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Author(s): Roger Theodore Lafferty

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF DANTE

ROGER THEODORE LAFFERTY

More than any other poet Dante was a philosopher. It is impossible to understand his work as a whole, and especially the *Divine Comedy*, unless it is studied as philosophy. While it is of supreme æsthetic interest, holding the attention of the world primarily by its striking imagery, its depth of feeling, and its matchless phrasing, its real significance, on which depends its final value, lies in its philosophy. It is indeed nothing but an expression of that philosophy. The whole literary work of Dante is a development of his philosophy. To be rightly understood and appreciated, therefore, Dante should be approached from the point of view of philosophical studies, rather than of literary scholarship. That scholarship, of course, is necessary to edit the writings, but is entirely inadequate to show the real meaning of the work. The preparation for a genuine study of Dante requires a knowledge of the history of thought, especially of that of the Middle Ages. For Dante gave poetic expression to the standard philosophy of his time, and this philosophy is thus the substance of his whole work.

As a philosopher, however, Dante was not himself an original creative thinker, but the poet of the philosophy which had been making for centuries. His mission was not to make, but to express. He brought together all the previous philosophies and welded them again — for the welding, too, had been done before him — into one great system. It is the poetic expression and the poetic, rather than the intellectual, value of the philosophical content that is so great.

Dante's philosophy was primarily one of intuition rather than concept, of imagination rather than reason. Thus it is from its very nature, without regard to its expression, poetic. The real value of such a philosophy it is the purpose of this essay to show. It is the only kind of philosophy that has any value, the human reason being so limited that the philosopher must eventually rely on his sense of the true rather than on syllogisms. And it is this sense of the true which makes Dante's work

so great also as poetry. Thus its universal appeal as poetry comes really from its greatness as philosophy. Dante's work is not philosophical poetry, but poetic philosophy. It is the nearest to an expression of what I should like to sketch as the philosophy for our own time.

It is in this light that the present study of Dante is made. We can examine through him the sources of our proposed philosophy. Then we can see these sources joined in him into our system. We can continue this system into our own notion of a philosophy by revising it according to modern science. From Dante himself we can take his method of philosophizing, and this is perhaps of most importance. In this way a real understanding of Dante can be had, and our purpose of developing a modern philosophy attained.

Thus Dante is a kind of source in substance and especially, as we shall see later, in method, and also a confirmation, of our proposed philosophy. Not only as such a source and support, but also as a direct expression, is Dante's work useful in an exposition of the kind of philosophy I have in mind. The *Divine Comedy* is the most perfect expression ever given to any system of philosophy; especially is it the finest expression ever given to a moral philosophy, or "Lebensanschauung." The particular view of life there expounded is so near to that which I am presenting here that the poem, after having served as a source, becomes of even greater value as the most inspiring expression in literature of our philosophy of life.

This seems to be the value of a study of Dante for contemporary thought and in general for contemporary culture. His contribution is to furnish the materials for an adequate view of life for the people of our time, to give his mighty support to such a philosophy, encouraging many who could accept it but are afraid, and above all to make this philosophy, when accepted, a source of immediate strength by giving it the most convincing and the most beautiful expression ever given to any ideal. Thus by a proper philosophical study of the great mediæval poet, we can make him of real and direct value to our own age. We can find what Dante may be to us.

Such, then, is the purpose and method of the study of Dante to be made in this essay. It is to build up a notion of philosophy around Dante. The study of the poet will be secondary; yet it will necessarily furnish a better understanding of him and his work than can be had in any other way.

I

Of all the philosophers of the Middle Ages, Dante is the most personal. His philosophy is so inwoven into his life as to be one with it. It seems to grow out of his own individual experience. It is the philosophy developed by a great spiritual nature thrown entirely upon the support of the spirit, by the failure of the outward life. Dante was primarily a spiritual man. He was interested in the higher intellectual and æsthetic values. He cared little for the "carnal pleasures." In the terms of a recent American poet, he was not "the Sport" but "the Scholar." Under any circumstances such a man will develop for himself a philosophy of a spiritual life. Hardship, misfortune, and failure in such of the worldly interests as he is obliged to pursue will make this philosophy more radical and consistent. So Dante's philosophy is indeed original, the outgrowth of his own individual temperament and experience.

Every man's philosophy, however, must get its detailed form from his environment. Temperament and experience give only color. Dante accordingly found the articulation of the philosophy of his nature in the philosophical systems and in the theology of his time. These were peculiarly adapted to his view of life. He added little to them, changed little. He absorbed the scholastic philosophy of the age; when he gives it off again it is very much the same, only beautified by the touch with Dante's soul, and humanized. As a philosopher Dante was hardly original. He was, however, a reconstructive thinker. He was not original only because he did not wish to be; he agreed with the thought of his time, but in an entirely independent way. He was like the present leaders of Hegelian thought. They are perhaps original geniuses, but their work does not show it. They agree too entirely with Hegel for that. But their agreement comes after a complete reconstruction of the Hegelian system. Slight changes may show great originality. The use of Hegelian philosophers is to readapt the system to the world which changes. So Dante took up the scholastic philosophy of his age and adapted it to his own life. His chief value lies in this direct fusion of an abstract superpersonal system of thought with a real human life. He is the great humanizer of mediæval philosophy.

As has just been said, Dante entirely built up the scholastic philosophy over again, going through the same steps its founders had gone through.

So his work is not merely a versification of St. Thomas Aquinas. But St. Thomas was his master, and gave Dante the sources and the method of using them. Then Dante constructed a system of his own, but, using the same materials, he of course got about the same result. For the completion of his system he took the Angelic Doctor himself as a source, and thus went a little beyond him. In a careful study of Dante's philosophy, therefore, his sources should be studied; and these should not be misunderstood. Dante knew Aristotle directly through Latin translations,¹ as well as indirectly through the paraphrases of Albertus Magnus and from quotations. Dr. Moore tells us that "the amount and variety of Dante's knowledge of the contents of the various works of Aristotle is nothing less than astonishing."² On Aristotle Dante built up his system, just as St. Thomas built up his scholasticism on the same philosopher. To a less degree Plato is a source for Dante's philosophy; but Plato's influence is chiefly indirect, through Aristotle himself. As a direct source he is decidedly secondary, as Dante's own words show; while Aristotle is "maestro di color che sanno,"³ Plato is called merely "uomo eccellentissimo."⁴ Plato was known to Dante at first hand only in the *Timæus*, which had been translated into Latin probably near the close of the fifth century.⁵ Beyond this Dante knew something more of Plato's works, through Aristotle, Cicero, and others perhaps.⁶ But in so far as Dante's system is the outgrowth of Aristotle, it is largely, indirectly, a development from Plato. Of other ancient philosophers the only ones who had any direct influence on Dante were Cicero, Boethius, and Seneca. "There is little or no evidence that Dante was acquainted with Cicero's oratorical works." Most of the quotations in Dante from Cicero are from the *De Officiis*, the *De Senectute*, the *De Amicitia*, and *De Finibus*.⁷ Here of course the knowledge is really direct in every sense, not even being through a translation. Boethius, Dr. Moore says, "is one of Dante's most favorite authors."⁸ Seneca also seems to have been well known to the poet. St. Augustine is a most important source of Dante's philosophy, but largely indirectly. St. Augustine's *City of God* is the great statement of official Catholic theology, of the regular notion of the physical

¹ Edward Moore, *Studies in Dante*, First Series, Oxford, 1896, p. 93.

² *Ibid.* p. 94.

³ *Inferno*, IV, 131.

⁴ *Convivio*, II, 5.

⁵ Moore, *Dante Studies*, First Series, p. 156.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 258.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 282.

constitution of the universe held by Christians in the Middle Ages. So in so far as this was a fundamental conception in Dante's mind, planted there by early instruction and constant environment, it excited a strong influence on his thought. Just as the scholastic philosophy had interpreted this conception, translating it into a mystic philosophy, so did Dante also. That Dante was directly acquainted with St. Augustine is known from various references to his works, and particularly from the eighth epistle deploring the neglect of the study of St. Augustine.¹ Then the Scholastics themselves, the later ones, are of course, as was said, of the utmost importance as shaping Dante's whole study. They are for him what Hegel is to the Hegelian. They are what he is reconstructing. Albertus Magnus he knew probably very well, but it was the great pupil of Albertus who was Dante's chief master, St. Thomas Aquinas. These, then, are the important sources of Dante's philosophy, and should be thoroughly known if one would thoroughly know Dante. For the present purpose it will be best to introduce the exposition of Dante's system by a brief review of the philosophy out of which it grew.

Scholasticism, the Scholasticism which Dante reconstructed from these sources, may be considered as a metaphysical development of St. Augustine's theology, by merging it with Aristotelian philosophy. In a general way, what, then, is St. Augustine's theology, what is the Aristotelian philosophy, and how do they merge? St. Augustine's theology is set forth in his *City of God*. There he gives the classic Catholic account of the whole of the universe. He begins by overthrowing pagan Rome. In the first five books of the treatise he says that the material misfortunes of Rome came to it not because of the Christian religion, but because of the recognition of the Roman gods, and that all the material good that came to Rome after the appearance of Christianity came to it because of Christianity. Then St. Augustine takes up the spiritual reasons for adherence to the gods, and says they are all false. Roman theology can never bring happiness to humanity in the future life. Only Christianity, through the mediation of Christ, can do that. Pagan Rome, representative of the kingdom of this world, being thus overthrown in these first five introductory books, the city of God is set up in its place. What follows, of course, is the important part of the work. "There is a city of God, whereof His inspired love makes us desire to be members," says

¹ Moore, *Studies in Dante*, First Series, p. 292.

St. Augustine in the first chapter of the tenth book. But now, he goes on to say, there are "two cities that in this world lie confusedly together." In the next world, he has just told us, they are distinct. How does it happen that there are two? God created first the angels. Some of these were good, some bad. The bad angels were so in having bad wills. Their wills opposed God, and they were accordingly separated from the good angels. Thus came about the two cities. Then God created the world and man. Man, as foreordained by God, sinned, thus giving the possibility to men, his descendants, of sharing in the two cities: some men would follow in sin and join the bad angels, others would join the good angels, or remain with God. Thus it is clear that the secular life in this world is a part of the city of the bad angels, and not in itself a separate community; and likewise that the spiritual life is one with the city of God, and not an independent existence. The life in this world is simply a part of that in the next. But the sin of the first man tainted his whole offspring and all his descendants with pride and self-love resulting from this evil use of free will, so that only those who are given the grace of God can come back to the city of God. This grace was given by God in Christ. Thus through Christ, the city of God grew up in this world, as well as the city of the bad spirits. Here is the identification of the city of God with the Church. The history of the human race is simply the development of these two cities. There have been three principal periods in this development, the period without law, the period with law, and the present period with grace or Christ, and the city of God organized in the Church. Here is the first Christian philosophy of history. The end of this period will be the end of this world, bringing to the denizens of the city of God eternal repose; and eternal damnation, or the second death, to the inhabitants of the earthly city. This end will be the Last Judgment. Death, or damnation, is eternal existence away from God. Thus the chief object of life is eternal repose in God. Such is the general argument. Incidentally are brought in the great mass of orthodox Christian doctrines, from that of the Trinity, fully discussed in the tenth chapter of the tenth book, which St. Augustine treats as do all Catholic theologians, as an incidental not central truth, to such doctrines as that of a woman's chastity depending on her will rather than on the physical act. But the description of the universe and its history seems to be the most important function of St. Augustine in mediæval philosophy. He gives a summary of the

factors. All succeeding mediæval philosophy, as well as his own, consists in the explanation of these factors.

Besides collecting the material, however, St. Augustine also himself contributed to the philosophy that was to build itself around this body of given beliefs. Side by side with the description of God and the angels, of the world and man, of Christ and the Last Judgment, is a metaphysical explanation of these things. St. Augustine's God is really not the person Jahveh of the primitive Hebrew religious mind, but is the metaphysical Being of the great Greeks. God is not a personal ruler of things, who changes his mind. He does not set out with a plan, and when he sees things going contrary step in and interfere to right them. This is the Hebrew conception. St. Augustine's God is Platonic. He is a great principle. He had complete foreknowledge of everything, including evil, before he made anything, and so arranged it that everything should work out just as it does. Thus prayer is answered, not by divine intervention, but by divine providence, which at the foundation of the world, foreseeing the prayer, arranged for its answer. Evil was introduced to produce a balance in things, which would bring about complete harmony. Thus in St. Augustine religion is already becoming metaphysics, and this is the essence of Scholasticism. The ultimate end of individual life is to be absorbed into the great Essence which is God. So the individual goes through several stages, each less material than the preceding, finally attaining to the complete life in God. This is mysticism. In so far as St. Augustine is a philosopher, in so far, that is, as he explains the world he describes, he is chiefly influenced by Plato and the Neoplatonists. In fact his philosophy consists simply of an application of the doctrines of Plato, which he knew in the main only indirectly through the Neoplatonists,¹ and of the doctrines of the Neoplatonists themselves, to the Christian and Hebrew conception of the universe. This conception, being reached independently, itself somewhat modifies the Platonic doctrines. This, then, is the chief value of St. Augustine's philosophy, that it introduces formally into Christian philosophy and theology the Platonic and the generally Greek elements already in the popular religion of the people.² He is the formal link between Platonism and Christianity.

¹ Maurice de Wulf, *History of Medieval Philosophy*, tr. by P. Coffey, London, 1909, p. 90.

² R. M. Johnston, *The Napoleonic Empire in Southern Italy*, London, 1904, vol. i, pp. 7-10.

This value, however, no matter how important, does not seem so great as the service he did in giving the first formal exposition of the data of Christian philosophy. His *City of God* is the great classic description of the Christian universe. The story of God creating a universe with angels, some of whom became bad and were thus separated from the rest, and then with a world and man, who sinned and fell and was later redeemed by the Grace of God through the sacrifice of Christ, is the core of all Christian philosophy. This philosophy simply explains the story of St. Augustine's *City of God*, eventually transforming it into pure metaphysics. Although "from the mediæval point of view, to philosophize means to explain the dogma, to deduce its consequences, and to demonstrate its truth,"¹ philosophy in the Middle Ages is nevertheless progressive, because it is not the dogma itself, but the metaphysical explanation of the dogma. The dogma came to mean more and more, until at last in Dante it becomes little less than, a concrete symbolism of the abstract metaphysical inner reality.

Così parlar conviensi al vostro ingegno
 Perocchè solo da sensato apprende
 Ciò che fa poscia d'intelletto degno.
 Per questo la Scrittura condiscende
 A vostra facultate, e piedi e mano
 Attribuisce a Dio, ed altro intende.²

It should be clearly understood that Scholasticism was not merely a proof, according to reason, of dogma; it was an interpretation of the dogma. It studied dogma as philosophy now studies the world. Instead of studying the world at first hand, it studied it indirectly, seeing it through the eyes of dogma. But the scholastic philosophy itself was as free as any other philosophy in its study of its world, once seen thus, and as much subject to progress. It progressed along the lines of the ancient Greek philosophy, developing from the Platonism of St. Augustine to the Aristotelianism of St. Thomas Aquinas, and at last becoming changed, from the oriental material of which it was an interpretation, into absolute mysticism, in Dante. Here it is not necessary to take up each step of the progress from St. Augustine to St. Thomas Aquinas, through Scotus

¹ Weber, *History of Philosophy*, tr. by Frank Thilly, New York, 1908, pp. 201, 202.

² *Paradiso*, IV, 40-45.

Erigena, St. Anselm, Abélard, Hugo of St. Victor, Peter the Lombard, and others, ending with Albertus Magnus; instead, the origin of the explanation, the philosophy of Aristotle, will be sketched, just as the data for the explanation, in the theological system of St. Augustine, have been presented, and then it will be easy to understand the application of the one to the other which is seen fully worked out in St. Thomas Aquinas.

Plato's system was a hierarchy of the factors of life: "the *ἀπειρον* or groundwork of Matter at the bottom, above that, Number, or the *outer* shape of things, above that again, Ideas, or their *inner* natures, and at the top the Supreme Good itself. But . . . these factors have no natural relations or connexions among themselves, and each has a separate and independent existence of its own."¹ Aristotle begins with this hierarchy as his material, and first of all establishes the connections which Plato had not seen. The ideas do not exist somewhere in Heaven above, separate from the matter. They are with the matter. The matter is their support, their substratum. Plato's doctrine of the ideas being separate is fantastic and nowhere proved. What "participation" means is not clear.² Being has three inseparable parts, the idea, or form, the matter, and the motion. This is the kernel of Aristotle's whole philosophical system. The next great change which Aristotle makes in Plato's system is to change the conception of matter. It is not a dead, bad thing, having only the power of resistance to being, or to participation in the idea, which is being, which resistance is the cause of all evil, but it actively desires to embody the idea, to have the form stamped upon it; in this it is female, wanting completion in the male idea. We are now able to understand Aristotle's principle of causation, the explanation of how the three elements of being are brought together into being. There are four causes. "Causes are spoken of in four senses. In one of these we mean the substance, i.e. the essence (for the 'why' is reducible finally to the formula, and the ultimate 'why' is a cause and principle); in another the matter or substratum, in a third the source of the change, and in the fourth the cause opposed to this, the purpose and the good (for this is the end of all generation and change)."³ By the third, the source of the

¹ John Beattie Crozier, *History of Intellectual Development*, London, 1902, vol. i, p. 54.

² *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. viii; *Metaphysica*, tr. by Smith and Ross, Oxford, 1908, i, 6.

³ *Metaphysica*, i, 3.

change, Aristotle here means motion. These four causes are really only two, however. The final cause, the attractive principle which draws the motion toward it, the purpose toward which things work, really embraces the form and the motion. This principle of final causation should be thoroughly understood, for it leads to the greatest of his doctrines, the Unmoved Mover, and is of the greatest importance in its application to the Christian theology. It is the working out of Plato's doctrine expressed in the *Philebus*, of how particular parts of matter get impressed with just the forms they do receive. Reason, says Plato, reason in the mind of God chooses certain forms and applies them to matter. But Aristotle has the matter itself attracted by these ideas or purposes, which thus are purposes or ends of action, final causes, and which, by attracting, move. Thus these three causes become one, and the matter is left as the second. Matter as a cause may be considered as a kind of hierarchy. Each formed thing is the matter for the form above it; or, each lump of matter is the form for the matter below it, until you can finally go no further. Then you get down to elementary matter, which is pure matter and has no form whatever. The need of such a substratum for being is seen in the principle of recurrence. One idea follows another idea, not haphazard, but in a fixed order. That which causes this fixed order may be understood by Aristotle's matter. Being is something more than the ideas, and this something more is matter. It determines what forms or ideas must follow. You divide and divide and divide again and always get surfaces. This final indivisible surface is matter. Going up the scale in the other direction we find that each thing is made out of something lower which already has a form. Thus the table is made out of boards, which are made out of trees, and so on. Each form is the matter for the thing just above it. This is the immediate cause of one form being given to this particular matter instead of any other possible form. One thing grows out of another, evolves from it, is descended from it. We are thus led into the consideration of the other great cause, the final causation.

This has been seen to be one with form and motion. The form is the efficient cause also, for it introduces the motion. But each thing is seen to work toward an end, and the end is seen to be the same form which is the efficient cause, in that it introduces the motion. The purpose of a thing is the real cause of it. The purpose existing in the mind of the builder causes him to build. Thus the purpose, itself a form, draws

on the builder to make the thing. But closer examination shows this purpose, in being a form already existing in the mind of the builder, to have been brought about by efficient causation by a previous form. So we continue to go back until we get to a great first form, a reservoir of all possible forms.

The great first form thus reached is God. This form, being the first, and there must be a first, has been caused by no efficient cause, for that would be a form, and so this would not be the first form. This great form thus becomes an uncaused form, and so unmoved. But each other form in the chain, going backward on which we have reached this first one, is referred to it, caused by it through the process of efficient causation. But we have seen that each efficient cause, or form, was also a purpose, or object of endeavor which produced the succeeding thing. So getting back to this first form we find it a purpose. It is thus the purpose of all the succeeding things, but as it is the first thing there can be no purpose toward which it strives. Itself is its only possible purpose. But every other thing, every other purpose, comes back to it. So it is what everything is striving to be. As has already been shown, in having no efficient cause, it is not moved from without, and thus now, as we see, it has no purpose, and so is not moved from within. But as all else is striving after it as the ultimate purpose, it moves everything toward itself. It is the great Unmoved Mover.

The Unmoved Mover thus has all other possible forms within it. At the outset it is a divine plan of everything. It has foreknowledge at the beginning of how all must be, the first form working out from it, and producing another, and so on forever. It is divine Providence, or foreknowledge. Conceived of as God, it will be necessary to remember, it cannot be moved. Things are as they are. My wish that they be different must result from their being as they are, and so my wish must have been foreseen by the Unmoved Mover and caused by him, indirectly through the whole chain of forms from him to my wish. Therefore any change resulting from my wish will simply be a part of the original divine plan, as the naturally resulting form from the form which was my wish. So, too, this God can take no interest in our affairs except that contained in his original plan. We can influence him in no way. We are in every sense completely his creatures, forms resulting from, growing out of, evolving from, this first great cause. Things thus have

value, and are good. Each thing is as it ought to be, which amounts to saying that it is good. God may truly say, "I am that I am."

How close this comes to the God of St. Augustine, who made the world and planned all its future history when he made it, it is easy to see. Almost any thinker could apply Aristotle's metaphysics to St. Augustine's description of the origin and history of the universe, once it had occurred to him to do it. It is the idea of combining them which is great. Yet the two studies had been growing up parallel all through the Middle Ages, and so it is not especially original in St. Thomas that he brings mediæval thought to a culmination by formally combining these two elements. The point to be noted is, however, that the mediæval mind was saturated with Aristotle's metaphysics as it was with the Bible, and was prone to find the Bible an expression of that metaphysics as much as to find the central truth in the Bible. That is to say, it was quite as inclined to make the one the central truth as the other. As has already been pointed out, St. Augustine's God was no longer the superman Jahveh of the early Hebrew mind. He had become a great first principle. He is nearer to Plato's Highest Good, however, than to Aristotle's Unmoved Mover. In St. Augustine's God, as in Plato's Highest Good, we have an arbitrary selection, according to reason, or the principle of the better, of certain forms which make the world. In Aristotle's Unmoved Mover this freedom or arbitrary nature is not apparent. Probably both conceptions are very much the same when analyzed. But the Unmoved Mover moves, and thus creates, by attraction as a purpose. It is the great first form and first purpose, out of which all other forms and purposes naturally and necessarily grow. There is of course no more choice or freedom in the created world than in Plato's conception, but there is hardly present the notion of selection in the Unmoved Mover. He is eternal disinterest in all but himself. He simply is, lives and has his being. Out of this being go forth the forms which make the world. But they merely go; they are not selected and sent. The only thing the Unmoved Mover does about this creation is to observe it. Contemplation here as always is the only part of the Unmoved Mover. He sees how his nature works out: he watches evolution. He furnishes endless energy for it. But he does not reason out the world and make it as Plato's Highest Good does. Still farther is he removed in this way from St. Augustine's God, who is so intimately interested in the world and

plans it so carefully. St. Thomas Aquinas, however, tends toward the analysis, just spoken of, which brings Plato and Aristotle together.

For God indeed predestines the world to be as it is, according to St. Thomas, but is free only in making the world or in not making it;¹ once he makes it, he has no choice but to make it as he does, that is, according to reason. Thus we see Plato and Aristotle pretty well reconciled. God creates the world not because he has to do so, but because in his freedom he chooses to do so. This is the function which St. Thomas calls Absolute Will. But once creation begins, it cannot go otherwise than as it does. This necessity is in what St. Thomas terms Conditioned Will. God must use reason: he cannot create an unreasonable world. Thus we see a God freely choosing to create a world, and creating it according to his own reason, like Plato's Highest Good, but having no arbitrary freedom of choice, being, as it were, controlled by his own reason, which thus becomes Natural Law, and in this being the same as Aristotle's Unmoved Mover. Of course St. Thomas's God has the same great foreknowledge of all things which St. Augustine's and Aristotle's had, and is the same metaphysical being, rather than the early Hebrew Jahveh or the later Hebrew ethical conception of a Principle of Righteousness.² St. Thomas goes a little beyond Aristotle in this, however, because he makes this knowledge the all-important element in creation. For man, actions and objects come first, and then knowledge of them; but for God, the knowledge is first. In fact it is the knowledge which makes things. God's knowledge of things comes first, and the things result. Anything in the mind of God is true, or, what is the same thing, real, having objective reality. Thus God by thinking creates forms and impresses them on reality. More than this, however, God's "being is like knowing (*cum suum esse sit suum intelligere*)."³ God is thus actually and literally Truth. Thus we see the conception of St. Thomas to be, unwittingly, no doubt, a combination of the conceptions of Plato and Aristotle.

¹ The writers of histories of philosophy are at variance in their reading of St. Thomas more than of almost any other philosopher. They probably do not take the trouble to read the whole five volumes of the *Summa* in the Latin. The writers here have been compared with the original as much as possible, and selected accordingly. On this point, see Janet and Séailles, *History of the Problems of Philosophy*, tr. by Ada Monahan, London, 1902, vol. ii, p. 284.

² See Matthew Arnold's *Literature and Dogma*.

³ H. O. Taylor, *The Medieval Mind*, London, 1911, vol. ii, p. 453.

The modifications which St. Thomas makes of Aristotle, however, surely have no Platonic origin: they are always the result of combining the historical theological system of the Bible as expressed in St. Augustine with the Peripatetic metaphysics. St. Thomas discusses the relation of philosophy to faith, or to theology, at the very outset, and subordinates philosophy most unequivocally to theology.¹ Philosophy is to explain the factors given by theology as far as it can; beyond this point it can show that what is beyond the reason is not therefore contrary to reason, and so justify faith. Faith goes on and completes man's view of the universe. So, while Aristotle is to be used to explain the Bible, anything in Aristotle contrary to the Bible must be modified to agreement with it. This accounts for all the changes of Aristotle's conception.

These changes are principally in the conception of God. Yet the changes are insignificant in comparison to the agreement. St. Thomas proves God's existence by defining him as Truth. Then he can say "Truth exists," for to contradict this would be to give an example of truth, and would thus prove the statement. The subject is included in the predicate when we say "God exists." Truth, in the dictionary sense, is the correspondence of the idea with its object. Just here, it might be interesting to observe, is a very good disproof of Pragmatism, in so far as it gives verbal expression to its ideas. The philosophical or metaphysical principle of Truth is the Absolute Eternal God, unchanging, unconditioned, the Unmoved Mover. The true, or truth in the dictionary sense, is the necessary agreement of an idea, or form, with its object; this agreement in fact makes the object. Thus Pragmatism is right in all that it says of this kind of truth. But it errs, according to this system of St. Thomas, in denying the philosophical principle of Truth, which is God. The difference is analogous to that already explained between absolute and conditioned will. St. Thomas's doctrine of God's making things by thinking them, and making them because what he thinks is true, the things being made real simply because, and only in so far as, they are true, is surely an interesting mediæval expression of Pragmatism. But it is a much more properly proportioned expression than that which we get to-day. If God, then, is Truth, and by being Truth, by the simple state of knowing creates all things, he must be pure actuality. In this, of course, St. Thomas is quite in agreement with Aristotle. From this it is easy to understand that "He is absolutely

¹ De Wulf, *History of Medieval Philosophy*, p. 312.

simple.”¹ He therefore has no body. God wills himself, as has been said, and so in this way may be considered as absolute will. Here is an interesting analogy, to say the least, to Fichte. But as will be presently shown, there is a distinct difference, because in St. Thomas’s system God and being, or God and the world, are distinctly different. For Fichte the world is in the great first Will; it cannot get out. For St. Thomas, although the world is the object of the divine Will, is what it wills, yet it at once proceeds out of God into separate being. Resulting from his nature as Will, comes God’s love. Here is an important variation from Aristotle, the most important, in fact. Here is where one sublime idea comes into conflict with another. For who can deny the lofty sublimity of Aristotle’s conception of the Unmoved Mover, without the last sphere, beyond the *Primum Mobile*, who exists in eternal Truth, so beautiful that, entirely without his consciousness of it, the whole harmony of the spheres is moved and kept moving by attraction to him? Much of the nobility of this conception lies in the unconsciousness of the Unmoved Mover of what he is doing, in the idea of his being so true and good and beautiful that, without any intention or even consciousness of it, he moves everything to seek him. But this is in complete opposition to the Christian conception of God’s being Love. That conception cannot be denied to be of great sublimity and beauty also. “God so love^r the world that he gave his only begotten Son.” This thought has appealed more to the world than perhaps any other in all the history of thought. The importance of this doctrine of God’s love for the world in the whole of Christian thought is too well known to need to be more than mentioned here. Surely, too, all who are as saturated with Christian dogma and Christian ways of thinking as any cultivated European or American must be, know and feel the sublimity of this conception that God is Love. How important a place the idea that God is so interested in the world and in his creatures that his very nature consists in this interest, which is love, has in Christian devotion is seen in any Christian devotional book, in none better than in this passage from the *Imitation of Christ*:

“I bless Thee, O Heavenly Father, Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, for that Thou hast vouchsafed to remember me a poor creature” . . .

“Ah, Lord God, Thou Holy Lover of my soul, when Thou comest into my heart, all that is within me shall rejoice.”²

¹ Janet and Séailles, *History of the Problems of Philosophy*, vol. ii, p. 282.

² Bk. iii, ch. 5.

The whole of Christian ethics is largely toned by this idea of divine unselfishness, which is indeed very different from the complete isolation and self-interest of Aristotle's Unmoved Mover. But the central and pivotal character of the doctrine that God is Love, in the Christian system of theology, left no possibility of hesitation for St. Thomas in modifying Aristotle's conception of the Unmoved Mover. "He does not, as Aristotle thought, lower Himself by knowing things inferior to Himself."¹ "As regards the question, whether God loves anything else besides Himself, it is the same question as whether he knows anything else besides Himself, and is solved in the same way."² So God remains the Unmoved Mover, but moves consciously by will and through love, which are the necessary working out of that truth which is his fundamental nature, and makes the world.

Although God must be the chief object of study for the human intellect, the first thing that the intellect can ever know is being.³ Being is divided into two classes, *entia* and *essentiae*. The *entia* are abstract ideas which deny existence in matter or real being. Blindness is a good example of such an *ens*. The *essentiae* are real beings, embodied forms. These essences are divided into pure essences and mixed essences. The pure essence is composed only of form and contains no matter. The mixed essences are those composed of form impressed on matter. There is but one pure essence, God. Matter is potentiality, possibility. It is the substratum of mixed essences. In matter St. Thomas brings in the distinction of the matter out of which something can be made, and the matter in which something has to exist, if it exist at all, and yet which is not its substance. The first is *materia ex qua*, or substance, the second is *materia in qua*, or accident. The first is potentiality only, pure matter, while the second already has some actuality. In matter St. Thomas finds the Aristotelian hierarchy, each formed object, or mixed essence, being the matter for the higher form.⁴ It must be remembered that mixed essences are, in so far as they are mixed, not reality or real Being. Only the pure essence, or God, is real Being, for He alone is nothing but actuality. Matter is not-being: in this St. Thomas again

¹ Janet and Séailles, *History of the Problems of Philosophy*, vol. ii, p. 283.

² *Ibid.* p. 284.

³ William Turner, *History of Philosophy*, Boston, 1903, p. 366.

⁴ For this exposition of Being, see Weber, *History of Philosophy*, pp. 242-245.

really agrees with Plato and not with Aristotle.¹ Matter is a hindrance to being: in so far as matter is in essence, the essence is not-being. Thus, of course, it was never "made," by God, or in any other way. It is the cause of evil, as resisting actuality or form. Thus evil is in the world, and yet not made by God. Matter could never have any existence apart from form, but is completely passive.² The union of form and matter, or *generatio*, is brought about by four causes, the four causes of Aristotle's system. The only real difference is that St. Thomas's doctrine of creation makes it necessary to deny eternity to matter and motion.³ God actively created the world because he willed to do so. Things do not move themselves toward God by an external motion in space. Motion originated in God's will. Except for this idea of the eternity of matter and motion, causation works in St. Thomas's system as it did in Aristotle's, and his general conception is thus Aristotle's slightly modified.

Out of this theodicy and metaphysics grow St. Thomas's notions of ethics and politics. The kernel of his ethics is that the chief end of man is happiness, which consists in the knowledge and love of God, in contemplation of God. Here, of course, he again repeats Aristotle. But the new doctrine of God's love adds an entirely new element to this contemplation, bringing it close to mysticism, as close as it could get in Scholasticism, until poetized by Dante. St. Thomas's ethics builds itself around this central notion of a Chief Good, or *Summum Bonum*. This complete happiness which consists in contemplating God can come only in the next world. In this world there is only a contingent happiness, which consists in a partial contemplation of God through reason and faith. But this vision of God was not stressed by St. Thomas: it remained for Dante to show how much of the divine contemplation man can reach in this world. St. Thomas thinks rather of a different kind of happiness on earth, coming from "health, external goods, and the society of friends."⁴ Morality on earth consists first in attaining as much of the *Summum Bonum* as possible, and then in rightly adapting ourselves to this imperfect state in this world, and living well in it. In politics St. Thomas works out this practical adaptation of the individual more at length. Society is the natural condition of men. Authority is simply

¹ See p. 12, above.

² De Wulf, *History of Medieval Philosophy*, p. 319.

³ *Ibid.* p. 324.

⁴ Turner, *History of Philosophy*, p. 376.

for the public welfare. The prince exists for the people. He is held in check by the Church, and by the right of revolution. The state should look after the moral welfare of its citizens, and so should provide schools and public charity. It is of importance to note, in connection with Dante, that St. Thomas does not prefer one form of government to any other. This shows Dante's independence of St. Thomas, and direct discipleship to Aristotle. It is not the form of the government, but its devotion to the welfare of its subjects that is important, according to St. Thomas.¹ It is to be noted also that St. Thomas subordinates the Emperor to the Pope as means to end, as matter to form.² St. Thomas's aesthetics are not very important. Croce sums them up thus:

A little differently Thomas of Aquin chose the three requisites of beauty, *integrity*, or perfection, *proper proportion*, and *clearness*; he distinguished, in the footsteps of Aristotle, the beautiful from the good, the former being that which pleases in contemplation alone (*pulcrum . . . id cuius ipsa apprehensio placet*); and he hints at beauty even in bad things, well imitated, applying the doctrine of imitation to the beauty of the second person of the Trinity ("in quantum est imago expressa Patris").³

All of the special doctrines grow directly out of St. Thomas's metaphysics and theology, however, and can be understood only in reference to this central doctrine. "In a word, God is the efficient, exemplary, and final cause of all things (q. 44). This formula embraces and expresses the whole of the theodicy of St. Thomas."⁴

Here, then, we have the historical development of that scholastic philosophy which Dante worked out all over again in his own mind, very much as each individual in embryo lives over the whole history of his race. We have the elements before us which make up Dante's intellectual environment. And in St. Thomas Aquinas we have the formal synthesis of these elements into one great system. Beginning with the Bible, St. Augustine gives it a European expression, Hellenizes it and Romanizes it. Thus transformed into Catholic theology, it is rationalized so far as may be, interpreted by the metaphysics of Aristotle, by

¹ For St. Thomas's politics, see Turner, *History of Philosophy*, pp. 375 ff.

² Weber, *History of Philosophy*, p. 245.

³ Benedetto Croce, *Estetica*, Milan, 1902, p. 179.

⁴ Janet and Séailles, *History of the Problems of Philosophy*, vol. ii, p. 286.

St. Thomas Aquinas. It remains for the greatest spirit and probably the greatest intellect of the whole movement, if not perhaps of the whole modern world, to humanize it and to eternalize it.

II

While Thomas Aquinas was essentially an intellectual man, and developed all his special doctrines out of his central metaphysics, Dante was primarily spiritual, and in his philosophy simply expressed his own experience. His philosophy begins in his own private and public life, and at the outset is only his personal reaction. His life was a very vivid one, and the inner life was violent. Profoundly earnest and conscientious, Dante meditated deeply on his experience. No one in literature shows such sensibility, such delicacy of feeling. Each thing meant more for him than for most men. Each movement in his life, from the most insignificant to the most important, took on a deep and subtle meaning in his meditation. But Dante's mind was synthetic. So he very early tried to bring all these particular meanings into one great meaning. What did all the steps of his life lead to? What was the whole movement? Thus we see Dante building up a philosophy, but a philosophy entirely of his own. It was a philosophy of the history of his own life. Living in a completely religious age, one in which the whole people were pervaded with a great philosophy,¹ he was sure to be drawn eventually in his introspection to the general study of the subject. So when he began actually to read philosophy he found in it the expression of his own meditations on his own soul, systematized and applied to the whole world. Then when misfortunes came he found in this philosophy the true comfort of his soul. Philosophy as personal introspective analysis had been his chief interest, or rather his guide. Strengthened by the formal philosophical writings of the great thinkers, it became indeed his spiritual mistress. Now when the outer world, for which he had cared anyway only in so far as he interpreted it in spiritual terms, began to crumble from before him, when his outer life began to become a failure, Dante turned entirely to the inner life of higher contemplation, which he

¹ The religion of the Middle Ages was Platonism in concrete and general expression, worked out as has been shown in the first part of this paper. And see George Santayana, *Three Philosophical Poets*, Cambridge, 1910, p. 77.

was pleased to call philosophy. Thus we see Dante's philosophy to be the expression of his own inner life.

This inner life of philosophy began to be recognized by Dante as such while he was still a very young man, and as he saw for the first time the possibilities of such a life, he called it the *Vita Nuova*, and wrote a book about it. In this book we have a wonderfully beautiful expression of Dante's natural spiritualizing tendency, which in its spontaneity is of course most obvious before circumstances had driven him to such a spiritual life. Here it is seen that Dante's inner life was not merely the result of the failure of external interests. He was naturally spiritual, naturally sought deep interpretations of each material object and action that he saw. So when at the age of nine he saw a little girl of eight whose beauty attracted him, he immediately began to spiritualize her, or, in modern phrase, idealize her. Everything about her came at last to have a deeper meaning. "Apparvemi vestita d'un nobilissimo colore umile ed onesto, sanguigno." And her general effect upon him was to stir "lo spirito della vita, lo quale dimora nella segretissima camera del core." For nine years Dante waited and idealized. He knew that in her there was a God stronger than he, who was come to rule over him. So she did rule over his young heart for nine years, very like Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, by her beauty alone, of the influence of which she was entirely unconscious. Here, however, it shows perhaps more to the advantage of the moved than of the mover, for such adoration meant a refinement of feeling such as few boys show from the age of nine to that of eighteen. His description of the second meeting shows how she had grown in his mind; and that she did not overthrow his ideal, but only added to it, shows the intensity of Dante's spirit. Now Dante had come to associate this girl, Beatrice, with all his inner musings. Each particular interpretation was somehow connected with her. So she became a golden chain binding all his thoughts together. She gave objective reality to that synthesis of the particular movements of his life into one great movement which we have already seen his constructive mind naturally seeking. So Beatrice came to be identical in Dante's mind with his own spiritual life. She came to be that highest contemplation which he felt to be the chief end of man. Dante had meanwhile become a poet. And it was the fashion for poets at this time to center all their verses about some fair lady. Each poet was to have his "mistress,"

or "lady," just as each knight had had. This mistress was sometimes an entirely literary conception. She was also often only a symbol for various abstract qualities, such as virtue, or wisdom, or beauty. So it was very natural that Dante should find in Beatrice the "lady" for his verses. She was really his lady, independently of his verses. As his chief interest, he naturally would have written about her anyway. She was, moreover, the symbol for Dante's whole spirituality. About this time Dante began to become acquainted with formal philosophy. As we have seen, it gave more definite form to that personal meditation which had been his philosophy. In fact it began to get the control of his mind completely, so as to drive out the precious thoughts of his own building. For a little while Beatrice, his own true individual contemplation, was forgotten. When she had become entirely spiritual,

Quando di carne a spirito era salita,¹

he began to neglect her for the more formal thought of others on the world in general. His soul was for a time not the principal subject of his thought; instead the world became the object of his study. But then he began that remaking of philosophy, which we have said was his great philosophical task. He began to mould the thought of the ages into the thought of his own soul, to make over the world's philosophy, making it a commentary on his own life. He used it, instead of being controlled by it. He used it simply to give shape and form to his meditations. Thus he came back to Beatrice. Now she had a larger meaning. She had become divine philosophy, or theology, his spiritual life systematized and harmonized with the universe. So as he closes the *Vita Nuova*, for it is no longer *nuova*, he promises to devote himself henceforward entirely to her. In one of the most exquisite pieces of prose style in all literature,² he says:

Mi fecero proporre di non dir più di questa benedetta, infino a tanto che io non potessi più degnamente trattare di lei. E di venire a ciò, io studio quanto posso, sì com' ella sa veracemente. Sicchè, se piacere sarà di Colui, per cui tutte le cose vivono, che la mia vita per alquanti anni duri, spero di dire di lei quello che mai non fu detto d'alcuna.³

¹ *Purgatory*, XXX, 127.

² If it is true that "Le style c'est l'homme," judging from the *Vita Nuova* it is easy to see what delicate sensibilities were Dante's. ³ *Vita Nuova*, XLIII.

From the point of view of the historian of philosophy, this completely personal nature of Dante's philosophy would be expressed by saying that he begins with ethics principally, and secondarily with politics and aesthetics, and from these develops a metaphysics. This is just the opposite to St. Thomas Aquinas's procedure, as we have seen. Dante begins with evolving philosophy as a guide to life. It is a "philosophy of life" that he is interested in. This is seen clearly in the *Convivio*. He has been searching for the *summum bonum*, for the chief end of life, for happiness. He has not been looking for the First Cause, nor for the real nature of being. The ethical end of man has been his subject. He has found this, in his own experience, to be that inner meditation or contemplation which was the essence of his spirituality. So when he comes upon the idea of a *summum bonum* in "the Philosopher," he eagerly studies the nature of it as there worked out. And it turns out to be quite the same thing, so he thinks, as he had himself discovered. The chief happiness of man, according to Aristotle was contemplation, and according to the revision of St. Thomas, contemplation of God. So Dante is led to metaphysics through ethics: the study of metaphysics leads to the contemplation which is the chief end of man, and this is the only reason for studying metaphysics, — an ethical reason. "Non si dee dicere vero Filosofo alcuno, che per alcuno *diletto* colla Sapienza in alcuna parte sia amico."¹ Wisdom for the love of wisdom is not proper: wisdom is for the ultimate attainment of the divine contemplation, the knowledge and love of God. Thus Dante's ethics becomes transformed into metaphysics, but it must be remembered that his metaphysics is, after all, a transformed ethics. So he writes the *Convivio* for the ethical purpose of making possible for the many as much as they can receive of the wisdom, or philosophy, which will give them some share in that divine contemplation which is the only true happiness of man.

Manifestamente adunque può vedere chi bene considera, che pochi rimangono quelli che all' abito da tutti desiderato possano pervenire, e innumerabili quasi sono gl' impediti, che di questo cibo da tutti sempre vivono affamati. Oh beati que' pochi che seggono a quella mensa ove il pane degli Angeli si mangia, e miseri quelli che colle pecore hanno comune cibo!²

Dante's very statement of philosophy, in the *Convivio*, shows this ethical purpose in his metaphysics.

¹ *Convivio*, III, 11.

² *Ibid.* I, 1.

Veramente l'uso del nostro animo è doppio, cioè *pratico e speculativo* (*pratico* è tanto, quanto *operativo*), l'uno e l'altro diletto-sissimo; avvegnachè quello del *contemplare* sia più, siccome di sopra è narrato. Quello del *pratico* si è operare per noi virtuosamente, cioè onestamente, con Prudenzia, con Temperanza, con Fortezza e con Giustizia; quello dello *speculativo* si è, non operare per noi, ma considerare l'opere di Dio e della Natura. E questo uso e quell' altro è nostra Beatitudine e somma Felicità, siccome veder si può.¹

So Dante shows in the *Convivio* the use of knowledge, and the nature of it. The object of metaphysics is its practical use in the life of man.

Here is something very like Pragmatism in the core of Dante's philosophy. For is he not making Metaphysics of no value except as it is of practical use? Professor James seems to have scented Pragmatism in Scholasticism, for in it alone does he find a pragmatic value in the metaphysical consideration of substance.² Yet, when one stops to think, it seems so incongruous as to be little short of amusing, to call Dante a pragmatist. The trouble here lies in confusing the notion of truth as a principle with that of truth as a word describing agreement between an object and an idea, as was remarked before in the consideration of St. Thomas's conception of God as absolute Truth.³ True, Dante says that the study of metaphysics is good only in so far as it serves a purpose, has value in so far, indeed, as it "works." But what does he mean by value? When does it work? Its purpose, Dante says, is to lead us to everlasting contemplation of eternal Truth. Metaphysics is true, in the dictionary sense,⁴ when it is an instrument by which we may attain to the principle of Truth which is God. It is true when its description of the universe and of God corresponds, and can be proved to correspond, with the unchanging reality which is there forever without regard to man or man's knowledge, whether it be successful or a failure. God is the absolute truth, or reality, without the realm of discourse, to which all descriptions of it in that world of discourse must apply or be false. Within the realm of discourse things are true or false pragmatically; but when these terms become descriptions of the reality without they are true or false absolutely. Such would be the answer of Dante to Pragmatism.

¹ *Convivio*, IV, 22.

² William James, *Pragmatism*, New York, 1907, pp. 87-89.

³ P. 13, above.

⁴ A phrase of Professor Santayana's.

In the *Divine Comedy* the whole system, sketched and presented in crumbs for the masses who could not, through inability, *dentro* and *di fuori* partake of the whole loaf, is built up into the greatest expression ever given to human thought. Here the practical life is shown, and the speculative. The practical is indeed very incidental. It is chiefly the expression of the metaphysics by which the divine contemplation is possible. And it is thus itself a contemplation of the Eternal as far as Dante could partake of that contemplation. Man can only partially attain in this life to this blessedness, which differs in different men.¹

Questo Angelo . . . dice . . . a qualunque va cercando la Beatitudine nella vita attiva che non è qui . . . la *Beatitudine* procederà . . . in *Galilea*, cioè nella *Speculazione*. . . . E così appare che la nostra Beatitudine, ch' è questa Felicità di cui si parla, prima trovare potemo *imperfetta* nella *vita attiva*, cioè nelle operazioni delle *morali* virtù, e poi *quasi perfetta* nelle operazioni delle *intellettuali*. Le quali due operazioni sono vie spedite e dirittissime a menare alla somma Beatitudine, la quale qui non si puote avere, come appare per quello che detto è.²

So this contemplation, found imperfectly in the practical life, almost perfectly in the life of speculation, can only be completely attained in the next life. But Dante went as far into Galilee as man has ever gone in this world, and his *Divine Comedy* takes us as far into the Heavenly Vision as any book ever written. Directly, however, the book is an allegorical poem, leading us to the supreme blessedness by being itself an expression of that philosophy or wisdom by which alone man can attain to the knowledge of God, which is the supreme blessedness of man. Hell is man entirely without wisdom or philosophy, and so entirely separated from the contemplation of God.³ Purgatory is the study of philosophy, which leads to the happiness that consists in contemplation of God. Paradise is the contemplation of God, which is the eternal happiness of man. This is the kernel of the philosophical meaning of the poem. Everything in it can easily enough be worked out with this as a basis of interpretation. Thus the particular punishments are the particular active unhappinesses which result from violating the cardinal virtues of the practical use of the mind, Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, and Justice. We suffer practical inconveniences in violating these

¹ P. 23, above.

² *Convivio*, IV, 22.

³ P. 19, above.

virtues, and we also cut ourselves off from the study of that philosophy which alone leads to real happiness. When Dante comes to the *Paradiso* he enters into a direct contemplation of God as well as into a metaphysical consideration of Him necessary for this contemplation. In the last canto comes the vision of God, which has been called the "sublimest conception of the human imagination." The philosophy in the *Divine Comedy* must not be understood to be merely metaphysics, for it covers the whole field of scholastic philosophy, including physics and cosmogony as well as metaphysics and theology.

This philosophy in its details has already been shown, in its elements. As has been said, Dante studied the sources of Scholasticism, and then put them together again. In what, then, lies his value? What advance did he make in Scholasticism? His chief value probably lies in the way he put these new elements together again, and in the poetic expression he gave the system when thus built up anew. Besides this, he really made an important advance, as we shall see presently.

In taking the elements of Scholasticism and moulding them again into a system, he really moulded them, not into a super-personal system, but into something human. He had already a philosophy of life when he began the study of formal philosophy. This was the philosophy of inner meditation which the *Vita Nuova*¹ shows him to have had from childhood. It was a biographical philosophy, an introspection. When he began the study of Aristotle and the others, he at first became a little untrue to his real self and was a true Scholastic. But very soon he became himself again, and thenceforward this Scholasticism became in his hands simply an interpretation of a human soul, his own. He made Scholasticism personal. It should be remembered always, however, that Scholasticism was never a merely intellectual pastime, without any vital relation to life. Such expressions as "the dry bones of his formal Scholasticism"² are very much at fault. The Middle Ages were aglow with an interest, and a very profoundly philosophical interest, in life; for their religion was carried into every fibre of every man's life, controlling his every thought and deed, and this religion was simply the philosophy of Plato and

¹ Of course when the *Vita Nuova* was written, Dante had studied formal philosophy. It is the early spiritual biography therein that is here meant.

² Charles Eliot Norton, in an article on Dante in the *Library of the World's Best Literature*.

Aristotle given a popular expression. Scholasticism was the expression of this philosophy for the learned, for whom the popular expression was not adequate. It was for "color che sanno," not for the layman. Nor were the great thinkers of the Middle Ages mainly taken up, as is quite generally thought, with considerations of "how many devils can dance on the point of a needle." This is one of those piquant and striking phrases which people remember, and which, when saying something not true, thus do great harm. Scholasticism was an attempt to formulate the religious expression of Platonism into a philosophy which would satisfy the intellectual people of the time, who thought as earnestly and honestly, and quite as profoundly and exactly, as those of the eighteenth century, or of our own time. Yet the formal Scholasticism was a formal thing. It was a great description of the Universe and God. In the system the soul of man had its place, and out of the interest in this soul goes the impulse to make the system. But although this gave the impulse, it was not itself the chief feature of the system. Dante makes the soul the chief interest, and makes the scholastic philosophy simply an interpretation of the soul. Thus he humanizes it. He applies the system directly to life. He gives a philosophy of life based on this philosophy of the cosmos. In this way he holds much the same relation to Scholasticism as Rudolph Eucken, in starting the present interest in a "philosophy of life" holds to Kantian or Cartesian metaphysics. In this way Dante starts an interest in life which is to find full expression in the Renaissance, of which Dante is in this sense, as in so many others, the precursor. The *Divine Comedy* works out the religious philosophy of Aquinas in detailed application to human life in all its phases. In this way Dante is the great humanizer of Scholasticism.

The chief way in which Dante humanized Scholasticism, however, was the way he humanized everything he touched, that is, by making it beautiful. This transforming æstheticism was kindred to his spirituality. Just as he spiritualized everything he thought about, so he beautified it. The *Vita Nuova* is a splendid example, not only in the beauty of its style, but in the poetic way in which each material object is treated. Around all a sacred mystic light glows. Everything is etherealized, touched by a heavenly beauty. So in philosophy, he was always the poet. Accordingly, when he gave expression to the Scholasticism he had transformed by making it a running commentary on human experience, he poetized it as no

philosophy has ever been poetized before or since. While this scholastic philosophy was an intellectual expression for thoughtful men of the popular religion, Dante brings it also to the layman. He does not lower its dignity, however, in the process, but raises it. As modern people are almost all laymen with respect to scholastic philosophy, we see that Dante did a greater service than would at first appear. For while the layman of his own time hardly needed the intellectual expression of the religion which had been popularized for him, the modern man does need this intellectual expression, for he has not the mediæval popular religion. Thus Dante really eternalized the whole thought of the Middle Ages. He made it intelligible to other peoples. The great value of Dante, therefore, in Scholasticism is that he is its poet.

It was said that Dante made also an advance in the system itself. This is in what we may term his Modernism. In fact Scholasticism itself was a kind of Modernism. We have said that it was an attempt to give intellectual expression to the religion of the masses for the intellectual elect. It was an attempt to rationalize religion, to give it a higher synthesis, a deeper and truer meaning than that understood by the vulgar. We have shown that God was for Scholasticism no longer what He had been for the early Jews, and actually was in the Middle Ages for the people, the superman Jahveh. He was instead a principle, and religion was nothing less than a concrete expression, and also a popularization, of this principle and the other metaphysical principles which made up the Universe. In Dante this Modernism reaches its climax. It must not be supposed that for St. Thomas Aquinas religion was merely a symbol or an allegory. It was literally true, but metaphysically true. It was true just as a table or any other concrete object is true for an absolute idealist. It really exists, but is something different than it appears to common sense. In fact all philosophy so interprets the world, as something different than it appears to common sense. This, then, and not allegory, was the Modernism that Scholasticism most certainly was. Dante carries this out to the utmost extreme. He even comes dangerously near to the allegorical interpretation of religion. The passage already quoted,¹ where he says the Bible attributes arms and legs to God and means something else, making a concession to the ignorance of the race, is an example of his metaphysical Modernism. A better example may be

¹ P. 8, above.

found in the *Convivio*, IV, 22. Here he explains the story of the three Marys who went to the tomb of Jesus, but found Him gone, an Angel in his place telling them that He was gone, and bidding them tell the disciples and Peter to go into Galilee, where they should find Him. The three Marys are the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the Peripatetics. The tomb is this life, the Savior is Beatitude. The Angel is "questa nostra Mobilità che da Dio viene, come detto è, che nella nostra ragione parla, e dice a ciascuna di queste sette, cioè a qualunque va cercando la Beatitudine nella vita attiva, che non è qui." Peter is those who are gone astray. Galilee is Speculation. Only God he does not interpret, but leaves as simply God. This might be the allegorical meaning, but the allegorical meaning for Dante was *quid credas*. At any rate it is evident throughout Dante's works that he is thoroughly a Modernist in the sense that we have just shown all Scholastics to be Modernists. He saw a deeper reality under every appearance. Such passages as those just quoted carry this principle much farther than anything in St. Thomas. Moreover in Dante we come closer to Mysticism than in previous Scholasticism. In true Mysticism there must be a complete absorption by the great first principle, or God, of each particular individual. In Scholasticism, it will be remembered, God and the world were kept always quite distinct. Being proceeded out of God, but it never quite came back. The Unmoved Mover, both of Aristotle and of St. Thomas, was always beyond the empyrean. Man's final blessedness consisted in contemplating Him, but always from without, never being absorbed into Him. So Scholasticism and Mysticism were really distinct, and in an important way. Pragmatically, if we may use the term here, there was little difference. Both would mean the same kind of life in general. Yet even pragmatically there was a slight distinction. One's own soul was more highly evolved in Scholasticism than in Mysticism. But in Dante we come very close to Mysticism. Probably he would have refused to subscribe to a clear statement of Mysticism; he would have insisted, with St. Thomas, that God and man are forever separate. But his actual conception, perhaps due more to imagination than to reason, was almost, if not quite, Mysticism. We might call him the link between pure Scholasticism and the Mysticism that many of the best souls of the Church thoroughly believed in, such as St. Catherine of Siena. In the *Paradiso* God is Light, and the whole of Paradise is glorified by this Light. The

contemplation which is eternal blessedness is very nearly identified by Dante with existence in this Light. It really is existence in the Light, and to that extent is Mysticism; but the soul does not become one with the Light—it retains its individuality. This approach to Mysticism is, together with the Modernism just mentioned, to which it is closely related, both claiming that “things are not what they seem,” and that the particular is not of importance, but only the universal—the real advance in Scholasticism made by Dante.

In considering this Modernism, it is interesting to observe that very soon after Dante, men came to feel universally the interest in life and in its real underlying meaning which he had brought to the layman. Accordingly they began to pay much less attention to the religious expression of the truth, but to seek directly the truth itself. They did not care for a truth that merely works, but wanted a direct communication with that description of eternal reality which really corresponds to it. So it is possible that here in Dante’s expression of the Modernism of Scholasticism he was again a precursor of the Renaissance.

So we see in Dante the great æsthetic humanizing of mediæval philosophy. Essentially a philosopher by nature, he also spiritualized and poetized everything he thought. Out of the beauty of his own soul and the ugliness of the material world outside, he made an individual personal philosophy which he harmonized with the formal philosophy of his time. He emphasized the deeper spiritual meaning of the formal philosophy, showing more directly its application to life. He emphasized also the deeper metaphysical meaning of religion, bringing it thus prominently before every one, while it had been known only to the elect. In this humanistic tendency he foreshadowed the great humanistic movement so soon to burst upon the world. He gave imaginative expression, at least, to the tendency toward Mysticism in Scholasticism. In both of these ways he probably brought Scholasticism to a close while he preserved it to the world forever. In the Humanism he brought men to drop the religious element entirely out of their thought, as the thing of secondary importance, and in the Mysticism he brought those who were not thinkers but Saints to give up the scholastic view of mere contemplation and to substitute a pure Mysticism. At any rate Scholasticism has never been the controlling influence over the mind of Europe since Dante. Yet he preserved the soul of Scholasticism, the profound truth

in it, for all generations to come, *in saecula saeculorum*. Combining the meditation of his own spirit with the philosophy of the spirit of the Middle Ages, he built up a majestic cathedral of holy thought, which soars forever toward Almighty God.

III

It is Dante's Humanism that means most to the world to-day. This is chiefly, no doubt, for most people, the Humanism from his literary appeal. The *Divine Comedy* studied purely as a literary work, that is, as an imaginative poem, and taken only in its literal sense is a great, according to some critics, the greatest, work in literature. But it has been our purpose here to discover what there is in Dante's philosophy as such which may be of value to us to-day. So by his Humanism we here mean the Humanism in his philosophy. In the first place, the study of Dante's life shows the true nature of philosophy. Philosophy should be no mere formal exercise, nor intellectual amusement. "Non si dee dicere vero Filosofo alcuno, che per alcuno *diletto* colla Sapienza in alcuna parte sia amico." The study of philosophy as a sort of mental gymnastics, much akin to chess, is more or less popular to-day. A certain disciple of Mr. McTaggart tells the writer that this is the great beauty of Mr. McTaggart's philosophy: it is such a wonderful system. It has the beauty of a locomotive engine, where all the parts are so ingeniously arranged. To this extent, indeed, Dante would be a very good pragmatist; he would insist on the value of the engine being entirely in its ability to run and do work, and not at all in its ingenious arrangement of parts for its own sake. Neither should philosophy be for the love of speculation, however interesting and beautiful the pure whiteness of speculation. We remember that Galilee, or Speculation, was only valuable because Christ, or Beatitude, was there. The place was not valuable in itself, but only as containing Christ. So speculation, a knowledge of science for the love of science, is not good. Especially Dante objects to the idea of an interest in special sciences, instead of the whole synthesis of sciences which is philosophy. But even the study of philosophy for its own sake is not the proper use of the intellect. Philosophy must be intimately connected with the spiritual life of the philosopher. The first lesson we learn, from the *Vita Nuova*, is that philosophy should be a very real thing for each of us. It should arise

from within, and grow out of our own experience. At the outset it should express a longing of the soul. It should be a very real and deep desire to understand the inner significance of our lives, and the ultimate purpose. Then when we have a meditation of our own, we can begin the profitable study of formal philosophy. It will give definite shape to our meditations. We shall not accept some other man's philosophy on purely formal grounds, but shall find in some great system the formal expression of our own. Thus Dante shows us that philosophy is a real and vital human thing. In the second place, Dante leads us through such a philosophy to the higher contemplation which should be the object of life, and for the attainment of which the philosophy, great as it is in itself, should only be an instrument. This contemplation for Dante was the contemplation, he said, of God. There is every evidence that, whatever he may have articulately thought about it, he really derived much of his happiness from contemplation of himself, and through himself of the universal spirit of man. God, moreover, was Truth, an eternal principle. It is contrary to our modern feeling to desire rapt contemplation of abstract Truth as our chief end of life. We are more inclined to find our contemplation very largely "nella vita attiva." By making this change we can get a new Humanism from Dante which may be of the utmost value to all of us to-day. We can admit that perhaps the chief happiness can only come in the next world, but that the happiness to be attained in this world, "Beatitudine *imperfetta*" though it be, is very important. And we may also put more emphasis on the "Beatitudine *imperfetta*" of the "vita attiva," as well as the "Beatitudine *quasi perfetta*" in the intellectual faculties. We may also find happiness in contemplation of the world and all its parts as well as in God. Thus we get a new Humanism, beginning with Dante as a source, which will be close to the modern ideas of culture and of the "strenuous life." Dante better than any one else can teach us to cultivate these two ideas. This is our great need to-day. We have culture in the study and a soulless business in the world. We need to make contemplation the contemplation of life. We need to make this world with all its aspirations and struggles, its hopes and fears, loves and hates, humor and sorrow, the subject of our contemplation. Thus the chief object of philosophy may be "human interest." This may be combined with an interest in God, if the individual feels a vital human interest in God. The principal idea, however, is to make our philosophy

our whole culture, for this is what Dante meant by philosophy, a study of life. The whole world becomes the great all-inclusive novel, and our philosophy or culture is the knowledge of it. Life becomes a reading of this great book. But we shall not merely sit in our study and observe. Our reading of this book will consist in taking a strenuous part in life itself. Our pleasure in this will be our interest in life. So too the business man, the vigorous man of action, will not work mechanically from a love of motion. He will infuse reason into his life of action, and thus give it meaning. He will find in his work a synthetic interest, akin to the interest in reading a book. His life will come to be the life of contemplation, just as much as that of the philosopher, only perhaps a more vivid contemplation, being closer to the subject of contemplation, the world and human life. So perhaps Mr. Roosevelt is more philosophic than some of his academic critics think, when he says that philosophy in the sense of closet-ethics is of no value; it is of value only when it is applied to life. The chief philosophic value, then, of Dante for us may be the intimate relation he established between philosophy and the human life.

"Sans doute, l'homme pourrait vivre sans se donner d'autre fin que la vie, mais il ne le veut pas," says M. Boutroux in his recent book on Science and Religion. In this book M. Boutroux shows that there are aspirations in the human soul for something divine, for religion. Here we come close to two things in Dante, his Modernism and his contemplation of God. As has been said, Dante takes religion in a very metaphysical sense. He gives us the idea of a religion which is a very different thing from the usual conception of mediæval religion. When he thus left faith in the truest sense, as "the substance of things hoped for, the essence of things not seen," to see clearly the nature of all things, to have a vision of God, he necessarily went back in reality to philosophy. His religion became a kind of Modernism. He shows us, then, how we may believe in religion, interpreted by the best knowledge of our day. Religion will not be a symbolism, but the outward appearance of an inner reality. The best philosophy known to Dante, by which to interpret religion, was Aristotle. To-day our science and speculation have gone considerably ahead of Aristotle. Why not take religion, as Dante did, as the outward appearance of an inner reality which is a little better expressed in our present science and speculation than it was in Aristotle? The element of faith comes in, in knowing that our present knowledge is only a stage toward the truth, as was Aristotle's, but that

the religion may well be the true outer appearance of an inner reality which philosophy is making better known by slow progress. The use of the religion is, that in it we have the true and unchanging appearance. And it is still necessary for those who cannot penetrate philosophical understanding. It has, besides the æsthetic value claimed for it, a sociological value. Such a value, to be the comfort for those who cannot directly understand the inner truth, but can feel it, is beautifully shown in the last two chapters of Loti's *Matelot* where the mother, after failure to find solace for the loss of her adored son, is comforted and restored by a sudden new faith in Christ and the Virgin. Precious myths! cries Loti, and ends the book sorrowing that we, the elect, cannot still cling to them ourselves. We do hold to faith in the æsthetic sense we have outlined. The use of philosophy is to get ultimately, in some future day, the inner reality, the deeper meaning. For we know the appearance to be only appearance. One way to realize such a Modernism is that shown by M. Boutroux :

Il serait peu conforme aux faits de dire que l'idée de Dieu est actuellement délaissée par la raison humaine. La raison s'est éloignée, de plus en plus, de l'idée d'une divinité extérieure et matérielle, qui ne serait qu'une doublure ou un agrandissement des êtres naturels. Mais, par contre, elle s'attache de plus en plus à des notions qui, rassemblées, définies, approfondies, répondent très certainement à ce que la conscience religieuse adore sous le nom de Dieu.

Par analogie avec la vie, nous pouvons concevoir un être où tout ce qui est positif, tout ce qui est une forme possible d'existence et de perfection s'unirait et subsisterait, un être qui serait un et multiple, non comme un tout matériel, fait d'éléments juxtaposés, mais comme l'infini, continu et mouvant, d'une conscience, d'une personne. Si cette idée, qui dépasse l'expérience, ne s'impose pas mécaniquement à l'esprit, elle n'en est pas moins très conforme à la raison humaine, comme en témoignent, et les traditions des peuples, et les réflexions des penseurs. L'être que représente cette idée est celui que les religions appellent Dieu.

Perhaps a little closer to the actual metaphysical Modernism of Dante would be the conception of M. Bergson. For him God is a center of motion from which all being proceeds. In *L'Évolution Créatrice* he says, on p. 270 :

Si, partout, c'est la même espèce d'action qui s'accomplit, soit qu'elle se défasse soit qu'elle tente de se refaire, j'exprime simplement cette similitude probable quand je parle d'un centre d'où les mondes jailliraient comme les fusées d'un immense bouquet, pourvu toutefois que je ne donne pas ce centre

pour une *chose*, mais pour une *continuité* de jaillissement. Dieu, ainsi défini, n'a rien de tout fait; il est vie incessante, action, liberté. La création, ainsi conçue, n'est pas un mystère . . .

Here we have very much the same idea of an Unmoved Mover that Dante conceived as God, only worked out according to the modern sciences. Such an interpretation of religion by a modern evolutionary philosophy is suggested by Fogazzaro's *Il Santo*. It is just now taking a good bit of attention, both of Catholics and other Christians who have intellectual conscience, and scientists and philosophers who have religious feeling.

The beauty of that mediæval vision of God may thus still have value for us. We too may find a higher and truer happiness in the development of our humanism into a contemplation of the divine. But the divine will have to be defined in terms of morality, art, and some such metaphysics as that of M. Bergson.

The true philosophy must, however, be an open one which will lead us on forever through the infinite. Of closed metaphysical systems we must be very cautious. The world, one always feels, in coming out of these circumscribing systems, the world is greater than that. "Dieu," says M. Bergson, "ainsi défini, n'a rien de tout fait; il est vie incessante, action, liberté." Philosophy is

le vrai prolongement de la science, pourvu qu'on entende par ce dernier mot un ensemble de vérités constatées ou démontrées, et non pas une certaine scholastique nouvelle qui a poussé pendant la seconde moitié du dix-neuvième siècle autour de la physique de Galilée comme l'ancienne autour d'Aristote.

Such a philosophy can lead us to a contemplation of God, much like that which Dante calls "somma Beatitudine." We see here, too, a new kind of Faith, yet about the same as Dante's, for Dante's was to complete what reason could not do. So where the report of science at present has not reached the philosopher can get by a kind of faith of intuition. His intuition can give him a notion of the whole. Thus directly through philosophy we can attain to a kind of faith which will lead us to where, "beyond the horizon of speculation, floats, in the passionless splendor of the empyrean, the city of our God."

Bid, then, the tender light of faith to shine,
By which alone the mortal heart is led
Unto the thinking of the thought divine.