The Uncanonical Dante: The Divine Comedy And Islamic Philosophy

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The distorted notions of invisible things which Dante and his rival Milton have idealized, are merely the mask and the mantle in which these great poets walk through eternity enveloped and disguised. It is a difficult question to determine how far they were conscious of the distinction which must have subsisted in their minds between their own creeds and that of the people. Dante at least appears to wish to mark the full extent of it by placing Riphaeus, whom Virgil calls justissimus unus, in Paradise, and observing a most heretical caprice in his distribution of rewards and punishments.

Percy Shelley, A Defence of Poetry

Chapter One

The case of Dante provides an excellent opportunity to open up the question of the Western canon. In one sense, Dante is the perfect example of a *canonical* author. His name is one of the few certain to appear on anybody's short list of the truly central authors in the Western literary tradition. But in another sense Dante can be regarded as uncanonical. In his own day he was widely suspected of being heretical in his religious views, [1] and a careful reading of his works does indeed raise serious doubts about his being the pillar of orthodoxy he is often taken to be today. [2] Out of this interplay between the *canonical* and the noncanonical Dante, I hope to show that the issue of the Western canon is more complicated than either its defenders or its attackers generally present it.

In discussing the issue of the canon, it is important to sort out at the **[End Page 138]** beginning what we do and do not mean by the term. A *canonical* work may merely be a work that has been accepted into the literary canon, one that has become a touchstone in the reading and teaching of literature. But the term *canonical* can suggest something else, that the work is orthodox and somehow represents a central authoritative position in Western culture. The word *canonical* is so loaded with religious connotations that it is difficult to separate the relatively neutral first meaning of the term from the loaded second meaning. Dante is a case in point. When people refer to him as a *canonical* author, they usually do not simply mean that he is widely read and taught. Most discussions of Dante today treat him as representing an authoritative cultural moment in the Western tradition, as the supreme embodiment of the medieval mind. Viewed that way, Dante becomes an emblem of everything contemporary critics of the Western canon bitterly hate and reject. The reason they feel that they must attack authors like Dante and displace them from the center of literary study is that these authors have come to stand for orthodoxy and thus seem to enforce the hegemony of Western culture.

Critics who wish to champion various forms of non-Western culture have a particular axe to grind with *canonical* authors like Dante. The contemporary debate over the Western canon seems to be premised on a sharp opposition between Western and non-Western cultures, as if they were complete and irreconcilable antitheses, and even wholly unrelated. One of the principal charges against the Western canon is that it is Eurocentric, that it remains confined within a narrow orbit of European ideas and beliefs, thus excluding all other views of the world. A corrolary of the idea of Eurocentrism is the concept of Orientalism, developed by Edward Said. [3] Said argues that throughout its history, the Occident has defined itself in opposition to the Orient, basing its elevated self-image on a debased vision of the cultural Other. In Said's argument, the Occident views itself as rational as opposed to an irrational Orient, as emotionally disciplined in contrast to an emotionally uncontrolled Orient, and as masculine over against a feminine Orient.

In medieval Europe the Orient was chiefly represented by the Muslim world, and one does not have to look far in medieval literature to find the kinds of orientalist stereotypes about which Said writes. The French Song of

Roland contains excellent examples, but even the *Divine Comedy* seems to provide grist for Said's mill. Consider the portrait of the prophet Mohammad and his nephew Alì that Dante gives when he places them among the schismatics in the Eighth Circle of Hell: **[End Page 139]**

No barrel, even though it's lost a hoop
or end-piece, ever gapes as one whom I
saw ripped right from his chin to where we fart:
his bowels hung between his legs, one saw
his vitals and the miserable sack
that makes of what we swallow excrement.
While I was all intent on watching him,
he looked at me, and with his hands he spread
his chest and said: "See how I split myself!
See now how maimed Mohammed is! And he
who walks and weeps before me is Alì,
whose face is opened wide from chin to forlock."
(xxviii, 22-36) [4]

This viciously unsympathetic treatment of these central figures of the Islamic religious tradition is exactly what Said's theory of orientalism would lead us to expect in a bastion of the Western canon such as Dante.

But the portrait of Mohammad in the *Divine Comedy* is an isolated moment, and wider reading in Dante reveals a surprisingly positive treatment of figures from the Islamic world. I want to discuss Dante's debt to Islamic thought in general and to one Islamic philosopher in particular. [5] This may seem like a recondite subject, one that will lead me away from the center of Dante studies. In many ways it will, but I hope that I have already suggested its larger importance. The charge against the Western canon is that it is Eurocentric and works to exclude all non-Western cultures. No figure is more firmly entrenched than Dante at the center of the Western canon. What happens if we can show that Dante displays a secret and even sometimes a not-so-secret sympathy for and affinity with Islamic thought? Non-Western culture in the very bastion of Western culture, Dante's Divine Comedy--that is a remarkable prospect, and one calculated to throw both attackers and defenders of the canon off balance. Attackers would have to grant that the Western canon is not as Eurocentric as they have claimed. And defenders of the canon might have to admit that *canonical* works are not quite as orthodox as they often maintain.

Chapter Two

The role of Islamic thought in Dante is a vast topic and has been extensively debated. In a brief essay, I cannot explore this subject **[End Page 140]** systematically and thus will confine myself to one small facet of it, concentrating on the Limbo episode of the *Inferno*, one of the most puzzling sections in the entire poem from a theological perspective. Dante did not invent the notion of Limbo; the idea emerged in response to a set of theological questions that troubled many medieval thinkers. Some were disturbed by the thought that people otherwise virtuous according to Christian standards would end up damned for all eternity merely because of where or when they were born. In particular, people born before the coming of Christ were denied access to the Christian revelation and thus never had the opportunity to embrace the Christian faith and be saved. Such considerations led to the development among medieval theologians of the idea of Limbo, a place in between, neither quite heaven nor hell. In the standard view, Limbo included two categories: Old Testament worthies who had lived virtuously and anticipated the coming of Christ, along with children who died before having been baptized (thereby dealing with another troublesome issue of salvation). [6] Thus Dante inherited a concept of Limbo, but he developed it in a very unorthodox way, choosing to add to the categories of people admitted to Limbo and shifting his emphasis away from the traditional areas. [7] Above all, he fills Limbo with figures out of classical antiquity. [8] Conventional medieval opinion would lead us to expect to find that Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and King David once occupied Limbo, but not Hector, Aeneas, Junius Brutus, Camilla, and Lucretia as we see in Dante.

However heretical Dante's treatment of these virtuous pagans might be, one could argue that he remains within the larger bounds of Christian orthodoxy because after all he presents Limbo as a form of punishment. The figures in Limbo are said to suffer because they feel themselves deprived of the true God, for Whom they yearn. But here one must read Dante carefully and follow closely the pattern of his presentation of Limbo. At first sight, being in Limbo seems painful, but as the canto proceeds, Dante subtly and quietly starts to modify the first impression we get of Limbo and to mitigate the punishment embodied there.

As Dante enters Limbo, he notes the suffering of the inhabitants:

Here, for as much as hearing could discover,
there was no outcry louder than the sighs
that caused the everlasting air to tremble.
The sighs arose from sorrow without torments, **[End Page 141]**
out of the crowds--the many multitudes--
of infants and of women and of men.
(iv, 25-30)

But when we get to the middle of canto iv, the intensity of suffering in Limbo has evidently diminished. This is how Dante describes his encounter with the great poets of antiquity:

I saw four giant shades approaching us;
in aspect, they were neither sad nor joyous.

(iv, 83-84)

From initially appearing as a place of sorrow, Limbo now seems a purely neutral state ("né trista né lieta"). [9] In the space of fewer than one hundred lines, Dante appears to contradict himself, and we want to ask him: "Which is it? Are the figures in Limbo in pain or merely 'neither sad nor joyous'?"

This kind of apparent contradiction can be explained as a deliberate rhetorical strategy on Dante's part, one made necessary by the intellectually represssive climate in which he was writing. During the Middle Ages, religious heresy was, to say the least, not well received, and could be punished severely, with excommunication, imprisonment, and even death. Dante came under suspicion of heretical views during his lifetime, and at least one passage in the *Divine Comedy* shows that he was writing under the shadow of doubts about his piety. [10] Under these circumstances, if Dante was intent on putting forth any form of heretical views in the Divine Comedy, he could not do so openly but had to go about the task very circumspectly. [11] At the most exposed point in canto iv, the opening, where his readers are forming their crucial first impressions of what he is up to, he puts the orthodox among them at ease by telling them what they want to hear, that he may be offering the virtuous pagans an alternative to outright hell in Limbo, but they will still be enduring pain. In the less exposed middle of the canto, Dante reveals that the great poets of antiquity are not suffering at all in Limbo, but have achieved a state of emotional equanimity that comports quite well with the classical idea of greatness of soul they seem to represent. [12]

Dante's sympathy with and admiration for the virtuous pagans is even more evident in his treatment of the ancient philosophers in Limbo, the last group of inhabitants he presents. We learn nothing about whether they are suffering, only that Aristotle is being honored by the [End Page 142] rest of the company. With everyone from Socrates and Plato to Democritus and Zeno present, the philosophers are positioned for an eternity of debating the great issues that divided them. [13] Now, for anyone who has ever been stuck in a late afternoon philosophy seminar, this may seem like precisely the formula for hell at its most horrific. But from the point of view of the philosophers themselves, it is difficult to conceive of a situation more perfectly suited to their wishes than the one Dante grants them in Limbo. In a famous passage in Plato's Apology, Socrates, faced with the prospect of death, outlines a view of the afterlife that seems to be a blueprint for Dante's Limbo:

if death is like a journey from here to another place, and if the things that are said are true, that in fact all the dead are there, then what greater good could there be than this, judges? . . . to associate with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer, how much would any of you give? . . . To converse and to associate with them and to examine them there would be inconceivable happiness. [14]

Dante did not read Greek, and it is unlikely that Plato's *Apology* was available to him in any form of translation. But he frequently displays knowledge of Plato's works, [15] and this passage may be a source for Dante's conception of Limbo. But whether or not Dante had this passage in mind,

the fact is that he punishes the ancient philosophers by placing them in a situation which Plato had Socrates picture as the greatest reward possible. In that sense, Dante's Limbo points ahead to the portrait of Hell in a more clearly unorthodox writer, Christopher Marlowe. His Doctor Faustus tells the devil Mephistopheles:

> Nay, and this be hell, I'll willingly be damned here.
> What! Sleeping, eating, walking and disputing? [16]

The portrayal of the ancient philosophers in Limbo seems a very unorthodox act on Dante's part, as he displays a proto-Renaissance admiration for a variety of forms of classical virtue. But the situation seems even odder when we go down the cast of characters in Limbo and discover that several important Muslim figures are present. Here Dante is really stretching the idea of virtuous pagans. It is one thing to put ancient Greeks, Trojans, and Romans in Limbo (though Dante appears to be the only Christian who did so). All these figures were born before the coming of Christ, and hence had no opportunity to receive the **[End Page 143]** Christian revelation, be baptized, and hence be saved. But what are Muslims doing in Dante's Limbo? By any definition of Limbo, including the one Dante has Virgil offer (iv, 37), Muslims do not belong. They were born well into the Christian era, and thus had the opportunity to become Christians. They cannot offer a geographic excuse, like the man born on the banks of the Indus River Dante mentions in the Paradiso who simply lives too far removed from Christian teaching (xix, 70-78). Then, as now, Muslims lived in close proximity to Christians, many of them in the Holy Land itself. [17] In the European Middle Ages Muslims represented the chief enemies of Christianity, an attitude solidified by Dante's time by many years of Christian-Muslim conflict in the Crusades. And who of all people should show up in Dante's Limbo but Saladin, perhaps the greatest of all the Muslim warriors during the era of the Crusades and the most successful against Christian forces? To be sure, Saladin was admired for his nobility and greatness as a warrior by his military opponents from Christian Europe. But this was the admiration of soldiers for one of their profession. A theologian is supposed to have different standards for judging people, and it is most peculiar that Dante chooses to assign as comfortable a berth as possible in the afterlife to Saladin, the great warrior against Christianity. [18]

The final two figures named in canto iv are also Muslims, two of the most famous medieval Islamic philosophers, Avicenna and Averroës. Although both are fascinating figures, I will concentrate on the more important of the two, Averroës, or Abu al-Walid Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rushd, to give him his full Arabic name. [19] In canto iv, Dante calls him the man who made "the great Commentary" ("'l gran comento"; iv, 144), referring to the many commentaries Averroës wrote on the books of Aristotle. Through these works Averroës exerted a great influence on the Christian thinkers of Europe such as St. Thomas Aquinas. But the extent of Averroës's influence on medieval Christian thought does not mean that he was widely respected or even accepted in the European Christian intellectual community. On the contrary, Averroës was probably the most widely condemned thinker in the medieval Christian world. He was generally

regarded as a free thinker, subversive of all religious orthodoxy, and the term Averroism became virtually synonymous with atheism in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. [20] The charge of Averroism was one of the most serious accusations that could be made against a medieval thinker.

Thus one would think that Dante would have placed Averroës among the heretics in the Inferno or perhaps among the schismatics with **[End Page 144]** Mohammad and Alì. [21] Instead he places Averroës with the ancient philosophers Dante greatly admired, thus giving an honored position to perhaps the most feared and hated thinker in the Christian Middle Ages. Averroës could not make the excuse that Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle could make of having been born before the coming of Christ. Averroës was in fact born in 1126 ad in C. Averroës could not make the excuse that Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle could make of having been born before the coming of Christ. Averroës was in fact born in 1126 onored position to perhaps the most feared and hated thinker in the Christian Middleen in our general ignorance of Muslim history we try to imagine how in the Middle Ages ideas from, say, Baghdad could have made it all the way to Florence. But in fact the Iberian Peninsula was for several centuries one of the centers of the Islamic intellectual world, and thus Averroës was virtually Dante's neighbor. [22]

Dante was in fact accused of being an Averroist, [23] and he refers to Averroës directly and indirectly several times in his writings. Sometimes he speaks of Averroës approvingly and even cites him as an authority he accepts, sometimes he appears to be critical of Averroës, but even just to mention him by name was a daring act in Dante's day. Averroës was most famous, or rather infamous, for his understanding of the human soul, worked out in terms ultimately derived from Aristotle, the Possible and the Active Intellects. This subject is extremely complicated and obscure, [24] deliberately so because of its dangerously unorthodox implications. At the risk of oversimplifying the matter, I will concentrate on Averroës's idea of the unity of the Possible Intellect, his paradoxical claim that all humanity shares a single intellect. The reasoning behind this strange idea goes something like this: when we think a rational truth, such as $2 + 2 = 4$, we all think alike and in that sense participate in the same intellect. The key corollary of this idea is that insofar as we participate in the unity of the Possible Intellect, we also participate in its eternity. Thus Averroës could in effect say that our souls are eternal by virtue of apprehending eternal truths such as those of mathematics. In short, Averroës's conception of the Possible Intellect allowed him to speak of the immortality of the human soul without implying the survival of the individual soul after death. In talking of the unity of the Possible Intellect, he was basically coming up with a notion of species immortality for the human race.

The advantage of this understanding of the soul for Averroës is that it gave him a way of talking publicly about human immortality to placate religious authorities, while pointing to an esoteric meaning of **[End Page 145]** immortality in harmony with his real philosophic position, a view in which the only true form of immortality is philosophic thinking. In Averroës's understanding, as individual human beings we die, but our

thoughts may live on. This outcome is especially true for someone who writes his thoughts down in books, thus making it possible for later generations to react to them. [25] Indeed, in the realm of the written word, philosophers can in effect converse with each other over the centuries, as Averroës did with Aristotle when he wrote his commentaries on the Greek philosopher's works. That is the sense in which for Averroës philosophers are immortal, living forever in the disputes to which their works give rise.

I want to stress that I am giving a radically clarified account of what Averroës meant in his analysis of the soul. To have been as clear himself about the concept would have defeated his purpose. But despite its obscurity, the idea of the unity of the Possible Intellect had great practical and moral implications. If all we have is a form of species immortality, then the actions or beliefs of individual human beings have no bearing on whether or not they will achieve eternal life. An anecdote from an early book on Aquinas shows that as abstruse as Averroës's doctrine of the Possible Intellect appears to be, somehow it filtered down to the level of the common man in the European Middle Ages. William of Tocco reports the case of a French soldier "who was unwilling to atone for his sins because, as he put it: 'If the soul of the blessed Peter is saved, I shall also be saved; for if we know by one intellect, we shall share the same destiny.'" [26] Here we see why orthodox authorities in both the Muslim and the Christian worlds condemned Averroës, and why both Albertus Magnus and Aquinas specifically attacked his idea of the unity of the Possible Intellect. [27]

Given its importance and notoriety, it is therefore highly significant that the Possible Intellect is one of the ideas Dante picked up from Averroës. [28] He refers to it in a significant, though of course obscure, passage in his political treatise, *De Monarchia*:

it is clear that man's basic capacity is to have a potentiality or power for being intellectual. And since this power can not be completely actualized in a single man or in any of the particular communities of men above mentioned, there must be a multitude in mankind through whom this whole power can be actualized. . . . With this judgment Averroës agrees in his commentary on [Aristotle's] *De anima*. [29] **[End Page 146]**

I cannot overemphasize how daring it was for Dante to refer to Averroës by name in this passage. In discussing the Possible Intellect he was dealing with one of the most sensitive and inflammatory subjects in late medieval thought, and to bring up Averroës explicitly in this context was to wave a red flag in the face of Church authorities. [30] It was in fact one of the principal reasons why Pope John XXII had De Monarchia burned in 1329 in Bologna and the Catholic Church officially placed it on its Index of Forbidden Books in 1554 (it was not removed until the nineteenth century, when the Averroist scare apparently had blown over). [31] Dante employs the idea of the Possible Intellect precisely in Averroës's sense, suggesting that philosophers form a community of thought over the centuries, that the gradual perfection of human thought grows out of a conversation among philosophers over time. We see now how profoundly appropriate it is that Averroës be placed in Dante's Limbo. Limbo is precisely an allegorical representation of Averroës's idea of the Possible Intellect. The eternal

conversation of the philosophers in Dante's Limbo is a metaphor for what Averroës meant by the immortality of human thought. How far this metaphorical conception of immortality can be extended throughout the *Divine Comedy* is a profound question for the interpretation of Dante.

Chapter Three

I cannot hope to settle the issue of Dante's Averroism, a subject that has been contentiously debated from his day down to ours. For the record I should state that the consensus among modern Dante scholars is that he was not an Averroist. [32] I myself believe that he was, but that is not the issue here. Our topic is Dante and the Western canon, and for what I want to show it is sufficient to have established Dante's debt to Averroës. The importance of a central Islamic philosopher to such a *canonical* European author as Dante in my view puts to rest many of the arguments typically made against the Western canon and especially its supposed Eurocentrism. Dante was evidently far more knowledgeable about non-Western authors than many of their champions today. I wonder how many of the critics of the Western canon have even heard of Averroës, let alone read any of his works.

The case of Dante shows that the simplistic opposition between Western and non-Western cultures often set up today cannot bear careful scrutiny. The sequence Aristotle-Averroës-Dante may serve as an emblem of the complex interactions that have taken place over the **[End Page 147]** centuries between Western and non-Western cultures. Islamic culture is certainly categorized as non-Western in today's debates, but as shown by the case of Averroës (as well as other Islamic philosophers such as Alfarabi), Islamic thought was profoundly rooted in the very Greek world that is at the fountainhead of Western culture. Indeed, in his so-called Decisive Treatise, Averroës displays a remarkable tolerance for ancient Greek thought, even though he recognizes that in Muslim terms it is the work of infidels:

But if someone other than ourselves has already examined that subject, it is clear that we ought to seek help toward our goal from what has been said by such a predecessor on the subject, regardless of whether this other one shares our religion or not. . . . By "those who do not share our religion" I refer to those ancients who studied these matters before Islam. [33]

With this defense of studying ancient philosophy, Averroës proved to be one of the central conduits of Greek thought to the European Middle Ages. The implications of this fact for our understanding of Western culture are still largely unexamined, but at a minimum it shows that the roots of European culture in its classical past are fundamentally intertwined with what we think of as non-Western sources. In short, the Western culture that is often branded today as Eurocentric in fact already incorporates a strong Islamic and hence non-Western component, even in such a *canonical* author as Dante. And Dante's case is by no means unique. Careful examination of another classic of the Western canon, *Don Quixote*, would similarly show that Islamic thought played a great role in shaping Cervantes's vision. Recall that in Cervantes's fiction the ultimate source of the details of Don Quixote's story is an earlier text said to be by an Arab narrator, Cide Hamete Benengeli.

To today's opponents of the canon, I would thus say: "Instead of rejecting the Western canon, study it carefully, and you will find that it is not exclusively Western after all. The situation is in fact far more complex than you realize, and studying classics like the *Divine Comedy* or *Don Quixote* may well introduce you to issues that have been quite central in what you

yourselves think of as non-Western cultures, issues to the understanding of which non-Westerners have made major contributions."

But I have a caution to the defenders of the Western canon as well: [**End Page 148]** do not defend it by reading it canonically. Authors may be *canonical* in the sense of being essential to the understanding of our culture without being *canonical* in the sense of being orthodox proponents of something monolithically designated as the Western tradition. As I have tried to show, it is only by reading Dante noncanonically that we become aware of the full richness and complexity of his thought, especially the way he is open to countercurrents of ideas within the supposedly rigid orthodoxy of the Middle Ages. We do no service to the Western tradition when we present its *canonical* authors as one monument to orthodoxy after another. Such a rigidification of the canon only invites adventurous students and scholars to search elsewhere--outside the canon--for the excitement and novelty of independent and subversive thought. But if we remain open to the possibility that an author *canonical* in his importance may yet be uncanonical in his thinking, we will find that the Western tradition contains enough tensions, contradictions, and conflicts within itself to keep even the most skeptical scholar occupied for a lifetime. And we will also find that the Western canon already incorporates non-Western components--to the point where an Islamic philosopher can find an honored place among the sages of ancient Greece and Rome in that most *canonical* and yet uncanonical of all works, Dante's *Divine Comedy.*

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Notes

1. See Teodolina Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 6, 267-68 (note 9).

2. For an excellent treatment of the heretical character of Dante, see the chapter "The Strangeness of Dante: Ulysses and Beatrice" in Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), pp. 76-104.

3. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).

4. All quotations from the *Divine Comedy* are taken from the translation of Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam, 1982).

5. I will be dealing solely with the issue of the impact of Islamic philosophy on Dante. Thus I will avoid the even more complicated issues raised by Miguel Asín Palacios in his book *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*, first published in Madrid in 1919, and available in English translation under the title *Islam and the Divine Comedy*, trans. Harold Sutherland (London: Frank Cass, 1926). Asín Palacios touched off a heated controversy by arguing that Dante's conception of the other world was heavily influenced by Muslim mythology and theology. For a good review of the controversy, see Vicente Cantarino, "Dante and Islam: History and Analysis of a Controversy," A Dante Symposium, eds. William de Sua and Gino Rizzo (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), pp. 175-98.

6. On the idea of Limbo, see Kenelm Foster, *The Two Dantes and Other Studies* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1977), pp. 169-71, Amilcare A. Iannucci, "Limbo: The Emptiness of Time," *Studi danteschi* 52 (1979-80): 72-73; hereafter abbreviated "LET," and Amilcare A. Iannucci, Commentary on Canto iv, Lectura Dantis Virginiana (1990), ed. Tibor Wlassics, vol. 1, pp. 43-44; hereafter abbreviated LDV.

7. See Barolini, p. 39, Iannucci, LDV, p. 45, and Gino Rizzo, "Dante and the Virtuous Pagans," A Dante Symposium, p. 119.

8. Foster, p. 171, finds this development "vastly . . . remarkable." See also Barolini, pp. 39-40, Iannucci, "*LET*," pp. 74, 90, 104, and Iannucci, *LDV*, pp. 42, 44. Asín Palacios finds precedents in certain Islamic writers for including pagans in paradise; see pp. 56, 61-63, 65, 81-84.

9. Rizzo, p. 121, writes of this moment: "One wonders if we are still in the same Limbo. The darkness is gone, the sighs and sadness are no longer to be seen or heard. As we progress from the throngs of infants, women and men who live in 'longing without hope' to the castle inhabited by the poets, philosophers and heroes of the classical world we find 'neither joy nor sorrow' in the appearance of these figures surrounded by light. Obviously, if these sages display 'neither joy nor sorrow' in their countenance, they can hardly be said to live 'in longing without hope.'" Iannucci, "LET," p. 75, note 13, recognizes this anomaly, but tries to explain it away: "It is true that unlike the unbaptized children and the flock (l. 66) of the virtuous but obscure souls whose sighs fill the air of Limbo (ll. 25-27), the illustrious virtuous pagans within the gates of the *nobile castello* show no emotion. . . . But this apparent impassability before their fate is due not to any substantial difference in the degree of their suffering in comparison with that of the rest of the souls in Limbo, but rather to Dante's conception of the savio who can exert absolute control over his passions. The virtuous pagans also suffer and perhaps even more for, being wise, they are more aware of what they have lost, but their dignity and self-esteem prevent them from expressing their anguish openly." This is a very interesting view of the situation; for Iannucci's sake, one only wishes Dante had made it explicit in the poem.

10. See *Inferno*, xix, 19-21. Here Dante offers a perfectly innocent explanation for having broken the baptismal font in the San Giovanni Church in Florence, as if more sinister explanations of his action had been circulating.

11. For Dante's view of the need for circumspection and even indirection in writing, see *Convivio, III*, x. See Christopher Ryan, trans., *Dante: The Banquet* (Stanford French and Italian Studies, 1989), p. 104: "It is highly commendable, and indeed necessary to use this figure of speech, in which the words are directed to one person and their intention to another, for while admonishment is always commendable and necessary it is not always

appropriate that it be voiced by anyone whomever. So when a son is aware of a fault in his father, or when a subject is aware of a fault in his lord, or when a person knows that to admonish a friend would increase his shame or diminish his honour, or when he knows that his friend is not receptive to admonishment but is angered by it, this is a most graceful and useful figure, to which we may give the name dissimulation. Its strategy is similar to that of a wise soldier who attacks a castle on one side in order to draw off the defences from another." See also Convivio, IV, viii, p. 141, note 14 in Ryan's edition: "if, when discussing something, the trained speaker knows that there is someone hostile in his audience, he has to be very careful in what he says."

12. The figures in Limbo are "great-hearted souls" ("spiriti magni")--iv, 119. See Rizzo, p. 122, and John D. Sinclair, trans., *Dante's Inferno* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 69: "Dante's description of them is a reminiscence of Aquinas's account of Aristotle's 'magnanimous'--great-souled--man."

13. Cf. Dante's description in the *Convivio, III*, xiv (p. 114 in Ryan): "Through these three virtues men rise to philosophize in that heavenly Athens towards which, through the dawning of eternal truth, the Stoics, the Peripatetics and the Epicureans hasten together, united in the harmony of a single will." Though adjacent to hell, Dante's Limbo more closely resembles this "heavenly Athens."

14. *Apology*, 41a-41c. Quoted in the translation of Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West, *Four Texts on Socrates* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 95-96.

15. See, for example*, Convivio, III*, v, for knowledge of the *Timaeus*.

16. Quoted in the text of J. B. Steane, ed., *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays* (Harmonsdworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1969), *Doctor Faustus*, I.v.141-142.

17. In his very detailed discussion, Iannucci keeps forgetting that Muslims appear in Dante's Limbo. At one point ("LET," p. 77), he defines the inhabitants as "born too early or too far away" to become Christians. On p. 84, he writes: "To be sure, Dante's Limbo contains A. D. men as well, who for spatial rather than temporal reasons lived in ignorance of Christ." On p. 107, Iannucci writes: "Dante's Limbo, therefore, is a summa of B.C. history." In such statements as these, Iannucci thus provides a good measure of how odd the presence of Muslims in Dante's Limbo is; he cannot accommodate them in his attempts to formulate Dante's principles of inclusion.

18. For Dante's positive evaluation of Saladin, see *Convivio*, IV, xi (p. 150 in Ryan). See also Asín Palacios, p. 262.

19. For biographical details, see Dominique Urvoy, *Ibn Rushd (Averroes)*, trans. Olivia Stewart (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 29-38. The best essay I know on Averroës is Muhsin Mahdi's "Averroës on Divine Law and Human Wisdom," in Joseph Cropsey, ed., *Ancients and Moderns* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), pp. 114-31. I first studied Averroës with Professor Mahdi in Arabic 147 at Harvard University, and wish to acknowledge my great debt to his instruction on the subject.

20. For a recent general account of Averroism, see Oliver Leaman, *Averroes and his Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 163-78.

21. See Asín Palacios (p. 262) on Dante's placing of Avicenna and Averroës in Limbo.

22. Asín Palacios (pp. 252-54) points out one probable means of transmission of the Islamic thought of Spain to Dante: his teacher, Brunetto Latini, was sent in 1260 as Ambassador of Florence to the court of Alfonso el Sabio in Toledo and Sevilla.

23. The first time Dante was publicly charged with Averroism appears to have been in 1327, six years after he died, when Guido Vernani made the accusation in his *De Reprobatione Monarchiae*. For brief excerpts from this work in English, see Michael Caesar, ed., Dante: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 110-14. For further excerpts in English, see J. F. Took, *Dante: Lyric Poet and Philosopher* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 167-68. On this subject, see Ernest Fortin, "Dante and Averroism," *Actas del V Congreso International de Filosofia Medieval* (Madrid, 1979), vol. 2, pp. 739-46. This essay is the best treatment I know of the relation of Dante to Averroës; in general Fortin's writings and conversations about Dante have been a great help to me in trying to understand the *Divine Comedy*.

24. For some relatively clear discussions of the subject, see Urvoy, pp. 99-109 and Leamon, pp. 82-103.

25. Cf. Brunetto Latini's comment at *Inferno*, xv, 119-20.

26. For this story, see Beatrice Zedler's preface to her translation of St. Thomas Aquinas's *On the Unity of the Intellect Against the Averroists* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 1968).

27. As an example of the hostility against Averroës, Aquinas calls him the "perverter" of Aristotle's philosophy (Zedler, p. 73). In the conclusion of the treatise, Aquinas becomes uncharacteristically belligerent as he challenges an unnamed Averroist opponent: "But if there be anyone boasting of his knowledge, falsely so-called, who wishes to say something against what we have written here, let him not speak in corners, nor in the presence of boys who do not know how to judge about such difficult matters; but let him write against this treatise if he dares; and he will find not only me who am the least of others, but many other lovers of truth, by whom his error will be opposed or his ignorance remedied" (75).

28. As an example of Dante's use of the idea, see *Convivio*, IV, xxi (p. 174 in Ryan). Karl Vossler also suggests that the idea of the Possible Intellect functions in the love poetry of the dolce stil nuovo, including Dante's Vita Nuova. See Karl Vossler, *Medieval Culture: An Introduction to Dante and His Times*, trans. William Cranston Lawton (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929), I, 305-8. This suggestion is supported by the fact that Dante's friend, Guido Cavalcanti, explicitly mentions the Possible Intellect ("possibile intelletto") in his famous canzone "Donna mi priegha" (7th stanza). On this subject, see George Holmes, Dante (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 8-10.

29. See Dante Alighieri, *On World-Government* (De Monarchia), trans. Herbert W. Schneider (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1949), p. 6. On the Averroism of this passage, see Vossler, I, 309, Holmes, pp. 68-69, Took, pp. 166-67, and Larry Peterman, "An Introduction to Dante's De Monarchia," Interpretation 3 (1973): 174-75.

30. This consideration may explain why in *Purgatorio*, xxv, 61-66, Dante takes pains to dissociate himself from Averroës's conception of the Possible Intellect. On this subject, see Holmes, p. 75.

31. See Peterman, p. 174 (note 15). For the condemnation of *De Monarchia*, see Chapter XVI of Boccaccio's *Life of Dante*.

32. Among many others, see, for example, Vossler, I, 107, Ricardo J. Quinones, *Dante Alighieri* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1979), p. 150, and Took, pp. 113-17.

33. "The Decisive Treatise, Determining the Nature of the Connection Between Religion and Philosophy" in George F. Hourani, ed. and trans., *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London: Luzac, 1961), pp. 46-47.