God should descend to earth to achieve this concord. Since the world, that is, not only heaven but earth as well, needed to be properly disposed for his arrival; and since the earth is properly so disposed only under a monarchy, that is, when wholly subject to one prince, as was said above; divine providence ordained that race and that city, namely glorious Rome, to accomplish it. And since even the dwelling place into which the celestial king was to enter needed to be supremely pure and clean, the holiest of lineages was ordained, such that after many worthy generations a woman finer than all others should be born, to become a chamber for the Son of God; and that was the lineage of David, of which was born the pride and honour of the human race, Mary. So it is written, in Isaiah: *'And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.'* Jesse was the father of that David referred to above. All this occurred at one point of time: David and Rome were born together, that is, when Aeneas came to Italy from Troy, which was a precursor to the founding of the Roman city, according to the written records. Thus the divine election of the Roman Empire is manifest in the birth of the sacred city, contemporaneous with the root of Mary's line.

And, in passing, it should be noted that from the moment when the heavens began their revolutions, they have never been better aligned than when he who created and rules them descended from above, as the mathematicians are able to ascertain by virtue of their art. Nor was the world ever, nor will it ever be so perfectly prepared as at the time when it was guided by the voice of the one sole prince and commander of the Roman people, as Luke the Evangelist witnesses. Universal peace then reigned everywhere, which it had never done before nor ever shall again, and the ship of human affairs was sailing on a swift and smooth course straight to its

true harbour. O ineffable and incomprehensible wisdom of God that at the same moment in Syria and in Italy your preparations were so perfectly complete! O utterly vile and foolish brutes that feed as though you were men, that presume to speak against our faith and seek to know, while merely weaving and ploughing, what God, in his great foresight, has ordained! Cursed be you, and your presumptions, and those who believe you!

As was said above, at the end of the preceding chapter, God not only granted Rome a unique birth but also a unique development; for, briefly, from Romulus her first founder, to the age of her greatest perfection, namely that of Augustus, the Emperor cited above, her evolution was effected by divine, not merely human, action. For if we consider the seven kings who first governed her, namely Romulus, Numa, Tullus, Ancus and the Tarquins, who were collectively the rulers and tutors of her youth so to speak, we will find that Roman history, especially that of Livy, portrays them as men whose characters differed according to the needs of the historical moment. If we then consider her later youth, after she was emancipated from the tutelage of the kings, from the time of Brutus, the first Consul, until Caesar, the first supreme prince, we find that she was elevated by godlike, not merely human, citizens whose love of her was inspired by divine, not simply human, love. This could not and would not have happened unless there had been a unique destiny conceived for her by God, and brought about by the supreme infusion of celestial grace.

Who would say that Fabricius was not divinely inspired when he refused to accept a well-nigh infinite quantity of gold to desert his country? Or Curius, whom the Samnites tried to corrupt, who refused, again through love of country, to accept a vast heap of gold, saying that the citizens of Rome sought to control not gold but its possessors? Or Mucius, who set his own hand in the flame because the blow with which he hoped to deliver Rome failed of its target? Who would say that Torquatus, who sentenced his own son to death out of love for the public good, could have endured his suffering without divine assistance? Or the Brutus mentioned above? Who would say it of the Decii and Drusi who laid down their lives for their fatherland? Who would say that Regulus, held captive after being sent from Carthage to Rome to exchange Carthaginian prisoners for Roman prisoners including himself, was moved solely by human and not divine nature when for love of Rome, after the envoys had withdrawn, he gave counsel to his own disadvantage?

Who would say of Quintus Cincinnatus, made dictator and taken from the plough, that he would have renounced his office when his term was over and returned to the plough without divine prompting? Who would say of

Camillus banished and in exile that he would have returned to free Rome of her enemies without divine influence, he who having freed her returned to exile of his own accord in order not to belittle the Senate's authority? O most sacred Cato who will presume to speak of you? Surely we cannot honour you more truly than by observing silence, following Jerome's example, who says, in his proem to the Bible, referring to Paul, that it is better to be silent than say too little. It must surely be evident, as we remember the lives of these and other godlike citizens, that those marvellous events did not occur without illumination from divine goodness, above and beyond those citizens innate virtue. It must be obvious that those men of supreme excellence were the instruments through which divine providence developed the Roman Empire, during which development the arm of God often seemed present. For was the hand of God not evident in battle when the Albans fought the Romans, for initial control of the empire, when the freedom of Rome lay in the hands of a single Roman? Was it not evident when the Gauls, having occupied Rome, secretly seized the Capitol by night and only a goose calling made it known? Was it not evident when during the war with Hannibal, the Romans lost so many citizens that three bushels of their rings were taken to Carthage, and they prepared to abandon their country, until young Scipio, the blessed, led the campaign for Roman liberation into Africa? And was the hand of God not evident when a newly-made citizen of slender means, namely Cicero, defended Roman liberty against the might of Catiline? Certainly it was.

Thus we need seek no further proof of confirmation that this sacred city had a unique birth and a unique development, conceived and ordained by God. I am of the certain opinion that the stones of her walls should be revered, and the soil on which she rests is of more worth than men claim or accept.

Chapter VI: Aristotle's Authority

In the third chapter, above, I promised to discuss the supremacy of the imperial and philosophic authorities. Having discussed the first, I shall continue my digression and consider Aristotle's authority, as promised. Here the meaning of the word *authority* should first be noted, since it is more important to clarify this in discussing philosophic authority than in imperial authority, which by reason of its majesty seems less open to question. It should be understood then that authority is nothing but '*the pronouncements of an author.*' This word, which is the Latin word *auctor* only lacking its letter *c*, has two alternative derivations. One is from a verb, *auieo* (*aio*), now little used in Latin, which signifies '*to tie together in speech.*' Anyone studying its original form carefully will observe that it exhibits its own meaning, since it is composed of the five vowels, in a variant sequence so as to form the image of a tie, vowels which are the soul and tie of every word, linking the consonants together. For a line drawn, to connect the vowels of the normal sequence, *aeiou*, in this alternative sequence would start from *a*, a line would link to *u*, return through *i* to *e*, and then run forward to *o*, forming the figure of a tie. Insofar as *author* is derived from this verb it is used only to refer to poets who tie their words together with poetic art; but we are not concerned with this meaning, rather the other origin from which it derives, as Uguccione affirms at the start of his book *Derivations*, that is the Greek word pronounced *autentin*, meaning '*worthy of being believed and obeyed.*' *Author*, in this derivation, is employed for any person deserving of being believed and obeyed. From this derives the word we are currently interested in, namely *authority*; thus we see that authority means '*acts or pronouncements worthy of being believed and obeyed.*' Thus, if I prove that Aristotle is most worthy of being believed and obeyed, it is evident that his words must be the supreme and noblest authority.

This may be proved as follows. Among workmen and craftsmen of the various arts and activities committed to one ultimate art or activity, the one pursuing this ultimate end must be obeyed and trusted by all, as being he who reflects the final goal of all the others. Thus the knight should be trusted by the sword, bridle, saddle and shield makers, and all trades established to achieve the goals of chivalry. Since all human activities need a final goal, namely the goal of human life, towards which man is directed by his humanity, the master or craftsman who studies this and reveals it to us should be obeyed and trusted above all others. That man is Aristotle, and thus he is most worthy of being believed and obeyed. In order to see why Aristotle is to be regarded as the master and exemplar of human reason,

insofar as it is directed to man's ultimate goal, we must realise that this goal of ours, which everyone naturally desires, was sought by wise men long ago. Since however, those desiring to achieve the goal are numerous, and their desires vary widely, though they have but the one common goal, it was difficult to discern this single goal, the one in which every human desire should rightly find rest.

There were many ancient philosophers, the first and foremost of whom was Zeno, who saw and believed that the aim of human life was simply strict integrity, that is, the strict and unqualified pursuit of truth and justice, showing sorrow at nothing, joy at nothing, feeling no passions. And they defined this integrity as: *'that which, without use or gain, is laudable for its own sake, according to reason.'* They and their sect were called Stoics, and to that sect glorious Cato belonged whom I dared not mention earlier.

There were other philosophers whose views and beliefs differed from theirs and the first and most important of these was Epicurus, who realising that every living creature is, as it were, directed by Nature towards its true end at birth, avoiding pain and seeking pleasure, declared that our aim was pleasure, that is, delight free from pain. Because he set no mean between the two, he claimed that pleasure was simply the absence of pain, as Cicero appears to relate in the first book of *De finibus*. One of his followers, who were named Epicureans, was Torquatus, a Roman noble and descendant of the glorious Torquatus mentioned earlier.

There were others, followers of Socrates and later of his successor Plato, who, having considered the matter more carefully, and seeing that we might commit wrongful actions through excess or deficiency, said that the aim of which we are speaking is virtue, that is, action free of excess or deficiency, and in accord with the freely adopted mean. They called this behaviour *'acting virtuously.'* They, like Plato and his nephew Speusippus, were termed Academics, from the place, the Academy, where Plato studied. They did not take their name from Socrates because his philosophy was based on negative statements.

Then, Aristotle, surnamed Stagirites, and his companion Xenocrates of Chalcedon, through their study, and the singular quasi-divine genius which Nature conferred on Aristotle, came to know this goal by much the same methods as Socrates and the Academics, and put the finishing touches to moral philosophy thereby perfecting it, so especially did Aristotle. Because Aristotle initiated the practice of speaking while strolling to and fro, he and his companions were known as Peripatetics, meaning *'those who walk about.'* And because this moral philosophy was perfected by Aristotle,

the Academics faded from memory, and all those who became attached to the sect were called Peripatetics. This group currently holds sway in teaching everywhere, and their doctrine may almost be called universal opinion. Thus it may be seen that Aristotle is the one who directs and guides mankind to its goal; and this is what I wished to show.

So, in summation, my main point has been clarified: namely that the authority of the supreme philosopher is invested with complete power. His authority is not opposed to that of the Emperor; but the latter authority without the former is dangerous, and the former without the latter is weakened, not inherently, but as a result of disharmony among the people. When both are united they are of the greatest benefit and possess the most complete power. So it is written in the book of Wisdom: *'Love the light of wisdom, all you who stand before the people,'* which is as much as to say: let the philosophic and imperial authorities unite, to achieve good and perfect government.

O wretched are you current rulers, and most wretched you who are ruled! For your government lacks philosophic authority, whether that due to your own study or other's counsel, so that the words of Ecclesiastes may be applied to all: *'Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!'* and to no land may the words which follow them be said: *'Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness.'* Take note of those at your side, enemies of God, you who have seized the government of Italy. I speak to you, Charles, King of Naples, and Frederick, King of Aragon, and to all you other tyrannical princes! Beware of those who sit by your side and offer counsel, and count how many times a day those counsellors call attention to the goal of human life. Better to swoop low like a swallow, than soar like a hawk merely to gaze on vilest things.

Chapter VII: The Meaning of the Second Stanza

Now we have seen how reverence is owed to the Imperial and philosophical authorities, we must return to the direct path of our intended exegesis. I say then, in the *canzone*, that the opinion I describe is so ingrained, unreservedly and without reasonable enquiry, in the common people, that any son or grandson of a notable person is called noble, even if they themselves are nobodies. This is the part that reads: *and now this false opinion has so endured among us, that one calls another noble if he can simply say he is the son, or grandson, of some man of note, though he himself is nothing*. It should therefore be noted that it is extremely dangerous to allow false opinion to take root through negligence. For, just as weeds spread in a neglected field and swamp and choke the blades of wheat, so that the wheat is invisible when seen from a distance, and the crop is ultimately lost, so a false opinion, if left unchecked and uncorrected, grows and spreads in the mind, so that the blades of reason, that is, of right opinion, are hidden, as it were, and also buried and lost. O how great the enterprise I have undertaken in this *canzone* in wishing to weed the neglected field of common opinion, so long deprived of cultivation! I do not, indeed, aim to clear the whole field, but only those areas in which the blades of reason are not wholly smothered; that is to say, I intend to set straight the minds of those in whom some glimmer of reason still survives due to their virtuous nature, since the others deserve no more attention than beasts of the field; for it seems to me to require no less of a miracle to restore someone to reason in whom the light of reason has been extinguished than to restore to life one who has been buried in the grave for four days.

After the evil state of popular opinion has been described, the *canzone* attacks it suddenly with an exceptional reproof, as though it were a thing of horror, saying: *Yet he's the worst of all, in truth*, in order to show its intolerable wickedness by affirming that those who espouse it are the worst of liars; for he who is wicked though descended from good stock, is not only ignoble and base, but the basest of all; and I use the metaphor of a path previously pointed out.

To clarify this let me pose a question and then answer it, as follows. Suppose a plain crossed by established paths, with fields of hedges, ditches, stone, timber, and other obstacles of every kind blocking all but these narrow paths. Snow has fallen covering everything and presenting the same vista everywhere, so that not a trace of a path can be seen. A man wishes to cross the plain to a dwelling on the other side, so through his own efforts, that is, utilising his own powers of observation and his own intelligence,

himself his own guide, he takes the direct line in the direction of travel, leaving footprints behind him. After him comes another man, wishing to reach the same place, who only needs to follow the footprints left behind; yet, though shown the way that the first man found without guidance, he, through his own error, wanders and winds among brambles and briars, and goes astray. Which of these is the worthy man? I say: the first. And what should the other be called? I say: the vilest of men. Why is he not merely unworthy? I reply: because a man who goes astray without guidance should be termed unworthy, that is to say base; but if he has guidance then his error and fault could not be greater, and therefore he is not merely unworthy, but of the vilest. So he who descends from noble stock through his father or some ancestor, yet is evil, is not only base but of the basest, deserving contempt and scorn more than other ill-bred people.

To prevent us falling into this utter baseness, Solomon, in the twenty-second chapter of *Proverbs*, exhorts those with ancestors of worth: '*Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set*'. And in the fourth chapter of that book says: '*But the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.*' Finally, in the *canzone*, where I say: *And like a dead man walks the earth!* I say that this vilest man is dead though he seems alive, in order to further discredit him.

Here it should be noted that the wicked may indeed be said to be dead, and those who stray from the paths of virtuous ancestors above all. This may be seen as follows. Aristotle, in the second book of *On the Soul*, says: 'life is the state of being of living things, and since life exists at many levels (vegetation in plants; sensation and movement in animals; sensation, movement and reasoning or intellect in man) and since things should be named for their noblest characteristic, it is evident that life in animals is sensation, while in man it is the use of reason. Thus, in such is the life and state of man's being, to abandon one's use of reason is to abandon that being, which is the same as being dead. And is not ceasing to reflect on the aim of life an abandonment of reason? Is not failing to reflect on the path to be taken an abandonment of reason? It is, indeed, and is most evident in the person who sees footprints before him but ignores them. That is why Solomon, in the fifth chapter of *Proverbs*, says: '*He shall die without instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray*'. That is to say: he who fails to follow his master and leaves no disciple is dead; he is the vilest of all. There are some who might say: How can he be dead and still walk the earth? I reply that he dies as a man but survives as a beast. For, as Aristotle says in the second book of *On the Soul*, the powers of the soul are

hierarchical, just as the figure of a rectangle stands above that of a triangle, and the five-sided pentagon above a quadrangle: thus, the power of sensation is above the vegetative power, and the intellectual above that of sensation. If a quadrangle is obtained by removing one side from a pentagon and closing the figure, making it no longer a pentagon, then what is formed when the highest power of the soul is removed is no longer a man but something possessing only powers of sensation, that is to say a brute. And this completes the meaning of the second stanza of the *canzone* under examination, in which the opinion of others' is discussed.

Chapter VIII: Reverence for Truth

The most beautiful branch that springs from the root of reason is discernment. For, as Thomas says at the start of his prologue to the Ethics: *'to know the relationship between one thing and another is a true act of reason,'* and this is discernment or discrimination. One of the fairest and sweetest fruits of this branch is the reverence owed by the lesser to the greater. So, Cicero, in the first book of *On Offices*, speaking of the beauty which shines from integrity, says that reverence is an aspect of that beauty. And just as reverence is one of the beauties of integrity so the opposite trait, irreverence, which may be termed arrogance in the vernacular, defiles and degrades integrity. Therefore Cicero, in the same place, says: *'To fail to know what others think of us is the mark of one who is not only arrogant, but dissolute,'* which is simply to say that to be arrogant and dissolute exhibits a lack of self-knowledge which is the source and measure of all reverence. Thus, since it is my wish, while observing all due reverence to the Emperor and to Aristotle, to eliminate error from certain minds in order to instil there the light of truth, I must show, before proceeding to refute the common opinion as stated, that by refuting it I do not argue irreverently with regard to Imperial or philosophic authority. For if I were to show myself as irreverent in any part of this work, it would nowhere be more unbecoming to do so than in this book, where in treating of nobility I should show myself noble and not base. Firstly I will demonstrate that I do not speak against Aristotle's authority, then that I do not speak against that of the Imperial Majesty.

Thus, when Aristotle says that: *'what appears true to the majority cannot be wholly false,'* he does not mean as regards outwards appearance, perceived by the senses, but as regards what is within and perceived by the mind, because the judgements of the senses, as witness the perceptions of the majority, are often totally false, especially in the case of things perceptible to multiple senses, since the senses are then frequently deceived. For example, we know that the Sun to most people seems to be a foot in diameter, which is quite false. For, according to the findings of that research made by human reason through its attendant arts, the diameter of the Sun is five and a half times that of the Earth, such that if the Earth is six thousand five hundred miles in diameter, that of the Sun is thirty seven thousand, seven hundred and fifty miles, even though by sensory perception it seems to measure a foot. So it is obvious that Aristotle did not have sense perception in mind; and thus I do not run counter to his statement, nor show irreverence to him, by seeking to refute issues of sensory perception. And it is plain that

I do intend to refute the claims of sensory perception. For those who judge in that way judge only by their view of what fortune grants or removes; since when they see powerful connections and marriages forged, wondrous buildings, extensive possessions and commanding lordships, they credit these with being the causes of nobility; indeed they consider them the very essence of nobility. While if they were to judge according to intellectual perception they would say the opposite, namely that nobility is a source of these things, as will be seen later in this book.

And just as I avoid impugning the reverence due to Aristotle, in my refutation, as may be seen, so I avoid impugning that due to the Empire; and I will demonstrate why I say this. Yet, since a speaker must take great care in his choice of words, when speaking in an adversary's presence, so that the adversary does not derive from them material for obscuring the truth, I, speaking here before a vast number of adversaries, cannot speak with brevity. So, if my digressions prove lengthy, let none be surprised. In order, then, to show that I am not displaying irreverence to the majesty of Empire, we must first consider what constitutes reverence. I maintain that reverence is simply the manifestation of submission due. Once this is acknowledged, it is necessary to distinguish between a person who is *irreverent*, and one who is *not reverent*. *Irreverent* denotes refusal of reverence, while *not reverent* simply denotes the absence of reverence. Irreverence therefore consists in renouncing submission due, while absence of reverence denies that submission is due. To clarify: a man can repudiate something in one of two ways. He can repudiate it while offending against the truth, as when a confirmation which is due is withheld, and this is rightly described as *renouncing* it. Or he can express repudiation while not offending against the truth, for example by refusing to endorse what does not exist, and this is rightly described as *denying* it. For example when a man repudiates the statement that he is wholly mortal, this rightly constitutes a denial.

So I am not being *irreverent* in denying reverence to the Empire, I am simply being *not reverent*, and this behaviour is not opposed to reverence since it does not offend against it, just as the absence of life does not offend against life, but rather death, which is the extinguishing of life. Death is not equivalent to absence of life, since absence of life is a characteristic of stones. Death denotes an extinguishing of life and cannot obtain in something not endowed with the habit of life, such that stones should not be called dead, but merely non-living. Similarly I, who do not owe reverence to the Empire in this instance, am not being *irreverent*, but am being *not reverent*, which is not a case of my showing arrogance, nor does it make me worthy of being condemned. On the contrary, reverence, if it could be called

reverence, would here constitute arrogance, since I would fall into a greater irreverence, namely irreverence towards truth and nature, as will be shown below. Aristotle, the master of all philosophers, defended himself against such error at the beginning of the *Ethics* where he said: 'If we have two friends, and Truth is one of them, we must concur with Truth.' Nevertheless since I maintain that I am simply not reverent, denoting a denial of reverence (that is, denying that reverence is manifestly due) I must show why this is denial and not repudiation, that is, why in this instance I am not duly subject to Imperial Majesty. And since the explanation will necessarily be lengthy, I intend to give it in a separate chapter, and without delay.

Chapter IX: Limits of Imperial Jurisdiction

To see why, in this case, that is, in refuting or endorsing the Emperor's opinion, I am not required to submit to him, we must recall what was discussed above in the fourth chapter regarding the Imperial office: namely, that Imperial authority was imposed in order to perfect human affairs, and that it is rightfully the ruler and regulator of all our activities, so that in consequence Imperial Majesty has jurisdiction over the full breadth of those activities, but does not extend beyond those bounds. Just as the Imperial office fixes the limits of every human art and office, so God sets limits to Empire; and this is not surprising since we see that Nature's art and office is likewise limited in all its operations. For if we choose to consider the universal aspect of all things Nature has a jurisdiction co-extensive with the whole universe, that is, heaven and earth; yet the universe exists within fixed bounds, as is proved in the third book of the *Physics* and in the first book of *On Heaven and Earth*. Therefore universal Nature's jurisdiction is confined within strict bounds, and so therefore is specific nature; and He who is limited by nothing sets the bounds to Nature, namely God, the first excellence, who alone by his infinite capacity comprehends the infinite.

In order to understand the limits of our activities, we should know that only those activities subject to reason and will are ours; for although the digestive process is located within us, it is not human specifically but natural. Further, our reason is relevant to four types of activity, which are to be regarded as different. There are activities which it considers, but does not, and cannot perform; for example things natural, supernatural and mathematical. There are activities which it considers and performs through its own actions, and these are termed rational, for example speech. Then there are activities which it considers and performs by means of external matter, as for example the mechanical arts. All of these three sets of activities are not in themselves subject to our will, though consideration of them is dependent on our will. For however much we wish a heavy weight to rise naturally or that a syllogism based on false premises should yield demonstrable proof, or that a house should stand as firmly when leaning as when erect, these things cannot be, because we are not, speaking correctly the makers of such activities but merely the discoverers of them. It was another who ordained them, and a greater maker who made them. There are then, fourthly, activities that reason considers, which are an act of will, for example giving help or offence, standing or fleeing in battle, remaining chaste or yielding to lust. These are wholly subject to our will, and therefore they lead to us being considered good or evil because they are of our own

making; since as far as our will can reach our activities extend. Because justice should be preserved and injustice avoided in all of these willed activities, and since justice may fail in two ways, either through not understanding where it lies, or through being unwilling to pursue it, the written Law was established in order to regulate and administer it. Thus Augustine says: *'If men knew justice, and, knowing it, pursued it, there would be no need for the written Law.'* And it is written at the start of the *Old Digest* that: *'Written Law is the art of right action and justice.'* The Emperor, that officer of whom we are speaking, is appointed to formulate, reveal and enforce this law, and we are subject to him as far as our own activities described extend, and no further. That is why the craftsmen and apprentices to every art and trade, are and should be, subject to the leader and master of the activities of those arts and trades, beyond which the rule of the master ceases, and therefore their subjection to that master. So we might say of the Emperor, if we were to use a metaphor to describe his office, is the one who sits the saddle of the human will. How this steed progresses if it lacks a rider is more than evident, especially in sad Italy, which has been left without the means of government.

It should be noted that the more specific something is to an art or rule, the more complete is its subjection; since if the cause is intensified so is the effect. Thus there are things so wholly a matter of skill, that nature becomes an instrument of that art, for example rowing with an oar, where the skill makes the natural motion, propulsion, its instrument; or threshing wheat, where art makes the natural quality of heat its instrument. Here all is subject above all to the leader and master of the art. There are activities where the skill uses Nature as its instrument, which are lesser arts; where the craftsmen are less subject to their master, for example sowing seed in the ground (where we must await the will of Nature) or setting sail from a port (where we must await the natural effects of weather). We find therefore in matters of this kind that disputes often arise among the craftsmen, with the superior seeking the advice of the inferior. There are other activities which do not belong to the art, but seem to be linked to it, such that men are frequently deceived. In such matters the apprentice is not subject to the master, nor are they bound to submit to him in respect of them as regards their particular art, for example fishing from a boat appears linked to navigation, and the virtues of herbs to agriculture. Yet they are distinct since fishing is an art of hunting, and subject to its authority, while the knowledge of herbs falls under medicine or some higher branch of learning.

What I have said with regard to other arts may be seen to hold true for the art of Imperial rule also. For in the art of Imperial rule there are certain

regulated areas of pure art, such as the laws appertaining to marriage, service, the military, or succession in office, where we are wholly subject to the Emperor without any doubt or question. There are other laws also which in some sense obey the laws of Nature, such as the age at which one is capable of managing one's own affairs, and in which we are not wholly subject. Then there are many others which appear to be associated with Imperial rule but where Imperial authority and judgement in such matters is not authoritative and acceptance of it may be erroneous. For example, regarding the definitions of maturity and nobility, Imperial authority cannot compel assent simply by virtue of the fact that it is Imperial. Let us render unto God what belongs to God. Thus, we need not be subject to or agree with the Emperor Nero's judgement, when he said that maturity was beauty and physical strength, but rather that of Aristotle, when he said that maturity was the summit of natural life. It is evident then that the definition of nobility is not within the scope of Imperial authority; and if it is not, we are not subject to the Emperor when treating of it; and if we are not subject to him we are not bound to reverence him in this matter; and that is the conclusion we sought to arrive at. So with free licence and complete conviction I shall now strike at the heart of received opinion and cast that opinion to the ground, so that by virtue of my victory true opinion may stand firm in the minds of those who are invigorated by such light.

Chapter X: The Emperor's Error

Now that I have noted others' opinions regarding nobility and it has been shown that I am free to refute them, I shall proceed to discuss the section of the *canzone* in which I do so. It begins, as noted above: *He who says: 'Man is living timber'*. Note that the Emperor's opinion, though it was in *error*, did, in one respect, namely that of *perfect manners*, touch on an aspect of nobility and it is not my intention to refute this point. The other aspect however, which is wholly foreign to the nature of nobility I do intend to refute, because it involves two concepts, raised in speaking of *ancestral wealth*, namely length of time and riches, which are wholly irrelevant to the concept of nobility, as has been said and as will be shown below. Therefore my refutation is divided into two parts: firstly I refute the idea that riches are a source of nobility and then that length of time is. The second part begins: *Nor will men grant the base-born worth*. It should be noted that in refuting riches as a source of nobility not only is the Emperor's opinion refuted, but also that of the masses, which was based on wealth alone. The first part is subdivided in two: in the first section I describe how, in general terms, the Emperor erred in his definition of nobility, and in the second I show the reason why. The second part begins: *For riches, despite what is believed*.

I write then in the *canzone* that *He who says: 'Man is living timber*, in the first place, tells an untruth (is in error) inasmuch as he says *timber*, and then leaves much unsaid (speaks defectively) inasmuch as he says *living* and not *rational*, the latter characteristic being that which distinguishes man from the beasts. Then I say that *the ruler of the Empire* erred likewise in attempting a definition; and I say *ruler of the Empire* rather than *Emperor* to show that it is beyond the scope of the Imperial office to decide the matter. Then I explain how he erred likewise in wrongly supposing ancestral wealth to be the source of nobility, and then proceeded *defectively* by embracing the inadequate distinction of *perfect manners*, since these comprise only a very small part of nobility not each and every formal aspect of it, as will be shown below. And, though the text is silent on the matter, we should not overlook the fact that the Emperor erred in his method of definition not merely in the constituent parts of it, even though he had a reputation as a great logician and most learned person. For the definition of nobility should more properly be derived from effects than causes, since it appears to be a kind of source that cannot be explained by what causes it, but rather by what flows from it. Then, where I say: *For riches, despite what is believed*, I explain that they cannot be the cause of nobility because they are base; and I explain that they cannot deny it because they are quite separate from it. I

prove that they are base by means of one of their greatest and most obvious defects, where I say: *It's clear that riches.*

Lastly I conclude, by virtue of what was previously said, that their loss does not cause an alteration in the upright mind, which demonstrates what I have said: that they are not united to nobility because no effect of union follows. Here we should note that, as Aristotle maintains, all things which give rise to something must first contain that thing perfectly in themselves. Thus he says in the seventh book of the *Metaphysics*: '*When one thing gives birth to another, it is born from it, through existing within its being.*' Moreover, it should be known, that everything which decomposes does so by undergoing change, and each thing that is changed must be connected to the cause of that change, as Aristotle says in the seventh book of the *Physics* and the first book of *On Generation*.

After setting out these things I go on to say that wealth cannot confer nobility, as others believe; and to show their separation from it, I say that it cannot deny nobility to whomever possesses it, nor can grant it, since wealth is by nature base, and by virtue of baseness the opposite of noble. Here baseness means degenerateness, the opposite of nobility, and a contrary cannot and does not produce its contrary, for the above-stated reason briefly touched on in the words: *Whoever tries to draw a form.* No painter could depict a form whose shape he could not first conceive as he wishes in his imagination. Further, wealth cannot deny nobility because it is remote from nobility, and for the reason stated above, that whatever alters or decomposes something must be connected to it. Therefore I add: *Nor can an upright tower be undermined by a distant river,* which is intended simply as an analogy for what has been said previously, namely that riches cannot affect nobility, in comparing nobility to an upright tower and riches to a distant river.

Chapter XI: The Inequity of Wealth

It now simply remains to be shown why riches are base, and distinct and remote from nobility, and this I prove in two brief sections of the *canzone* to which I now turn. After they have been explained, what I have said will become clear: namely that riches are base and remote from nobility, and thus the arguments already directed against wealth will be wholly proven.

I wrote: *It's clear that riches are imperfect, and are base.* To clarify the meaning of these words, it should be noted that the baseness of anything derives from imperfection, and likewise nobility from perfection, so that the more perfect a thing is, the nobler its nature; the more imperfect, the baser. Thus if riches are imperfect, it is obvious that they are base. That they are imperfect is swiftly shown by the text, where I say: *for however great, they bring no peace, but rather care.* Not only is their imperfection made evident here, but their state is shown to be the most imperfect and therefore wholly base. Lucan affirms this when he says, addressing riches: *'The laws perished without a struggle, and you riches, the basest part of things, led the attack.'* Their imperfection may be quickly seen in three ways: firstly in the absence of discrimination attendant on their acquisition; secondly in the danger that accompanies their increase; thirdly, in the ruin resulting from their possession. Before I demonstrate this, I must resolve a doubt that arises: for, since gold, pearls and property have, in essence, a perfect form, and actuality, it seems incorrect to claim that they are imperfect. It should be understood that such things as gold and pearls are perfect considered in themselves, and are not riches; but conceived as human possessions they are riches, and full of imperfection in that sense. It is not impossible for something to be both perfect in one respect and imperfect in another.

I say then that the imperfection of riches may firstly be observed in the lack of discrimination attendant on their acquisition, in which no distributive justice is present, while injustice, characteristic of imperfection, almost always is. For if we consider the ways in which riches are acquired, they may be summarised under three headings. They are acquired purely by chance, for example without design and unexpectedly through some unanticipated event; or they are acquired by chance aided by reason, for example through legacy and inheritance; or they are acquired by reason aided by chance, as in the case of lawful or unlawful profit. By lawful profit I mean gain deriving from an honest craft, commerce or service; by unlawful, I mean gain from theft or robbery. In all these three ways the injustice of which I speak is evident, for buried wealth which is discovered

or recovered as often reveals itself to the evil man as the good one; and this is so evident as to require no proof. Indeed I once saw the site, on the slope of a mountain named Falterona, in Tuscany, where the basest peasant in the whole region, while digging, found more than a bushel of the finest antique silver coins, which had been lying there awaiting him for perhaps two thousand years or more. It was through observing this kind of inequity that Aristotle was led to remark: *'the more intelligent a man is, the less he is under the sway of chance.'* I claim that inheritance by legacy or succession often aids the bad rather than the good, though I do not intend to show evidence of this. Rather, let all cast their eyes about to discover what I choose to pass over in silence, in order to avoid accusing anyone in particular. Would it were God's will that what a certain Provençal desired should come to pass, namely that he who does not inherit virtue should not inherit wealth either!

It is my contention that it is precisely to the evil that the recovery of riches comes rather than to the good, since unlawful gain never comes to the good as they refuse it. What good man would ever seek gain by force or fraud? Such a thing would be impossible, for by choosing to carry out an unlawful action he would cease to be good. And the good rarely make a lawful gain, because it would require all their attention and the good man's attention is directed to more vital things, so that he rarely gives it the attention required.

Thus it is clear that the acquisition of riches in whatever manner represents an inequity, and therefore Our Lord called riches unrighteous saying: *'Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness,'* so inviting men to act liberally and grant benefactions, in order to engender friendship. How sweet an exchange it is to give of these imperfect things in order to acquire and keep things that are perfect, such as are represented by the hearts of worthy men! That market is open every day. Indeed, that kind of commerce is different to all others, for while a man believes he is purchasing one person's friendship with a benefaction thousands upon thousands are bought thereby. Who does not keep a place in his heart for Alexander because of his royal acts of benevolence, or Alfonso VIII of Castile, or Saladin, or Boniface II the good Marquis of Monferrato, or Raymond V of Toulouse, or Bertran de Born, or Galeazzo de Montefeltro? When their generosity is spoken of, not only those who would cheerfully do the same, but even those who would rather die than do so, retain a love for these men in their memory.

Chapter XII: The Dangers of Wealth

As has been said, the imperfection of riches may be seen not only in the fact of their acquisition but also in the dangers attendant on their increase; and since more of their defectiveness can be seen in this latter, the text mentions that alone, saying that *however great* they are, not only do they not bring peace, but they provoke a greater thirst for wealth, making men more defective and less self-sufficient. Here it should be understood that defective things may hide their defects beneath the surface, concealing them beneath a guise of perfection; or may reveal them completely, so that the imperfection is openly evidenced on the surface. Those things that conceal their defects at the outset are more dangerous, since we are thereby prevented from being alert to them, as in the example of the traitor who shows himself in the guise of a friend, encouraging us to trust him, while beneath the mask of friendship he conceals the defect of enmity. In this manner riches are dangerously imperfect in their increase, for in provoking an increased thirst for wealth they subvert the promised satisfaction and bring about the very opposite. For, like false traitresses, riches always promise satisfaction to those who gather them in sufficient quantity, but with this promise seduce the human will to avarice. That is why Boethius, in his *Consolation of Philosophy*, calls them dangerous, saying: ‘*Alas! Who first unearthed that mass of gold and gems, those precious perils, that sought to remain hidden.*’ These false traitresses, if one studies them closely, promise to quench all thirst and feelings of want, and to ensure utter satiety and feelings of sufficiency. This is what they do initially, guaranteeing fulfilment of their promise when their sum has increased to a certain amount, but then when that sum is achieved, instead of satiety and refreshment they produce and induce intolerable burning thirst in the body; and instead of sufficiency they set a new goal: that is, desire for a greater quantity, and when this in turn has been achieved, they induce a mighty fear and anxiety over what has been acquired.

Thus, they do not bring peace, but rather sorrow, which was absent while they were absent. So, Cicero, in his book *On Paradox*, in denouncing riches says: ‘*I have never considered these people’s money, nor their magnificent mansions, nor their riches, nor their lordships, nor the pleasures with which they are altogether captivated, as things good or desirable, since I have indeed seen men who possess all these things still covet all manner of things they possess. For the thirst of avarice is never satisfied nor satiated; and not only are they tormented by a desire to increase their possessions, but they are tormented also by the fear of losing*

them.' These are Cicero's very words. Evidence of even greater importance regarding this imperfection is found again in Boethius in the *Consolation of Philosophy*: 'Even if the goddess of wealth were to grant riches equal to the quantity of sand the wind-driven sea raises, or the number of stars that shine, the human race would not cease its lament.'

If further evidence is needed to prove this point, let us summon up all that Solomon and his father David cry out against riches, all that Seneca, especially in his letters to Lucilius, all that Horace, Juvenal, and in fact what every writer, poet, and the truth of Holy Scripture cry out against these false whores that possess every defect. And so that our belief might be supported by what we ourselves observe, let us reflect on the lives of those who pursue riches, how secure their lives are when they have gathered them, how satisfied and untroubled they are! What then imperils and ruins cities, territories and individuals, every day, more than the accumulation of wealth by some new person? Such accumulation reveals fresh desire, which cannot be satisfied without causing injury to others. What were the two categories of Law, namely Canon and Civil, intended to curb if not the rush of greed brought about by the amassing of wealth? Both categories of Law make this evident if we consider their beginnings (that is, those of their written record). O how clear it is, crystal clear, that riches are rendered wholly imperfect by their increase, since only imperfection comes from them, regardless of their quantity! That is what my *canzone* declares.

However, a doubt arises here and a question which should not be passed over but raised and answered. Someone intent on twisting the truth and splitting hairs might object that if riches are rendered imperfect by the act of acquisition which increases desire for them, knowledge itself must be imperfect and base for the same reason, since desire for it increases likewise. Hence the ancient saying: 'With one foot in the grave, I would still wish to go on acquiring knowledge.' However, they might say, it is untrue that knowledge is made base by imperfection: therefore, refuting the consequence of the original premise, neither does desire render riches base. And the fact that knowledge is something perfect is evidenced by Aristotle in the sixth book of the *Ethics*, which states that knowledge is the perfect record of things which are certain.

This point requires a brief answer. First we must determine whether desire is increased by the acquisition of knowledge, as is proposed by the questioner, and if so the reason for this. Thus, I say that human desire is increased not only by the acquisition of knowledge and riches, but by all acquisition, though in varying ways. The reason for this is that the supreme desire of all things, and the one first given to them by Nature, is to return to

the first cause. Now, since God is the cause of our souls and has created them in his image (thus it is written: *'Let us make Man in our image, after our likeness.'*), the soul desires above all else to return to Him. And, as a pilgrim walking a strange road imagines every distant house to be an inn, and on finding it not so fixes his hopes on the next, and so goes from house to house until he finds the inn, so our soul, as soon as it enters this strange un-travelled road of life, fixes its sight on the goal of its own supreme good, and therefore believes that all it sees which seems to possess good in any way is indeed that same supreme good. Because its knowledge is initially imperfect due to lack of experience and instruction, small goods appear great ones, and from these it conceives its initial desires. So we see little boys first fixing their desire on an apple, and then when older wanting to own a pet bird, later still desiring fine clothes, a horse, a wife, modest wealth, then greater riches, and then more still. This progression is due to the fact that what is sought is attained in none of these, but there is a hope of finding it further on. Thus it can be seen that one object of desire stands in front of another in the eyes of the soul, like a pyramid, where the smallest object at first covers all, forming as it were the apex to the ultimate object of desire, namely God, who is, as it were, the base of all the rest. And the further we move from the apex towards the base, the greater the objects of desire appear; this is the reason why the acquisition of wealth causes human desires to become progressively inflated.

We may, however, lose the path through error, just like the roads of this earth. For just as there can only be one road from one city to another that is best and most direct, and another that leads away in the opposite direction, among all the many others that lead to and from it, so there are varying paths in human life, among which, one is the truest and another the most false, the others being less true or false. And just as we see that the most direct path to the city achieves our desire and provides rest when the effort is over, while the opposite does neither, so with our life. A wise traveller reaches his goal and rests; the wanderer never reaches it, but lethargic in mind forever fixes his sight longingly upon it. Though this explanation does not wholly answer the question raised above, it does at least provide a path to the answer, in showing that our desires do not all increase in the same way. But since this chapter has become somewhat lengthy, the answer must wait for a new chapter, and here the entire argument which I intend to make against riches will be brought to a close.

Chapter XIII: The Imperfections of Riches

To answer the question, I state that desire for knowledge cannot properly be said to increase, although, as has been said, it grows in a specific manner. Whatever increases, is always one, strictly speaking; the desire for knowledge is not however always one, but is many; where one desire ends, another commences; so that strictly speaking its growth is not an increase but a progression from small matters to great ones. For, if I desire to know the principles of natural things, the desire is fulfilled as soon as I do know them, and terminates. If I then desire to know what each of these principles is and how it exists, that is a new and distinct desire. Nor am I robbed of my first perfection of desire by the appearance of this new one; this growth being a cause of greater perfection and not imperfection.

However the desire for riches is, strictly speaking, an increase, since it remains always one, and no progression of goals or achieved perfection is found here. If someone objects that just as the desire to know the principle of natural objects is one thing, and the desire to know what these principles are another, so the desire for a hundred marks is one thing and for a thousand another, I reply that this is false. For a hundred is part of a thousand and related to it, just as a part of a line is related to a whole line, along which there can be single continuous motion, and where the progression or movement does not terminate at any point. But knowledge of the principles and knowledge of the nature of each are not parts of each other, but are related as distinct lines are, where there cannot be a single continuous motion, and where when the motion along one is complete, it is succeeded by motion along the other. Thus, it seems that knowledge cannot be called imperfect, as suggested by the questioner, because of the desire for knowledge, in the way that riches are through desire for them. For, in the desire for knowledge, desire is progressively satisfied and brought to completion, while in the desire for riches it is not. Hence the question is answered and the doubt proved groundless.

The person intent on splitting hairs might well still object by claiming that many desires are satisfied by the acquisition of knowledge, yet the ultimate goal is never attained, which is almost equivalent to an imperfection of a desire which though remaining one and the same, is never satisfied. Here I again reply that the objection is invalid, namely that the ultimate goal is never attained; for our natural desires, as was shown in the third book, are satisfied in achieving certainty; and the desire for knowledge is a natural desire, so that the goal of certainty satisfies it, even though few, because they take the wrong road, complete the journey. Anyone who understands

Averroes' commentary on the third book of *The Soul* has learned this from him. Thus Aristotle in the tenth book of the *Ethics*, speaking against the poet Simonides, says that: '*A man should be drawn as far as is possible to divine things*', by which he indicates that our faculties envision the goal of certainty. Moreover, in the first book of the *Ethics* he says that: '*the trained student seeks to know things for certain, to the extent that their nature admits of certainty.*' By that he means that one should consider the goal from the perspective of the knowledge desired, as well as the man who desires it. And so Paul says, in *Romans*, that one should not seek to know more than one ought, but only according to the measure given. Thus in whatever manner the desire for knowledge is comprehended, whether in general or in particular, it attains perfection. And inasmuch as knowledge is perfect it is noble, and its perfection is not lost by desiring it, as is the case with accursed wealth.

I must now show briefly why the possession of riches is harmful, which is their third mark of imperfection. Possessing them is harmful for two reasons: firstly, because it is a source of evil; secondly because it deprives men of good. It is a source of evil because it renders the possessor full of fears and detested, through mere preoccupation with them. How great the fear, when travelling or taking lodging, waking or sleeping, of one who is conscious of having wealth about him, a fear of losing not only his possessions, but through them his life. Wretched merchants who travel the world know this well, since even the windswept leaves make them tremble with fear when they are carrying riches; and when they are not, filled once more with a sense of security they shorten the journey with songs and conversation. Thus Boethius says: '*If a traveller journeys empty-handed, he can sing in the face of thieves.*' That is what Lucan means in his fifth book when he praises poverty for the security it offers, with the words: '*O the simple security of a poor man's life! O the safety of straightened lodgings and meagre furnishings! O the un-comprehended wealth of the Gods! Within what walls, and temples, could this event have occurred, and the man not have shaken with fear when the hand of Caesar came knocking?*' Lucan is speaking of the night Caesar came to the cottage of the fisherman Amyclas, when seeking to cross the Adriatic. How vast the hatred everyone bears for the owner of wealth, a hatred born either from envy or from the desire to seize his possessions! It is so great that a son will kill his father, acting contrary to the love he owes him; indeed Italians, in the regions of the Po and Tiber, have witnessed the most clear and striking examples of such behaviour. Therefore, says Boethius, in the second book of the *Consolation*, '*Truly, avarice makes men hated.*' Possession of riches also deprives men of

good, for by their possession, the virtue of generosity is thwarted; and this virtue brings about good and makes men famous and beloved, which cannot happen through the possession of wealth but only through its surrender. Thus Boethius says, in the same book: '*Money is good when through transfer to others as largesse, it is no longer in one's possession.*'

Hence the baseness of riches is clear from all this evidence, and hence a man of true knowledge and right desires never loves them; and not loving them distances himself from them and seeks not to unite with them, except inasmuch as they are necessary to perform some service or other. This is rational, because what is imperfect cannot be united with what is perfect. Thus a crooked line is never seen united with a straight line, and if there is a juncture of any kind it is of point with point, not line with line. Thus it follows that the mind *upright* in its desires and *true* in its knowledge is not lessened by the loss of wealth, as the text of the *canzone* at the end of the third stanza states. In reaching this conclusion, the text seeks to prove that riches are like a distant river, flowing far from the upright tower of reason, or nobility, and that is why wealth cannot deprive a man of the nobility he possesses. In this manner the *canzone* marshals its arguments and proofs against riches.

Chapter XIV: The Irrelevance of Ancestry

Having refuted others' error, as it occurs, in the section on riches, I must now refute it, as it occurs, in the section where antiquity is said to be a source of nobility, implied by the words: *ancestral wealth*. My refutation is revealed in the part beginning: *Nor will men grant the base-born worth*. Firstly this position is refuted by the erroneous argument they themselves advance: then their argument contradicts itself, to their great confusion, and this I reveal where I say: *For, it follows from what was said*. Finally I conclude that their error is obvious, and that it is thus time to reveal to the truth, and this I state where I say: *So it is clear to all sound minds*.

I say then: *Nor will men grant the base-born worth*. Here it should be known that it is these men's erroneous opinion that one born base can never be called noble, and nor can his son. This contradicts however the very same claim of theirs in which by using the word *ancestral* they imply that nobility requires time, for, in that case, it is impossible by a passage of time to reach a moment where nobility is engendered, since according to their reasoning it is impossible for a man born base ever to become noble by chance or action, and impossible for a noble son to be born of a base father. For if the son of a base man is base, then so is his son and his grandson and so on forever, and it is impossible to find a point in time where nobility is achieved. If those holding a contrary view declare by way of a defence that nobility is achieved whenever the base origin of the ancestors shall have been forgotten, I reply that they contradict themselves since at that point too there would have to be a transformation from baseness to nobility, from one man to another, or from father to son, which is contrary to what they assert.

If my adversaries should defend themselves, pertinaciously, arguing that nevertheless that they consider this transformation to have taken place when the base origin of the ancestors is no longer recalled, it is right for this analysis to offer them a reply, even though the text of the *canzone* does not address it. So, I assert that there are four extremely inconvenient fallacies contained in what they say, and thus their reasoning cannot be right.

The first fallacy is that, if their argument were correct, the more virtuous human nature became, the slower and more difficult would be the achievement of nobility, which is incorrect since the more virtuous a thing is the more it is a source of good; and nobility is one of the things considered good. That my contention is valid is shown as follows. If nobility were conferred by lack of remembrance, then the sooner remembrance was lost the sooner nobility would be created, and the more forgetful men were, the more swiftly would such loss of remembrance occur. Therefore the more

forgetful men were, the nobler they would become; and conversely the better their memories, the more slowly they would become noble.

The second fallacy is that this distinction between base and noble could only be made in regard to men, which is unreasonable since we find traits of nobility or baseness in every manner of thing. So, we often talk of a base or noble horse, or falcon, or pearl. That the distinction could not then be made is shown as follows. If lack of remembrance of the baseness of ancestors were a source of nobility, and if there was no lack of remembrance where there was no baseness – given that the lack is a fading of memory, and in other creatures, plants and minerals baseness and nobility are not recorded, because they are in the one and equal state of nature – then there could be no source of nobility or baseness in them, since such attributes are to be regarded as the results of a continuance or deprivation, which the same subject is capable of; thus no distinction could be made between one trait and the other. If those holding a contrary view were to say that in man nobility signifies that the memory of baseness is absent, but in other things it is to signify the goodness of the thing, one would like to respond not with words but the flat of a blade to such stupidity and inconsistency.

The third fallacy is that what is engendered would frequently arise before that which engenders it, which is wholly impossible, and this can be seen as follows. Assume that Gherardo da Cammino had been the grandson of the basest peasant ever to drink the waters of the Sile or Cagnano, and his grandfather was still remembered. Who would dare to say Gherardo was a base man? Who would not agree that he was noble? No one, surely, regardless of their presumption: since he was noble and such will be the remembrance of him forever. If memory of his ancestor was not yet erased in accord with the objection, and yet he was a great noble and seen both then and now to be so, then nobility would have been his before the erasure of memory that engendered it came to be. This is altogether impossible.

The fourth fallacy is: that after his death a man would be considered to have been noble yet was not noble while alive, a proposition that could not be more illogical. This can be seen as follows. Suppose that during the lifetime of Dardanus the memory of his base ancestors survived, and suppose that during the lifetime of his descendant Laomedon this memory had faded and lack of remembrance occurred. According to my opponents, Laomedon would be noble during his lifetime while Dardanus would be base. We, who lack any memory of the ancestors prior to Dardanus, ought to say that Dardanus was therefore base while alive but now noble after his death. The claim that Dardanus was a son of Jove does not contradict this, since that is a fable, which should be disregarded in philosophical

discussion. Even if my opponents wish to endorse this fable, what the fable conceals undoes all of their arguments. It is therefore clear that their argument, that an established absence of remembrance is the cause of nobility, is false and erroneous.

Chapter XV: Further Fallacies Exposed

After my *canzone* shows that the elapse of time is not required for nobility, by using my opponents' own doctrine, it proceeds instantly to overthrow their previously stated opinion so that their false reasoning shall not taint the mind disposed to truth. It achieves this in the passage beginning: *For, it follows from what was said.*

Here it must be understood that if a man cannot change from being base to being noble, nor a noble son be born of a base father, as their opinion claims, one of two fallacies must obtain. Either there is no such thing as nobility, or there has always been a multiplicity of men in the world and the human race is therefore not descended from a single man. This can be shown as follows. If nobility is not newly engendered, as their opinion claims, a man always remains in the condition of baseness of nobility he was in at birth, and at birth is in the same condition as his father. Hence the continuation of this static condition has existed since our first parent: for as was Adam, the first progenitor, so the whole human race must be, since by this reasoning there can be no change in condition between Adam and modern times. Therefore if Adam was noble, all are noble, and if base, all are base, which eliminates any distinction based on these alternatives, and hence the alternatives themselves. It follows from this: *That all are noble or forever base.*

If this is not the case, and some people must be called noble and others base, then of necessity the human race must have descended from multiple origins, that is from at least one that was noble, and one that was base. My *canzone* states this where it says: *Or else that Man had no beginning*, meaning no single one, as it does not use the plural. This is wholly false according to Aristotle, to our Faith which cannot lie, and to the laws and ancient teachings of the Gentiles. For though Aristotle does not assert human evolution from a single individual, he yet considers that all men are of one essence, a state which multiple origin could not have produced. Plato believes that the existence of all men depends on one Idea and not many, which is equivalent to assigning them a single origin. Aristotle would certainly have been amused at talk of two species of humans, like those of horses and asses; for, to excuse Aristotle, those who thought so might well be considered asses.

That it is also wholly false according to our faith, which all must contend, is clear from Solomon, who, distinguishing between mankind and the animals, speaks of the former as the Sons of Adam, saying: *'Who*

knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to earth?’

That the Gentiles considered it false, is evident from the first book of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, where he speaks of the creation of the world according to pagan, or Gentile, belief, saying: ‘*Humankind was born. Either the creator god, source of a better world, seeded it from the divine, or the newborn earth just drawn from the highest heavens still contained fragments related to the skies so that Prometheus, blending them with streams of rain, moulded them into an image of the all-controlling gods.*’ He did not say men, and clearly states that the first man was alone; thus my *canzone* says: *But to this I cannot consent*: that is that man had no origin. The *canzone* then adds: *Nor should they if they are Christians!* I say Christians, rather than philosophers or Gentiles, though their opinions are similar, because Christian doctrine has greater weight, and destroys all error, by virtue of the supreme light of heaven that illuminates it.

Then in saying: *So it is clear to all sound minds*, I conclude that their error has been refuted, and say that it is time for their eyes to be opened to the truth. I say that it is evident to sound minds that their assertions are empty: that is, lacking the marrow of truth. I say *sound* for good reason, since it should be understood that our intellect may be described as sound or infirm; and by intellect I refer to the noble part of our soul, to which the common term *mind* may be given. The mind may be termed sound when no illness of mind and body impairs its action, which consists in knowing what things are, as Aristotle asserts in the third book of *On the Soul*.

With regard to the sickness of the spirit, I have observed three terrible infirmities of the human mind. One is caused by innate arrogance since there are many who are so presumptuous as to believe they know everything, and so take uncertain things as certain. Cicero wholly condemns this vice in the first book of *On Offices*, as does Aquinas in his book *Against the Gentiles* where he says: ‘*Many are so intellectually presumptuous as to believe that their intellect has the measure of all things, regarding as true what seems true to them, and false whatever seems to them false*’. So they never achieve true learning; and thinking themselves sufficiently learned, they never question, never listen, only demand to be questioned themselves, and before the question is completed, deliver the wrong answer. It is for these that Solomon says in *Proverbs*: ‘*Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than of him.*’

The second infirmity is caused by innate weak-mindedness, for there are many who are so obstinately base that they cannot believe they can learn anything by themselves or from others. These are people who never seek

knowledge or argument, nor care what others have to say. Aristotle speaks out against them in the first book of the *Ethics*, calling them an inadequate audience for moral philosophy. They ever live like beasts, far from learning.

The third infirmity is caused by innate superficiality, since there are many with such a wayward imagination that they leap about in their reasoning, and reach a conclusion before establishing the syllogism, and before leaping from that conclusion to another, while thinking their reasoning subtle, forsaking established principles, and in their imagining seeing nothing as it truly is. Aristotle says that we should ignore them and have nothing to do with them, saying in the first book of the *Physics* that: '*It is not fitting to argue with one who denies established principles.*' Among these people are found many uneducated individuals who are ignorant of their alphabet, but wish to dispute concerning geometry, astrology and physics.

The mind may also be unsound through illness or bodily defect: sometimes due to a birth defect, as with the mentally retarded, sometimes by a radical alteration of the mind, as with maniacs. It is such mental illnesses that the law refers to in Justinian's *Infortiatum*: '*When making a will soundness of mind, not body, is needful.*' So it is to those intellects that are not ill in mind or body, but free, unhindered, and sound in the light of truth, that I say it is clear the common opinion referred to is empty, that is without value.

Subsequently I add that I judge the holders of such opinion false and empty, and so refute them; and I do this where I say: *And thus I say their words are false.* Then I state that we must proceed to reveal the truth, namely by showing what nobility is, and how to recognise those in whom it exists. I say this with the words: *And will now, in speaking as I think.*

Chapter XVI: Defining Nobility

As the *Psalm* says, ‘*The King shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by him shall glory; but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.*’ These words serve as a fitting introduction here because every true king should love truth above all. Therefore it is written in the book of *Wisdom*, ‘*Love the light of wisdom, you who stand before the people,*’ and the light of wisdom is truth itself. I say then that every king should rejoice now that the false and harmful opinion held by wrong and deceived people, who have spoken unjustly about nobility until now, has been refuted.

I must now proceed with the section of the *canzone* which deals with the true opinion, according to the division made previously in the third chapter of this book. This second section which begins: *I say that all virtue at inception*, proposes to establish the essence of nobility with respect to truth. This section is subdivided in two parts: in the first part I intend to show what nobility is, and in the second to show how those who possess it may be recognised. The second part begins with: *And the soul this goodness adorns*. The first part is further subdivided in two: in the first subdivision I examine matters which are needed to clarify the definition of nobility; in the second the definition itself is considered. And the second subdivision begins at: *Thus, where there’s virtue there’s nobility*.

To enter thoroughly on the subject, two things must initially be considered: firstly what is meant by the word *nobility*, considered simply of itself; and secondly what path must be taken to elucidate the definition mentioned above. I say then that if we consider common speech, the word *nobility* means the perfection of each thing’s own nature. It is not only predicated of man, but also of other things, since a stone, plant, horse or falcon is considered noble whenever its nature is seen to be perfected. Therefore Solomon, in *Ecclesiastes*, says: ‘*Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles,*’ which is to say of those who are perfect in mind and body. This is clear from what he says previously: ‘*Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child*’, that is a man who has not yet reached perfection; and a man may be a child not simply in years but also because of misconduct or congenital defect, as Aristotle teaches in the first book of the *Ethics*. It is true that there are fools who think the word *noble* means *to be known to and named by many*, and they argue that the word derives from the Latin verb that signifies to know, namely *noscere*. This is wholly false, for if it were true, things most famous and named most frequently would be the noblest of their kind. And so the obelisk of Saint Peter would be the noblest stone in the world; Asdente the Parma cobbler would be nobler than any of

his fellow citizens; and Albuino de la Scala would be nobler than Guido da Castello of Reggio; yet these things are wholly false. Therefore it is wholly false to say that *noble* derives from the verb to know. It derives rather from *non vilis* meaning *not base*.

It is this perfection of things that Aristotle refers to in the seventh book of the *Physics* where he says: 'Each thing is most completely perfect when it attains its own true virtue, and is so then according to its nature. Hence a circle is called perfect when it is truly circular,' that is when it attains to its own true virtue, and then it fulfils its nature to the widest extent, and may be called a noble circle. This state occurs when there is a point within the circle equidistant from all points on the circumference, which is its particular virtue. Thus a circle which is egg-shaped is not noble, nor even one that is shaped almost like the full moon, because its nature lacks perfection. Thus we can clearly see, to generalise, that the word *nobility* means in all things the perfection of their true nature. That is what we were in search of at the outset, in order to make the most effective beginning to our discussion of the part of the *canzone* we are examining.

Secondly we must find a method of procedure that will help define nobility in man, which is the aim of our present argument. Since we cannot define the highest perfection in members of a single species, for example, human beings, by referring to essential principles they possess in common, it must be known and defined by the effect of those principles. Therefore we read in the *Gospel of Saint Matthew* that Christ says: '*Beware of false prophets...Ye shall know them by their fruits.*' The definition we are searching for can be seen directly in the words '*by their fruits*': that is, by the moral and intellectual virtues of which our own nobility is the seed, as its definition will make wholly clear. The above covers the two matters that required investigation before proceeding, as was stated above.

Chapter XVII: Moral Virtue

Now that these two matters have been considered, we can proceed to examine the text of the *canzone*. It commences by stating: *I say that all virtue at inception rises from a single source: virtue I mean that makes men happy in every one of their actions.* And it continues: *As stated in the Ethics, virtue is an elected habit,* thus setting out the full definition of moral virtue according to Aristotle in the second book of the *Ethics*. He emphasises two things of primary importance: one is that all virtue springs from a single source; the second is that the phrase ‘*all virtue*’ refers to moral virtue, which is our subject. This is shown where I say: *As stated in the Ethics.* Here we should know that the moral virtues are the fruits most proper to us, since practising them is within our power in all respects. They are enumerated and defined in various ways by different philosophers, but since the divine opinion of Aristotle is to be preferred to those of others in matters where he has voiced an opinion, I will leave that of others on one side, and briefly say what these virtues are by commenting on his opinion.

These are the eleven virtues as given by Aristotle. The first is Courage, which is the means and restraint by which we regulate our boldness and timidity in things which are destructive of our lives. The second is Temperance, which is the regulator of our gluttony or excessive abstinence in things which preserve our lives. The third is Liberality, which regulates us in the giving and receipt of temporal goods. The fourth is Munificence, which regulates the administration of great expenditures and sets limit to their size. The fifth is Nobility of Mind which is the regulator and acquirer of great honours and fame. The sixth is Love of Honour, which regulates and disposes us with regard to the honours of this world. The seventh is Gentleness, which controls our anger or excessive patience with regard to the evils that assail us. The eighth is Affability, which allows us to accommodate ourselves to others. The ninth is Truth, which restrains our claiming to be greater than we are, or deprecating ourselves as less than we are. The tenth is Good Disposition which regulates us in our amusements, enabling us to indulge in them as we should. The eleventh is Justice which disposes us to love rectitude and employ it everywhere.

And each of these virtues is related to two inimical associated vices, one due to exercising the virtue too much; the other due to exercising it too little. The virtues constitute the mean between their related vices, and spring from a single source, namely habitually virtuous choice. Hence we can say of them in general that they are an elected habit residing in the mean. It is through the exercise of these virtues that a man is made happy and content,

as Aristotle says in the first book of the *Ethics*, where he defines Happiness saying that: *'Happiness is action in accord with virtue in the perfect life.'* Many place Prudence or good judgement, among the moral virtues, and rightly so, but Aristotle classes it with the intellectual virtues, even though it is a guide to the moral virtues and shows how they are interrelated and how without it they could not exist.

We should note, however, that we may achieve two kinds of happiness in this life, following two distinct paths leading to it, one which is good and the other the best. One is the active life, the other the contemplative life; and although, as has been said, we may achieve happiness through the active life, the other life leads us to the highest happiness and state of bliss, as Aristotle proves in the tenth book of the *Ethics*. Christ affirms it with words from his own lips as reported in the *Gospel of Saint Luke*, where in answering Martha, he says: *'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.'*

And Mary, according to the verses preceding these in the Gospel of the Evangelist, was sitting at the feet of Christ, showing no concern for domestic affairs, but simply listening to the words of the Saviour. The moral exposition of these words is that our Saviour wished by them to indicate that even though the active life is good, the contemplative life is superior. This is clear to anyone who considers the words of the Evangelist deeply. Some people however, might argue that: *'Since happiness achieved by the contemplative life is superior to that of the active life, and both can be and are the fruit and aim of nobility, why not start with the intellectual rather than the moral virtues?'* To this I would reply briefly that in every kind of instruction the capacity of the pupil must be taken account of, and the student should be led on the path that proves easiest to them. Therefore since the moral virtues are more commonly and better known, more sought after than the intellectual virtues, and more pursued by outward demonstration, it is appropriate and expedient to follow this path rather than the other; just as we would gain less knowledge of bees by talking of how they produce wax than how they produce honey, though bees produce both.

Chapter XVIII: Nobility and Virtue

In the last chapter we saw how all moral virtue springs from a single source, namely habitually virtuous choice, and this was expressed by the text of the *canzone* preceding the point where it reads: *I say, nobility, by definition*. In the next section, I proceed by means of likely inference to discover that every virtue named above, considered separately or jointly, springs from nobility as an effect does from its cause. This inference is founded on the philosophical proposition which states that when two things are seen to have an aspect in common they must both be related to a third thing, or else one to the other, as an effect is to a cause. This is because any one aspect, primarily and essentially, can only have one thing as its cause; and if two things sharing the common aspect were not the effect of some third thing, or one the effect of the other, both would be primary and essential causes of that aspect, which is impossible. So the text of the *canzone* says that nobility and *virtue, so defined*, namely moral virtue, have this in common that each implies praise of the person to whom it is applied. And this is stated where I say: *So that in themselves the two agree, having one effect*: that is praising and commending one whom others claim to possess nobility. The inference is then drawn, based on the proposition above, that one must therefore proceed from the other, or both from a third; and the text adds that it is to be presumed that one comes from the other rather than both from a third, if it appears that one has greater worth than the other; saying this in the line: *Yet if the one contains the other's worth*.

It should be noted that we are not proceeding here by necessary proof, as we could in arguing that if cold generates moisture, and we observe clouds generating moisture, then cold generates clouds, but rather by an acceptable and appropriate induction, for if there are many things in us worthy of praise, and the source of praise that we merit is found in us, it is reasonable to attribute these things to that source; and it is more reasonable to consider that which comprises several things to be the source of them, than to consider them as being the source of it. Thus nobility, which generates every virtue, as cause does effect, and many of our other praiseworthy activities as well, must be considered such that virtue is referred to it as a cause rather than to some third thing within us.

Finally, it says that what has been stated, namely that every moral virtue derives from a single source, and that nobility and virtue have one thing in common, so that one must be cause of the other or both caused by a third thing; and that if one contains all and more than the worth of the other, the other is more likely to proceed from it than from a third thing; you

should *accept as proven*, that is, conceived and set down with what follows in mind. This ends the stanza and this present section.

Chapter XIX: Nobility's Extent

Now that certain points, necessary to our seeing how to define the good of which we speak, have been considered and resolved in the preceding section, we can proceed to the next section of the *canzone* which commences: *Thus, where there's virtue there's nobility*. This may be subdivided in two. In the first part, something touched on earlier and left unproven is now proved; the second part concludes with the completion of the definition we have been searching for. The second part commences: *And just as perse derives from black*.

In order to explain the first part, we must commit what has been said above to memory: namely, that if nobility is more comprehensive than virtue, then virtue must proceed from it. The claim that nobility is more comprehensive than virtue is proven in the present section, which offers the heavens as an example, saying that wherever virtue exists, there is nobility.

Here it should be noted that there is no need to prove things which are self-evident, as is stated in the *Digest* and held as a rule of Law: and nothing is more evident than that nobility exists wherever there is virtue, while it is common knowledge that everything may be called noble of its kind. The text then says: *As where there is a star there is sky*; though the converse is not true, namely that where there is sky there is a star. Similarly, nobility exists wherever there is virtue, though virtue does not always exist wherever there is nobility; and this is a fine and appropriate comparison, since true nobility is a heaven in which many varied stars shine. The intellectual and moral virtues shine in her; the virtuous pre-dispositions conferred by Nature, such as piety and religiosity, and laudable emotion, for example modesty, mercy and many others, shine in her; and the physical perfections, such as beauty, strength and lasting health.

So plentiful are the stars scattered throughout the heavens, that it should not surprise us if human nobility produces many and diverse fruits, so numerous are their natures and powers, gathered together and united in one simple substance; and from them as from varied branches appears fruit in varied ways. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that human nobility, with regard to its many fruits, exceeds that of the angels, though the angels' nobility is more divinely unified. The Psalmist had this nobility of ours, and its diverse fruits, in mind when he composed the psalm, beginning: *'O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!'*, where he praises man, as though marvelling at divine affection for the human creature, saying: *'What is man, that thou art mindful of him?...For thou has made him a little lower than the angels, and has crowned him with glory and honour. Thou*

madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands.' So the comparison between human nobility and the heavens was truly fine and appropriate.

Then, where the text of the *canzone* states: *And in women and the young*, it proves what I say, showing that nobility extends to places where virtue does not reside. And it says: *We perceive this noble state* to exist, referring to nobility itself which is a state of true well-being, wherever there is shame (that is, fear of dishonour) as it exists in women and young people, in whom shame is fine and laudable, though this shame is not a virtue but a certain kind of benign emotion. The text says: *And in women and the young*, because, as Aristotle states in the fourth book of the *Ethics*: '*shame is not laudable or fitting in the elderly or the virtuous,*' since it is necessary for them to keep apart from the things that cause them to feel shame. Women and the young have less need for caution, so that the fear of being dishonoured through some error is laudable in them; since this feeling derives from nobility, and in them may be seen as, and given the name of, nobility, just as shamelessness may be viewed as baseness and a lack of nobility. So it is a good and perfect sign of nobility in children, and the immature, when shame is painted on their faces following an error, since it is the fruit of true nobility.

Chapter XX: The Definition of Nobility

In the words that follow next: *And just as perse derives from black*, the *canzone* proceeds towards the definition of nobility we seek, one which will allow us to perceive the essence of this nobility about which so many speak falsely. Drawing a conclusion from what was said earlier, it states that every virtue, *or rather the set of virtues*, that is, every elected habit occupying the mean, will derive from this nobility. Perse is a colour composed of purple and black, but since black predominates it is classified with black. Similarly virtue is composed of passion and nobility but, because nobility predominates, virtue is classified with it, and termed the good. Then the *canzone* argues from what precedes that no one should think himself noble merely because he can say: *'I am of such and such a race,'* if in fact its fruits are not his. I immediately expand on the point, saying that those who possess this grace, that is, this divine thing, are *almost godlike*, untainted by vice. No one can grant such a gift but God alone, who is no respecter of persons, as the divine Scriptures make clear. It is not excessive for my text to employ the words: *For almost godlike are they*, since, as was stated in the seventh chapter of the third book, just as there exist men who are wholly base and bestial, so there are men who are wholly noble and divine, as Aristotle proves in the seventh book of the *Ethics*, citing Homer. So let not the Uberti of Florence or the Visconti of Milan say: *'Because I am of this house, I am noble,'* for the divine grace does not enter a race, that is, the family stock, but an individual; and as will be shown below, family does not make nobility, though noble individuals may ennoble a family.

Next, where I say: *Since God alone grants it to those souls*, I refer to those who receive it, that is those on whom the divine grace descends, since it is truly a divine gift according to the words of the Apostle James: *'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.'* Then I say that God alone bestows this grace on the soul of that human being whom he sees dwelling within his own person, prepared and disposed to receive the divine act. For as Aristotle affirms in the second book of *On the Soul*, *'Things must be well-disposed towards their agents if they are to receive their actions.'* So, if the soul dwells imperfectly in a person it is not well-disposed to receive this divine infusion, just as a precious stone if it is not well-disposed, or is imperfect, cannot receive the celestial virtue, as the noble Guido Guinicelli said in a *canzone* of his beginning: *'To the noble heart Love ever repairs.'* The soul, therefore, may be ineffectual in a person because of a defect of temperament, or age, and the divine radiance is never reflected in a soul of this kind. Such Individuals,

whose souls are deprived of divine light, may be said to be as valleys facing north, or subterranean caves, into which the sunlight never falls unless it is reflected from some other place which it does illuminate.

Lastly the text draws to a conclusion, in stating, with regard to what has been said previously, namely that the virtues are the fruits of nobility that God instils in the well-disposed soul, that to *some*, that is, those few who have understanding, it is obvious that human nobility is nothing but '*the seed of happiness, planted by God in the well-disposed soul*' that is the soul whose body is perfectly disposed in every part. For if the virtues are the fruits of nobility, and happiness is the sweetness attained through virtue, it is clear that this nobility is the seed of happiness, as has been said. Careful consideration will reveal that this definition of nobility comprises all four causes, namely the material, formal, efficient and final: the material in referring to *the well-disposed soul*, which is the subject and medium of nobility; the formal in referring to it as *the seed*; the efficient in referring to it being *planted by God* in the well-disposed soul; the final in referring to it being the seed *of happiness*. Thus we have now defined the nature of human virtue, which descends to us from the supreme spiritual virtue as virtue descends into a precious stone from the noblest celestial body.

Chapter XXI: The Gift of Nobility

In order to gain a more perfect understanding of that human goodness called nobility, which is the source of all good in us, we must clarify in this particular chapter how this goodness descends to us, first with regard to natural principles and then to theological principles, that is, by way of the divine and the spiritual. We should know firstly that man is composed of body and soul, and it is in the soul, as has been said, that nobility resides, nobility being the seed of divine virtue.

Various philosophers have, it is true, held varying opinions regarding the differences between our souls. For Avicenna and Algazel maintained that souls are noble or vile in and of themselves from inception. Plato and others maintained that they issue from the stars and are more or less noble according to the nobility of their individual star. Pythagoras maintained that all souls were equally noble, not only human souls but those of the creatures and plants, and mineral forms; and he said that the only differences lay in their matter and form. If each were to defend his own opinion, it would be possible to find some truth in all. But since on initial examination they appear somewhat distant from the truth, it is more appropriate to proceed according to the opinion of Aristotle and the Peripatetics rather than them.

So I say that when human seed enters the womb, it bears with it the power of the generative soul, and the power of heaven, and the power of the combined elements, namely the innate disposition. It ripens and organises matter to receive the formative power donated by the soul of the engenderer, and the formative power readies the organs to receive the celestial power which, from the potentiality of the seed, actualises the living soul. As soon as the living soul is created it receives, from the power of the celestial mover, intellectual potential, which draws to itself all the universal forms, in their potentiality, as they are found in its maker, but to a lesser degree the more distant it is from the primal Intelligence.

It should not be a surprise to anyone if I speak in a manner difficult of comprehension since even to myself it seems a wonder how a process such as that could ever be fully perceived and described by the intellect. It is not something that can be expressed verbally, in the vernacular, I mean. Thus, I would say in the words of the Apostle Paul: *‘O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How un-searchable are his judgements and his ways past finding out!’* Since the disposition of the seed may be more or less beneficial, and the disposition of its sower more or less beneficial, and the disposition of the Heavens in their effects good, better or of the best, varying in accordance with the constellations which undergo

continuous change, it follows that the soul created from human seed and these powers is of greater or lesser purity. According to its purity the power of intellectual potential, mentioned above, descends into it, in the manner described. If, due to the purity of the recipient soul, it should happen that the intellectual power is quite free of and distant from every physical shadow, then divine virtue increases in it, as in a substance fitted to receive it: hence it increases this intellectual power in the mind, according to the mind's capacity for receiving it. This is that seed of happiness of which I am currently speaking.

And this is in accord with the opinion expressed by Cicero in his book *On Old Age* where he says, speaking in the person of Cato: '*Thus a celestial soul descended into us from the highest house, to a place which is contrary in nature to the divine nature and to eternity.*' In a soul such as this exists its own proper powers, the intellectual power, and the divine power, that is, the influence mentioned above. So it is written in Aristotle's book *On Causes*: '*Every noble soul has three activities, the animal, the intellectual, and the divine.*' There are even some who claim that if all the preceding powers in their optimum disposition were conjoined in the creation of a soul, so much of the Deity would descend into it that it would become almost another God incarnate. This is virtually all that can be said of the matter with regard to the principles of philosophy.

With regard to the principles of theology, it may be said that when the supreme deity, God, sees his creature ready to receive his benefaction, he endows it with gifts in proportion to its readiness to receive those gifts. Since the gifts derive from ineffable Love, and that divine Love is an attribute of the Holy Spirit, they are called the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts, as Isaiah distinguishes them, are seven in number: namely, Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Strength, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of God. O fortunate harvest, O fortunate and wondrous seed! O generous and admirable sower, who only waits for human nature to prepare the soil for sowing! Blessed are those who cultivate such seed aright! Here we should know that the first and noblest shoot which sprouts from this seed and bears fruit is the intellectual appetite, which in Greek is *hormen*. If this is not correctly cultivated and rightly nurtured through benign habits, the seed is of little worth, and it would have been better if it had not been sown. Therefore Saint Augustine asserts, as does Aristotle in the second book of the *Ethics*, that one should cultivate the habit of acting virtuously and restraining one's passions in order that this shoot of which I spoke may grow strong through benign habit and be strengthened in its uprightness, in order to bear fruit, and from this fruit produce the sweetness of human happiness.

Chapter XXII: On Human Happiness

It is a precept, espoused by moral philosophers who speak about beneficence, that one should invest care and thought in rendering one's gifts as useful as possible when presenting them to their recipient. Thus, wishing to act in accord with this rule, I intend to make my Convivio as useful in each of its sections as I can. As the opportunity presents itself, in this section, to speak about human happiness at some length, I shall speak about its sweetness, since no other discussion could be more useful to those who lack knowledge of it. For, as Aristotle says in the first book of the *Ethics*, and Cicero in his book on *The Purpose of Good*, he who cannot see the target aims amiss, and in the same way he who does not perceive this sweetness cannot rightly attain it. So, as it is our ultimate solace, for the sake of which we live and dedicate ourselves to action, it is supremely necessary and useful to perceive this target, in order to aim the arrow of our activity towards it. And he is most highly regarded who indicates it to those who do not perceive it.

Ignoring, therefore, the opinions held by Epicurus and Zeno on the matter, I intend to pass directly to the true opinion held by Aristotle and the other Peripatetics. As was said earlier, from that divine goodness, sown and infused in us at generative inception, a shoot springs which the Greeks term *hormen*; that is the natural mental appetite. Just as the various crops look identically grass-like when they first spring up, then lose their similarities as they grow, so this natural appetite, issuing from divine grace, seems at inception not unlike that which simply comes from nature, and is similar to it, just as the first shoots of the various crops are similar to one another.. This similarity is found in animals as well as men; and this is apparent in the way that every animal, rational as well as brutish, as soon as it is born, loves itself, and fears and flees from things which are inimical to it, which it hates. Then as this appetite develops, in a dissimilar manner, one takes one path and another takes another path. As the Apostle Paul says: '*they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize*' so human appetites develop from inception along differing paths, yet there is one path alone that leads us to our peace. Thus, ignoring all others, we must follow in our present text that one which begins well.

I say then, that from inception this appetite loves itself, though indiscriminately; then it begins to distinguish those things that it likes or dislikes to a greater or lesser degree, and pursues or flees to a greater or lesser degree, to the extent that its understanding allows it to make distinctions not only between those things which it loves secondarily, but

also within itself, its principal love. And distinguishing within itself those parts which are noblest, it loves them more; and since the mind is a nobler part of man than the body it loves that part more. And so first loving itself, and, through itself, other things, and also loving the better part of itself more, it is clear that it loves the mind more than the body or other things; the mind which it ought to love more than other things, by nature. Thus, if the mind ever delights in the use of the thing beloved, that being the fruit of love, and if the greatest delight is found in the use of the thing most loved, then the use of the mind is our chief delight. And what is most delightful to us: in that is our happiness and blessedness, beyond which lies no greater delight, nor even any equal, as all can see who consider the preceding argument with care.

And let none say that every appetite is a mental one, for by mind I intend here only what concerns the rational part, that is, the will and intellect. Thus, if any should wish to call the sensory appetite mind, that proposition would not and could not be admitted, since no one doubts that the rational appetite is nobler than the sensory one, and therefore more worthy of love. So it is with this appetite of which we speak. In fact there is a twofold use of the mind, practical and speculative, practical meaning operative, each of which is delightful, though contemplation is more so, as has been explained above in the seventeenth chapter. The practical use of the mind consists of our acting in accord with virtue, that is, rightly, with prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice; the speculative use consists not of our actions, but our reflection on the works of God, and Nature. This together with the other constitutes our blessedness and supreme happiness, as can be seen. This is the sweetness of the seed mentioned above, as is now clear, a sweetness which the seed rarely attains, due to its poor cultivation or wayward growth. Conversely it may arise through careful regulation and cultivation, since as the seed sprouts it may grow to reach a place where it did not originally take root, so as to attain the fruit. This is a kind of grafting process, of a given nature onto a different rootstock. Therefore no one can be excused for failing to attain it, since if the fruit is not acquired from a person's own roots, he may well acquire it by means of a graft. Indeed, would that those who have realised a graft were as numerous as those who allow themselves to stray from the excellence of this root!

One of these two uses of the mind is indeed more filled with blessedness than the other; namely, the speculative, which, being inviolate, is the use of the noblest mental faculty, namely, the intellect, which due to that love rooted in us which has been mentioned, is most worthy of love. That faculty cannot, in this life, find perfect use which is to see God, the

supreme object of intellect, except insofar as it contemplates and beholds him through his effects. We find if we read carefully, that the Gospel of Saint Mark teaches us to seek this blessedness, and not that of the active life, as the highest. Mark says that Mary Magdalene, Mary of James, and Mary Salome went to the sepulchre to find the Saviour and did not find him there. They did, however, discover a young man dressed in white who said to them: *'You seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen: he is not here; behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there ye shall see him, as he said unto you.'* By these three ladies may be understood the three schools of the active life: namely the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the Peripatetics, who go to the sepulchre, that is the present world, which is the house of corruptible things, to seek the Saviour, that is blessedness, and fail to find him. But they do find a young man in white, who, according to the testimony of Matthews and others, was an angel of God. Thus Matthew says: *'the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow.'*

This angel is our nobility, which comes from God, as has been said, and speaks through our faculty of reason, saying to each one of these schools, that is, to all who go in search of blessedness through the active life, that it is not here, but that they should go and tell the disciples and Peter, that is, those who go seeking him and those who have gone astray, like Peter who denied him, that he will go before them into Galilee, that is, that blessedness will go before us into Galilee, that is, into contemplation. Galilee, that is, as much as to say, whiteness; whiteness being a colour more imbued with material light than any other; as contemplation is more imbued with spiritual light than anything else found here below. And the angel says: *'He will go before you'*, and not *'He will be with you'*, so that we understand that God is always in advance of our contemplation, and that we can never here below attain to him who is our supreme blessedness. And he says: *'There you will see him, as he said'* that is, there you will possess his sweetness, namely happiness, just as it has been promised to you here, that is, as it has been ordained that you will be empowered to possess it. And so it appears that we are first able to find our blessedness, this happiness of which we speak, imperfectly, as it were, in the active life, that is, in the exercise of the moral virtues, and later on perfectly in the exercise of the intellectual virtues. These two types of activity are the swiftest and most direct paths leading to the supreme blessedness, which cannot be possessed here, as is clear from what has been said.

Chapter XXIII: The Signs of Nobility

Now that the definition of nobility has been adequately examined, and clarified throughout as far as is possible, so that we now see what constitutes the noble person, it seems appropriate to proceed to that part of the text which begins: *And the soul this goodness adorns*, which identifies the signs by which we may recognise the noble person referred to above. This part is subdivided in two: in the first section I affirm that this nobility openly shines and glows throughout the entire life of a noble person; in the second it reveals the distinctive splendours of nobility; the second section begins: *Obedient she is, sweet and modest*.

Regarding the first section, it should be known that this divine seed, of which I have spoken, germinates instantly in our soul, growing and extending itself diversely into each power of the soul according to its need. It germinates then in the vegetative, sensory and rational powers, and branches out through all their virtues, directing all of them to their perfection, and preserving itself in them until the moment when, with that part of the soul which is undying, it returns to heaven, to the highest and most glorious Sower. The text states this in the first section mentioned. Then, when it says: *Obedient she is, sweet and modest*, it shows how we may recognise a noble person by manifest signs, which constitute the action of this divine goodness; the section is subdivided in four parts, according to its varied action in the four ages of humanity: that is, adolescence, maturity, old age, and senility. The second part commences: *In maturity, she is firm and temperate*; the third commences: *Then in old age she's just*; the fourth commences: *Finally in life's fourth phase*. This is the general meaning of this section, regarding which it should be known that every effect, insofar as it is effect, is stamped with a likeness to its cause, to the degree that it can retain it. So, since our life, as has been said, and the life of every living thing here below is caused by heaven, and heaven reveals itself to all such effects not as a complete circuit, but a partial circuit, and so its motion above them is virtually an arc, all earthly life, and by earthly I mean not merely men but other forms of life, rising and falling, must also resemble an arc. Turning again to human life, which is our sole concern at present, I assert then that it resembles this arc, rising and falling again.

It should be noted that arcs below, like the one above, would be of equal span, if the material sown in our constitution did not impede the full measure of human nature. But since the fundamental humour, the substance and nourishment of the heat that constitutes our life, varies in degree and quality, and has greater duration in one effect than another, then the arc of

one person's life is of greater or lesser span than another. Death is sometimes violent, or hastened by sudden illness, but only that death which is commonly known as natural, constitutes the boundary of which the Psalmist has said: '*Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over*'. The master of our life, Aristotle, knowing of this arc of which we speak, appears to believe that our life is simply a rise and fall, and so he says in his book *On Maturity and Old Age*, that maturation is simply growth. It is difficult to establish where the highest point of this arc lies, because of the variation in span mentioned above, but in most lives, I believe, it is attained between the thirtieth and fortieth year, and in those whose nature is perfect, I believe it is attained in the thirty-fifth year. And this logic convinces me: that our Saviour, Christ, had a perfect nature and chose to die in the thirty-fourth year of his life, because it would not have been fitting for divinity to enter into such a decline. Nor is it credible that he would not have wished to remain alive until he had reached this summit of ours, since he had lived here during the inferior state of youth. This is revealed by the hour of his death, since he wished to make it conformant with his life. As Luke says, it was near the sixth hour when he died, which is to say the height of day. Thus we may take the word 'near' to signify that Christ's thirty-fifth year was the summit of his life.

However this arc of life is not characterised in the writings solely by reference to its midpoint, but is divided into four periods, according to the four combinations of contrary qualities that compose us, to each of which combinations one part of our life corresponds, and these are known as the four ages of man. The first is Adolescence, which corresponds to the hot and moist; the second is Maturity which corresponds to the hot and dry; the third is Old Age, which corresponds to the cold and dry; and the fourth is Senility which corresponds to the cold and moist, as Albertus says in his *De aetate*. These periods of life also correspond to the seasons of the year, spring, summer, autumn and winter, and the hours of the day, up to tierce, from tierce to nones (omitting sext, mid-way between, for an obvious reason), nones to vespers, and vespers onward. Therefore the gentiles, that is, the pagans, said that the sun's chariot was drawn by four horses: Eoüs, Pyroïs, Aethon, and Phlegon, as Ovid records in the second book of the *Metamorphoses*.

Regarding the parts of the day, it should be briefly noted that as was said above in the sixth chapter of the third book, the Church, when distinguishing the hours of the day, employs the temporal hours, of which there are twelve in each day, long or short according to the length of the solar day. Because the sixth hour, that is, mid-day, is the noblest hour of the

entire day, and the most virtuous, it draws the religious offices near to it, that is both before and after it, from each side, as far as is possible. For this reason the office of the first part of the day, tierce, is said at the end of that part of the day, while the offices of the third and fourth parts are said at their beginning. And for this reason mid-tierce is said before the bell is rung for that part of the day, and mid-nones after it is rung for that part of the day, as is mid-vespers. It should therefore be clear to all, that nones should properly be rung at the beginning of the seventh hour of the day. And this is sufficient for the present digression.

Chapter XXIV: The Four Ages of Man

Returning to the main statement, I say that human life is divided into four ages. The first is called Adolescence, which means 'increase of life'; the second is Maturity which means 'the age that may be productive', that is, which can grant perfection, and so is considered the perfect age, since one can only grant what one already has; the third is Old Age, and the fourth Senility, as was said above.

Regarding the first age, no one doubts, and the learned all agree, that it lasts till the twenty-fifth year; and since up to that time the soul is concerned with the growth and beauty of body, as many great changes occur in one's person, the rational part cannot discriminate perfectly. Thus the Law ordains that prior to attaining this age a person may not do certain things without a mature guardian.

Regarding the second age which is indeed the summit of life opinions vary widely as to its duration. However, leaving aside what philosophers and physicians have to say, and referring to the appropriate law, I say that for the majority, with regard to whom every judgement regarding what is natural to us must be made, this age lasts for twenty years. The reasoning which leads me to this conclusion is that if the highest point of our span is in the thirty-fifth year, the periods of rise and fall within this age of maturity must be of equal duration; this ascent and descent is shaped like a taut bow. It follows therefore that maturity is completed in the forty-fifth years. And just as adolescence lasts for the first twenty-five years, rising towards maturity, so the fall, that is old age, lasts for the same number of years following maturity, and concludes in the seventieth year. Yet since adolescence does not begin at the first moment of life, taking it in the sense stated, but nearly eight years later, and since our nature strives to ascend and is held back in descending because the natural heat has decreased and possesses little power, and the moisture has condensed, reduced not in quantity but quality, so that it evaporates and is consumed less quickly, then beyond old age there remains a period of perhaps ten years, more or less; and this period is senility. Hence it is said of Plato who may be said to have possessed a most excellent nature in its perfection of being and in that physiognomy Socrates observed when he first saw him that he lived to the age of eighty-one, as Cicero affirms in his book *On Old Age*. And I believe that if Christ had not been crucified and had lived out the span which his life, according to its nature, might have encompassed he would have passed from the mortal body into the eternal in his eighty-first year.

In fact, as has been said above, these ages may be longer or shorter according to our temperament and constitution, but whatever their duration, it seems to me that, as has been said, this proportion must be maintained in all persons, that is, by making the ages longer or shorter according to the sum of their full term of natural life. Throughout each of these ages, the nobility of which I speak in the *canzone* reveals its effects variously in the soul that is ennobled, and this is what the stanza, about which I am currently writing, is intended to show. Here it should be noted that our nature when fine and upright develops in accord with what is reasonable, just as we see plants developing according to their nature; and thus some manners and modes of behaviour are more reasonable at one age than another, where the ennobled soul develops in an orderly manner along a direct path, employing its activities in the periods and ages of life proper to them, according as they are directed to the attainment of its ultimate fruit, happiness. Cicero agrees with this in his book *On Old Age*. Leaving to one side the allegorical meaning that Virgil gives the various ages of human development in the *Aeneid*, and what Egidius the Hermit says regarding it in the first part of his book *The Regimen of Princes*, and likewise Cicero in his book *On Offices*, and simply pursuing what reason can perceive of itself, I say that this first age is the door and path by which we enter on this our good life. The portal must necessarily provide certain things which Nature's goodness, never lacking in essentials, grants us, just as we see her giving the vine its leaves to protect the grapes, and tendrils to defend and strengthen its weakness so as to bear the weight of fruit.

The beneficence of Nature, then, gives this age four things essential to our entry into the city of the good life. The first is obedience, the second sweetness, the third modesty, the fourth beauty of body, as my *canzone* says in this section. We should know therefore that just as a person who has never been in a city would not know how to find their way about without guidance from someone familiar with it, so an adolescent who enters the tangled wood of this life would not know which was the right path unless it was shown to them by their elders. Nor would it be helpful to point it out unless they were obedient to command; thus obedience is essential to this age of life.

Some might well say: is one who is obedient to obey false direction as well as good? I reply that this is not obedience but transgression: for if the king commands one thing and the servant another, to obey the servant would be to show disobedience to the king, which is transgression. Thus Solomon says, in seeking to correct his son, and it is his first command: '*My son, hear the instruction of thy father*'. He shields him from bad advice and the teaching of others, saying: '*My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.*'

Thus, as an infant clings to its mother's breast as soon as it is born, likewise a son, as soon as light enters his mind, should respond to his father's correction, and his father should instruct him. He should ensure that his own actions do not provide a counter-example to his words of correction, since we see that every son would naturally follow his father's footsteps than those of another. For this reason, the Law, taking this into account, states and commands that the father's person should always be considered righteous and upstanding by his sons; thus it is clear that obedience is essential to this stage of life. And Solomon therefore writes in *Proverbs*, that he who suffers his chastener's just reproofs humbly and obediently '*shall be honoured*' and he says '*shall be*' to indicate that he is speaking to an adolescent, one who could not be honoured in their present stage of life.

If someone objected that what is said is said only regarding the father and not others, I reply that all obedience refers back to the parent. Thus the Apostle Paul says to the Colossians: '*Children obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.*' If the father is no longer living, it refers back to whoever is designated such by the father's last will. Should the father die intestate, it refers back to whoever the Law entrusts with the child's guidance. Next in order, teachers and elders should be obeyed, those to whom the child appears to have been entrusted by the father or by one who stands in the father's place.

Since the present chapter has become lengthy due to the useful digressions which it contains, I will discuss the remaining points in a further chapter.

Chapter XXV: Adolescence

Not only is the virtuous soul and nature obedient in adolescence, it is also pleasant, which is the other thing essential to this age of life in order to pass satisfactorily through the gate of maturity. It is essential because we cannot possess the perfect life without friends, as Aristotle asserts in the eighth book of the *Ethics*; and the majority of friendships seem to be created in this first stage of life because at this stage a man begins to be gracious or otherwise. This graciousness is acquired through pleasant behaviour, namely sweet and courteous speech, and sweet and courteous service and acts. This is why Solomon says to his adolescent son: *'Surely, He scorneth the scorner: but He gives grace unto the lowly.'* And elsewhere he says: *'Put away from thee a froward mouth and perverse lips put far from thee.'* And thus it seems this pleasantness is essential, as has been said.

Moreover, feelings of shame are essential in this period of life, and so a virtuous and noble nature displays it at this time, as the text says. Since a feeling of shame is a highly distinctive mark of nobility in adolescence, because it is vital for creating a firm foundation to the life towards which the noble nature inclines, we must speak of it with some care. I say that by shame I mean a trio of emotions essential to the basis of a virtuous life: the first is awe, the second modesty, the third a sense of shame, though everyone does not comprehend this distinction. All three are essential to this stage of life for these reasons: it is necessary to be reverent and eager in order to learn; to be restrained in order to avoid transgression; to repent of errors, so as not to fall into habitual error. These comprise the feelings which together are commonly called shame.

Awe is the amazement of the mind at seeing, hearing, or in some other way perceiving, great and marvellous things. Inasmuch as they appear great, they inspire reverence in those who perceive them; inasmuch as they appear marvellous, they create a yearning for knowledge of them. That is why ancient kings placed magnificent works of art, gold and gems, in their palaces, so that those who saw them would be amazed, and therefore would feel reverence, and be eager to gain information of the king's honours. Thus Statius, the sweet poet, in the first book of the *Thebaid*, says that when Adrastus, king of the Argives, saw Polynices clad in a lion's skin, and Tydeus in the hide of a wild boar, and recalled the reply Apollo had given concerning his daughters (*Regarding which of their suitors he should allow to wed his two daughters, the Delphic Oracle replied: 'Yoke to a two-wheeled chariot the boar and lion which contend in your palace'*), he was struck with awe, and became more reverent and eager to acquire knowledge.

Modesty is the mind's recoil from base things, for fear of becoming associated with them; as we see with virgins, virtuous women, and adolescents who are so modest that their faces become pallid or tinged with red, not only when they are tempted or induced to commit a fault, but even when some act of sensual pleasure is conceived in imagination. Thus Statius says, in the first book of the *Thebaid* cited, that when Aceste, the nurse to Argia and Deiphyle, Adrastus' two daughters, brought them before their noble father in the presence of two strangers, Polynices and Tydeus, the virgins became pallid and then flushed, and their eyes evaded every other glance, turning to their father's gaze alone, for reassurance. O how many faults modesty curbs! How many dishonourable actions and demands it silences! How many ignoble desires it bridles! How many evil temptations it checks, not merely in the modest person but in whoever gazes on them! How many foul words it restrains! As Cicero says in the first book of *On Offices*, '*There is no foul act that is not foul to speak about.*' Therefore a modest and noble man never speaks in such a way that his words would be unbecoming to a woman. Ah, how ill it becomes a noble man in search of honour to speak of things that would sound ill on a woman's lips!

A sense of shame is the fear of being disgraced for committing a fault. From this fear springs repentance for the fault, which within it has a bitter taste that acts as a curb on further fault. Thus Statius says in the aforementioned passage that Polynices, when asked by King Adrastus about his origin, hesitated, from shame, before speaking of his transgression against his father, and the faults of his father, Oedipus, since they were witnessed in the son's shame. He named his ancestors, his native land, and his mother, but not his father. From this it is evident that a sense of shame is essential to this age of life.

Not only obedience, pleasantness, and shame, are displayed by a noble nature in this period of life, but also beauty and poise of body, as the text affirms where it says: *She adorns her body*. And the word adorns is a verb and not a noun, a verb, I say, in the present tense indicative of the third person. Here we should note that this operation is also essential for the good life, since a great part of the activity of the soul must be achieved by means of the body and the body is effective when it is well-ordered and well-disposed in its parts. When it is so, it is then beautiful in part and in whole; since proper order among the members grants the pleasure of wonderful and inexpressible harmony, and their proper disposition, their health, gives them a colour pleasant to observe. So to say that a noble nature makes the body beautiful, lovely and well-poised is simply to say that it adorns it with the perfection of order. It is clear that this characteristic, along with those

already discussed, is essential to adolescence. These then are the things that the noble soul, that is the noble nature, intends it to possess from the beginning, as a thing, as has been said, seeded by divine providence.

Chapter XXVI: Maturity

Now that the first section of this part, which shows how we may recognise a noble person by manifest signs, has been discussed, I must proceed to the second section which begins: *In maturity, is firm and temperate*. Here it says that as in adolescence the noble nature shows itself to be obedient, sweet and modest, adorning its own person, so in maturity it is firm, temperate, loving, courteous and honest; five qualities which seem to be, and are in fact, essential for our perfection, insofar as we consider it in relation to own selves. Regarding this, we should note that everything noble nature prepares in the first stage of life is set out and ordered by the foresight of universal Nature, which directs individual natures to their perfection. This perfection of ours can be considered in two ways. It can be considered with regard to ourselves, and must be achieved in maturity, which is the fullness of life. Or it can be considered with regard to others; and because self-perfection is essential first, which must then be communicated to others, this secondary perfection can only be achieved in the succeeding stage of life, namely old age, as will be explained below.

Here we must first recall what was discussed previously in the twenty-second chapter regarding our initial and inborn appetite. This appetite only ever pursues or flees; and when it pursues or flees what is proper to the correct extent, a person stays within the bounds of perfection. Nevertheless this appetite must be curbed by reason, for just as a loose horse, however noble its nature, cannot be guided without a good rider, so this appetite, which is called, by the philosophers, irascible (seeking to avoid the spiritually repellent) or concupiscent (seeking to unite with the object of desire), however noble it may be, must obey reason, which guides it with bridle and spur like a good horseman. Reason uses the bridle when appetite is in pursuit, and this bridle is temperance, marking the limits of pursuit; it uses the spur when appetite is in flight, to turn it back towards the place from which it flees, and the spur is called courage, or magnanimity, a virtue that indicates the place to stand and fight. And how unrestrained Aeneas was, Virgil, the greatest of poets, shows in that part of the *Aeneid* where this stage of life is allegorised, namely in the fourth, fifth and sixth books. How great his restraint when, having found such pleasure with Dido, and having derived so much gratification from her, he left her to pursue an honourable, praiseworthy and fruitful path, as is recorded in the fourth book of the *Aeneid*. What spurring, when Aeneas plucked up the courage, in the face of great peril, to enter Hell with only the Sibyl beside him, in search of the ghost of his father Anchises, as is described in the sixth book of that story.

From this it is clear that to achieve perfection in the time of maturity it is essential to be *firm and temperate*. This is what the virtuous nature achieves and demonstrates, as the text expressly states.

It is essential, moreover, in order to achieve perfection at this stage of life, to be loving, since it is appropriate, as this period lies on the meridian circle, for it to look both forward and backward: and it is appropriate to love one's elders, from whom one has received existence, nurture and education, and not to appear ungrateful, just as it is to appropriate to love one's juniors, so that by loving them maturity may provide benefits to those from whom, later, it may, if prosperity fails, derive support and honour. As Virgil reveals in the fifth book of the *Aeneid*, it is this love which Aeneas showed when he left the elderly Trojans behind in Sicily, entrusting them to Acestes' care, freeing them from their labours, and when in the same place he prepared his young son Ascanius, and the other youths, for the games. From this it is clear that love is essential to this stage of life, as the text says.

Moreover it is necessary to be courteous at this stage of life, for though courtesy is becoming in all ages of life, in this age it is especially necessary, because absence of it cannot be readily excused as it can in adolescence because of tenderness of youth, or in old age, conversely, because it is rendered impossible by the gravity and sternness it is required to show; and still more so in senility. Virgil, our noblest poet, shows, in the sixth book mentioned, that Aeneas possessed such courtesy, where he says that in order to honour the lifeless body of Misenus, Hector's trumpeter, who had placed himself in his hands, Aeneas took his axe and prepared himself to hew wood for the funeral pyre, according to their custom. From this it is clear that courtesy is essential to maturity, and therefore the noble spirit displays it at that stage of life, as has been said.

Further, it is essential at this stage of life to be loyal. Loyalty consists of practising what the laws decree, and this is particularly appropriate in the mature; for an adolescent, as has been said, may be excused because of the tenderness of youth; and an elder should be just by virtue of his wider experience, and ought to conduct himself in a just manner, not merely as a follower of the law where his own judgement and the law are virtually in agreement, but almost independently of any law, which is something a person at the mature stage cannot do. It suffices that such a person follows the law and takes pleasure in following it, as Virgil, in the fifth book, says Aeneas did, when he held the Sicilian games on the anniversary of his father's death, for he loyally awarded each victor what he had promised, according to their long-standing custom, which was their law.

From all this it is clear that loyalty, courtesy, love, courage and temperance are essential to this stage of life, as the text of my *canzone* states; and therefore the noble soul displays them all.

Chapter XXVII: Old Age

Having adequately examined and discussed the attributes a noble nature confers on maturity, as displayed in my text, it seems fitting to consider the third part which begins: *Then, in old age*, where the text seeks to reveal those things which a noble nature exhibits and should possess in that third age of life.. It states that in old age the noble soul is prudent, just, generous, and takes delight in speaking well of others' virtues, and hearing them well-spoken of, that is to say, is affable. These four virtues are well-suited indeed to this stage of life.

In order to see this we should note that, as Cicero says in his book *On Old Age*: '*Life has a fixed path and virtuous nature a single course; and in each part of our life a season has been given for certain things.*' Therefore, as that which will bring us to ripeness and perfection is granted to adolescence, as was said above, so ripeness and perfection in turn are granted to maturity, that the sweetness of its fruit may prove profitable to itself and others; for as Aristotle says, man is a social animal, and thus he is required to be useful to others as well as himself. Hence we read of Cato that he thought of himself as born not merely for himself, but rather for his country and the whole world. Therefore, following on our own perfection, which we acquire in maturity, should come that perfection which illuminates others as well as ourselves; one should open like a rose that can no longer remain closed, and shed the fragrance created within; and that in the third age of life which concerns us here. One should therefore be prudent, that is, wise, and to be wise requires a vivid memory of things past, a sound knowledge of things present, and a clear foresight for things future. For, as Aristotle says in the sixth book of the *Ethics*: '*It is impossible for a man to be wise without being virtuous,*' so that a person who proceeds by cunning and deceit is called astute and not wise; for just as no one would call a man wise for knowing how to pierce the pupil of an eye with the point of a knife, so a man who knows how to perform evil acts is not to be called wise, since by performing it he always harms himself while harming others.

Considering this more carefully, from prudence good counsel arises, which in human actions and affairs guides a man, and others also, to a virtuous end. This is the gift that Solomon asked of God on finding himself at the helm of government, as is written in the third book of Kings. Nor does a prudent man such as this wait to be summoned by the words 'Counsel me', but he makes provision for counselling others, just as a rose offers its scent not only to those who approach it for that reason but to whoever passes nearby. Some doctor or lawyer might reply to this: '*Shall I offer my counsel*

then even if it is not asked for, and thus make no profit from my skill?’ I answer as our Lord did: *‘Freely have you received, freely give.’* Thus, dear lawyer, I say that you should not sell those counsels unrelated to your skill, which derive only from the commonsense God gave you, and this is the prudence of which we speak, to the children of Him who gave it to you: but those counsels that are related to your skill, which you have purchased, you may sell, but not without fittingly paying an occasional tithe and making an offering to God, that is to those poor wretches who have nothing left but God’s bounty.

It is also fitting to be just at this stage of life, so that one’s judgement and authority may be a light and law to others. As this specific virtue, justice, was reckoned by ancient philosophers to display itself to perfection in this age of life, they entrusted the rule of cities to those of this age: and therefore the council of rulers was called the Senate (from *senes*, old men). O alas, alas my country! What pity for you grips me whenever I read or write anything that has to do with civil government! However, as justice will be dealt with in the penultimate book of this work let it suffice to have touched on it briefly here.

It is also fitting to be generous at this stage of life, because a thing is fitting when it satisfies the requirements of its own nature most fully: nor can the requirements of generosity be so satisfied except in this age of life. For if we carefully consider Aristotle’s reasoning in the fourth book of the *Ethics*, and Cicero’s in his book *On Offices*, generosity should be evidenced at a time and place where the generous man injures neither himself nor others. This is something that cannot be achieved without prudence and justice, virtues which it is impossible to possess in their perfection, naturally, before this stage of life. Oh, you ill-fated misbegotten men who defraud wards of court and widows, steal from the weakest of all, rob others of their rights by force, and with your gains host banquets, grant horses and arms, goods and money, dress in fashionable attire, erect fine buildings, and believe yourselves generous! What is this but to act like a thief, who steals the altar-cloth to cover his own table? We should deride your gifts, you tyrants, as we would that thief who invites guests to his house and spreads the stolen altar-cloth on his table, its ecclesiastical markings still visible, thinking they will take no notice. Listen, stubborn men, to what Cicero says of you in his book *On Offices*: *‘There are many, who wish to be famous and impress, who take from some to give to others, believing they will be well regarded, enriching others for whatever reason they choose. But nothing is more opposed to what is right than this is.’*

It is also appropriate to be affable at this stage of life, to speak of the good and hear it discussed willingly, because it is fine to speak of the good when it gains a hearing. This stage of life also carries an air of authority, because men are more inclined to find this age's voice authoritative than any earlier one: and it brings knowledge of many fine and virtuous matters because of its wider experience. Thus Cicero says in his book *On Old Age*, in the person of Cato the Elder: *'I derive greater pleasure and satisfaction from conversation now than I once did.'*

Ovid tells us, in the seventh book of the *Metamorphoses*, that all these four things are appropriate to this stage of life, by citing the myth in which Cephalus of Athens approached King Aeacus for help in his war against the Cretans. He shows how prudent old Aeacus was when, having lost almost the whole of his people to plague, caused by airborne contamination, he wisely turned to God and asked him to restore the dead. Because of his wisdom, which allowed him to maintain his patience and turn to God, his people were restored to him in greater numbers than before. Ovid shows how just he was, recounting that Aeacus distributed the deserted lands among his new people. He shows his generosity, by having him say to Cephalus after the request for help: *'Don't ask for our help, assume it. Don't hesitate to reckon the forces of this island your own, and (let this state of my fortunes last!) energy is not lacking. I have men enough, and thank the gods, the moment is auspicious and there will be no excuses'*.

Oh, how much there is of note in this reply! But to one who understands it thoroughly it suffices to set it down here without additions. Ovid shows that Aeacus was affable in his long diligently-recounted speech to Cephalus, telling the story of the plague and his people's restoration. Thus it is clear that four things are appropriate to this stage of life, which is why the noble nature displays them there, as the text states. To make the example given more memorable, Ovid says of Aeacus that he was the father of Telamon, Peleus and Phocus, while Ajax was the son of Telamon and Achilles of Peleus.

Chapter XXVIII: Senility

After covering the previous parts of the *canzone* regarding the stages of life I must proceed to discuss the last part which begins: *Finally in life's fourth phase*, and in which the text propose to show how the noble soul acts in that last age of life, namely senility. It states that the noble soul does two things: firstly, that it returns to God as if to the harbour from which it departed when it entered the ocean of life; secondly, that it blesses the journey it has made, because it has proved direct, favourable, and free of bitter storms.

Here it should be noted that, as Cicero says in his book *On Old Age*, a natural death is as it were a harbour and place of rest after our long journey. This is surely true, for just as a capable sailor lowers his sails on approaching port and progressing smoothly enters it quietly, so we must lower our sails of worldly preoccupation and return to God in our whole mind and heart, so that we reach our harbour in perfect gentleness and peace. Here our own nature provides a major lesson in gentleness, for in a death such as this there is no suffering or harshness; as a ripened apple drops gently from the bough, with no violence, so without suffering the soul parts from the body in which it dwelt. Thus Aristotle, in his book *On Youth and Old Age*, says that: *'death in old age takes place without sadness.'* And just as one who returns from a long journey is met at his city gate by the citizens, so the noble soul is met, as it ought to be, by the citizens of the eternal life. This is achieved by contemplating their virtuous works and thoughts: for having already surrendered itself to God and disengaged from worldly matters and preoccupations, it seems the soul sees those whom it believes to be with God. Listen to what Cicero says, in the person of Cato the Elder: *'I seem already to see, and inspire myself with the greatest longing to see, your ancestors whom I loved, and not only them, but also those of whom I have heard.'* The noble soul, then, surrenders itself to God at this stage of life, and awaits the end of life with great longing, seems in departing an inn to be returning to its true dwelling, in arriving from a journey to be returning to its city, in leaving the open sea to be returning to its harbour.

O you wretched vile beings who course, sails spread, towards that port! Where you should find rest you wreck yourselves, in going against the wind, and perish in the very place towards which you have journeyed for so long! Lancelot, that noble knight, did not wish to enter with sails spread, nor that noblest of Italians, Guido da Montefeltro. Those noble individuals lowered the sails of worldly preoccupation, and in later life entered a religious order, forsaking all their worldly pleasures and affairs. Nor is one

excused because of the bond of marriage, which may bind still in later life; since it is not only those who conform to the life and rules of the Saints; Benedict, Augustine, Francis and Dominic, who are dedicated to the religious life, for even those who are married can dedicate themselves to living a good and truly religious life, for it is in our hearts that God wishes us to be religious. That is why Saint Paul says to the Romans: *'For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.'*

At this stage of life the noble spirit blesses times past, and well may it do so, because by turning its thoughts to the past it recalls its own virtuous actions, without which it could not reach the harbour it approaches with such a degree of wealth and gain. It behaves like the virtuous merchant who, as he nears port, considers his profit, saying: *'If I had not made this journey I would not have gained this wealth, nor would I have any delight to take in my city which I am nearing'* and so he blesses the path taken. The fine poet Lucan reveals, in the second book of his *Pharsalia*, by way of allegory, the two things appropriate to this stage of life. He says there that Marcia in old age returned to Cato and begged him to take her back. Here Marcia signifies the noble soul. And we may translate the allegorical figure as follows. Marcia was a virgin, signifying in that state adolescence, and later married Cato, signifying in that state maturity; she then bore children, and they signify the virtues appropriate to maturity; she then left Cato and married Hortensius, signifying thus the end of maturity and the onset of old age; she also bore him children signifying the virtues appropriate to old age. Hortensius died, and Marcia having thus become a widow, by which is signified the end of old age, and the state of senility, she returned, at the commencement of her widowhood, to Cato, signifying that the noble soul returns to God at that time. What man on earth is more worthy of signifying God than Cato? None: indeed.

What does Marcia say to Cato? *'While there was blood in my veins,'* she says, that is, in maturity, *'while I still had the power to bear children'*, namely in old age, which is indeed the mother of the other virtues, *'I accomplished all your commands'*, that is to say the soul remained committed to worldly duty. She then says: *'I took two husbands,'* that is, was fertile at two stages of life, *'and now that my womb is exhausted and I have lost the capacity to bear children, I return to you, being unable to serve another spouse.'* That is to say the noble soul, on seeing that it is no longer associated with a fruitful womb (that is when the soul feels the members

have grown weak), turns to God, who requires no bodily members. And Marcia says: *'Grant me the rights of our former marital chamber, and grant me a marriage even if in name only.'* That is to say, the noble soul says to God: *'My Lord, grant me your peace; grant that I may at least be called yours in the little life left to me.'* And Marcia says: *'Two reasons move me to ask this: one that after death I may be said to have died as Cato's wife; the other that after my death it may be said you did not spurn me, but out of goodwill took my hand again in marriage.'* The noble soul is moved by like reasons, and wishes to depart this life as the spouse of God, and wishes to show that its activity has been pleasing to God. O you misbegotten and unhappy beings who would depart this life under the name of Hortensius rather than that of Cato! It is good to end what I wish to say about the signs of nobility with that man's name, because in him nobility displayed those signs at every stage of life.

Chapter XXIX: Last Words on Lineage

Now that my text has revealed the marks of each stage in the life of noble persons, by which they may be recognised and without which they could not exist, any more than the Sun could exist without light, or fire without heat, the text concludes its section on nobility by crying out to all, saying: *See how many now are deceived!* Those, that is, who think themselves noble because they are of an ancient and famous lineage, descended from excellent ancestors, though they themselves lack nobility.

Here two matters arise, which it is appropriate to consider at the end of this book. Manfred da Vico, who calls himself now Praetor and Prefect, might say: *'Whatever I may be, I represent and evoke my ancestors, who earned the office of Prefect through their nobility, and were worthy to participate in the Emperor's coronation, and receive the rose from the Pastor of Rome: to me are due the honour and reverence of the people.'* Then, some member of the San Nazzaro family of Pavia, or the Piscitelli of Naples might say: *'If nobility is as has been described, namely a divine seed planted through grace in the human soul, and if the lineage or race itself lacks a soul, as is evident, then no lineage or race can be termed noble; and this is contrary to the opinion held by those who claim our lineage to be the noblest in all their cities.'*

To the first statement Juvenal replies in his eight *Satire*, where he begins by exclaiming: *'What benefit are these honours which derive from men of earlier ages if those who would clothe themselves with them live evil lives, if those who speak of their ancestors and describe their great and wondrous deeds dedicate themselves to base actions?'* And he says: *'Will they become noble through family, who are unworthy of that family? That is to call a dwarf a giant.'* Later he says of a man of this type: *'There is no difference between you and the statue erected in your ancestor's memory except that his head is made of marble and yours is alive.'* Here I disagree, with all due respect, with the poet, since a statue of marble, metal or wood raised as a memorial to some worthy man differs significantly in its effect from a worthless descendant. Because a statue always bears witness to the good opinion of those who have heard tell of the great renown of the statue's subject it engenders that good opinion in others. A worthless son or grandson does the opposite, since he weakens the good opinion of those who have heard well of his ancestors, since their thought will be: *'It is impossible for his ancestors' renown to be as great as is claimed, since such a plant has sprung from their seed.'* He who bears false witness against the good should incur not honour but dishonour, and for this reason Cicero says: *'the son of a*

worthy man should seek to speak well of his father.' Therefore, in my judgement, just as he who defames a worthy man deserves to be rejected and shunned by all, so a worthless man descended from virtuous ancestors deserves to be cast out by all, and a good man should close his eyes so as to avoid witnessing the disgrace thus visited on virtuous men of whom the memory alone remains. Let that suffice for the present regarding the first statement made.

To the second statement we may reply that indeed lineage possesses no soul in and of itself, yet it is quite true that it may be termed noble, and indeed is noble in a certain way. It should be noted here that every whole is composed of its parts. There are some wholes that together with their parts partake of a single essence, as a man partakes of a single essence in common with all his parts; what is deemed to exist in a part is deemed to exist in the same way in the whole. There are other wholes which do not constitute an essence in common with their parts, for example a pile of grain; this kind of essence is secondary, resulting as the sum of many grains which have a true and primary essence in themselves. In such a whole the qualities of the parts are said to exist secondarily, in this way, as does its essence; thus the pile is white because the grains that comprise it are white. This whiteness however resides first in the grains and only secondarily in the pile as a whole, and so is white in a secondary sense. In the same way a race or lineage may be called noble. Just as white grains must be predominant in the pile in order for the pile to be white, so those who are noble must predominate numerically in a lineage for it to be called noble, in order that their virtue in its renown may hide the presence of the worthless among them. Just as the grains in a white pile of wheat might be removed one by one and each replaced by a grain of red millet until the pile changed colour and nature, so in a noble lineage the good might die off one by one, and the bad be born into it in sufficient numbers to cause a change in its nature, so that it would deserve to be called not noble but base. This should suffice as a reply to the second statement.

Chapter XXX: Conclusion

As has been shown previously, in the third chapter of this book, my *canzone* has three principal divisions. Since two of these have been discussed (the first being dealt with in the third to fifteenth chapters, and the second in the sixteenth to the twenty-ninth, that is in sections of thirteen and fourteen chapters respectively, the first two chapters of the book comprising the preface) I will, in this thirtieth and final chapter discuss the third principal division, which was composed as a *tornata* to the *canzone* by way of adornment, and which commences: *Against-the-errant-ones, my song, go forth. Against-the-errant-ones* acts as a single word and is the title of the *canzone*, after the example of our good brother Thomas Aquinas, who gave the title of *Against the Gentiles* to a book of his which he wrote to confound all those who stray from the Faith. I say *go forth* as if to say: ‘you are perfect and it is time to cease from standing still and to go forth, since your undertaking is great, *and when you are in that place where our lady is*, tell her your purpose’. Here it should be noted that, as our Lord said, one should not cast pearls before swine, since it does them no good and harms the pearls; and as the poet Aesop says in his first fable: to a cockerel a grain of seed is worth more than a pearl and it therefore leaves the latter and chooses the former. In consideration of this, and as a precaution, I direct my *canzone* to reveal its purpose where the lady, Philosophy, is to be found. This noblest lady will be found where her mansion is, that is in the soul where she dwells. And Philosophy dwells not in the wise alone, but also, as has been shown above in an earlier book, in those in whom the love of her dwells. I tell my *canzone* to disclose its purpose to both of these, so that her meaning may prove beneficial to them, and be welcomed by them.

I tell my *canzone* to say to this lady: *I speak to you of a friend of yours*. In truth, nobility is her friend, for they love each other so, that nobility always calls upon her, and Philosophy never turns her sweetest gaze towards any other. O how great and beautiful an adornment is bestowed on nobility in the closing lines of this *canzone*, where she is called the friend of her whose true comprehension is in the most secret places of the divine mind!

End of the Convivio