

Dante as Critic of Medieval Political Economy in *Convivio* and *Monarchia*

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ABSTRACT

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Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) has traditionally been viewed through the lens of his poetic masterpiece, the *Commedia*. While his so-called “minor” works, including the overtly political book four of *Convivio* and the treatise *Monarchia*, have been studied, much of this work tends to read Dante through the theologized, over-determined hermeneutic of the narrative of his poetic journey through the afterlife. Also, because of the overwhelming temptation to associate Dante’s place in intellectual history with his clerical contemporaries in Paris and Bologna, a similar trend (often combined with the first) reads Dante as merely an idiosyncratic but minor epigone of the scholastics in his non-poetic work. The latter vein of interpretation is very common and tends to generate interpretations of Dante’s political thought which see it as a predominantly abstract encounter with scholastic theology and philosophy in the context of the high medieval church-state conflicts, particularly in the contentious age of Popes Boniface VIII, Clement V, and John XXII and their bloody disputes with claimants to the Holy Roman throne and French and Aragonese monarchies over political control of northern Italian territories.

While this kind of reading is not unwarranted—for Dante’s *Monarchia* does make strong claims in the late medieval church-state conflict and deploys a philosophical lexicon current with scholastic intellectuals of the time—many scholars have read Dante’s monarchical theory in *Convivio* and *Monarchia* exclusively as a response to and

dialogue with the major scholastic and juridical writers, particularly of the “mirrors of princes genre,” on both sides of these political conflicts between Church-State claims to authority. This is not completely wrong, but in so doing many have, conversely, failed to understand that Dante is making a coherent and unique normative argument. Such readings fail to read Dante 1) as a real Florentine politician, 2) as an enthusiastic follower of Aristotelian paradigms (not merely a scholastic Aristotelian), 3) as a committed political secularist, and 4) as contextualized within the rich municipal, social, economic, and political histories of Florence and Medieval Italy.

This study thus moves away from previous approaches to Dante’s political thought and does a close re-reading of *Convivio* and *Monarchia* in a properly historicized framework, inspired by the work of Ernst Curtius and modern historicist methodology, contextualizing it in 13th and 14th century history. In particular, the study departs from Dante’s denunciation of greed in his lyrics, *Commedia*, *Convivio*, and *Monarchia* to establish the fact —through extensive research in economic history, commercial development, economic thought, political history, social history in medieval Italy etc.— that far from being a merely abstract denunciation of mammon or usury, like that found in the Bible and other theological writings, it is a unique and acerbic response to broad changes that can only be construed, on the basis of historical scholarship, in terms of the emergence of early capitalism in Florentine society around the early to mid 13th century. During Dante’s life, greed became a serious object of social discourse, with voices expressing both approbation and disapprobation, because of the monetization, urbanization, and commercialization of northern Italy. Moreover, during this period the Florentine state is effectively transformed from a bourgeois merchants’

republic to an oligarchy of the wealthy. The rise of a mega-wealthy, *nouveau riche* economic elite resulted in many social dislocations and factional conflicts. Through an examination of the economic and social development of the Florentine state and the role its powerful banks and firms played in it—from its early *popolo* governments, ordinances of justice, white and black Ghibelline crises, through the early 14th century *Mercanzia*—I thus adjust the typical church-empire historiographical binary to show that Dante’s monarchical theory is in fact a meaningful response not only to the broader ideological claims of the church-empire (spiritual-secular) conflict, but in fact, is also a response to the latter’s imbrication within the political and economic development of early capitalism. My investigation includes extensive research on the relationship between banking, commerce, and papal and Florentine-state political phenomena.

Thus, having pointed out the existence of a historical object we might call medieval Italian “political economy” as interlaced with traditional historiographies of Church-Imperial-City-State politics in 13th and 14th century Italy (chapters 2 and 3), and the history of the historiography of capitalism during the same period (chapter 4), I carefully examine Aristotle in terms of Dante (chapter 5). In particular, I show that Aristotle’s conception of justice, chrematistic wealth-getting and monetary accumulation (natural vs. unnatural), and the moral *teloi* of the human being and state in the *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* moor and inform Dante’s main claims and denunciations of greed in regards to his own time: Aristotle presents an alternative model to his contemporary *status quo*. By understanding Dante’s political works as an Aristotelian inspired critique of political economy (Dante cites “the philosopher” hundreds of times) I show that Dante is responding to emergent capitalism as an

institutionalization of greed which leads to infinite and unsolvable regressions of conflict which only one universal monarchical authority can stop, provided that such a monarch acts according to properly Aristotelian philosophical conceptions.

Chapter 1 serves as an initial overview of the whole study, also positioning it in relation to debates within the field of Dante studies; chapter 2 examines the international and political situation of Florence and Italy during Dante's time; chapter 3 proposes a new historiography of this history and examines it as the development of "political economy"; chapter 4 explores the emergence of capitalism in Florence and Italy in the 13th and 14th centuries (also motioning to debates about the nature and definition of "political economy" and "capitalism"); finally, chapter 5 examines Aristotle's critique of political economy in the *Ethics* and *Politics*, then pivots to Dante's deployment of such Aristotle's paradigms in *Convivio* and *Monarchia* to both denounce the injustices generated by the intertwinement of politics and acquisitive monetary wealth-getting and to articulate a monarchical political model for stopping the deleterious effects of greed.

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For Maria, Beatrix, Leo, Mom and Dad.

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**Chapter 1. Dante's Political Thought as *Political Economic* Thought:
Criticism, Historicism, and New Avenues for Research**

1. Introduction: Greed, Wealth, and Political Economy

Throughout the *Commedia*, Dante condemns greed and the accumulation of wealth as directly intertwined with the political dysfunction and injustice of the Italy of his time. In conversation with Forese Donati in *Purgatorio*, Florence is the place that “day by day [is] deprived of good and seems along the way to wretched ruin” (di giorno in giorno più di ben si spolpa, / e a trista ruina par disposto).¹ In the canto of Brunetto Latini—in which Dante also evokes an unmistakable linkage between sodomy and usury—we see that while Florence was once great, it has become a “nest of wickedness” (nido di malizia) where “[there is] a people presumptuous, avaricious, envious” (gent’è avara, invidiosa e superba).² Indeed, we learn in *Inferno 16* a sentiment reiterated in *Paradiso 15-18*: that “the newcomers to the city and quick gains” (la gente nuova e i sùbiti guadagni) have infected Florence with “excess” (dismisura).³

¹ *Purg.* 24.80-81; Text and translations of the *Commedia* (Mandelbaum) and *Convivio*

² *Inf.* 15.78; *Inf.* 15.68

³ *Inf.* 16.73-74; For an investigation into the Aristotelian valence of the term *misura* and how it fits into Dante’s larger courtly, sociological, and ethical framework in the *Commedia* and in his lyric poetry, see Teodolinda Barolini, “Sociology of the *Brigata*: Gendered Groups in Dante, Forese, Folgore, Boccaccio-From ‘Guido, I’ vorrei’ to Griselda,” *Italian Studies* 67, no. 1 (2012): 4-22 and Teodolinda Barolini, “Aristotle’s *Mezzo*, Courtly *Misura*, and Dante’s Canzone *Le Dolci Rime*: Humanism, Ethics, and Social Anxiety,” in *Dante and the Greeks*, ed. Jan M Ziolkowski (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2014). For a close to complete catalogue of greed and monetary corruption in the *Commedia*, see Leonid M. Batkin, *Dante e la società italiana del ’300* (Bari: De Donato, 1970).

In his encounter with Sordello, before vituperating the corruption of Florence, Dante cries out for a monarch—a Caesar—capable of restoring peace and order to an Italy that is “[an] abject...inn of sorrows...[a] ship without a helmsman in harsh seas” (*serva, di dolore ostello, / senza nocchiere in gran tempesta*) and devoid of peace.⁴ Everywhere, “all flee from [virtue] as if it were an enemy” (*virtù così per nimica si fuga*) and throughout Italy, there is not a single government imbued with philosophical authority—invoking the words of *Ecclesiastes*— “whose king is noble and whose princes devote their time to the people’s needs and not to their own wantonness” (*lo cui re è nobile e li cui principi usano il suo tempo a bisogno, e non a lussuria*).⁵ In *Paradiso*, where corrupt church and state governance is contrasted to the divine governance of the cosmos, Beatrice decries the “greediness...who—within your depths—cause mortals to sink so, that none is left able to lift his eyes above your waves!” (*cupidigia che i mortali affonde / sì sotto te, che nessuno ha podere / di trarre li occhi fuori delle tue onde!*).⁶ And, when hailing the possible coming of “alto Arrigo”—Henry VII of Luxembourg, who Dante once believed might begin to restore just political order — Beatrice declares that Italy is incapable of accepting this monarchical rule because “the blind greediness bewitching you, has made you like the child who dies of hunger and drives off his nurse” (*la cieca cupidigia che v’ammalia / simili fatti v’ha al fantolino / che muor per fame e caccia via la balia*).⁷

⁴ *Purg.* 6.127-151; *Purg.* 6.76-77

⁵ *Purg.* 14.37; *Conv.* 4.6.16

⁶ *Par.* 27.121-123

⁷ *Par.* 30.139-141; Dante, of course, sees greed, whether as *cupidigia* or *avarizia* (Lat. *cupiditas* and *avaritia*), as tightly wound together with a “Ulyssian” desire for

The *Commedia*'s intense focus on the strong connection between greed and political corruption are also the major drivers of Dante's political thought in *Convivio* and *Monarchia*, where he underscores the political dysfunction, wars, and social maladies of his time as a consequence of capital accumulation and an overlapping of politics and economics; the former as a superstructure in-nested in and representative of the church-imperial contests over which and to which even smaller party interests and municipal sovereignties bend. In *Monarchia*, the end of the universal polity is justice, which—in stopping the endless onslaught of greed— results in peace and aims to the intellectual development and fulfillment of all human beings. But, as I will show, chrematistic polities (or wealth-getting states)—that is, in Dante's time, early capitalistic states and international capitalist power—thwart the achievement of that goal and make Dante's new theory of the state and empire and political project necessary.⁸ Thus Dante is perhaps one of political economy's first critics in the Latin west, for he truly

knowledge, mastery, and all forms of *folle volere*. Of course, it links to traditional topoi from the Christian tradition too. On the former see, Teodolinda Barolini, "Guittone's *Ora Parrà*, Dante's *Doglia Mi Recca*, and the *Commedia*'s Anatomy of Desire," in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), and on the latter see Richard Newhauser, *The Early History of Greed the Sin of Avarice in Early Medieval Thought and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). But Dante's linkage of greed with the entire complex of insatiable desire for money, political power, and domination—within the theological and moral condemnation of deadly sins and vices generally—is not merely an abstract reflection on the perennial *pondus amoris* and Dante's moral investigation of multivalent *incontinenza*, but also a recognition, as I will show, of actual *monetary* greed stratified within and enabled by political power and corporate-private enterprise.

⁸ Much has been written on Dante's theory of the state and imperium, about which there is a vast literature and many controversies. For a philosophically rich and accurate picture of Dante's theory of the empire and state, see the preeminently coherent work of Bruno Nardi, "Il concetto dell'Impero nello svolgimento del pensiero dantesco," in *Saggi di filosofia dantesca* (La Nuova Italia, 1967).

understood Aristotle's critique of chrematistics and political economy in the *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁹

⁹ "Political Economy" is a term most often associated with the field of study that emerged starting with the French physiocrats and took form in its eighteenth and nineteenth century "classical" exemplars, such as Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, and Mill. The phrase "Critique of Political Economy" of course is taken from Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin in association with New Left Review, 1976); Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International Publishers, 1981); Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books, 1993), who made its critique his primary objective. In this study, however, I intend political economy in its purely classical-antique—and by extension 'medieval'—formulation, that is, as derived from Aristotle's arguments regarding the difference between politics and household management (*oikonomia* or *oikonomike*), natural and unnatural wealth-getting (*chrematistike*), and pursuit of monetary accumulation, exchange (*kapelike*), and its relationship to justice, which are examined especially (but not exclusively) in his *Politics* (Book 1) and *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book 5). Here below, I give a brief overview for understanding how Aristotle conceptualizes it and as it relates to Dante's political thought and by "critique" I mean a moral-philosophical claim against a union of state power, holders of monetary interests, and the pursuit of the bad sort of wealth-getting. For political economy in the Aristotelian vein see, Spencer J. Pack, *Aristotle, Adam Smith and Karl Marx on Some Fundamental Issues in 21st Century Political Economy* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2010); Ricardo F. Crespo, *A Re-assessment of Aristotle's Economic Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Odd Langholm, *Wealth and Money in the Aristotelian Tradition: A Study in Scholastic Economic Sources* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1983); Scott Meikle, *Aristotle's Economic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Nicolas J. Theocarakis, "Nicomachean Ethics in Political Economy: The Trajectory of the Problem of Value", *History of Economic Ideas* 14, no. 1 (2006): 9.; and M. I. Finley, "Aristotle and Economic Analysis", *Past & Present*, no. 47 (1970): doi:10.2307/650446. On the relationship between the latter and modern theories of economy and political economy, see Spencer J. Pack, "Aristotle's Difficult Relationship with Modern Economic Theory," *Foundations of Science* 13, no. 3-4 (2008): doi:10.1007/s10699-008-9135-x; Ricardo F. Crespo, *Philosophy of the Economy: An Aristotelian Approach* (New York: Springer, 2013); Cornelius Castoriadis, "Value, Equality, Justice, Politics: From Marx to Aristotle and From Aristotle to Ourselves," in *Crossroads in the Labyrinth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984); Joseph A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954); Karl Polanyi, "Aristotle Discovers the Economy," in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* (The Free Press Glencoe, IL, 1957); and Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. While there is a vast literature on medieval economics, for the centrality of Aristotle in its development see Odd Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools: Wealth, Exchange, Value, Money, and Usury According to the Paris Theological Tradition, 1200-1350* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992); Odd Langholm, *The Legacy of*

In this study, I will demonstrate the existence of “political economy” in Dante’s Florence and Italy, namely as a historically undeniable phenomenon of the nearly complete entanglement of the political and the economic in the time of Dante. Indeed, eminent historians have already laid the framework for such a study.¹⁰ A new perspective on the economic and political history of Dante’s time allows us to understand his use of Aristotle in *Monarchia* and to explain how his normative political theory depends in part upon a critique of political economy.¹¹ Such a critique, we shall see, is not only consistent with understanding what motivates Dante’s stringent denunciations of greed and political dysfunction throughout the *Commedia*, but is

Scholasticism in Economic Thought: Antecedents of Choice and Power (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Joel Kaye, *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange and the Emergence of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Joel Kaye, *A History of Balance, 1250-1375: The Emergence of a New Model of Equilibrium and Its Impact on Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹⁰ The main historians who have called attention to this total overlapping of politics and economics in the history of the northern Italian city-states and Florence in the age of Dante are Davidsohn, Salvemini, Ottokar, Rubinstein, Brucker, and Najemy among others. Nicolai Rubinstein, in "Studies on the Political History of the Age of Dante," in *Atti del congresso internazionale di studi danteschi* (Firenze: G.C. Sansoni, 1965), 237, remarks that it is “difficult...to draw a line between economic history and political and social history” during this period.

¹¹ In paving the way for this analysis on political economy, I am indebted to Joan M. Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 41, for her work demonstrating the true centrality of “commerce” within the nexus of “the independent city-state, the claims of empire, and the church,” the dominant forces which drive Dante’s political thought, and to Justin Steinberg, whose work in *Accounting for Dante: Urban Readers and Writers in Late Medieval Italy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) on “accounting” for the circulation of Dante’s lyric within merchant and bourgeois spaces, inspired me to make further investigations into historicizing other socio-economic questions in Dante’s political work.

crucial to the project of historicizing Dante as a unique, consistent political theorist in all his works, especially the *Monarchia*.¹²

We can therefore rest assured that our researches into Dante as a critic of political economy, and hence early capitalism, is not an anachronism. In the opening of his famous essay, *Dante come personaggio-poeta della Commedia*, Gianfranco Contini remarks that “ogni storia è storia contemporanea, suona un famoso teorema crociano. Se questa impostazione è corretta, non cadrà necessariamente nell’anacronismo ogni tentativo di richiamarsi all’attualità per illuminare eventi di culture sospite o remote.”¹³ For a Dantista concerned with our very own attualità, there is no more relevant contemporary history with regards to a real factual history of the time of Dante’s real life (1265-1321) than that of capitalism. As Marx observed in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, in a chapter on primitive accumulation, “capitalist production developed earliest” in medieval Italy.¹⁴ In thinking about Dante’s political thought and articulating

¹² On the cause of “historicism” in Dante studies see below, Ch.1 section 3, and cf. Teodolinda Barolini, “Only Historicize”: History, Material Culture (Food, Clothes, Books), and the Future of Dante Studies,” *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 127 (2009): 37-54. In regards to Dante’s fundamental coherency (this is not to say he is not an eclectic and idiosyncratic) as a thinker, I also agree with Bruno Nardi’s view in, “Le rime filosofiche e il «Convivio»,” in *Dal “Convivio” alla “Commedia.” (Sei Saggi Danteschi)* (Roma: Nella sede dell’Istituto Palazzo Borromini, 1992), 35, “che la dottrina di Dante sulla Monarchia era ormai saldamente costituita in tutti i suoi elementi essenziali” from his early lyrics, like *Doglia mi reca* and *Le dolci rime* to the *Convivio* and *Commedia*.

¹³ Gianfranco Contini, “Dante come personaggio-poeta della Commedia,” in *Un’idea di Dante* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976), 33.

¹⁴ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 876; Sombart, a colleague of Max Weber, in *Der moderne Kapitalismus: historisch-systematische Darstellung des gesamteuropäischen Wirtschaftslebens von seinen Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart. Die Genesis des Kapitalismus, 1* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1902) and *Der moderne*

the grounds upon which he can be said to “critique” political economy, it is clear that in late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth century Italy, despite the nuances of particular academic debates regarding the origins of capitalism, we are talking about early or “proto” capitalism (see below, chapter 4).¹⁵ Capitalism has long been known to have its

Kapitalismus: historisch-systematische Darstellung des gesamteuropäischen Wirtschaftslebens von seinen Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart. Die Theorie der kapitalistischen Entwicklung, 2 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1902) identifies Northern Italy as prototypically capitalistic. See also his extensive treatment of medieval Florence in *The Quintessence of Capitalism: A Study of the History and Psychology of the Modern Business Man*, trans. Mordecai Epstein (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1915). It should also be noted that, contemporaneously with Sombart, it was the judgment of Robert Davidsohn, in the *Storia di Firenze, Vol. II, Pt. 1. Guelfi e Ghibellini* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1972), 538, in the tenth chapter on the “Ordinamenti di Giustizia e la caduta di Giano della Bella,” with the label “La Genesi del Capitalismo” (Die Entstehung des Kapitalismus [The origin of Capitalism]), that “nel secolo decimoterzo in tutte le grandi città dell’Alta e Media Italia la società assunse un nuovo assetto economico, come a Firenze, dove però le conseguenze politiche del mutato regime economico furono più manifeste che altrove. Lo sviluppo del capitalismo, di cui nei tempi moderni la scienza si è affaticata a scoprire le origini, fu quello che dette la sua impronta a quell’epoca.”

¹⁵ Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century. Volume III: The Perspective of the World*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 57; Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 8-40; Philip J. Jones, *The Italian City-state: From Commune to Signoria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 186. While it has since been vociferously debated whether or not it is appropriate to refer to “Capitalism” in the thirteenth century, many intelligent critics identify enough features of mercantile, financial, commercial, world-economy, and political development in the period’s history to permit me to insist in a qualified sense that in Dante’s Florence and northern Italy of the mid-thirteenth through early fourteenth centuries, we are at least witnessing an early form capitalism, so to speak, with a lower-case ‘c’, even if many wish to restrict the origins of Capitalism to post-sixteenth century Europe. It remains to be sufficiently proven what is at stake in denying its existence in earlier forms. On this vast discussion and debate regarding the origins of capitalism in medieval Italy—and its status as “capitalism”—see the above, and among so many innumerable others; Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974); Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century. Volume I: The Structures of Everyday Life, the Limits of the Possible*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th - 18th Century. Volume II: The Wheels of Commerce*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1982); Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London: Verso, 2002);

roots in the bourgeois revolution that ushered in the end of “feudalism”—disputed term it may be—and, as we shall see later, it can be said that the institutions of feudalism as culminating from the “parcellized sovereignty” of the late Roman Empire and the Christian dualisms of church and empire resulted in a complex patchwork of institutions and political concepts that nourished the emergence of markets and political economic institutions recognized today and labeled with the term capitalism and clearly bearing the marks of what created it.¹⁶ In any case, there is no doubt that the central formations were there during the period of Dante's life.¹⁷

Moreover, the further one investigates into its roots, the more one sees that an interest in Dante's political thought, historicized and contextualized in this context of early capitalism, is far from running any risk of anachronism, and on the contrary, corresponds to the historical reality in medieval Italy. As Gaetano Salvemini puts it, “it was Dante's fate to be living just at a time when society had come under the control of

Martha C. Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism in Europe, 1300-1600* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); and William Caferro, “Economy: Hard Times or Prosperity?”, in *Contesting the Renaissance* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

¹⁶ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Citizens to Lords: A Social History of Western Political Thought From Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (London: Verso, 2008), 164-167, *et passim*; Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (New York: Verso, 2013), 148. ff.

¹⁷ Eric Mielants, following the analysis of Wallerstein and Abu-Lughod, remarks in his important work on the topic, *The Origins of Capitalism and the "Rise of the West"* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 31-32, regarding what he calls “Inter-City-State System of the Middle Ages,” that “capitalistic features became more and more apparent in Europe after A.D. 1100 and the mutual existence of feudalism and capitalism was entirely possible up until about 1350. All of this took place within an inter-city-state system, before any sort of crisis caused one type of logic (the capitalist one) to dominate the other (the feudal one).”

moneyed merchants.”¹⁸ According to John Larner, “In 1300 the Italians were the principal heirs of a revolution, which, beginning in the eleventh, and reaching its peak in the second half of the thirteenth century, had given to the whole of Europe a new prosperity, and to Italy the supremacy of the medieval world.”¹⁹ For George Holmes, in 1300 Rome, about to cease being the ecclesiastical capital of Europe, was the home of “symbolic vestiges” of power and civilization while “Florence...was a city with no civilized past but an apparently infinite capacity for expansion fed by its industrial workshops and its mastery of international finance.”²⁰

¹⁸ Gaetano Salvemini, "Florence in the Time of Dante", *Speculum* 11, no. 03 (1936): 317-326.

¹⁹ John Larner, *Culture and Society in Italy, 1290-1420* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 22.

²⁰ George Holmes, *Florence, Rome, and the Origins of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 3; Jones, in *The Italian City-state: From Commune to Signoria*, 179, notes that this is truly not merely an “industrial” capitalism (industrial in a medieval, not modern sense) but a financial one with a “connection formed between trade and finance. Both in origin and development in fact it is difficult to differentiate from commerce the operations and institutions of money-changing, banking, and credit—of *mercatores*, *campsores*, *bancherii*. By mere effect of their commercial expansion and dispersal overseas, their demand and accumulation of capital, their dealings in different currencies, Italian merchants were early impelled to contract and organize all kinds of credit and exchange transactions, not only among themselves or in relationships of business, but also in time with clients and society at large. Among themselves for commercial purposes, beside various forms of partnership, investment and shareholding, they evolved from the late twelfth century a whole new machinery of credit payments at home and abroad: at home by encouraging *cambiatores* (then followed by merchants themselves) to engage in banking, by accepting deposits, advancing credit, and transferring payments between clients and their own or other *bancherii*; abroad by devising instruments (bills) of loan and exchange (*ex causa cambii*), advancing funds repayable in different or distant currencies and markets.” For a perspective on medieval “industry,” see Jean Gimpel, *The Medieval Machine: The Industrial Revolution of the Middle Ages* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976).

As John Najemy states, the transformation from older feudal nobility to a new class of urban *nouveaux riches* is reflected in Dante's *Paradiso 16*, where Cacciaguida fetishizes with nostalgia the great families of the "more virtuous" Florence of the mid-twelfth century. In agreement with Davis, he points out that "Dante wrote at the height of Florentine economic power and demographic expansion in the early fourteenth century, and in the aftermath of one of the greatest explosions of violence perpetrated by elite factions. His purpose in fashioning the myth of an earlier, simpler, more tranquil Florence was to highlight the corruption and devastation that great wealth and political rivalries had inflicted on the city."²¹ However, the fact that few of the elite families of Cacciaguida's day were still politically active by the end of the thirteenth century (ex. Donati, Della Bella, Visdomini, Tosinghi, Lamberti, and Admiari), shows that "in little more than a century, economic growth and political turbulence had consigned much of the elite to oblivion and generated a new one," the new class that Dante decries acerbically to the three noble Florentines in *Inferno*, when they ask if "cortesia e valor" remain in the city as it once did: "La gente nuova e i sùbiti guadagni / orgoglio e dismisura han generata / Fiorenza, in te, sì che tu già ten piagni."²² This "gente nuova" which took shape in the mid-thirteenth century, "made Florence the economic giant of Europe, and dominated the life of the republic for the next two centuries and more."²³ Najemy puts it succinctly: Florence's history was dominated by a competition between

²¹ John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 6.; On this also see Davis's classic essay *Il buon tempo antico* in Charles Till Davis, *Dante's Italy, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 71-93.

²² *Inf. 16:73-75*; Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 6.

“two distinct but overlapping political cultures and classes: an elite of powerful, wealthy families of international bankers, traders, and landowners organized as agnatic lineages; and a larger community of economically more modest local merchants, artisans, and professional groups organized in guilds and called the *popolo*.”²⁴

In the eyes of Charles Till Davis, Villani’s “pious moralizing” about “factionalism and civil war” was “often borrowed from Dante,” but not that of wealth. He writes correctly,

it was precisely these characteristics of Florentine development which excited his imagination and moved him to write his history. His description of the rough clothes and frugal life of the *Primo Popolo* seems forced when we compare it with the inscription which that same *popolo* placed on their new town hall, celebrating the power and victories of their city. Its first line asserted: 'Florence is full of all imaginable wealth.' This note, also struck by Villani in many passages, gives a truer impression of the spirit of early Florentine historiography than the borrowings from Dante with which he tried to ornament his *Chronicle*.²⁵

The legacy of the post-1250 life of Florence is one and the same with the history of early capitalism or political economy in Italy. Florentine banks like the Mozzi, Spini, Bardi, and Peruzzi—to name just a handful— had branches and dealings, not just in Italy, but throughout Europe and the Middle East.²⁶ Much of this activity was what we would easily identify as financialized, not merely industrial-productive, capitalism in

²⁴ Ibid., 5.

²⁵ Davis, *Dante's Italy, and Other Essays*, 93; Davis notes that this is from the partial translation of the inscription as transcribed in Nicolai Rubinstein, “The Beginnings of Political Thought in Florence. A Study in Mediaeval Historiography,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 198-227.

²⁶ Edwin S. Hunt, *The Medieval Super-companies: A Study of the Peruzzi Company of Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 38-75; Jones, *The Italian City-state: From Commune to Signoria*, 187.

collusion with multiple layers of state and ecclesiastical powers: these banks lent huge amounts of money to the kings, feudal nobles, convents, bishops, popes, and municipalities—and of course, to private enterprises—of Europe at rates of interest between 36 and 262%.²⁷ This lending led to massive profits. According to Salvemini, at the end of the thirteenth century the firm of the Florentine Cerchi was regarded as among the most powerful in the world and was believed to possess a capital of 900,000 florins.²⁸ Vieri de' Cerchi was said to be personally worth over 600,000 florins. Other powerful firms, like the Bardi and the Peruzzi, also had massive amounts of capital: in 1319 the annual turnover in the public books of the Bardi firm was 873,638 florins and merely the war debts owed mostly to these two Italian banks by Edward III of England had risen to 1,365,000 florins in 1339.²⁹ How much is 900,000 to 1.5 million florins of capital? To put that into rough perspective, around 1300, 8000 florins was considered a large fortune, in 1268 Florence bought the town of Poggibonsi for 20,000 florins, and in 1348 the entire city of Avignon sold to the pope for 80,000 florins.³⁰ When talking about Florentine firms between 1260 until the financial crisis of the 1340s (the period that overlaps with Dante's lifetime), we are literally talking about capital assets that rival today's multinational industrial corporations and investment banking complexes (Haliburtons, Citibanks, GEs, Goldman Sachs, Koch Industries, etc.). The capital of

²⁷ Salvemini, "Florence in the Time of Dante," 319.

²⁸ Ibid., 319.

²⁹ On the accounting data, organization, operations and power of the Peruzzi company in the historical context of the 13th and 14th centuries, see the important and indispensable study of Hunt, *The Medieval Super-companies: A Study of the Peruzzi Company of Florence*.

³⁰ Jones, *The Italian City-state: From Commune to Signoria*, 197.

some single firms was greater than the sovereign wealth of entire kingdoms, and merely the amount of debts— “among capital, fees, and interest” (tra di capitale e provisioni e riguardi) owed some of them by England, as Villani puts it, “were worth an entire kingdom” (valeano un reame).³¹ From their first appearance in the 1230s, the chief *campsores papae* were Tuscan *mercatores*, most conspicuously Florentines, and they both monopolized the management and swelled the coffers of papal finances at great profit to themselves.³²

Indeed, to quote the eminent historian Philip Jones, author of monumental works on the history of medieval Italian society and economy:

between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, the era of Western expansion, Italy—and more especially now the North and Centre—became indelibly identified, to contemporaries and for posterity, with two subversive, ‘anti-feudal’ forces, republicanism and capitalism: of liberty and civility, ‘political man’, civic ethic, and *polis*-mindedness (*libertas in Italia sedem principalem eligit*), and of commerce (*mercatura*), ‘economic man’, business ethic, and the embourgeoisement of civil and political society (*in Italia regnat populus*). Trade and freedom drew together in creative but tense combination: from political and economic developed also cultural renaissance and deviation—Italy’s unmedieval culture, practical, secular, humanist—while from the relationship between them resulted all the innermost history of the Italian city-states, of progress, crisis, and revolution from commune to signoria.³³

³¹ Giovanni Villani, *Giovanni Villani: Nuova Cronica*, ed. Giulio Cura Curà (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2002), 856; Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 133; Carlo M. Cipolla, *Before the Industrial Revolution: European Society and Economy, 1000-1700* (New York: Norton, 1976), 200.

³² Gino Arias, "I banchieri italiani e la S. Sede nel XIII secolo: linee della storia esterna," in *Studi e documenti di storia del diritto* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1902); Jones, *The Italian City-state: from Commune to Signoria, 192-197*.

³³ *Ibid.*, 152.

Jones also writes, according to the judgment of modern and previous scholars, that the biggest invention of this urban landscape was “la creazione, unica per quel tempo, di una società fatta di città, repubblicane e commerciali, città-Stati e città mercantili, che riunivano i due principi politici ed economici del ‘vivere civile’ (antifeudale e antimonarchico) e della ‘practica della mercatura’ (‘capitalistica’, ‘borghese’).”³⁴

Thus, regarding Dante's political thought, we simply cannot interpret the split between the Church and Empire, Guelf and Ghibelline, and the later White Guelf and Black Guelf rift, without already seeing undergirding this superstructure a vast, functioning system of international capital and commercial interest determining not only the broader ideological contests, but also the actual internal structure of politics within Florence itself.³⁵ In this political economy not only do state interests bend to financial interests, the powers of the state act also in unison with oligarchies and formations of power centered around networks of allied and competing capitalist interests, and increasingly become one. The history of Florentine political changes and “popular revolutions,” which culminates in the anti-magnate “ordinamenti di giustizia” legislation of 1293, were nonetheless all revolutions involving capitalist interests

³⁴ Philip J. Jones, *Economia e società nell'Italia medievale* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1980), 4.

³⁵ Sergio Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del dugento*, ed. Sergio Raveggi (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1978). Gino Masi, "I banchieri fiorentini nella vita politica della città", *Archivio Giuridico "Filippo Serafini"* 9 (1931): 57-89.; Gino Masi, *Il nome delle fazioni fiorentine de'bianchi e de' neri* (Aquila: Officine grafiche Vecchioni, 1927).; Gino Arias, "Il fondamento economico delle fazioni fiorentine de' guelfi bianchi e de' guelfi neri e le origini dell'ufficio della Mercanzia in Firenze," in *Studi e documenti di storia del diritto* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1902).

(*popolani, popolo grasso, grandi*); anti-magnate, but not anti-capitalist or anti-oligarchical.³⁶ Starting with the *primo popolo* (1250-1260), its rule was “not a social revolution” but rather emerged from a disagreement within the elite between those dedicated to “factions and those who saw such alliances as damaging to the economic interests of their class and city.”³⁷ In fact, through Florentine history we see the unification of capitalist interests, and its most powerful guilds (*arti maggiori*) *Calimala*, *Lana*, and *Cambio*—which represented the most powerful banking and industrial-trade firms—with restricted-access state power, culminating in Florence’s “guild republicanism.”³⁸ The most overt and open institutional example of the latter, of course, is seen in Florence’s 1308 *mercanzia* or *universitas mercatorum*—a unification of the most powerful guilds of *Calimala*, *Cambio*, *Lana*, *Por Santa Maria*, and *Medici*, *Speziali*, *Merciai*, into a governing state power.³⁹ Authority and power are often directly related to the possession or demands of capital accumulation or access to markets.⁴⁰ As Jones points out, the distribution of power in the Italian city-states was directly linked to “wealth and migrated with movements of wealth, and through all revolutions of

³⁶ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 68-69; Robert Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze. Vol. II, Pt. 2.* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1972), 537ff.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁸ John M. Najemy, “Guild Republicanism in Trecento Florence: The Successes and Ultimate Failure of Corporate Politics,” *The American Historical Review* (1979): 53-71.

³⁹ Antonella Astorri, *La Mercanzia a Firenze nella prima metà del trecento: il potere dei grandi mercanti* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1998).

⁴⁰ For the still definitive work regarding the history of the Florentine guilds, see Alfred Doren, *Le Arti Fiorentine, 2 Vols* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1940). See also Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought From the Twelfth Century to the Present* (London: Methuen, 1984).

political and economic regime, oligarchy, in fact or law, was the predominant form of government."⁴¹ The tight linkage between economic interest and state power causes the state to become unjust for several reasons, which we will explore with Dante (and Aristotle), and requires a monarchical form of government to stop the injustices of capital accumulation and wealth-getting.

⁴¹ Philip J. Jones, "Communes and Despots: The City State in Late-Medieval Italy," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (Fifth Series)* 15 (1965): 71-96.

2. Dante's Political Thought

Notwithstanding the trend of making Dante a receptacle and representative for almost any position or content area,⁴² Dante has been widely recognized as a unique political thinker who was passionate about the idea of *Monarchy* and hoped that a monarchy might restore peace and justice to his society.⁴³ Dante's *Convivio* and *Monarchia*, recognized as Dante's most explicitly political works (especially the latter), rely heavily on direct interaction with Aristotle—particularly since Aristotle's detailed conceptions of metaphysics (first philosophy), ethics, and politics provide a clear and consistent notion of justice and the common good in a time when historical, economic, and political factors left the justice of states and goods quite doubtful and when other intellectual claims to truth were advocating for what he considered misguided imperial or church arguments over temporal affairs.⁴⁴ Aristotle provided Dante a particularly serviceable integration of the latter matters with the ethical, providing the closest comprehensive and systematic theory of ethical-political compass of individuals in relation to goods, other individuals, society as a whole, and “the highest good,” that

⁴² For a searing polemic on this very problem, see Francesco Benozzo, *Appello all'UNESCO per liberare Dante dai Dantisti* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2013).

⁴³ In this vast body of literature, see the focused and illuminating studies of Nardi, "Il concetto dell'Impero nello svolgimento del pensiero dantesco" and "Le rime filosofiche e il «Convivio»"; Francesco Mazzoni, "Teoresi e prassi in Dante politico," in *Monarchia; Epistole Politiche* (Torino: Edizioni RAI radiotelevisione italiana, 1966); Davis, *Dante's Italy, and Other Essays*, and Hans Kelsen, *La Teoria Dello Stato in Dante*, trans. Vittorio Frosini (Bologna: M. Boni, 1974).

⁴⁴ For a catalogue of Dante's use of Aristotle see Edward Moore, *Studies in Dante. First Series. Scripture and Classical Authors in Dante* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896).

Dante had access to—particularly as the censorship bans of Aristotle began to end in the late duecento.⁴⁵

We see the pervasiveness of Aristotle not only in the dozens of commentaries of Dante, but in direct references within the texts of Dante themselves—signaled by invocation of the “filosofo.” In *Convivio*, a standard concordance shows sixty-nine invocations of the philosopher: “Sì come dice lo Filosofo...”⁴⁶ In both *Convivio* and *Monarchia*, however, what is particularly striking is that reference to Aristotle as guiding principle not only rivals biblical citations, but completely trumps and overpowers the latter in terms of structural primacy and intellectual priority—such that we clearly see that Biblical revelation, as opposed to what is popularly claimed, is *not* truly the *first* source of ‘Truth’ for Dante, but rather that which supports what can be rationally and philosophically observed in nature and society.⁴⁷ We see this in that Dante starts his *Convivio* by invoking Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 1, emphasizing the

⁴⁵ For a comprehensive analysis of the evolution and deployment of Aristotelian thought as it was progressively translated and circulated in the 13th century see Stephen Gaukroger, “Augustinian Synthesis to Aristotelian Amalgam,” in *The Emergence of a Scientific Culture: Science and the Shaping of Modernity 1210-1685* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006); Janet Coleman, “Some Relations Between the Study of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, *Ethics* and *Politics* in Late Thirteenth- and Early Fourteenth-century University Arts Courses and the Justification of Contemporary Civic Activities (Italy and France),” in *Political Thought and the Realities of Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph Canning and Otto Gerhard Oexle (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998); and Cary J. Nederman, *Medieval Aristotelianism and its Limits: Classical Traditions in Moral and Political Philosophy, 12th-15th Centuries* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1997).

⁴⁶ Intratext.com

⁴⁷ As Gaukroger, *op. cit.*, 78-79, has examined, this is the opposite of the predominant strands of scholastic approaches to epistemology and the ontology of truth that, while maintaining that first philosophy (metaphysics in the Greek sense) starts with sensory observation, nonetheless it is truly undergirded by revelation and revealed-theology (metaphysics is often translated as theology, but its meaning is different).

universality of Truth and access to it--hence the metaphor of the “banquet” of “food” for all and emphasis on its vernacular dissemination:

Sì come dice lo Filosofo nel principio de la Prima Filosofia, tutti li uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapere. La ragione di che puote essere ed è che ciascuna cosa, da providenza di propria natura impinta è inclinabile a la sua propria perfezione; onde, acciò che la scienza è ultima perfezione de la nostra anima, ne la quale sta la nostra ultima felicitade, tutti naturalmente al suo desiderio semo subietti (As the Philosopher says at the beginning of the *First Philosophy*, all men by nature desire to know. The reason for this can be and is that each thing, impelled by a force provided by its own nature, inclines towards its own perfection. Since knowledge is the ultimate perfection of our soul, in which resides our ultimate happiness, we are all therefore by nature subject to a desire for it.)⁴⁸

Though his advocacy for monarchy as the best form of state certainly shares an overlap of concerns and context with the main political theorists of his era, like Thomas Aquinas, Ptolemy of Lucca, Giles of Rome, John of Paris, Remigio de' Girolami and Marsilius of Padua, it is mistaken—as has been the fashion of some scholars of current and previous generations—to reduce Dante to the caricature of a sort of epigone of “real” professional political theorists, the scholastics and jurists, or as merely their minor interlocutor.⁴⁹ When Dante does cite another medieval authority, as he does in his

⁴⁸ *Conv.* 1.1

⁴⁹ This is the unfortunate procedure many traditional intellectual historians. See Dante's treatment for example by J. A. Watt, “Spiritual and Temporal Powers,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought C. 350-c. 1450*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), which though technically correct in many aspects, tends to treat Dante as a minor figure in relation to supposedly bigger, trend setting political ideas, which is to ignore everything that makes Dante's thought unique in a properly historicized mode. Watt cannot help but make unwarranted value judgments—and hence from forwarding a skewed historiography— remarking that Dante's *Monarchia* is “naive in its optimism,” “credulous,” “bizarre in its theology” and “under-researched in that its attempts to refute hierocratic arguments...are elementary as compared with professional theologians such as John of Paris and Remigio de' Girolami or indeed as compared with those very canonists whom Dante affected to despise for their lack of theological and philosophical expertise.” The present study

Convivio, such citation must be examined in its particular context and content and must not be viewed as automatic evidence of Dante's inferiority or obeisance to other writers. Not only do the political theories of the canon lawyers and medieval political theorists vary greatly amongst themselves in their technical details—some being on the 'secular' and others on the 'spiritual' side of the prototypical church/empire conflict (and Marsilius of Padua's work post-dates the *Monarchy*)—but they inherently represent and explicitly express different political concerns and presuppose different teleologies (from very different intellectual and subjective positions) than those of Dante's *Monarchia*.⁵⁰ If at all, Dante is only “responding” to these texts in *Convivio* and *Monarchia* in a very weak sense, and his articulation of his own ethical and political perspective should be seen primarily as a reaction to his lived world and experience. Dante's citation of Aquinas' *Summa contra gentiles* in *Convivio*, for example, in its context—to anyone who has read Aquinas' work—clearly has almost nothing to do with the latter and the work of *Convivio* generally demonstrates an opposite epistemological stance in reprimanding the primary value of knowledge as it comes through the material channels of the senses—not revelation—even if mediated by separated substances. While we

seeks to refute such views by recontextualizing Dante's political thought within a more precise historical framework.

⁵⁰ Though it pertains to a previous generation of scholars, the legacy of “scholastifying” Dante's thought in all regards, including political thought, still bears upon the field. Of a generation ago, Nardi, as a scholastically trained Italian scholar excels at careful intellectual history regarding Dante and scholasticism/Averroism. In my view, Michele Maccarrone, “Il Terzo Libro Della «Monarchia»,” *Studi Danteschi* XXXIII, fasc. I (1955): 5-142, and Gustavo Vinay, *Interpretazione della "Monarchia" di Dante* (Firenze: F. Le Monnier, 1962) represent over-determining tendencies to make Dante a follower or either Aquinas, Averroes, or other scholastic authorities while entirely ignoring Dante's unique and systematic understanding of Aristotle, and indeed the historical situation of Dante's time, in his own right.

certainly should not deny that there are valid and noteworthy avenues of research open to intellectual historians in drawing important connections between certain topical areas amongst the canon of scholastic and other political, scientific, philosophical, and theological writers of the era with the work of Dante and others,⁵¹ it is imperative to insist that Dante's thought is a unique, idiosyncratic, and incredibly learned deployment of Aristotelian philosophy. If also imbued with many elements that characterize medieval learning of the time, it *must be read* against the politics of his situation and time and deserves this scholarly attention without the undue interference that the onus of an expansive discourse of intellectual history of medieval political thought presents in the space a study like this. In other words, in this study I leave aside anxieties about Dante's possible influences and anxieties of influence.

How can Dante then be said to relate to the other philosophical, theological, and publicist/juridical writers and theorists of his time—that is, to his place in medieval

⁵¹ For excellent examples of intellectual historians doing careful work on the consonance and dissonance of certain concepts and themes across an array of 13th-14th century thinkers in the areas of theology, philosophy, law, politics, and economics see Kaye, *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange and the Emergence of Scientific Thought*; Joel Kaye, *A History of Balance, 1250-1375: The Emergence of a New Model of Equilibrium and Its Impact on Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools: Wealth, Exchange, Value, Money, and Usury According to the Paris Theological Tradition, 1200-1350*; Giacomo Todeschini, *Il prezzo della salvezza: lessici medievali del pensiero economico* (Roma: Nuova Italia scientifica, 1994); Giacomo Todeschini, *Franciscan Wealth: From Voluntary Poverty to Market Society*, trans. Donatella Melucci (Franciscan Institute, Saint Bonaventure University, 2009); Stephen Gaukroger, *The Emergence of a Scientific Culture: Science and the Shaping of Modernity 1210-1685* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006); Ian P. Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris: Theologians and the University, C.1100-1330* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Cary J. Nederman, *Lineages of European Political Thought: Explorations Along the Medieval/Modern Divide From John of Salisbury to Hegel* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

political thought? The majority of writing on Dante's political thought in the context of medieval political thought generally has taken place either within the context of Dante studies or by intellectual historians. Many studies exist, as a subfield of Dante studies comparing or examining Dante to or with respect to particular medieval political theorists,⁵² or a basket of them,⁵³ and there are a plethora of extensive manuals on the topic of medieval political thought written by intellectual historians which more or less touch on Dante vis-a-vis the canon of thinkers of the time.⁵⁴ If historicized, such studies tend towards broader political history of a monumental nature—with the notable

⁵² For example, on Dante and Aquinas (a truly massive field of its own!), see, for starters, Michele Maccarrone, "Il Terzo Libro Della «Monarchia»", *Studi Danteschi* XXXIII, fasc. I (1955): 5-142; Vinay, *Interpretazione della "Monarchia" di Dante*; Etienne Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1949); Dino Bigongiari, *Essays on Dante and Medieval Culture* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1964). On Dante and Remigio see Davis, *Dante's Italy, and Other Essays* and Antonio Sarubbi, *Chiesa e stato comunale nel pensiero di Remigio de' Girolami* (Napoli: Morano, 1971).

⁵³ For synthetic treatments of Dante's political thought with a primary focus on Dante with an aim to compare, contrast and contextualize it with other thinkers and traditions see the exhaustive works of Bruno Nardi, "Le Rime filosofiche e il «Convivio»," in *Dal "Convivio" alla "Commedia."* (*Sei Saggi Danteschi*) (Roma: Nella sede dell'Istituto Palazzo Borromini, 1992); Bruno Nardi, *Saggi di filosofia dantesca* (La Nuova Italia, 1967); Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*; Francesco Ercole, *Il pensiero politico di Dante* (Milano: Alpes, 1927); Arrigo Solmi, *Il pensiero politico di Dante: studi storici* (Firenze: La Voce, 1922); and John Robert Woodhouse ed., *Dante and Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁵⁴ In preparing this study I have consulted a variety of standard manuals old and new, including James Henderson Burns, *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought C. 350-c. 1450* (Cambridge University Press, 1988); Ewart Lewis, *Medieval Political Ideas* (New York: Knopf, 1954); Otto von Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Age*, trans. Frederic William Maitland (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959); Janet Coleman, *A History of Political Thought: From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); Joseph Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300-1450* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996); Walter Ullmann, *A History of Political Thought: The Middle Ages* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965); Antony Black, *Political Thought in Europe, 1250-1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Wood, *Citizens to Lords: A Social History of Western Political Thought From Antiquity to the Middle Ages*.

exception of Ellen Wood's study of medieval political thought—and largely neglect to integrate their intellectual historiographies with detailed economic and social history. While I will make the case for new historicism in this study in section 1.3, as comprehensive treatment of this topic has been done elsewhere, I here offer my reader my analysis of Dante's core commitments and refer the reader interested in this other discourse to other sources which have done this exhaustively and are noted here in the bibliography. A careful examination of Dante's critique of political economy in terms of the ideological commitments demonstrated by other medieval political writers of the period is a worthy cause, yet beyond the limited focus of the present study.

That said, it is also a complete mistake, in my estimation, to prepare a hermeneutical key for reading Dante's political works in *Convivio* and *Monarchia* by means of an overdetermining insistence that Dante's chief concern is maintaining the *forma mentis* and qualifying the discourse, for the sake of mere novelty, of the other big "medieval" publicist treatises, philosophical and theological commentators, and *Fürstenspiegel* of the time.⁵⁵ This is the procedure of Gustavo Vinay, whose opinions that Dante's political work was inspired by other treatises, that Dante was an epigone of Aquinas, and that he had never read Aristotle's *Politics* are problematic.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, at least two

⁵⁵ For an excellent study on the narrative pretensions and use of fiction in the rhetorical construction of the medieval *Fürstenspiegel*, see Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁵⁶ Of course, Gustavo Vinay, "Introduzione," in *Monarchia* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1950), vi-vii, acknowledges that Dante's entire experience informed his real life political work, but remarks, in a seemingly arbitrary manner (other than his imaginary vision of Dante's work table) that "San Tommaso ha ispirato la *Monarchia*, forse Giacomo da Viterbo, non Giovanni da Parigi, non l'Aristotele della *Politica*, tanto meno i glossatori, le

contemporary scholars have suggested that Dante was really a much better poet and actually a "bad" political theorist⁵⁷; another that Dante is guilty of innumerable scholastic errors and wilts under the justified criticism of Guido Vernani;⁵⁸ and another that Dante's statements regarding politics and political thought are mostly contradictory, but can be interpreted most successfully through the lens of his encounter with authority and the framework of the *Commedia*.⁵⁹

This study maintains that Dante's political voice is, in fact, unique and coherent, and that a historicizing account of it best shows this quality when furnished with the Aristotelian paradigm upon which Dante builds his political theory. In order to understand where the current study stands in relation to the critical reception of Dante as a political thinker (see 1.3 below) it is therefore necessary to attempt an unbiased answer to the question, namely, what *does* Dante say about politics? I therefore attempt a contained primary reading of Dante's *Monarchia* and *Convivio* to illustrate the main

parentesi politiche del *Decretum*, e delle Decretali...quando Dante scrisse la *Monarchia* aveva sul tavolo la *Summa contra gentiles* e alcuni commenti aristotelici di S. Tommaso..." It is clear that Aristotle's *Politics* was already in circulation by the time of Dante's birth and that Dante knows the *Politics*, insisting on the Aquinas filter is unwarranted even if readings of Aquinas' Aristotle in terms of Dante might also be interesting.

⁵⁷ Richard Kay, "Introduction," in *Dante's Monarchia*, auth. Dante Alighieri (Toronto, 1998).; Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, "La «Monarchia» di Dante alla luce della «Commedia»," in *Studi medievali, 3a serie, XVIII, Fasc. II* (Torino: Giovanni Chiantore, 1977).

⁵⁸ Anthony Kimber Cassell, "Dante's *Monarchia* and Vernani's Refutation in Context," in *The Monarchia Controversy: An Historical Study with Accompanying Translations of Dante Alighieri's Monarchia, Guido Vernani's Refutation of the Monarchia Composed by Dante and Pope John 22.'s Bull Si Fratrum* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2004).

⁵⁹ Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*.

argument of Dante's political thought. This is necessary to examine not only the critical reception hinted to above in more detail, but for explaining the rationale behind exploring Dante's political thought as *political economic thought* and justify the need to re-historicize it.

* * *

Dante develops his political thought and particularly his vision of universal empire in *Convivio* 4 and *Monarchia*, also given special expression in *Purgatorio* 6. The core of Dante's thought turns on the unique nature of the human species as a philosophical one with a special teleology that is not, contrary to common conceptions, entirely displaced to the afterlife and beatific vision.⁶⁰ Starting in *Convivio* with Aristotle's maxim (Si come dice lo Filosofo) cited above, Dante sees the act of understanding (nous) as our ultimate goal—in line with the schema and teloi of the human sciences as articulated in book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*—and the activity, philosophizing, as that which most defines our species.⁶¹ In a passage that is often characterized as Dante's "Averroism," Dante says that philosophy is a collective activity that can only be carried out properly by the human race as a unit:

...opus humani generis totaliter accepti est actuare semper totam potentiam intellectus possibilis per prius ad speculandum et secundo propter hoc ad operandum per suam extensionem (the activity proper to mankind considered as a whole is constantly to actualize the full intellectual potential of humanity,

⁶⁰ The end of all laws (eternal, divine, human, and natural) for Aquinas, in the treatise of laws, is the beatific vision in the afterlife. See Aquinas, *Summa theologica, Prima secundae*, §90-108.

⁶¹ *Conv.* 1.1.1, *Mon.* 1.3

primarily through thought and secondarily through action (as a function and extension of thought).⁶²

For Dante the goal that the empire seeks to secure is ultimately the good life through the rule of the monarch (*vita felice*) to “bring man happiness, for this is the end for which he is born” (*l’uomo viva felicemente: che è quello per che esso è nato*).⁶³ Accomplishing the teleological happiness of humankind writ large is the reason for human civilization: “the root foundation underlying the Imperial Majesty is, in truth, man’s need for human society, which is established for a single end: namely, a life of happiness” (*lo fondamento radicale della imperiale maiestade, secondo lo vero, è la necessità della umana civiltade, che a uno fine è ordinata, cioè a vita felice*).⁶⁴ Indeed, invoking Aristotle’s *Politics* and the principle of the superiority of unity in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Dante even suggests within this view of teleology that we see when “when many are directed to a single end, one of them should be a governor or a ruler, and all the rest should be ruled or governed” (*più cose ad uno fine sono ordinate, una di quelle conviene essere regolante o vero reggente, e tutte l’altre rette e regulate*)—bringing up the example of the order and regulation of a ship, where the captain sees that “the different offices and objectives are directed to a single end: namely, that of reaching the desired port by a safe route” (*diversi officii e diversi fini di quella a uno solo fine sono ordinati, cioè a prendere loro desiderato porto per salutevole via*).⁶⁵ Likewise, in religions, armies, and other organizations ordered to ends, namely the “human species”

⁶² *Mon.* 4.1-2

⁶³ *Conv.* 4.4.4

⁶⁴ *Conv.* 4.4.1

⁶⁵ *Conv.* 4.4.5; *Pol.* 1.5.1254a28-31

(umana specie),⁶⁶ there must be one authority. Almost hailing a sort of secular humanism, Dante insists that it is obvious (manifestamente vedere si può) that there must be one emperor, like a captain, that acts on the best interests of and for the proper ends of the entire human race, which Dante phrases provocatively—with an almost neo-Pelagian tinge to it—as the “perfection...[of]... the universal social order of the human species” (universale religione della umana spezie).⁶⁷

Dante sees this secular human happiness, that is happiness *in this life* as something achievable and of key importance—evoking the images the earthly paradise of *Purgatorio*⁶⁸—as *not* in conflict with that of the eternal life of the Christian in salvation. The monarch is enlightened by *philosophy* in achieving this earthly task, not *theology*:

Duos igitur fines providentia illa inenarrabilis homini proposuit intendendos: beatitudinem scilicet huius vite, que in operatione proprie virtutis constitit et per terrestrem paradisum figuraturò et beatitudinem vite eterne, qui consistit, in fruitione divini aspectus ad quam propria virtus ascendere non potest, nisi lumine divino adiuta, que paradisum celestem intelligi datur. Ad has quidem beatitudines, velut ad diversas conclusiones, per diversa media venire oportet. Nam ad primam per phylosophica documenta venimus, dummodo illa sequamur secundum virtutes morales et intellectuales operando; ad secundam vero per documenta spiritualia que humanam rationem transcendunt, dummodo illa sequamur secundum virtutes theologicas operando (Ineffable providence has thus set before us two goals to aim at: i.e. happiness in this life, which consists in the exercise of our own powers and is figured in the earthly paradise; and

⁶⁶ *Conv.* 4.4.6

⁶⁷ *Conv.* 4.4.6

⁶⁸ For a reading of Dante’s notion of earthly paradise, see the famous essay by Ernst H. Kantorowicz, “Man-Centered Kingship: Dante,” in *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 451-495.

happiness in the eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of the vision of God (to which our own powers cannot raise us except with the help of God's light) and which is signified by the heavenly paradise. Now these two kinds of happiness must be reached by different means, as representing different ends. For we attain the first through the teachings of philosophy, provided that we follow them putting into practice the moral and intellectual virtues; whereas we attain the second through spiritual teachings which transcend human reason, provided that we follow them putting into practice the theological virtues, i.e. faith, hope and charity.)⁶⁹

This is why Dante stresses here that there are two guides that correspond, respectively, to the two goals, and he is unambiguous about which one is the true political authority, the one that guides temporal things:

Propter quod opus fuit homini duplici directivo secundum duplicem finem: scilicet summo Pontifice, qui secundum revelata humanum genus perduceret ad vitam eternam, et Imperatore, qui secundum philosophica documenta genus humanum ad temporalem felicitatem dirigeret. (It is for this reason that man had need of two guides corresponding to his twofold goal: that is to say the supreme Pontiff, to lead mankind to eternal life in conformity with revealed truth, and the emperor, to guide mankind to temporal happiness in conformity with the teachings of philosophy.)

Dante, moreover, goes to significant lengths to debunk the argument of those who assert that “the authority of the empire is dependent on the authority of the church in the same way as a builder is dependent on the architect” (*auctoritatem imperii ab auctoritate Ecclesie dependere velut artifex inferior dependet ab architector*).⁷⁰ This argument, Dante says, depends on a reading of Genesis (1.16) and the story that God created “two great lights” (*duo magna luminaria*) which they take allegorically (*allegorice dicta*) to mean the two powers, spiritual and temporal. Leaving aside Dante's

⁶⁹ *Mon. 3.16.7-9*

⁷⁰ *Mon. 3.4.1*

logical deconstruction of the argument throughout book 3—which truly deserves a new, careful study in its own right to rescue its understanding from the damage inflicted upon it by Dante scholars—his conclusion is very clear: “thus I say that the temporal realm does not owe its existence to the spiritual realm, nor its power (which is its authority), and not even its function in an absolute sense; but it does receive from it the capacity to operate more efficaciously through the light of grace which in heaven and on earth the blessing of the supreme Pontiff infuses into it” (sic ergo dico quod regnum temporale non recipit esse a spirituali, nec virtutem que est eius auctoritas, nec etiam operationem simpliciter; sed bene ab eo recipit ut virtuosius operetur per lucem gratie quam in celo et in terra benedictio summi Pontificis infundit illi).⁷¹ Peter, on the basis of spiritual authority, simply cannot “loose or bind the decrees or laws of the empire” (solvere seu ligare decreta Imperii sive leges).⁷² It goes without saying: there should be no surprise that Dante’s *Monarchia*, besides being popular amongst Protestant reformers, was included on the index of prohibited books in Catholic countries until 1888.⁷³

If Dante's political orientation is fundamentally secular and he believes that man's highest activity is *in this world* and that the good life consists in socially instantiated actualization of the philosophical-contemplative intellect, a process brought about by collective species action, Dante is also concerned here with with the debilitating power

⁷¹ *Mon.* 3.4.20-21

⁷² *Mon.* 3.8.11

⁷³ Richard Kay, "Introduction," In *Dante's Monarchia*, written by Dante Alighieri. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), xxxv.

of greed because it is most contrary to justice: fulfilling of the teloi of human contemplation requires monarchical curbs against greed, which is to say justice or “equitate.” Dante advocates for strong monarchical leadership because otherwise “human greed would cast these ends and means aside if men, prompted to wander by their animal natures, were not held in check ‘with bit and bridle’ in their journey” (humana cupiditas postergaret nisi hominest, tanquam equi, sua bestialitate vagantes ‘in camo et freno’ compescerentur in via).⁷⁴

Dante shows in *Monarchia* 1 and *Convivio* 4 that this role is best left to the emperor who can bring about this peace through justice:

Et cum ad hunc portum vel nulli vel pauci, et hii com difficultate nimia, pervenire possint, nisi sedatis fluctibus blande cupiditatis genus humanum liberum in pacis tranquillitate quiescat, hoc est illud signum ad quod maxime debet intendere curator orbis, qui dicitur romanus Princeps, ut scilicet in areola ista mortalium libere cum pace vivatur (And since none can reach this harbour (or few, and these few with great difficulty) unless the waves of seductive greed are calmed and the human race rests free in the tranquility of peace, this is the goal which the protector of the world, who is called the Roman Prince, must strive with all his might to bring about: i.e. that life on this threshing-floor of mortals may be live freely and in peace).⁷⁵

Going back to humanity, the “religione della umana spezie,” the human community for Dante is a universal whole (humana univertitas est quoddam totum).⁷⁶ Because of this, individual cities and kingdoms do not fulfill this community’s political destiny, which must conform with a single principle—just as all of nature is governed by god who

⁷⁴ *Mon.* 3.16.9-10

⁷⁵ *Mon.* 3.16.11-12

⁷⁶ *Mon.* 1.7.1

is monarch over nature. Thus "world monarchy is necessary for the well-being of the world" (monarchiam necessariam mundo ut bene sit).⁷⁷ In *Monarchia* 1.5, the formulation is similar: "there must therefore be one person who directs and rules mankind, and he is properly called 'Monarch' or 'Emperor.' And thus it is apparent that the well-being of the world requires that there be a monarchy or empire" (...unum oportet esse regulans sive regens, et hoc 'Monarcha' sive 'Imperator' dici debet. Et sic patet quod ad bene esse mundi necesse est Monarchiam esse sive Imperium).⁷⁸

For Dante, imperial authority is truly limitless. In *Epistola* 7 (composed 17 April 1311) to Henry VII—in a passage that mirrors many of the arguments of *Monarchia* 2 (esp. *Mon.* 2.10) and Dante's assertion that the world monarch's jurisdiction is limited only by the ocean (*Mon* 1.9.12)—writing out of exasperation that after victories in the Po valley, Henry forgets Tuscany (as if he thinks that the imperial rights to preserve Roman territory were confined by the borders of Liguria), Dante states that "the glorious power of the Romans cannot be held in check either within the boundaries of Italy or within the three sides of Europe itself. For although it has been subjected to violence and has drawn back its governance within narrower confines, nonetheless it stretches out everywhere, by unfringible right, as far as at the waves of Amphitrite, and the

⁷⁷ *Mon.* 1.7.3

⁷⁸ *Mon.* 1.5.9-10; Also from letter VI, March 31 1311 "...the Eternal King, whose goodness sustains the heavenly things above...has ordained that human affairs should be governed by the Holy Roman Empire, in order that human beings should enjoy the peace that only the stability of such a government can guarantee, and should live in citizenship with one another throughout the world, in accordance with the will of nature"; Translations of the letters are adapted from Claire E. Honess, *Dante Alighieri: Four Political Letters*, written by Dante Alighieri (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2007).

inadequate waters of the ocean can scarcely contain it” (Romanorum gloriosa potestas nec metis Ytalie nec tricornis Europe margine coartatur. Nam etsi vim passa in angustum gubernacula sua contraxerit, undique tamen de inviolabili iure fluctus Amphitritis attingens vix ab inutili unda Oceani se circumcingi dignatur).⁷⁹ For Dante, going against the grain of the ascendant real political impetuosity of his day, which were moving towards national sovereignty and localized-national conceptions of political community and identity, these competing authorities were a multiheaded hydra.⁸⁰ Italy was quite literally for him, “wretched...left alone, at the mercy of private decisions and devoid of any public control...[and] so battered and buffeted by gales and floods that words cannot describe it.”⁸¹

In his post-exilic years, Dante clearly evolved his political thought as against municipalism or nationalism in favor of universalism, as he put it in the *De vulgari eloquentia*: “To me, however, the whole world is a homeland, like the sea to fish - though I drank from the Arno before cutting my teeth, and love Florence so much that, because I loved her, I suffer exile unjustly — and I will weight the balance of my judgement more with reason than with sentiment” (Nos autem, cui mundus est patria velut piscibus equor, quanquam Sarnum biberimus ante dentes et Florentiam adeo diligamus ut, quia dileximus, exilium patiamur iniuste, rationi magis quam sensui

⁷⁹ *Ep.* 7.3

⁸⁰ *Ep.* 7.6

⁸¹ *Ep.* 6.1

spatulas nostri iudicii podiamus).⁸² Dante, raging at the Florentine authorities cutting deals between Clement V and the papal court at Avignon and Robert of Anjou against Henry, scoffs at the “voracity of [the Florentines’] cupidity” (6.2; 6.3) that causes them to neglect what is to the “advantage of everybody” by claiming proscriptive territorial rights and causing public authority to sink into oblivion.⁸³ Dante vigorously disputes the notion (implicit in their actions) that “the politics of Florence were one thing and that of Rome something quite different.”⁸⁴

As we can clearly gather from Dante’s genealogy of correct philosophy according to the Aristotelian and peripatetic schools,⁸⁵ human beings require peace, unity, and concord make to this uniquely human philosophical fulfillment possible; for philosophy to properly be fruitful. The polity is to seek such an end, namely that

opus humani generis totaliter accepti est actuare semper totam potentiam intellectus possibilis, per prius ad speculandum et secundario propter hoc ad operandum per sum extensionem ...patet quod genus humanum in quiete sive tranquillitate pacis ad proprium suum opus ...liberrime atque facillime se havet. Unde manifestum est quod pax universalis est optium eorum que ad nostram beatitudinem ordinatur (the activity proper to mankind considered as a whole is constantly to actualize the full intellectual potential of humanity, primarily through thought and secondarily through action (as a function and extension of thought)...it is apparent that mankind most freely and readily attends to this activity...in the calm or tranquility of peace. Hence it is clear that universal peace is the best of those things which are ordained for our human happiness.).⁸⁶

⁸² *De vulgari eloquentia*, 1.6.3

⁸³ *Ep.* 6.2

⁸⁴ *Ep.* 6.2

⁸⁵ *Conv.* 4.6.9-16

⁸⁶ *Mon.* 1.4

Dante invokes monism—also derived from Aristotle’s metaphysics—to argue that political unity requires the rule of a single individual.⁸⁷ Peace and concord, necessary for human happiness, as Dante says, require a political unity based also on a “unity of human wills” and this can only come to fruition if there is a single will governing.⁸⁸ This depends on an Aristotelian conception of the proper governing of the soul by the rational element, in which one both does just acts but *acts justly and freely* from a firm disposition (*NE 2*) and from habits that are the product of good laws and a good lawgiver (*NE 10*) such that human beings can choose concord freely and rationally (cf. *Purg.* 16.16-21). A philosophically grounded monarch is necessary:

...omnis concordia dependet ab unitate que est in voluntatibus; genus humanum optime se habens est quedam concordia; nam, sicut unus homo optime se habens et quantum ad animam et quantum ad corpus est concordia quedam, et dimiliter domus, civitas et regnum, sic totum genus humanum; ergo genus humanum optime se habens ab unitate que est in voluntatibus dependet. Sed hoc esse non potest nisi sit voluntas una, domina et regulatrix omnium aliarum in unum, cum mortalium voluntates propter blandas adolescentie delectatione indigeant directivo, ut in ultimis *ad Nicomacum* docet Philosophus. Nec ista una potest esse, nisi sit princeps unus omnium, cuius voluntas domina et regulatrix aliarum omnium esse possit. Quod si omnes consequentie superiores vere sunt, quod sunt, necesse est ad optime se habere humanum genus esse in mundo Monarcham, et per consequens Monarchia ad bene esse mundi (all concord depends on the unity which is in wills; mankind in its ideal state represents a kind of concord; for just as one man in his ideal state spiritually and physically is a kind of concord (and the same holds true of a household, a city, and a kingdom), so is the whole of mankind; this the whole of mankind in its ideal state depends on the unity which is in men’s wills. But this cannot be unless there is one will which controls and directs all the others towards one goal, since the wills of mortals require guidance on account of the seductive pleasures of youth, as Aristotle teaches at the end of the *Ethics*. Nor can such a single will exist, unless there is one ruler who rules over everybody, whose will can control and guide all the other wills. Now if all the above conclusions are true—as they are—for

⁸⁷ *Mon.* 1.6-8; *Mon.* 1.14-15

⁸⁸ *Mon.* 1.

mankind to be in its ideal state there must be a monarch in the world, and consequently the well-being of the world requires a monarchy).⁸⁹

This squares with what Dante says about the emperor being, “the one who rides in the saddle of the human will” (lo cavalcatore de la umana volontade).⁹⁰ But he cannot be so if he is not really acting by making laws with the authority over human wills properly. To achieve this, we absolutely need authoritative philosophy: “therefore having discussed the imperial authority, I must continue my digression and take up the subject of the authority of the Philosopher” (ragionato della [autoritade] imperiale, procedere oltre si conviene...a vedere di quella del Filosofo).⁹¹ What he means in this section, as his etymological prologue confirms, is that that from this word *autentin* derives the word ‘autore’ and ‘autoritade,’ but the important part is that it means “worthy of faith and obedience” (degno di fede e d’obediencia) and the most authoritative person above all is Aristotle, for the philosophy that will inform the imperial role, is “most worthy of faith and obedience” (dignissimo di fede e d’obediencia) and whose words are the “supreme and highest authority” (sono soma e altissima autoritade).⁹² In other words, Aristotle’s authority in political and ethical matters is the supreme paradigm for good government:

E però che tutte l’umane operazioni domandano uno fine, cioè quello dell’umana vita, al quale l’uomo è ordinato in quanto egli è uomo, lo maestro e l’artefice che quello ne dimostra e considera, massimamente obedire e credere si dee. Questi è Aristotile: dunque esso è dignissimo di fede e d’obediencia. E a vedere come Aristotile è maestro e duca della ragione umana in quanto intende alla sua finale operazione, si conviene sapere che questo nostro fine, che ciascuno disia naturalmente, antichissimamente fu per li savi cercato (Since all human activities

⁸⁹ *Mon.* 1.15.8-10

⁹⁰ *Conv.* 4.9.10

⁹¹ *Conv.* 4.6.1

⁹² *Conv.* 4.6.5

require a final end, namely the end of human life to which man is directed insofar as he is human, the master or the craftsman who studies this and reveals it to us should be obeyed and trusted above all others. That man is Aristotle: he therefore is the most worthy of faith and obedience. In order to perceive how Aristotle is the master and leader of human reason, insofar as it is directed to man's final activity, we must know that this end of ours, which everyone by nature desires, was sought out in very early times by the sages).⁹³

There are many philosophies and ideological justifications, which Dante surveys here, that can put the emphasis on the wrong ends, and end up causing, as he says in *Monarchia* so succinctly, a sickness of intellects (practical and theoretical).⁹⁴ These can lead to the emperor stepping outside the bounds of his authority and trying to define goods outside the bounds of his his authority, outside of philosophical truth. The only way to preserve justice, therefore, is through the making and enforcement of laws crafted with proper philosophical conceptions regarding matters that pertain to our wills:

Sono anche operazioni che la nostra [ragione] considera ne l'atto de la volontade, sì come offendere e giovare, sì come star fermo e fuggire a la battaglia, sì come stare casto e lussuriare, e queste del tutto soggiacciono a la nostra volontade; e però semo detti da loro buoni e rei perch'elle sono proprie nostre del tutto,

⁹³ *Conv.* 4.6.6-8

⁹⁴ *Mon.* 1.16.4-5: "O genus humanum, quantis procellis atque iacturis quantique naufragiis agitari te necesse est dum, bellua multorum capitum factum, in diversa conaris! Intellectu egrotas utroque, similiter affectu: rationibus irrefragabilibus intellectum superiorem non curas, nec experientie vultu inferirum, sed nec affectum dulcedine divine suasionis, cum per tubam Sancti Spiritus tibi efflectur: 'Ecce quam bonum et quam iocundum, habitare fratres in unum'" (O human race, how many storms and misfortune and shipwrecks must toss you about while, transformed into a many-headed beast, you strive after conflicting things. You are sick in your intellects, both of them, and and in your affections; you do not nurture your higher intellect with inviolable principles, nor your lower intellect with the lessons of experience, nor your affections with the sweetness of divine counsel, when it is breathed into you by the trumpet of the holy spirit: 'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.')

perché, quanto la nostra voluntade ottenere puote, tanto le nostre operazioni si stendono. E con ciò sia cosa che in tutte queste volontarie operazioni sia equitade alcuna da conservare e iniquitade da fuggire (la quale equitade per due cagioni si può perdere, o per non sapere quale essa si sia o per non volere quella seguitare), trovata fu la Ragione scritta, e per mostrarla e per comandarla. Onde dice Augustino: «Se questa - cioè equitade - li uomini la conoscessero, e conosciuta servassero, la Ragione scritta non sarebbe mestiere»; e però è scritto nel principio del Vecchio Digesto: «La ragione scritta è arte di bene e d'equitade». A questa scrivere, mostrare e comandare, è questo ufficiale posto di cui si parla, cioè lo Imperadore, al quale tanto quanto le nostre operazioni proprie, che dette sono, si stendono, siamo subietti; e più oltre no (There are also activities which our reason contemplates as an act of the will, as for instance giving offense or assistance, standing ground or fleeing in battle, and remaining chaste or yielding to lust. These are completely subject to our will, and therefore we are considered good or evil, because they are completely of our own making; for as far as our will can reach, so far do our activities extend. Since in all of these voluntary activities justice must be preserved and injustice avoided, and this justice may be lost in two ways (either through not knowing what it is, or through not willing to follow it), written Law was invented in order both to establish it and to administer it. So Augustine says, "If men had known it (namely justice) and, when known, had observed it, there would have been no need of written Law." Therefore it is written in the beginning of the Old Digest that "Written law is the art of well-doing and justice." The official of whom we are speaking, namely the Emperor, is appointed to formulate, demonstrate, and enforce precisely this Law, and to him we are subject as far as our own activities extend, which have already been described, and no further).⁹⁵

This is why for Dante, linking the authority of Aristotle with the emperor's authority and good law making is so key. As he writes, "e non repugna [la filosofica] autoritade alla imperiale; ma quella senza questa è pericolosa, e a questa senza quella è quasi debile, non per sé ma per la disorinanza della gente: sì che l'una coll'altra congiunta utilissime e pienissime sono d'ogni vigore" ([Aristotle's] authority is not opposed to the imperial authority; but the latter authority without the former creates a danger, and the former authority without the latter creates a weakness, not inherently,

⁹⁵ *Conv.* 4.9.7-10

but as a result of the lack of harmony among the people).⁹⁶ As Dante explains, this philosophical infusion is necessary because there are some areas in which the emperor cannot make valid laws, because they lack the Aristotelian authority and since it may concern something that he cannot really will to define:

Queste cose simigliantemente, che dell'altre arti sono ragionate, vedere si possono nell'arte imperiale: ché regole sono in quella che sono pure arti, sì come sono le leggi de' matrimonii, de li servi, de le milizie, de li successori in dignitade, e di queste in tutto siamo a lo Imperadore subietti, senza dubbio e sospetto alcuno. Altre leggi sono che sono quasi seguitatrici di natura, sì come costituire l'uomo d'etade sofficiente a ministrare, e di queste non semo in tutto subietti. Altre molte sono che paiono avere alcuna parentela con l'arte imperiale - e qui fu ingannato ed è chi crede che la sentenza imperiale sia in questa parte autentica -: sì come [diffinire] giovinezza e gentilezza, sovra le quali nullo imperiale giudicio è da consentire, in quanto elli è imperadore: però, quello che è di [Cesare sia renduto a Cesare, e quello che è di] Dio sia renduto a Dio” (In like manner what we have discussed with regard to the other arts may be seen to hold true for the art of imperial rule. For in the art of imperial rule there are certain spheres of regulation which are pure arts, such as laws pertaining to marriage, slavery, military service, succession in office, in which matters we are entirely subject to the Emperor without any possible doubt or question. There are other laws which in a sense follow from the forces of nature, such as determining at what age a man is sufficiently prepared to manage his own affairs, and in these we are not entirely subject. There are many others which seem to be associated with the art of imperial rule, and anyone believing the imperial judgment in such matters to be authoritative was, and still is, deceived. For example, regarding the definitions of maturity and of nobility, the imperial judgment cannot compel assent simply by virtue of the fact that he is Emperor).⁹⁷

We will see this more later, but if the ruler does not rule according to justice and tries to make definitions outside of justice, philosophically defined, this behavior causes *mal governo*.⁹⁸ A key example of this, which will be explored in chapter 5, is the

⁹⁶ *Conv.* 4.6.17

⁹⁷ *Conv.* 4.9

⁹⁸ *Conv.* 4.6.14-15

attempt to define nobility as the possession of wealth rather than as virtuous behavior in regard to giving or taking wealth. Furthermore, an imperial pronouncement that “greed is good,” for example, would simply be illegitimate on the grounds that any rational law would condemn vicious behavior that in and of itself is opposed to the paradigm of justice that must be embodied in the state and, for the individual, which violates the properly calculated ethical mean. The emperor has no authority to define certain things, and should he perversely legislate without philosophical authority, such laws would be corrupt and unjust.

Imperial authority and the authority of Aristotle, as Dante makes exceedingly clear, need to be joined together. Dante’s discourse on this point is anything but an abstract desire to “authorize” himself in regards to more prestigious authors. For Dante, the joining of Aristoteleian concepts of philosophy to imperial power is the only way to effectuate justice. In *Monarchia* 1.10 Dante argues that the monarch is necessary to adjudicate disputes related to greed and pleonexia, which create impossibly endless regressions of contested authority without a universal emperor:

Et ubicunque potest esse litigium, ibi debet esse iudicium; aliter esset imperfectum sine proprio prefectivo: quod est impossibile, cum Deus et natura in necessariis non deficiat. Inter omnes duos principes, quorum alter alteri minime subiectus est, potest esse litigium vel culpa ipsorum vel etiam subditorum—quod de se patet—: ergo inter tales oportet esse iudicium. Et cum alter de altero cognoscere non possit ex quo alter alteri non subditur—nam par in parem non habet imperium—oportet esse tertium iurisdictionis amplioris qui ambitu sui iuris ambobus principetur. Et hic aut erit Monarcha aut non. Si sic, habetur propositum; si non, iterum habebit sibi coequalem extra ambitum sue iurisdictionis: tunc iterum necessarius erit tertius alius. Et sic aut erit processus in infinitum, quod esse non potest, aut oportebit devenire ad iudicem primum et summum, de cuius iudicio cuncta litigia dirimantur sive mediate sive inmediate: et hic erit Monarcha sive imperator (Now wherever there can be conflict there must be judgment to resolve it, otherwise there would be an imperfection without

its proper corrective; and this is impossible, since God and nature never fail in their provision of what is necessary. There is always the possibility of conflict between two rulers where one is not subject to the other's control; such conflict may come about either through their own fault or the fault of their subjects (the point is self-evident); therefore there must be judgment between them. And since neither can judge the other (since neither is under the other's control, and an equal has no power over an equal) there must be a third party of wider jurisdiction who rules over both of them by right. And this person will either be the monarch or not. If he is, then our point is proved; if he is not, he in his turn will have an equal who is outside the sphere of his jurisdiction, and then it will once again be necessary to have recourse to a third party. And so either this procedure will continue ad infinitum, which is not possible, or else we must come to a first and supreme judge, whose judgment resolves all disputes either directly or indirectly; and this man will be the monarch or emperor).⁹⁹

For Dante, to stop such an infinite regression of querelles because of competing authorities, justice will be greatest when it is joined to power and the proper will to act. But note, with the invocation of the will here, Dante articulates a version of power conceived both in terms of political authority and political control as well as in philosophical terms. Dante's definition of justice, which closely traces that given in *Convivio* and depends on Aristotle's in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, particularly book five, is articulated in *Monarchia* 1.11 in reference to the *NE* 5.1: "justice, considered in itself and in its own nature, is a kind of rectitude or rule which spurns deviation from the straight path to either side; and thus it does not admit of a more and a less - just like whiteness considered in the abstract" (*iustitia, de se et in propria natura considerata, est quedam rectitudo sive regula obliquum hinc inde abiciens: et sic non recipit magis et minus, quemadmodum albedo in suo abstracto considerate*).¹⁰⁰ It is present more or

⁹⁹ *Mon.* 1.10.1-5

¹⁰⁰ *Mon.* 1.11.3-4; Shaw's note, in *Dante: Monarchy*, edited by Prue Shaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 23, n. 4. is important: "Concepts such as 'justice' and 'whiteness', considered in themselves (i.e. in the abstract), consist of a simple and unvarying essence; in practice such abstractions are observable in our world only in

less in relation to the absence of injustice “both in the disposition and in the actions of an agent” (quantum ad habitum et quantum ad operationem).¹⁰¹ When there is the least amount of injustice justice is “strongest” (potissima). But it can be impeded, either in relation to habit and disposition or in regards to the power to do actions when “the will is not entirely free of all greed” (voluntas ab omni cupiditate sincera non est). Dante repeats Aristotle’s point that justice is *doing* something in relation to other people and giving them their due.¹⁰² Accordingly, the presense of greed represents the most contrary thing to just relations with others and is the most destructive vice to justice broadly conceived. For Dante, therefore,

...iustitia potissima est in mundo quando volentissimo et potentissimo subiecto inest; huiusmodi solus Monarcha est: ergo soli Monarche insistens iustitia in mundo potissima est...notandum quod iustitie maxime contrariatur cupiditas, ut innuit Aristotiles in quinto *ad Nicomacum*. Remota cupiditate omnino, nichil iustitie restate adversum; unde sententia Phylosophi est ut que lege determinari possunt nullo modo iudici relinquuntur. Et hoc metu cupiditatis fieri oportet, de facili mentes hominum detorquentis. Ubi ero non est quod possit optari, impossibile est ibi cupiditatem esse: destructis enim obiectis, passiones esse non possunt. Sed Monarcha non habet quod possit optare: sua nanque iurisdictio terminatur Oceano solum... (justice is at its strongest in the world when it resides in a subject who has in the highest degree possible the will and the power to act; only the monarch is such a subject; therefore justice is at its strongest in

concrete 'subjects' (the individual who enacts justice, the thing which is white) and the nature of the subject in any given instance will determine how 'pure' or 'impure' they are, i.e. to what degree they are 'mixed' with or 'contaminated' by what is opposed to them. What is opposed to justice, Dante will now go on to explain, takes two forms: it may be in the disposition of the subject, i.e. in his will, which can be incapacitated by greed, which is self-serving (egotistical) and thus in conflict with justice itself which is altruistic [ad alterum], concerned with the welfare of others and the common good; or it may be in action, if the subject lacks the power to act in relation to what he perceives to be just and wishes to do.”

¹⁰¹ *Mon.* 1.11.

¹⁰² *NE.* 5.1.1129a5-1130a15

the world when it is located in the monarch alone... it must be noted that the thing most contrary to justice is greed, as Aristotle states in the fifth book of the *Ethics*. When greed is entirely eliminated, nothing remains which is opposed to justice; hence Aristotle's opinion that those things which can be resolved by law should in no way be left to the judge's discretion. And it is fear of greed which makes this necessary, for greed easily leads men's minds astray. But where there is nothing which can be coveted, it is impossible for greed to exist, for emotions cannot exist where their objects have been destroyed. But there is nothing the monarch could covet, for his jurisdiction is bounded only by the ocean).¹⁰³

The problem of greed and the need for universal authority against is so central to Dante's thought: it is repeated in *Convivio* when Dante says "the human mind does not rest content with limited possession of land but always seeks to achieve glory through further conquest" (l'animo umano in terminata possessione di terra non si queti, ma sempre desidera gloria d'aquistare)¹⁰⁴ and in *Monarchia*, where Dante claims that "since the monarch can have no occasion for greed (or in any event of all men the very least occasion), as we saw earlier (and this is not the case with other rulers), and since it is greed alone which perverts judgment and obstructs justice, it follows that he alone, or he more than anyone else, can be well disposed to rule, since of all men he can have judgment and justice in the highest degree" (cum ergo Monarcha nullam cupiditatis occasionem habere possit vel saltem minimam inter mortales...quod ceteris principibus non contingit, et cupiditas ipsa sola sit corruptiva iudicii et iustitie prepeditiva, consequens est quod ipse vel omnino vel maxime bene dispositus ad regendum esse potest, quia inter ceteros iudicium et iustitiam potissime habere potest).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ *Mon.* 1.11.8-12

¹⁰⁴ *Conv.* 4.4.3

¹⁰⁵ *Mon.* 1.13.7

Thus with this conception of justice we can begin to unravel some of Dante’s other central arguments. One of the major points in *Monarchia* 1.10, as we have seen, is Dante’s assertion that the monarch must be free of greed and that the good monarch—through his upright will in habits and proper power to act—will stamp out greed which he sees as a cancer on justice and the proper rule of the state. Both Law and Aristotle’s philosophy, without this monarch and law enforcer who makes *good laws*, are impotent. Italy is lawless, as Dante says, full of *mal governo* and like a ship without a captain, and this is because of the absence of a true emperor and the preponderance of greed, which is opposed to justice. For Dante, the empire will bring freedom and just government.¹⁰⁶ In his capacity of ruling the whole world with justice the ruler, however, would literally “love” the people rightly in so far as he is the intermediary between all men and other princes and free of greed. For Dante, “recta dilectio” or “karitas” is the only just disposition of a ruler because with love and not greed, the true good, the telos of man, is sought above all else, a good that as Dante has made clear is a good actualized by the community together in just reciprocity and friendship, following Aristotle:

Preterea, quemadmodum cupiditas habitualem iustitiam quodammodo, quantumcunque pauca, obnubilat, sic karitas seu recta dilectio illam acuit atque dilucidat. Cui ergo maxime recta dilectio inesse potest, potissimum locum in illo potest habere iustitia; huiusmodi est Monarcha: ergo, eo existente, iustitia potissima est vel esse potest. Quod autem recta dilectio faciat quod dictum est, hinc haberi potest: cupiditas nanque, perseitatie hominem sprete, querit alia; karitas vero, spretis aliis omnibus, querit Deum et hominem, et per consequens bonum honimis (just as greed, however slight, dulls the habit of justice in some way, so charity or rightly ordered love makes it sharper and brighter. So the man in whom rightly ordered love can be strongest is the one in whom justice can have its principal abode; the monarch is such a man; therefore justice is or can be at its strongest when he exists. That rightly ordered love does what has been stated can be deduced from this: greed, scorning the intrinsic nature of man, seeks other

¹⁰⁶ *Mon.* 1.11

things; whereas love, scorning all other things, seeks God and man, and hence the true good of man).¹⁰⁷

With this rightly ordered love (surely this is a Dantean derivative of Augustine's concept of rightly ordered desire amalgamated with Aristotelian conceptions), people will not exist as means to another's end but an end for themselves. To be able to have a freedom of will means living in the sort of society that forms people well with laws such that people *freely* choose the right ends. Recapitulating the classical schemata from Aristotle's *Politics*, in which regimes are structured around base or virtuous desires of one, many, or few, Dante does not merely make an analogy between states of souls and states of regimes, he seems to truly believe that monarchy, of all the forms of government, most truly enables such freedom because it removes the perverted forms of government, which Aristotle characterizes as despotic and governed by selfish interests that set mankind into slavery according to the ends of that regime:

Genus humanum solum imperante Monarcha sui et non alterius gratia est: tunc enim solum politione diriguntur oblique—democratia scilicet, oligarchie atque tyrannides—que in servitutem cogunt genus humanum, ut patet discurrenti per omnes, et politizant reges, aristocratici quos optimates vocant, et populi libertatis zelatores; quia cum Monarcha maxime diligit homines, ut iam tactum est, vult omnes homines bonos fieri: quod esse non potest apud oblique politizantes. Unde Philosophus in suis *Politicis* ait quod in politione obliqua bonus homo est malus civis, in recta vero bonus homo et civis bonus convertuntur. Et huiusmodi politione recte libertatem intendunt, scilicet ut homines propter se sint. Non enim cives propter consules nec gens propter regem, se e converso consules propter cives et rex propter gentem; quia quemadmodum non politione ad leges, quinimo leges ad politionem ponuntur, sed magis ille ad hos, ut etiam Philosopho placet in hiis que de presenti materia nobis ab eo relictae sunt (Mankind exists for its own sake and not for the sake of something else only when it is under the monarch, for only then are perverted forms of government (i.e. democracies, oligarchies and tyrannies), which force mankind into slavery, set right - as is clear to anyone who examines them all; only then do kings, aristocrats (known as the great and the

¹⁰⁷ *Mon.* 1.11.13-14

good) and those zealous for the freedom of the people govern justly; for since the monarch loves men most, as we have already noted, he wants all men to become good; and this cannot happen under perverted forms of government. Hence Aristotle in the *Politics* says that in bad government the good man is a bad citizen, whereas in good government the good man and the good citizen are one and the same thing. And these just forms of government aim at freedom, i.e. that men should exist for their own sake. For citizens do not exist for the sake of consuls, nor the people for the sake of the king, but on the contrary consuls exist for the sake of the citizens and the king for the people; for just as a political community is not formed for the sake of the laws, but the laws are framed for the benefit of the political community, in the same way those whose lives are governed by the law are not there for the sake of the legislator, but rather he is there for their sake, as Aristotle says in those writings he left to us on this subject).¹⁰⁸

For Dante there is a strong connection between the sort of regime one lives under and the kinds of liberty it endows through the habit formation. Dante is not talking about liberty in any sense of modern liberalism's conception of rights and freedoms from government intervention, or freedom to engage in self-motivated or self-interested behavior. Also conspicuous here, at least in *Monarchia*, is his lack of concern for the classic Christian tropes of fallen state of nature because of original sin being an impediment to just government that so dominate the writings of his scholastic contemporaries, and of course looms in the tradition since Augustine. To be truly free is to live in a just society—and part of the entire argument of this thesis will be to examine how Dante views his own society as lacking in justice and how his response to what I call medieval political economy makes sense of this state of affairs.

Finally, Dante connects this philosophical and just state derived conception of political liberty (highest under the just monarch) and links to it the Roman theme of republican liberty, so as to push it in the direction of linking his own conception of

¹⁰⁸ *Mon.* 1.12.9-12

world-wide monarchy with divine providence and the historical example of the Roman empire and *pax romana*.¹⁰⁹ Here Dante spends great energy showing that the Roman Empire was achieved not “by force of arms” (*violentia*) but “by right” (*de iure*). His description of right in this instance is extremely important. Interspersing a more clearly philosophical argument with a historical argument related to miracles and providence derived from scripture and Roman literature, Dante comes to argue starting in *Monarchia* 2.5 that “right” or the “law” is the common good of the people: good law preserves liberty and the Roman people had divine favor because it was God’s providential intention to extend this common good across the whole world. Returning to the exact conception of justice in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.5-6, a conception that we shall see later is so key for articulating an argument against the mixture of economic greed and political governance, that it is proportional reciprocity (see below: “*ius est realis et personalis hominis ad hominem proportio*”) that holds the city together—Dante claims that his conception of right is this precisely Aristotelian one.¹¹⁰ In fact, Dante recognizes that justice, properly conceived, is opposed to a merely arithmetical (or rectifactory) justice that seeks to balance exchanges or claims in terms of the restitution of money or equalization of damage and, rather, consists in a sort of

¹⁰⁹ *Mon.* 2.1.1-7

¹¹⁰ *NE* 5.3.1131b17-1131b23: “This, then, is what the just is—the proportional; the unjust is what violates the proportion. Hence one term becomes too great, the other too small, as indeed happens in practice; for the man who acts unjustly has too much, and the man who is unjustly treated too little, of what is good. In the case of evil the reverse is true; for the lesser evil is reckoned a good in comparison with the greater evil, since the lesser evil is rather to be chosen than the greater, and what is worthy of choice is good, and what is worthier of choice a greater good.”

proportion that recognizes a priority of the common good. Dante weaves these concepts together in this passage from *Monarchia 2*:

Quicumque preterea bonum rei publice intendit, finem iuris intendit. Quodque ita sequatur sic ostenditur: ius est realis et personalis hominis ad hominem proportio, que servata hominum servat societatem, et corrupta corrumpit - nam illa Digestorum descriptio non dicit quod quid est iuris, sed describit illud per notitiam utendi illo; si ergo definitio ista bene 'quid est' et 'quare' comprehendit, et cuiuslibet societatis finis est commune societatum bonum, necesse est finem cuiusque iuris bonum commune esse; et impossibile est ius esse, bonum commune non intendens. Propter quod bene Tullius in Prima rethorica: semper - inquit - ad utilitatem rei publice leges interpretande sunt. Quod si ad utilitatem eorum qui sunt sub lege leges directe non sunt, leges nomine solo sunt, re autem leges esse non possunt: leges enim oportet homines devincire ad invicem propter comunem utilitatem. Propter quod bene Seneca de lege cum in libro De quatuor virtutibus, "legem vinculum" dicat "humane societatis." Patet igitur quod quicumque bonum rei publice intendit finem iuris intendit. Si ergo Romani bonum rei publice intenderunt, verum erit dicere finem iuris intendisse. Quod autem romanus populus bonum prefatum intenderit subiciendo sibi orbem terrarum, gesta sua declarant, in quibus, omni cupiditate sumnota que rei publice semper adversa est, et universali pace cum libertate dilecta, populus ille sanctus pius et gloriosus propria commoda neglexisse videtur, ut publica pro salute humani generis procuraret (Moreover, whoever has the good of the community as his goal has the achievement of right as his goal. That the one necessarily follows from the other can be show in this way: right is a relationship between one individual and another in respect of things and people; when it is respected it preserves human society and when it is violated it destroys it. For the description of it given in the *Digests* does not say what right is, but describes it in terms of its practical application. If therefore our definition correctly embraces both the essence and the purpose of right, and if the goal of any society is the common good of its members, it necessarily follows that the purpose of every right is the common good; and it is impossible that there can be a right which does not aim at the common good. Hence Cicero is correct when he says in the *De inventione* that laws are always to be interpreted for the benefit of the community. For if laws are not framed for the benefit of those who are subject to the law, they are laws in name only, but in reality they cannot be laws; for laws must bind men together for their mutual benefit. For this reason Seneca speaks appositely of the law when he says in *De quattor virtutibus* that "law is the bond of human society." Thus it is clear that whoever has the good of the community as his goal, it will be true to say that the achievement of right was their goal. That the Roman people in conquering the world did have the good of which we have spoken as their goal is whown by their deeds, for, having repressed all greed (which is always harmful to the community) and cherishing universal peace and freedom, that holy dutiful

and glorious people can be seen to have disregarded personal advantage in order to promote the public interest for the benefit of mankind).¹¹¹

While we can leave extended analysis of book 2 for elsewhere, we here have a functional understanding of Dante's normative political commitments. As mentioned before, for Dante, the emperor's authority is limited in scope: the emperor has no authority over philosophical truth—that is the emperor cannot declare that wealth-getting is the way to civic peace and thus make it so philosophically, as philosophy shows that it is *not* so. The emperor's authority presides over matters involving human choice, provided that he has proper philosophical formation in moral philosophy, but not in actions prescribed by nature. The emperor acts only as last authority: the principle of subsidiarity is in effect and municipalities keep their authority provided it is legitimate.¹¹²

* * *

A coda on this discussion poses the question: how does Dante see himself in regards to other voices writing on the topic of spiritual and temporal power and proffering political theories of monarchy? The answer to this is ascertained by paying close attention to his deployment of Aristotle—which, in ways that I cannot overstate, is *subversive of most of the intellectual and political grain of the time*. We can illustrate this subversion in terms of politics then where Dante starts an explicit battle against

¹¹¹ *Mon.* 2.5.1-5

¹¹² *Mon.* 1.14

theologians, scholastics, and canon lawyers: we see he is *distinguishing* himself from writers in the scholastic-juridical vein, like Aquinas, Ptolemy of Lucca, and Giles of Rome, and certainly qualifying the secular-slanted analyses of John of Paris.

This happens most acerbically in Book 3 of *Monarchia*, where Dante gets to the

Questio igitur presens, de qua inquisition future est, inter duo luminaria magna versatur: romanum scilicet Pontificem et romanum Principem; et queriter utrum auctoritas Monarche romani, que de iure Monarcha mundi est, ut in secundo libro probatum est, immediate a Deo dependeat an ab aliquot Dei vicario vel ministro, quem Petri successorem intelligo, qui vere claviger est regni celorum (the present question, therefore, which we are now to investigate, concerns the 'two great lights,' that is the Roman Pope and the Roman Prince; and the point at issue is whether the authority of the Roman monarch, who is monarch of the world by right, as was proved in the second book, derives directly from God or else from some vicar or minister of God, by which I mean Peter's successor, who assuredly holds the keys to the kingdom of heaven...).¹¹³

Here, Dante wields Aristotle (first principles) from the very beginning to combat the claim of the pope or of principalities generally (who do the same in secularized sacralizations of law etc.) that Christian revelation—to which the prince/pope/church has supposedly been granted access to as “Truth” by god and divine privileges—justifies various claims of authority. He also strongly rejects the Platonized notion that the king is a sort of living law or demigod—in its more than figural aspect—and that by divine election has an unquestionable right to the office and privileges of such to undertake measures without necessarily following the prescriptions of human goods as conceived in the Aristotelian sense (as seen above in this chapter). As Ullman shows, the papal or secular sovereign “emerges in the laws as the *lex animata*, the personified law. In a

¹¹³ *Mon.* 3.1

word, the emperor as depicted in the Code (and the Novellae) approached the essence of “l’etat c’est moi.”¹¹⁴ Aristotle is so central here, as Kantorowicz and Kenneth Pennington point out in their works in detail, because this canonical legitimation of power and authority (indeed the entire notion of the *corpus mysticum* and king’s “two bodies”) from Frederick II to Innocent III and Boniface VIII etc. depends on this notion of the sovereign being a *lex animata*.¹¹⁵ The textual support for the abstract *lex animata* that enters the vast mix of heterogeneous elements of medieval political writing on sovereign right derives – unmistakably—from the 13th century Aristoteles Latinus *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 5, in the discussion of whether justice is best understood as proportional or rectifactory.¹¹⁶ A major point to take away from Dante’s response to the divine right argument in book 3 of *Monarchia* is that Dante—in attacking the absolutist claims of the prince or pope as *lex animata*—is, in effect, attacking the official juridical superstructure of political economy. As such, it also attacks the major enabling ideology that would be necessary to justify the idea that the emperor or pope’s authority, as opposed to Dante’s arguments seen above, extends into even those things which are subject to nature, not merely to human wills. The argument that god directly or indirectly grants absolute authority and power to the holder of an office leads very quickly that his actions or pronouncements are beyond reproach, even if false or morally vile. For Dante this is

¹¹⁴ Walter Ullman, *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages; A Study in the Ideological Relation of Clerical to Lay Power* (London: Methuen, 1962), 61.

¹¹⁵ Kenneth Pennington, *The Prince and the Law, 1200-1600: Sovereignty and Rights in the Western Legal Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

¹¹⁶ See *NE* 5.4. 1131b25-1132b18: “...This is why, when people dispute, they take refuge in the judge; and to go to the judge is to go to justice; for the nature of the judge is to be a sort of animate justice; and they seek the judge as an intermediate, and in some states they call judges mediators, on the assumption that if they get what is intermediate they will get what is just...”

perverse and he seeks to exit this political discourse (which he sees as sophistic casuistry), so prominent in the genre of medieval publicist tracts, almost entirely by meticulously deconstructing it.¹¹⁷

From the start of the most pointed argument against the authoritarian claims of the papacy and abusive secular rulers, Dante claims Aristotle as source of truth in tandem with scripture, even to its expense, in battling decretalists, theologians, and perverse philosophers who pervert common and social goods with intellect and arbitrary declaration of justice. In *Monarchia* 3, 1 for example, he makes reference to Aristotle's *Ethics* and critique of Platonic forms as a means of justifying any sort of causality (and in fact, the root of mythological conceptions of authoritarian and hierocratic political order as per the Republic—and echoed in the *Somnium Scipionis*), thus grounding the critique along Aristotelian principles.

Echoing the Aristotelian passage,

¹¹⁷ In his landmark study, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), Ernst H. Kantorowicz deconstructs the juridical and philosophical construction of the “Kings Two Bodies” as the official ideology of medieval ruling classes on both the church and state side. The core idea is that the body of the state or king (office) exists above and outside the body natural of the particular ruler. In other words, the body of the ruler or the state—and likewise the body politic— is a sort of Platonized form the preservation of whose ideal structure becomes the first prerogative of statecraft and ideological justification for any particular policies. Hierocratic and imperial writers are full of this core political conviction, and it would require an entire study alone to demonstrate sufficiently that the last book of Dante's *Monarchia* is a sustained and consistent attempt to point out the fallaciousness of this sort of reasoning which is consistent in his claims that authority rests in particular moral acts and teleologies understood by a particular leader (monarch) imbued with “phylosofica documenta.”

we had perhaps better consider the universal good and discuss thoroughly what is meant by it, although such an inquiry is made an uphill one by the fact that *the Forms have been introduced by friends of our own*. Yet it would perhaps be thought to be better, indeed to be our duty, for the sake of maintaining the truth even to destroy what touches us closely, especially as we are philosophers; for, while both are dear, *piety requires us to honour truth above our friends*. The men who introduced this doctrine did not posit Ideas of classes within which they recognized priority and posteriority (which is the reason why they did not maintain the existence of an Idea embracing all numbers)...¹¹⁸

Dante proceeds to reveal the truth that cannot be treated

Sine rubore aliquorum emergere...fortisan alicuius indignationis in me causa erit. Sed quia de trono inmutabili suo Veritas deprecatur, Saloman etiam silvam *Proverbiorum* ingrediens meditandam veritatem, impium detestandum in se facturo nos docet, ac preceptor morum Phylosophus familiaria destruenda pro veritate suadet... (without putting certain people to shame, and will therefore perhaps be a cause of some resentment against me. But since truth from its unchangeable throne implores us, and Solomon too, entering the forest of *Proverbs*, teaches us by his own example to meditate on truth and loathe wickedness; and since our authority on morals, Aristotle, urges us to destroy what touches us closely for the sake of maintaining truth).¹¹⁹

With reference to Aristotle's first philosophy, particularly the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*,

Dante forwards philosophical principles to articulate how revelation and reason are perverted by decretalists and court philosophers—hence also the reference to Aristotle's

Sophistical refutations:

Hominibus nanque rationis intuitu voluntatem prevolantibus hoc sepe contingit: ut, male affecti, lumine rationis postposito, affectu quasi ceci trahantur et pertinaciter suam denegent cecitatem. Unde fit persepe quod non solum falsitas patrociniū habeat, sed - ut plerique - de suis terminis egredientes per aliena castra discurrant; ubi nichil intelligentes, ipsi nichil intelliguntur: et sic provocant quosdam ad iram, quosdam ad dedignationem, nonnullos ad risum. Igitur contra veritatem que queritur tria hominum genera maxime colluctantur. Summus nanque Pontifex, domini nostri Iesu Christi vicarius et Petri successor, cui non quicquid Christo sed quicquid Petro debemus, zelo fortasse clavium, necnon alii gregum cristianorum pastores, et alii quos credo zelo solo matris

¹¹⁸ *Mon.* 3.1; *NE* 1.6.1096a11-a23

¹¹⁹ *Mon.* 3.1.2-3

Ecclesie promoveri, veritati quam ostensus sum de zelo forsan - ut dixi - non de superbia contradicunt. Quidam vero alii, quorum obstinata cupiditas lumen rationis extinxit - et dum ex patre diabolo sunt, Ecclesie se filios esse dicunt - non solum in hac questione litigium movent, sed sacratissimi principatus vocabolum aborrentes superiorum questionum et huius principia inpudenter negarent. Sunt etiam tertii - quos decretalistas vocant - qui, theologie ac phylosophie cuiuslibet inscii et expertes, suis decretalibus - quas profecto venerandas existimo - tota intentione innixi, de illarum prevalentia - credo - sperantes, Imperio derogant (For it often happens that men who guide their will by the light of reason, should they be swayed by misguided impulses, put the light of reason behind them and are dragged by passion like blind men, and yet obstinately deny their own blindness. And so it happens very often that not only does falsehood find defenders, but that many stray beyond their own borders and make incursions into the territory of others, where, understanding nothing, they quite fail to make themselves understood; and thus they provoke some people to anger, others to disdain, and many to mirth. Now three classes of people in particular fiercely oppose the truth we are investigating. For the supreme Pontiff, the vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ and Peter's successor, to whom we owe not what is due to Christ but what is due to Peter, perhaps motivated by a zealous concern for the keys, and with him other shepherds of the Christian flock and others who I believe act only out of zealous concern for Mother Church: these people oppose the truth I am about to demonstrate - perhaps, as I said, out of zealous concern and not out of pride. Certain others, however, whose stubborn greed has extinguished the light of reason, and who, having the devil as their father, yet profess themselves to be sons of the church, not only stir up quarrels in relation to this question, but, loathing the very expression 'most sacred sovereign authority', would even impudently deny the first principles which underlie this question and those previously discussed. There is also a third category, called decretalists - ignorant and lacking in any philosophical or theological training - who argue their case exclusively with reference to their decretals (which I certainly think worthy of veneration); trusting in their authoritativeness, I believe, they disparage the empire. Nor is this a cause for astonishment).¹²⁰

Aristotle is central to this argument, in so far as first philosophy and logic—all of which inform political science and our understanding of the good from proper first principles—are necessary to straighten out the injustice of the situation. The key thing to repeat is that revelation is *not* the primary foundation of all truth, and moreover, Dante is unequivocally *uninterested* in anything less than the complete destruction of

¹²⁰ *Mon.* 3.3.4-10

hierocratic/theological and corporatist/juridical claims to the appropriation of secular and temporal power:

Isti...asserentes auctoritatem Imperii ab auctoritate Ecclesie dependere velut artifex inferior dependet ab architect... Propter hanc et propter alias eorum rationes dissolvendas prenotandum quod, sicut Phylosopho placet in hiis que De sophisticis elenchis, solutio argumenti est erroris manifestatio. Et quia error potest esse in materia et in forma argumenti, dupliciter peccare contingit: aut scilicet assumendo falsum, aut non sillogizando; que duo Phylosophus obiciebat contra Parmenidem et Melissum dicens: "Quia falsa recipiunt et non sillogizantes sunt"(those people who assert that the authority of the empire is dependent on the authority of the church in the same way as a builder is dependent on the architect [(*Metaphysics* 1, 1)]...In order to refute this and other arguments of theirs, it must first be borne in mind that, as Aristotle states in the *Sophistical Refutations* [(18, 176b 29)] to refute an argument is to expose an error. And since an error may occur in the content and in the form of an argument, there are two ways in which an argument can be flawed: either because a false premiss has been adopted, or because the logic is faulty; both of these charges were made against Parmenides and Melissus by Aristotle when he said: "They adopt false premisses and use invalid syllogisms [(*Physics* 1, 3 186a 6)].¹²¹

¹²¹ *Mon.* 3.4.1-4

3. Critical Reception

In this background, a preponderance of the criticism has looked at the relationship between Dante and the particular events in the church/state conflicts (as discussed above) and intertwined this with Dante's putative intellectual relationship with any number of philosophical and theological writers.¹²² A defining feature of this critical reception has been to attempt to claim that Dante is eclectic and inconsistent, to link him firmly within the intellectual milieu of the medieval political and juridical theorists, or to ignore the uniqueness of Dante as a political thinker all together—an argument often linked to the claim that Dante was actually an incredible poet but only a poor political thinker. Another abiding feature of criticism has been to identify the potential dates of the composition of book 4 of *Convivio* and the *Monarchia* and attempt to graft such potential composition dates on determined political events as a way of establishing a hermeneutical framework. Such frameworks, based on theoretical dating schemes unattested to by hard evidence, elevate or obviate particular readings and interpretive strategies regarding the text that often, for the most part, ignore the cohesive nature of Dante's argumentation and vision for *Monarchy*, especially within the entire complex context of his life as a politician, the social, economic, and political history of Florence, and other historical facts that clearly contributed to Dante's work.¹²³ We will briefly

¹²² This is a general judgment on the field, but see especially Cassell, "Dante's *Monarchia* and Vernani's Refutation in Context".

¹²³ For a succinct overview of recalcitrant controversies in the interpretation of *Monarchia*, see Ovidio Capitani, "Monarchia: Il Pensiero Politico," in *Chiose minime dantesche* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1983). For a more comprehensive overview of the various interpretive controversies regarding Dante's political thought see Gabriele Carletti, *Dante Politico: la delicità terrena secondo il pontefice, il filosofo, l'imperatore* (Pescara: Edizioni scientifiche abruzzesi, 2006).

examine the latter set of topics first and then the former in light of the criticism and the now accepted dating of the *Monarchia* to 1317, then discuss the inadequacies and adequacies of the critical reception in a more historicized vein and propose a way forward.

Let's start with the first topic. There is one formulation universally agreed upon—perhaps because its tautology is so easy (though this is often a claim made by those who have not really approached Dante with a proper methodology)—namely, that Dante is rather difficult for the modern reader to understand. Mazzoni says that to the modern reader the *Monarchia* appears full of “apparenti aporie.”¹²⁴ The conflicting voices within Dante's political opus are part of an

inesauribile problematica: inesauribile proprio per l'interiore carica dialettica che l'ormai sicuramente accertato «eclettismo» di Dante filosofo (che trova piena rispondenza, del resto—dopo la rinuncia al volgare «illustre» attuato nel *Convivio*, nelle Canzoni allegoriche e filosofiche nonché teorizzato nel *De vulgari eloquentia*—nell'ostentato plurilinguismo del Poema maggiore) porta forzatamente con sé, imponendo un vero e proprio *tour de force* ai moderni interpreti: i quali, anche inconsapevolmente, tendono a mettere in rilievo, «iuxta propria principia», in sede di esegesi globale e puntuale, una o l'altra delle varie sfaccettature di quel prisma, sottolineando i dati che più rispondano all'idea archetipa ch'essi volglion riconoscere e ritrovare mentre vengono disegnando storicamente il ritratto di Dante teorico della politica.¹²⁵

A problem in this regard has been thus that any discussion of Dante's politics or political philosophy, as Cesare Vasoli puts it, must inevitably deal with the already long and drawn-out “querelle” regarding the nature, origins, and tendencies of Dante's

¹²⁴ Mazzoni, "Teoresi e prassi in Dante politico", ix.

¹²⁵ Ibid., x.

philosophy.¹²⁶ Vasoli is right to point out that in this discussion critics have often attempted to claim Dante as a partisan of various ideologies and failed to subject his thought within its whole context in an historically rigorous manner:

sono spesso intervenuti elementi estranei ad una seria e rigorosa verifica storica, come, ad esempio, la preoccupazione di porre l'intera vicenda poetica dell'Alighieri sotto il segno di ideologie ben determinate, il proposito di conservare, anche in un tale caso, un'immagine della cultura medievale del tutto artificiosa o l'intenzione di connettere e, magari, ridurre entro termini squisitamente contemporanei concezioni e idee che sono state invece il frutto di un lungo e difficile travaglio intellettuale.¹²⁷

For the most part, seeking a comprehensive and complete picture of Dante's political work and philosophical conceptions through a holistic and rigorous reading of the text and history—*on Dante's own terms*—has not been the dominant focus of Dante criticism. Many have continued in the tradition of insisting that Dante is a follower of Aquinas and have applied many aspects of scholastic thought to Dante so as to insist that the scholastic value system—which can be argued to exist through a certain mode of reading in the *Comedy's depiction of the afterlife*—ought to be the intellectual paradigm for reading Dante's on almost everything.¹²⁸ Even Dante's Aristotle is really a St. Thomas version of Aristotle.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Cesare Vasoli, "Filosofia e politica in Dante fra Convivio e Monarchia", *Lecture Classensi* 9-10 (1982): 11-37.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹²⁸ Auerbach is a major player in forwarding this way of reading Dante, as brilliant as his work was. See Erich Auerbach, *Dante, Poet of the Secular World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 90; Nardi, in "Le rime filosofiche e il «Convivio»", 26, called this the "preteso tomismo di Dante"; for a study that reads Dante through the scholastic lens, see Christian Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's Comedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); for a more recent debate about the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of Dante in relation to the intellectual culture of the the middle ages, see Maria Luisa

We have already discussed the penchant to insist that we see Dante in the *Monarchia* as an epigone or authority appropriator of scholastic theologians and philosophers and attempted to dismiss this as an unscientific claim.¹³⁰ Yet this is the predominant theme—combined with the tendencies to see in Dante so many *aporie* articulated by Mazzoni and Vasoli above—of Albert Ascoli’s recent work on Dante’s *Monarchia*, which attempts to read the treatise (with *Convivio*), “in terms of elaborate rhetorical strategies by which Dante both defines and delimits the authority of others and stakes his own claim to undertake such a definitional enterprise authoritatively.”¹³¹ For Ascoli, Dante’s *Monarchia*, in comparison with his other works, represents Dante’s “dramatic entrance...into the world of high medieval culture and politics” and is a “window onto Dante’s self-construction as a specifically Latin *auctor*.”¹³² The treatise in this view is “a Latin *tractatus* in the scholastic mode concerned with a central late-medieval question of political theory” that yet lacks a “*prima facie* claim to historical importance in the emergence of a prestigious modern authorship...[and]..is not, stylistically, on the cutting edge.”¹³³ For Ascoli, in this treatise Dante is mostly

Ardizzone and Teodolinda Barolini eds., *Dante and Heterodoxy: The Temptations of 13th Century Radical Thought* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2014).

¹²⁹ Vinay, "Introduzione"; Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*.

¹³⁰ This interpretive framework is heavily indebted to A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scolar Press, 1984).

¹³¹ Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*, 229.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 232.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 232.

concerned with “mirroring” high medieval “dominant philosophical-theological discourses of the day,” and he takes the fact that Dante’s *Monarchy* and *Convivio* are devoid of specific historical referents (to specific popes and emperors) to indicate that Dante’s positions rather “seem to be grounded in a universal truth that transcends individual time, place, and person.”¹³⁴ Ascoli’s interpretation is that Dante’s predominant concern with institutional and political authority in *Monarchia* and *Convivio* traces his overall concern with establishing his personal philosophical-poetic *auctoritas* in relation to previous *auctores*. The problematic of temporal and spiritual authority—which features strongly in *Monarchia* 3— in Ascoli’s view is part of “the issues and problems that surround the culture of authority in the Middle Ages.” This leads Ascoli to see Dante’s insistence that the *Monarch* is most uniquely capable, with the philosophical authority of Aristotle to be free of greed and instill universal justice over disputes, as idealistic except when seen as part of his rationalistic appropriation of authority:

Dante seems to assume that “monarchy” is an office capable in and of itself of transforming the “will to power” into a “will to judgment” in the secular world. In so doing, he presumes that the person occupying that office, alone of human kind, will be free of the effects of the Fall of humanity, i.e., without a will tainted and weakened by sin, even though he will later make it clear that the universal effects of the Fall make imperial justice necessary in the first place (3.4.14–15). Dante’s apparent ability to make such an assertion without falling immediately into contradiction likely depends upon the purely rational terms in which book 1 operates, a point stressed by the twice-repeated citation of Aristotle as *auctoritas* in support of his claim, rather than any of the possible scriptural, patristic, or scholastic theorists of human desire. These rational terms are at once human (human nature has just been defined in terms of a collective “possible intellect”) and ahistorical (apparently valid in any time and every place), and they permit a temporary amnesia concerning the fundamental gap between divine perfection and the corrupted temporality of a post-Edenic world. But when, in book 2, the

¹³⁴ Ibid., 234-238.

figure of the Empire is tested against the realities of history (the usurping violence it apparently used to gain sway over the world [2.1]) and the failings of individual Emperors (e.g., Constantine's abdication of his imperial office and division of the Empire [2.11.8; cf. 3.10; see n 47]), the flaws of the argument become potentially visible. They become even more evident in book 2, and especially in book 3, as the Empire is confronted with the competing claims of the City of God on earth, that is, the Church Militant, to hold dominion over the City of Man. And they are still further exposed by the re-introduction of theologically grounded articles of faith – including the universal fallenness of human nature, the inability of men to establish true internal and external justice without the gratuitous intervention of divine grace, and the supreme authority of God to which all human authorities are secondary. By book 3, then, the claims of book 1 can only be maintained by submitting them to radical modifications.¹³⁵

Ascoli's hermenutic strategy too strongly accepts Dante's concern with authority and thus reads Dante's actual articulation of his proposed Aristotelian-based monarchical resolution of the very real historical problems of greed through an entirely different lens, namely that of theology, only to insist that in fact the worldly and other-worldly aspirations of Dante are irreconcilable if not for the latter's enduring interest in authority. Instead of historicizing the context and reasons for which Dante would ignore naming specific figures like Frederick II in *Monarchia* as compared to other texts like *Convivio*, the absence of whom is allegedly an inherent contradiction because of Frederick the emperor's immoral policies (for this he is a bad example), Ascoli's reading strategy tends towards an allegorical model where Dante's political ideas are easier to resolve the more difficult and possibly contradictory they appear. Ascoli says that the exclusion of Frederick and Boniface etc. are linked to the text's telos: the "transformation of the historical scene,"¹³⁶ despite the fact that historically speaking Dante did exclude Frederick from the *Monarchia*, and Dante's references to Frederick in

¹³⁵ Ibid., 252-253.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 291.

Convivio as the one who linked imperial authority to wealth (see chapter 5), when historicized outside the context of anxiety of influence and the medieval culture of authority, can produce other readings in which Frederick's absence is not meaningful for interpreting the *Monarchia*. In the end, Ascoli's reading insists that the *Commedia* presents the proper means to interpret the historical materials that the text demands we take seriously: "*Monarchia's* inability to absorb and interpret the materials of history, including Frederick, might be remedied by the transhistorical, "figural" framework offered by the *poema sacro*, which also allows Dante openly to assume the prophetic role that he can only hint at for himself in *Monarchia*."¹³⁷ While Ascoli's discursive reading of Dante's relationship to authority certainly has other merits, this reading of *Monarchia* seems to reflect the tendency, that Teodolinda Barolini has pointed out so eloquently, to "theologize" our readings of Dante on account of the "hermeneutic guidelines that Dante has structured into his poem, hermeneutic guidelines that result in theologized readings whose outcomes have been overdetermined by the author."¹³⁸ We might agree that a figural, transhistorical, and even a reading based on authority might be meritorious, but insist too that we ought to be careful of overdetermining a broader historical-material context outside of the frame of reference that the discourse of authority provides.

Thus, a key aspect of this problem of the pitfall of narrative overdetermination of the *Comedy* is that it results in displacing any historical concreteness that can moor an

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 292.

¹³⁸ Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 17.

interpretation of the text often taken within abstracted theological hermeneutic which is, on the contrary, rooted in a religious dualism of “worldly” and “otherworldly.” By the same token, Dante’s statements are viewed as the resonance of an idealized Christian hope, not as a *worldly* statement reflecting something imperative about history or the historical imperative immanent in making political statements of the strongly normative sort that Dante did, in fact, make. Auerbach reflects the former in his remarks about Dante’s response to the politics of his time. For Auerbach, even though Dante was actively involved in the politics of his day, the force of his thought lies in “static and transcendent elements in political and historical thinking”:

For him the concepts of “history” and “development” would have had no validity in themselves; he asked for a sign by which to interpret events and he found only chaos; on every hand individuals advanced illegitimate aspirations and the result was confusion and disaster. For him the measure of history was not history, but a divine and perfect order of the world: a static, transcendent principle, to be sure, but this does not mean that it was abstract and dead.¹³⁹

Auerbach’s move then is to neuter any reading of the *Monarchia* that accepts Dante’s *own* claims that worldly perfection is the purpose of a just monarchical state, that the arc of history is changeable through political action, and that Dante’s political writing is a reflection of real political and material situations and events—and concrete aspirations—rather than a meditation on metaphysical and theological writings of scholastic writers. It is hard to see how this interpretive move leaves any space for something that is not a typical, dead, abstract *forma mentis* reading.

¹³⁹ Auerbach, *Dante, Poet of the Secular World*, 66.

Amazingly this interpretive move tends to turn up everywhere and shows why a historicizing reading of Dante's work generally, and of his political works particularly, is difficult with the overdetermined Dante hermeneutic. The reason for its pervasiveness as problem, as Barolini has pointed out, is that the hermeneutic leads to real historical meaning being theologically allegorized, going plainly against Dante's insistence in *Convivio* that the historical sense is the literal sense and, furthermore, is the actual meaning of what he means to say.¹⁴⁰

For Giuseppe Mazzotta, Dante's history is completely caught up in this inversion, in which Dante's acknowledgment of the operation of Christian notions of divine providence *in* history somehow equates to all of history being the object of divine redemption. For Mazzotta, seeing what he calls "Dante's theological structure of history" also involves reading (with a method best known to patristic theologians like Augustine and Irenaeus)— *both* Dante's actual historical situation and apparently history from Mazzotta's historiographical standpoint—as an allegory and *figura* of history devoid of any capability of having a historical methodology applied to it: "Dante figures the necessary unity between historical process and prophecy: the end of the historical process can be none other than the imposition of redemption upon history....History, as the allegory of renewal, makes a fresh start by going back to the past, and, through a theology of hope, opens up to the belief that the new will arrive."¹⁴¹ It is no surprise then that for Mazzotta, notwithstanding Dante's entire concern with the "historical city and

¹⁴⁰ *Conv.* 2.1-2

¹⁴¹ Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 64-65.

his belief that he, as a poet, occupies a singular and creative role in the shaping of that order,” Dante’s voice somehow “arises in a condition of exile from the city of life.”¹⁴² Putting aside the fact that this is an absurd and nonsensical statement—i.e. what does Mazzotta mean that Dante, the writer of *Monarchia*, was writing from a city outside of this life?—it is clear that Mazzotta’s entire way of reading Dante is anti-historical, and other-worldly. Everything Dante writes is a rhetorical deployment of scholastic and patristic tropes, and in short, everything potentially *real* about Dante’s vision of political order is mythological and metaphorical:

when scholars have had to deal with Dante’s myth of political order, their attention conventionally has focused on *Monarchia* either to ascertain and debate the philosophical assumptions that sustain its political theory or to establish the possible discrepancies, or coherence, between that tract and the political theology, which, in the oblique forms of poetic language, figures prominently in the *Divine Comedy*. One can hardly account for the reluctance of critics to handle this question in more than literal and purely ideological terms since the study of the overt thematic strains of the poem inevitably leaves out of the picture the importance of the interdependence of the metaphors of order and exile.¹⁴³

For Mazzotta the problem, in other words, is not merely letting the *Comedy* serve to further an overdetermined reading of Dante’s politics into abstraction (the earthly and historical and real into the heavenly and “other worldly”), but rather, that it is not made sufficiently abstract enough. Order and Exile must be metaphors of some ideal, as if Platonic form (despite Dante’s utter denunciation of Platonism in the *Monarchia*), but only somewhat historically relevant, order and exile in Dante’s real life.¹⁴⁴ A further

¹⁴² Ibid., 107.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 108-109.

¹⁴⁴ Nardi, in "Le rime filosofiche e il «Convivio»," 13, remarks “è il congedo dalla pargoletta allegorica, ossia dalle rime allegoriche di contenuto filosofico. Dinanzi ai

problem indebted to this way of reading Dante has been, as Mazzotta does here, basically to exclude the *Convivio* and *Monarchia* from serious consideration as major works of Dante if not subservient to the *Comedy*. Anna Maria Chiavacci-Leonardi has written, exemplifying this belief and their interpretive dependency on the *Comedy*, that “le opere di Dante cosiddette minori, cioè scritte prima o fuori della *Commedia*, non sono sufficienti a se stesse; non si spiegano cioè nel loro stesso ambito, non si bastano, se non in via del tutto provvisoria” and Dante is “uomo di una sola opera.”¹⁴⁵

Another Dante critic, Richard Kay—sharing the biases of Chiavacci-Leonardi—makes it clear that we value the *Monarchia* in terms of Dante the poet, the author of the *Commedia*, not as the author of *Monarchia*. For Kay, “the natural temptation is to assume that the *Monarchia* is as great a work of its kind as the *Commedia*, but that would be to overrate it.”¹⁴⁶ Not only does Kay make value judgements about how we should determine our reading of the *Monarchia*, but claims, with the authority of Gilson (that Dante was “neither a philosopher nor a theologian”), and that in relation to intellectuals of the time, such as “Aquinas, Bonaventure, Scotus, Ockham, and even

problemi metafisici intorno ai quali la niente del poeta-filosofo s'era smarrita, e la cui soluzione richiedeva chiarezza e precisione di concetti, il velo dell'allegoria era ormai divenuto ingombrante. Dante filosofo conosceva troppo bene Aristotele, per ignorare il luogo degli Analitici Posteriori, ove si vieta di far uso delle metafore là dove s'hanno da definire concetti o s'ha da procedere a dimostrazioni rigorose. E senza dubbio egli sapeva altresì del rimprovero che Aristotele fa a Platone, nella Metafisica, che l'affermare che l'idee sono gli esemplari delle cose, le quali di essi partecipano, è vaniloquio, introducendosi nel linguaggio filosofico metafore.”

¹⁴⁵ Chiavacci-Leonardi, "La «Monarchia» di Dante alla luce della «Commedia»", 147-148.

¹⁴⁶ Richard Kay, "Introduction," in *Dante's Monarchia*, auth. Dante Alighieri (Toronto, 1998), xv.

Marsiglio of Padua...Dante was a figure of less awesome dimensions,¹⁴⁷ despite the fact that Masiglio of Padua's political work was only published after Dante's death and value comparisons with other figures like Scotus and Ockham are unnecessary. This sort of puzzling standpoint is also reflected in Kay's quick decision that, although Dante did know Aristotle very well, his "heavy-handed use" of Aristotelian logic was mostly done for "rhetorical effect."¹⁴⁸

In much of the discussion on Dante's thought, whether simplistically characterized either as an ultimate expression of a philosopher or theologian, or read through the hermeneutical lens of the *Comedy*, too much emphasis has been placed on phases of thought too.¹⁴⁹ Solari had already in 1923 argued against an interpretive move that was overly dependent on tying the reading of certain works to certain phases or events, notion arguing for more synthetic approach: "la distinzione in fasi chiuse, successive, è già per se stessa distinzione arbitraria, inadeguata a una personalità divinamente creatrice come quella di Dante. Il cui pensiero politico più che per fasi cronologicamente distinte si svolge ... da una sintesi iniziale, i cui elementi hanno sviluppo e accentuazione diversa nelle singole opere, finché nella *Monarchia* si rivelano completamente spiegati e tradotti in forma logica e scientifica."¹⁵⁰ Carletti, a modern critic, rightly comments in

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., xv.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., xvii.

¹⁴⁹ Carletti, *Dante Politico: La felicità terrena secondo il pontefice, il filosofo, l'imperatore*, 7.

¹⁵⁰ Gioele Solari, "Il pensiero politico di Dante. Rassegna critica delle pubblicazioni del secentenario", *Rivista storica italiana* XL, fasc. IV (1923).

this regard, against the grain of most of the critical tradition, that “riferimenti e concetti politici sono presenti nel *Convivio* come nella *Commedia*, nelle *Epistole* come nella *Monarchia*. Talvolta prendono le mosse da fatti e personaggi reali, talaltra presentano un contenuto più teorico, ma la riflessione non è mai fine a se stessa, mai avulsa dal contesto storico, ma sempre in funzione di un utile presente per il genere umano, di una effettiva, concreta, applicabilità dei suoi principi in vista di una migliore convivenza civile.”¹⁵¹

Ultimately, in this study I accept Nardi’s well known assertion that Dante was a coherent thinker whose ethical and political commitments evolve but are present and mostly consistent in his texts from his lyric productions through the *Convivio*, *Commedia*, and *Monarchia*. For Nardi, these works are

indissolubilmente legato tra loro, in quanto il fervore di quel pensiero alimenta l’ardente sentimento che si placa in quella poesia. Nello sviluppo di questo pensiero e di questa arte m’è parso che importanza fondamentale avesse la *Monarchia*, come l’opera cui Dante affidò la commozione del suo animo, quando si fu persuaso qual fosse per lui, il solo modo di far cessare lo scandaloso conflitto fra l’Impero e la Chiesa, e di ricondurre nel mondo la pace. Da quella scoperta prorompe, a mio parere, la luminosa altissima poesia della *Commedia*.¹⁵²

And, in disabusing ourselves of the scholasticizing hermeneutics still so entrenched in Dante studies, it is helpful to remember Nardi’s, still relevant, admonishment:

Ma dovunque Dante abbia fatto i suoi studi filosofici, è certo che la sua cultura filosofica, pur essendo aristotelica nella sostanza, è eclettica nell’interpretazione d’Aristotele. Un tempo si parlava del tomismo di Dante. Ma a guardar bene, la

¹⁵¹ Carletti, *Dante Politico: La Felicità Terrena Secondo Il Pontefice, Il Filosofo, L'imperatore*, 7.

¹⁵² Nardi, "Le rime filosofiche e il «Convivio»", 6.

leggenda del tomismo di Dante s'è formata quando troppo poco si conosceva la filosofia del suo tempo, sì che dire tomismo voleva dire filosofia scolastica. A questo si deve aggiungere il proposito apologetico o diciamo pure propagandistico, da parte dei neotomisti, ai quali, più che l'esatta intelligenza del pensiero dantesco da un punto di vista critico, premeva di richiamare i filosofi moderni, attraverso lo studio di Dante, allo studio di S. Tommaso.¹⁵³

In terms of allegorizing and theologizing all things Dante, Nardi's remark is astute, recalling, as we have seen above, that Dante is deeply concerned with *justice on planet earth*. If Dante artistically depicts the beatific vision and the *Paradiso* remains as much a deep artistic representation of metaphysical and theological mysteries¹⁵⁴ as it does a narrative space inhabited by real historical persons and describing real events, at the end of the day Nardi helps us on the road to a historically situated Dante by reminding us to forget the over-scholastification of Dante in so far as that it is impossible to read Dante at face value and believe that his commitments are scholastic. If the fundamental idea of the *Contra Gentiles* is that philosophy cannot satisfy the natural desire for knowledge, as Aristotle would have it—but only the beatific vision, Dante believes that human desire is limited to the science that is attainable, and that “la filosofia può soddisfarlo appieno e darci la beatitudine.”¹⁵⁵ For Nardi, none of the philosophy or learning that Dante exalts in his works is done for its own sake, or for mere rhetorical effect, but in fact is genuinely intended “per illuminare situazioni della vita morale e sociale, non solo di Firenze, ma di tutta l'Italia. I concetti filosofici sono pensati da Dante in rapporto a queste situazioni, con l'intento dichiarato di dissipare la falsa

¹⁵³ Ibid., 27.

¹⁵⁴ For a new interpretation of the metaphysical Dante, see Christian Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's Comedy*. One does not have to state that the theological Dante is not important, but merely that it is not the only framework for approaching Dante.

¹⁵⁵ Nardi, "Le rime filosofiche e il «Convivio»", 28.

opinione sulla nobiltà, poiché questa falsa opinione a suo parere, come abbiamo visto, era cagione di ‘pessima confusione del mondo.’”¹⁵⁶

However, even if we take Nardi as an incitement to historicism, even in historicizing studies of Dante there has still been a tendency to blunt the force of Dante’s political claims and displace them to the otherworldly. This is evident in the work of Joan Ferrante, who is correct to see that “the dominant political-social realities of Dante’s world, northern Italy in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, are the independent city-state, the claims of empire, the church, and commerce.”¹⁵⁷ The *Political Vision of the Comedy* attempts to historicize Dante’s political “vision” but does so only partially. Though Ferrante argues that these historical factors are essential for understanding the political vision of the *Comedy*, she still conceives of the ultimate aims of his political vision in his entire *oeuvre* as essentially interwoven with the narrative presentation, fictions, and structure of the *Comedy*, and not the other way around:

Dante’s position on the relation of individual states, cities, kingdoms to the empire and on the distinct separation of functions of the spiritual and temporal powers is fundamental to an understanding of his political vision in the *Comedy*, as they are the basic issues of the *Monarchy*. Once they have been established, I can show how Dante sees the individual’s relation to and responsibility for society through the three models presented in the three *cantiche*: the corrupt society based on greed and selfishness without order or justice (Hell), the transitional society of men working together to rid themselves of disruptive elements and to achieve a common goal (Purgatory), and the ideal society, based on love, wisdom, and justice, in which all share in the joy and harmony, presided over by the supreme Emperor, God (Paradise).¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 32.

¹⁵⁷ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, 41.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 42.

In other words, though a historicizing framework, the narrative of the *Comedy* as an otherworldly journey still functions as the predominant hermeneutical frame. This is shown in the way that Ferrante, while recognizing that “Dante’s views on commerce and language underlie his whole political presentation in the *Comedy*” and that the realization that “greed and selfishness are destructive to the public good and to the individual soul whereas love, concern for the needs of others, and a sense of social responsibility bring personal rewards and strengthen society,” nonetheless insists that for Dante it is only “in that ideal society, which in the *Comedy* is portrayed in Paradise, that the proper atmosphere for such realization is achieved.”¹⁵⁹ As seen above, Ferrante at the end of accounts, seems to equivocate the idea of Dante’s emperor with an allegorizing notion of the “supreme Emperor” in Paradise, displacing the potential fruits of a historicized approach in regards to Dante’s political thought back to the otherworldly, and in effect, accepting the typical procedure of theologizing and allegorizing readings. In other words, Ferrante is helpful for putting so much of an emphasis on the intersections of city state, imperial, church politics and the role of commerce in Dante’s time, however, her grafting of the narrative structure of the *Comedy* onto the supposed aims of Dante’s political thought overdetermines her examination of how Dante actually responds to and addresses the very worldly aims of identifying unjust polities, fixing them, defining justice, and conceiving of a monarchy that can ensure the end of greed. Ferrante’s erudite work is limited by this hermeneutical frame that invites us, furthermore, to dive directly into the issues from *outside* the confines of the *Divine Comedy* and within the Augustinian framework of the

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 42-43.

two cities. The Augustinian model itself will always lead to an overdetermined hermeneutics of any political theory especially if its premises are accepted. Ferrante accepts them, despite the fact that in Dante's most developed political thought in *Convivio* and *Monarchia* this is completely unwarranted.¹⁶⁰ She writes that "the heavenly rather than the earthly city...is the positive model against which the other must finally be seen."¹⁶¹

Charles Till Davis is another scholar for whom a more historicizing approach has been only partially successful. For Davis, Italy during Dante's life "denoted a peninsula united by language and history but not by any central government. Italy remained, in fact, after the failure of Frederick II's attempt to conquer her, in her habitual state of political chaos."¹⁶² But he also acknowledges that economy played a central role: "despite this political disorder, Italy continued to be the economic powerhouse of Europe, the great source of her capital and the most important center of her

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 48: "Like Augustine in the *City of God*, Dante presents his audience with a choice between two cities, the city of God and good, Paradise, and the city of evil, Hell. The conflict between the two, in history as in the individual moral struggle, is between the principles of selfishness and self-indulgence, and devotion to divine law. But for Augustine, the heavenly city Jerusalem, is embodied in the church; the earthly city, Babylon, in the pagan state...Because he is concerned with the contemporary situation in Italy, Dante shifts from the traditional type for heaven and hell--Jerusalem and Babylon--to the more immediate counterparts, Rome and Florence." Needless to say it is significantly more complicated than this, and again the idealized projection of Augustine's political categories of the sin and corruption of the "earthly" city and the pristine justice of the "heavenly" city, skews our actual political and historical understanding of how Dante would actually conceived of the political situation of his life time and how he actually *did* believe in a Roman/Imperial justice that was not a mere religious abstraction.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 50.

¹⁶² Davis, *Dante's Italy, and Other Essays*, 1.

manufacturing and trade. Dante's own city, Florence, was in the forefront of Italian economic activity, and her position was viewed by many contemporaries with wonder and admiration."¹⁶³ Davis sees greed as linked to the church reform movement and acknowledges that Dante seeks an emperor to squash all cupidity of rulers and popes, but his analysis stops there.¹⁶⁴ Davis, in discussing Dante's "vision of history"—the word "vision" is really revealing—fails to historicize or make any meaningful connection between Dante's careful and intricate political theory and the actual conditions of greed in the Italy of his day, and defaults to the typical discourse of otherworldliness. It is precisely that, a "vision," not a reality, and Davis leaves behind almost everything interesting one could say about the topic as theology washes away the need to be concerned with history, which itself becomes a merely symbol and figure of Dante's subjectivity:

Rome would again be the guardian of earthly peace and justice and the symbol of salvation, the temporal point at which man's earthly and heavenly beatitudes could intersect. Dante's vision of history was largely a vision of Rome. As Reade says, it was not a philosophy of history, and despite Dante's devotion to Aristotle, the poet showed, at least in this field, very little concern with secondary causes. His historical theology depended much more on myths of the past and dreams of the future than on a close reading of contemporary trends. He could personify avaricious Florence and aggressive France and their accomplices on the papal throne as precursors and embodiments of Antichrist. The savior or Veltro for whom he waited was an eschatological figure. This figure was the heir of the heroes of pagan Rome who made "the good world" but he was also charged with leading men forward toward the Rome of Paradise, the Rome of which Dante, Beatrice, and Christ would all be citizens together.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Ibid., 1.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 29-37.

¹⁶⁵ Charles Till Davis, "Dante's Vision of History," in *Dante's Italy, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 41.

Indeed, later, Davis writes that Dante's "vision of the reformation of this...[world]...is conveyed by prophecies. These are genuine predictions, unlike the rhetorical ones written after the fact the one finds so often in the *Commedia*, and they are naturally often enigmatic and hard to interpret. Dante's prophetic mirror is darker than his poetic one. Yet these prophecies form an important element of the poem, and up to a point they are clear enough. They are all directed against cupidinous lust for wealth and power. They assert that poverty prevents and cures cupidity, and that a total rejection of temporal jurisdiction by clerics is a prerequisite for ecclesiastical reform. But such reform is possible, according to the poet, only if it is accompanied by political, and apparently imperial, peace and renewal. In the *Commedia* Dante therefore links Francis and Augustus..."¹⁶⁶ Dante's solution, for Davis, surely seems true, but lacks analytical specificity:

a revitalized empire and a re-pauperized church. Dante's eschatology rests on twin premises: total authority for the empire and total poverty for the church. At first glance their juxtaposition seems incongruous, but they are really complementary, for only in this way can competition between church and empire be ended and each resorted to its proper function. As we shall see, Francis the mendicant and Henry VII the Roman emperor...serve as the models for Dante's Conception.¹⁶⁷

While Davis' analysis is technically correct, it is too content in seeing Dante's pronouncements against greed and normative statements about politics as still mostly abstracted and schematically coherent within the typical Dante hermeneutic.

¹⁶⁶ Charles Till Davis, "Poverty and Eschatology in the *Commedia*," in *Dante's Italy, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 42-43.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

Specifically, it lacks compelling reasons, outside of a typical *forma mentis* discourse, why this is actually *the paradigm* that really defines Dante's vision of empire.

It is important to mention that controversies regarding the dating of the *Monarchia* and *Convivio* have also played a significant role in the critical reception of Dante's work. Much conjectural interpretation in the field ultimately hinges upon the dating of one text to another.¹⁶⁸ Indeed as Kay points out

Dante scholars have...expended a great deal of effort to determine the precise date of each of his works. Far from being mere pedantry, this attention to chronology is essential for an understanding of how the works are interrelated, which in turn enables us to trace the development of Dante's thought from work to work. Moreover, precise dating places each work in a context of historical events, which often illuminate the author's motivation and intention. Finally, firm dates permit us to trace the relationship between similar contemporary works. For instance, because of Marsilio of Padua's *Defensor pacis* is explicitly dated 24 June 1324 by its colophon, it cannot have influenced Dante, who died in 1321. To be sure, each work can be read in a historical vacuum, as some philosophers and literary critics are inclined to do, and while it is certainly a prudent practice to attempt to understand a work in isolation, still the result is also part of a larger picture. Accordingly, in order to appreciate the *Monarchia* fully, one must first determine its date.¹⁶⁹

It is not the intention of this study to insist on the validity of these controversies other than in a qualified manner. Regarding the dating of the treatise, here is the rough outline.¹⁷⁰ We have no mention of the treatise attested to during Dante's lifetime.

Besides mentions in epitaphs written by Bernardo Scannabecchi and Giovanni del

¹⁶⁸ See the discussions in Kay, "Introduction", and for an up to date, exhaustive, appraisal of this topic and its continuing inconclusiveness as an effective hermeneutic, see Paolo Chiesa and Andrea Tabarroni, "Introduzione," in *Monarchia*, auth. Dante Alighieri (Roma: Salerno editrice, 2013), lx-lxvi.

¹⁶⁹ Kay, "Introduction," xx.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., xx-xxxi, and Mazzoni, "Teoresi e prassi in Dante politico."

Virgilio—which suggest that the work was already known after Dante’s death—one of the first mentions of the text is by Guido Vernani who, in his *De reprobatione Monarchie composite a Dante* from circa 1329, denigrated Dante entirely, and was the portavoce for the attack on Dante mounted by papal operatives.¹⁷¹ This squares with what we learn from Boccaccio, who in the *Vita di Dante* claims that *Monarchia* was coopted by supporters of Louis IV of Bavaria and then condemned by the Dominican. Vernani, in addition to declaring it heretical, also wanted to burn all copies of the book and even mused about having Dante’s remains exhumed to be burned along with copies of the book.¹⁷²

As Kay notes, because of such “imprecision, dates ranging throughout the second half of Dante’s lifetime have been proposed.”¹⁷³ Some had hypothesized that the work might have been composed as early as 1298 or 1301-1302, before the promulgation of Boniface VIII’s bull *Unam Sanctam*. But following Nardi’s convincing demonstration that the *Monarchia* must have followed the writing of *Convivio*, which is agreed to have been composed between 1304-1307 and which logically follows the progression of ideas developed in the latter work, any assertion of a date before this time is thus an untenable position.¹⁷⁴ Nardi’s position, besides depending on evidence regarding the

¹⁷¹ On Guido Vernani, see Cassell, "Dante's Monarchia and Vernani's Refutation in Context", 50-106.

¹⁷² Boccaccio, *Vita di Dante*, 25.

¹⁷³ Kay, "Introduction," xxi.

¹⁷⁴ Bruno Nardi, *Dal "Convivio" Alla "Commedia."* (*Sei Saggi Danteschi*) (Roma: Nella sede dell'Istituto, 1992), 116-133.

composition of *Convivio*, relies heavily on the evidence suggested by the authority of Boccaccio, that the treatise was composed “nella venuta d’Arrigo VII imperadore.”¹⁷⁵ In sum, Nardi conjectures that the *Monarchia* may have overlapped with the composition of the last book of *Convivio*, but that in any case, the third book surely was a response to Henry VII’s descent into Italy, a position in which he is in agreement with Maccarrone.¹⁷⁶

However, Kay notes that this position is itself highly problematic as it involves a further spread of dates: Henry VII was elected in November 1308, was involved in negotiations with the pope through 1309, arrived in Italy in 1310 and remained there until his death in 1313.¹⁷⁷ Many commentators, both within Dante studies and in the history of medieval political thought, undoubtedly linking the *Monarchia* to the content of the political letters (*Epist.* 5; *Epist.* 6; *Epist.* 7) and the actual physical imperial force of Henry that challenged the Guelf regimes of northern Italy, have tended to place the treatise within the 1310-1313 range.¹⁷⁸ While Solari, Ercole, and a number of German scholars of the early 20th century have upheld yet another year range, placing the treatise between 1314-1321, during the reign of Louis IV of Bavaria, the controversy was definitively settled after the philological results of the Ricci edition of the *Monarchia* of

¹⁷⁵ Boccaccio, *Tratatello*.

¹⁷⁶ Bruno Nardi, *Dal "Convivio" Alla "Commedia."* (*Sei Saggi Danteschi*), 175.ff.; Michele Maccarrone, "Il Terzo Libro Della «Monarchia»", *Studi Danteschi* XXXIII, fasc. I (1955): 5-142.

¹⁷⁷ Kay, "Introduction," xxi-xxii.

¹⁷⁸ Black, *Political Thought in Europe, 1250-1450*; Alessandro Passerin d'Entrèves, *Dante As a Political Thinker* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952); Davis, *Dante's Italy, and Other Essays*.

1965.¹⁷⁹ Ricci's discovery that Dante's reference to *Paradiso* 5 in *Monarchia* 1.12.6 was attested to in all of his 18 manuscripts gives more philological certainty to the dating of the *Monarchia* in the years concurrent with or indeed even after the composition of *Paradiso*. When coupled with the historical data we have that Dante resided with Can Grande della Scala at Verona in the period of 1316-1319, and that the latter needed to "prove that the papacy had no jurisdiction over the Empire when the imperial throne was vacant" the date of approximately 1317 for Ricci has stuck. While this caused some dissension amongst scholars who were deeply committed to other datings, and this has been amply discussed elsewhere, nonetheless we must agree with Francesco Mazzoni who viewed this as definitive.¹⁸⁰

If this is true, I want to emphasize in this study that both Henry's expedition is and the events happening concurrently with his stay with Can Grande are fresh in Dante's mind, but that we must really reject the notion that Dante is only reacting to things at the time he supposedly wrote them. All of the following things preceded or are concurrent with the 1317 date:¹⁸¹ the death of Henry VII (1313), the 1314 election to the throne of Louis IV of Bavaria and Frederick of Austria, without the ratification of either by the Avignon pope Clement V. Then the election of John XXII in 1316, the second Avignon pope, who wholly aimed to consolidate the hierocratic vision and policies of his predecessors going back to Boniface VIII, who then declared the imperial throne vacant,

¹⁷⁹ Kay, "Introduction", xxii. ff.

¹⁸⁰ Mazzoni, "Teoresi e prassi in Dante politico," lix-lxiv.

¹⁸¹ Vittorio Russo, *Impero e stato di diritto: studio su «Monarchia» ed «Epistole» politiche di Dante* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1987), 12.

and appointed Robert of Anjou the imperial vicar for Italy and deposed the imperial vicars nominated by Henry VII. Under his aegis power will pass decisively to Matteo Visconti who submits to papal prerogatives, but will be rejected by both by Passerino Bonacolsi of Mantua and Can Grande della Scala—who both adhere to one of the *Monarchia*'s (3) main arguments, namely that their power derives directly from god and has no need of papal confirmation. My contention, sharing with Nardi in the first essay from dal *Convivio alla Commedia*, is that Dante is extremely coherent and his whole political thought is reacting to the sum of his life thought and political/moral beliefs. In this thesis I show this to be a reaction to *political economy*. Dante is reacting to a whole society over time in development in multilayered complexity from before the time he was born, and which will have relevance well after his death, though the fortune of Dante's political work after his death falls outside the purview of this investigation.¹⁸² In other words, a truly historicizing approach sees everything occurring throughout Dante's life—*all the history*—as something that potentially contributes to Dante's political thought from imperial/church spats, to the problematic early capitalism that gave rise to and fueled these contests for power.

¹⁸² For an accounting of how the arguments developed in *Monarchia* later came to influence the work of Bartolus of Sassoferato, Ciovanni Calderini, Alberto da Rosciate, and Cola di Rienzo, see *Ibid.*, 13-17; also see Diego Quaglioni, "Introduzione," in *Opere, Volume secondo: Convivio, Monarchia, Epistole, Egloge*, ed. Marco Santagata, Gianfranco Fioravanti, Claudio Giunta, Diego Quaglioni, Claudia Villa and Gabriella Albanese (Milano: A. Mondadori, 2014). On the fierce denunciation of Dante in the 14th century see Aldo Vallone, *Antidantismo politico nel XIV secolo* (Napoli: Liguori, 1973) *Cultura e memoria in Dante* (Napoli: Guida editori, 1988). On the use of Dante's political work, esp. *Monarchia* as a platform for antipapal polemicism, see Pastore Stocchi, *Monarchia: Testo e cronologia*, in "Cultura e scuola" IV (1965), n. 13-14, pp. 714ff.; On the matters of dating, see generally Richard Kay, "Introduction," in *Dante's Monarchia*, auth. Dante Alighieri (Toronto, 1998) and Paolo Chiesa and Andrea Tabarroni, "Introduzione," in *Monarchia*, auth. Dante Alighieri.

I thus agree with Vittorio Russo, who proposed a different sort of reading some years ago, one that Nardi's reading of the synthetic sensitivity and understanding of Dante's doctrine of the *imperio* enables for us, but has yet to be truly attempted. Russo points out that the attempts to link Dante to any specific political event, to Guelfism or Ghibellinism, or by and by, within some sort of partisan reaction are misplaced. All the historical events and political occurrences make up the

temperie rovente di avvenimenti storici e di scontro ideologico che si colloca a pieno diritto la *Monarchia*, come intervento politico e "risposta" intellettuale. E il suo destino travagliato, certo così diverso da ogni altro coevo esemplare della trattatistica politica, ne rivela da una parte lo spessore teorico che l'attraversa e che giustifica, al di là del *topos* retorico, il vanto iniziale di voler mostrare verità *intemptatas ab aliis*, di voler affrontare il problema della monarchia universale in forma *ab omnibus* intemptata; d'altra parte ne riscatta la volontà progettuale e operativa, che Dante ascriveva alla sua opera (*materia presens non ad speculationem per prius, sed ad operationem ordinatur*), giacché il politico fa parte di quelle *inquisitiones*, che essendo in nostro potere attuare, *non solum speculari, sed etiam operari possumus...*¹⁸³

For Russo, and I agree entirely, we must take Dante's interest in praxis seriously, within the whole picture of social history of his time. As Russo continues, with a perspective that is valid for all of Dante's political work:

Solo a questo patto una rilettura della *Monarchia* di Dante riuscirà a dare risultati più articolati e più fruttosi; al patto cioè di riconoscervi un tentativo complesso di risposta teorico-politica a domande storiche ben precise, tentativo e domande esattamente collocabili e riconoscibili nella più vasta dinamica sociale del tempo, e non l'esito sterile della reazione isolata e dell'esaltazione solipsistica dell'esule fiorentino. Il riferimento all'esperienza biografica di Dante resta viceversa fondamentale per evidenziarne il carattere «tipico» in quanto esperienza storica di un intellettuale formatosi all'interno di una società già economicamente avanzata, come fu, per quei tempi, la società fiorentina, in cui la situazione strutturale con la comparsa di fenomeni come l'accumulazione del

¹⁸³ Russo, *Impero e stato di diritto: studio su «Monarchia» ed «Epistole» politiche di Dante*, 16.

denaro, il lavoro salariato e la divisione tra i gruppi umani della comunità per interessi contrari e competitivi, assunse forme a modi, che la moderna storiografia, sia pure in maniera controversa, ha definito di tipo protocapitalistico.

What Russo highlights is the need for a historicist or historical materialist approach that cuts through the interpretive problems that have riddled and ruined many previous attempts to define Dante's political thought outside of the real capitalist-protocapitalist social, economic, and political structures of medieval Italy in which Dante lived and wrote. If the superstructure of Dante's time has been widely observed to be a robust formation, as shown above, of capitalist interests developing hand-in-glove with political, church, and municipal institutions and interests as a *political economy*, we must also see that one reason for scholars' inability to see it as such has a lot to do with the overtly philosophical, theological, and religious valence of its ideological composition and self-presentation. During this time in the medieval communes *there were* also many religious movements and the influence of Christian scholasticism, mendicant piety, as well as well newly articulated theories of statehood, which from Roman Law and the recovery of Aristotle, inherited new conceptions of private property and authority from past writers that meshed well the needs of the new historical realities and issued in an array of updated conceptions. The economic element was not completely manifest at the level of ideology, and for the historian it still remains a mostly separate part of the accepted political historiography of medieval Italy, but there is no question that one does not have to look very hard to see its total imbrication in political, religious, and philosophical self-presentation of this society. In sum, it is necessary to recognize that Dante was an intellectual responding to the latter—as his lived his experience in that world entirely—and, as his work from his lyric production

thorough the *Commedia*, *Convivio*, and *Monarchia* shows, with his strong focus on greed, he was also responding explicitly to the strong junction of economics with politics.¹⁸⁴ We must dispense entirely with the quasi-Hegelian move of seeing history as the working of absolute spirit—as Mazzotta and many critics seem to see things—and Dante’s consciousness as *otherworldly*. We might remember Marx’s remark in *Holy Family*, where he begins arguing for a historical materialist approach to history, that “*Real humanism* has no more dangerous enemy... than *spiritualism* or *speculative idealism*, which substitutes “*self-consciousness*” or the “*spirit*” for the *real individual man* and with the evangelist teaches: ‘It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.’ Needless to say, this incorporeal spirit is spiritual only in its imagination.”¹⁸⁵

Steinberg has done some work in addressing the lack of historical specificity in studying Dante, when describing the circulation of Dante’s lyric production in

Accounting for Dante:

early vernacular texts were experienced *in specific social ‘places.’* The manuscript was produced by merchant elite writers for merchant elite readers, and later possessors of the manuscript were also drawn from the mercantile and bourgeois classes. Many of the poets collected in the anthology were representative of the political elite...[underlying] the importance of Italian poetry for maintaining political and social cohesiveness....current scholarship about the duecento lyric, ignoring its anthropological uses, rarely explores the implications of class. Most studies view Dante and his contemporaries as divided by psychological, doctrinal, and aesthetic concerns, not by economic ones. As a result, *Dante remains the last flame of High Scholasticism*, untainted by the emergence of the marchands ecrivains. While erudite commentaries on the *Commedia* increasingly help us understand the medieval world behind its creation—a world split between church and empire, Guelph and Ghibbeline, Guittonians and stilnovists—the social

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 17-20.

¹⁸⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Holy Family, Or, Critique of Critical Critique* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Pub. House, 1956), 16.

divisions that underlie such categories and that informed the politics and culture of Dante's time are often overlooked.¹⁸⁶

The main thrust of this study, taking Barolini's exhortation "always historicize" seriously, is to re-engage in a historicist examination of the *political economy* of Dante's Italy that exits tradition of "many commentaries...[repeating] previous commentaries...because the implicit hermeneutic guidelines structured by Dante into his text determine, indeed overdetermine, interpretation."¹⁸⁷ This study seeks to continue the work of Barolini and Nardi in Dante studies, but also move in the direction of laying the foundation for making a contribution outside of Dante studies in the vein of Curtius by contextualizing Dante's 'minor' political works in terms of the political and economic history of his time. Curtius importantly notes in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* "that dissociation from the basic foundation of history which is observable in all the medieval philologies is the tendency to replace unknown concretes by non-existent abstractions. Dissociation from history in the widest sense: national, political, social, economic, legal history; history of philosophy and science; ecclesiastical history..."¹⁸⁸ Where Curtius was speaking of research into the problematic area of the "knightly and courtly ethos," his methodological insight is equally true with regards to making proper sense of medieval economy and politics generally and, in particular, Dante's 'political' works as part of a coherent oeuvre and as texts that are not mere

¹⁸⁶ Steinberg, *Accounting for Dante: Urban Readers and Writers in Late Medieval Italy*, 145.

¹⁸⁷ Barolini, "'Only Historicize': History, Material Culture (Food, Clothes, Books), and the Future of Dante Studies", 37.

¹⁸⁸ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013), 520.

reflections of scholastic caricatures or evidence *ex post facto* that reinforces spurious stock-historiographies of the medieval period and onwards, often with vague genuflections to authority, humanism, or cultural antiquities (one thinks for example of the repetition of notions similar and derived from the influential assumptions of Burkhardt's *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien* [1860]): "only cooperation between the various medieval specialties can solve the problem...medieval philology must ask of medieval historiography what it has to tell concerning medieval class-ideals, and the concrete political, military, and economic factors which conditioned them."¹⁸⁹

Therefore, in this study I intend to do the following:

1) to take Dante seriously in terms of historical knowledge. He talks about a new politics, greed, and political regimes. He is disputing both sides of the church - state binary. As scholars are not careful in specifying what Guelfs and Ghibellines are, we ought to do so. It is necessary to re-parse the political and institutional history of Italy.

2) to graft the real political history of Italy and Florence, church and empire, on to the history of the real economic development of Italy and particularly Florence. These histories are already imbricated, and they need to be shown specifically in relation to Dante to make sense of his political commitments. When we are talking about politics we are also talking about economy and the emergence of (proto)capitalism. I here propose, by running through a detailed investigation of the *popolo* and guild regimes of Florence, to show that there did emerge a class-based, wealth-based oligarchy in

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 536.

Florence that then later consolidated its power further in big banking consortia during Dante's life. Scholars almost never talk about this fact as motivating Dante's political thought, although it is clearly the most plausible explanation for Dante's unique focus on greed and monarchical justice as a remedy for greed's debilitating effects.

3) to carefully examine Aristotle in terms of Dante. Particularly how his philosophy of justice and wealth-getting moors all of the main claims Dante makes. By understanding Dante's use of Aristotle as an Aristotelian inspired critique of political economy, we will hence see that Dante is responding to the real emergent capitalism of his time and we will give significant texture and nuance to his response to the church/empire conflicts, also seeing the political and economic structures of Florence and international entities as particularly operative in making such a critique necessary.

Thus while this chapter 1 serves as an intital overview of this study, Chapter 2 examines the international and political situation of Florence and Italy during Dante's time, Chapter 3 proposes a new historiography of this history and examines it as the development of *Political Economy*, while chapter 4 explores the existence of capitalism in Florence and Italy in the 13th and 14th centuries, how we might define capitalism, while chapter 5 examines Aristotle's critique of political economy in the *Ethics* and *Politics* and Dante's deployment of such political economic vocabulary to denounce the injustices generated by it in *Convivio* and *Monarchia*.

Chapter 2. *Papato, Impero, Commune, Banchiere*: The History of International, Italian, and Florentine Political Development in the 13th - Early 14th Centuries

In order to illustrate my thesis about Dante, as explained in the previous chapter, it is imperative here to furnish an appropriately detailed historical overview of the Italian and International political situation as well as the political conditions of Florence, not only during the time of Dante's life, but also over the course of the 13th century.¹⁹⁰ As Franz Hettinger has framed it, to understand the politics and society of Dante's time historically one must see that it is under the spell of the two opposed forces of "Papato ed Impero."¹⁹¹ In fact, this is often taken to be the historiographical paradigm of the entire high Middle Ages.¹⁹² However, this is not entirely accurate. For the purpose of historical precision, we must see that the political situation Dante is responding to in *Convivio* and *Monarchia* is in fact framed by the interplay, as Joan Ferrante and Philip Jones have pointed out, of the papal/imperial contest but *within* the complex and advanced context of the emerging Italian city-states, their factions, and political commitments—also heavily determined by commerce, trade, and markets—evolving

¹⁹⁰ Much has of course been written about Feudal Europe as well as the social/political history of Italy before the 13th century. As Jones has pointed out in *The Italian City-state: From Commune to Signoria*, 1-50, what applies to feudal Europe in the 13th and 14th century is often invalid for Italy, which reached a state of significant urbanization and economic advancement in transition from feudalism prior to the end of feudalism in the rest of Europe. For such context see the important work of Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society* (London: Routledge, 1989). On Italy in particular, see David Abulafia, *Italy in the Central Middle Ages: 1000-1300* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) and John Kenneth Hyde, *Society and Politics in Medieval Italy; The Evolution of the Civil Life, 1000-1350* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973).

¹⁹¹ Franz Hettinger, "Die Politik der Göttlichen Komödie," in *Die Göttliche Komödie des Dante Alighieri nach ihrem wesentlichen Inhalt und Charakter* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1889), 539; d'Entrèves, *Dante As a Political Thinker*, 8.

¹⁹² For an example of this way of reading high medieval political thought in this fashion, see Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300-1450*, 44-78.

from the time of their increasing independence from imperial and papal claims in the early 13th and into the 14th century's beginning of "civic humanism."¹⁹³ This historical sketch is thus intended to give a factual overview of the political history of the imperial/papal (temporal/spiritual) antagonism in which we must, on a very basic level, contextualize Dante's political thought, not least because it has traditionally always been understood this way and because it is still pertinent for a historicized re-examination of the facts. In so doing, this chapter also intends to set up the content of this second chapter for a more historicized and detailed political economic analysis in the third chapter.

The further historicizing of this political context will show the deficiency of the heuristic dualisms of spiritual/temporal papacy/empire and show the necessity of further examination into the overdetermination—in an intellectual framework of theological vs. secular antagonism—of the historiography and interpretive framework of political thought of this time. Such overdetermination occurs at the expense of the extensive social, economic, and cultural histories which were so decisive in the actual formation and development of political activities, governmental policies, papal and imperial actions, and political institutions in the city states during this time.

Thus this chapter will examine:

¹⁹³ Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*; On civic humanism see James Hankins, *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).. Late medieval city states and civic consciousness in the 14th century are often taken to presage the "renaissance." Surely it is the other way around, see "Renaissances and Revolutions" in Jones, *The Italian City-state: From Commune to Signoria* 1-54.

- 1) the International and Italian political situation, the emergence of the *Guelfi* and *Ghibellini*, and the basic historical antagonisms between the papacy and the empire over time.

- 2) the Florentine political situation as an interconnected and simultaneous historical phenomenon closely influencing and being influenced by the former.

- 3) the later stages of Florentine political development as tracing Dante's life and career, giving an explanation of the events that surrounded his exile and vehemently political literary production in the 1290s and early 1300s.

1. International and Italian Political Situation

When Henry VI (1165-1197), of the house of Hohenstaufen, son of Frederick Barbarossa, and Holy Roman Emperor (1191-1194) died, his intention of clamping down on papal power suffered a setback.¹⁹⁴ Innocent III (Lotario dei Conti di Segni; 1160-1216), taking advantage of a paralyzing double election between competing houses of the German monarchy—of Philip of Swabia (1177-1208), brother of the deceased Henry VI, and Otto IV of Brunswick (1175-1218), of the house of “Welf” in 1198¹⁹⁵—began his attempt to move imperial power into the solid orbit of the papacy, then slipping away, according to the tradition of papal prerogatives of the Gregorian reform movement that effectively had settled the investiture conflict.¹⁹⁶ Innocent was thus also famous for his juridical consolidation of church powers, including the two firmaments doctrine, which is key to understanding the third book of the *Monarchia*.¹⁹⁷ Much has been written about this that we will have to content ourselves to pass in outline, as this is merely background information for contextualizing the political scene during Dante’s

¹⁹⁴ Thomas Carson, *Barbarossa in Italy* (New York: Italica Press, 1994), xii-xvi.

¹⁹⁵ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 65-66.

¹⁹⁶ Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

¹⁹⁷ *Gesta Inn. III.*, sec., ii., p. 3, 4, as quoted in Alexander Clarence Flick, *The Rise of the Mediaeval Church and Its Influence on the Civilisation of Western Europe From the First to the Thirteenth Century* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), 547: “God...hath set in...the heavens two great lights, the greater to rule the day, the lesser to rule the night, so also hath He set up in His Church...two great powers: the greater to rule the day, that is the souls; the lesser to rule the night, that is the bodies of men. These powers are the pontifical and royal: but the moon, as being the lesser body, borroweth all her light from the sun both in the quantity and quality of the light she sends forth, as also in her position and functions in the heavens...The royal power borrows all its dignity and splendour from the pontifical.”

lifetime.¹⁹⁸ In any case, this conflict is also the real origin of the terms “Ghibelline” and “Guelf” in Italian politics. The terms emerge in the context of the battle of succession between the Swabians and the Guelfs (Welfs) in the remnants of the Holy Roman Empire, while “Ghibellino” comes from *Waiblingen*, one of the Hohenstaufen Castles and comes to stand for the imperial side, and thus the terminology merges into the battle between the Papacy and Empire.¹⁹⁹ The conflict between Otto and Philip and Innocent III, according to Kelsen, “ha portato, di conseguenza, a quella iniqua confusione di interessi e rapporti politici, che caratterizza il tredicesimo secolo,” and it was at this time that the terms “Guelf” and “Ghibelline” began to be used for names of political parties in Italy, to set apart supporters of the Empire from those of the Papacy, without completely or necessarily corresponding to such support in particular cases.²⁰⁰

In any case, Innocent, after initially supporting Otto IV, switched his support to Frederick, Henry VI’s son—future Frederick II—and pitted him against Otto following the latter’s murder of Philip.²⁰¹ Nonetheless, as king of Sicily, and with this papal

¹⁹⁸ On Innocent III, see Jane E. Sayers, *Innocent III: Leader of Europe, 1198-1216* (London: Longman, 1994). On Papal monarchy, investiture, and the medieval political history behind the two swords doctrine and its subsequent effects and evolution, see Walter Ullmann, *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages; A Study in the Ideological Relation of Clerical to Lay Power* (London: Methuen, 1962); Watt, “Spiritual and Temporal Powers”; William Francis Barry, *The Papal Monarchy From St. Gregory the Great to Boniface VIII (590-1303)* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1922).

¹⁹⁹ Robert Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze. Vol. 1.* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1972), 57-60; Abulafia, *Italy in the Central Middle Ages: 1000-1300*, 272; Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 2.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

support, Frederick II—who Berman has called “the most brilliant and the most powerful monarch in the history of Europe after Charlemagne and prior to Napoleon”—managed to get the upper hand on his adversaries and assert the supremacy of his dynasty, becoming one of the most fierce adversaries of the pope, his former protector.²⁰² Upon the election of Cardinal Sinibaldo Fieschi, a partisan of the imperial side, as Innocent IV, Frederick is purported to have declared “nessun Papa può essere ghibellino.”²⁰³ Likewise, now no emperor could be considered “Guelf”—even if of Guelf lineage. Frederick—born of an Italian mother and German (Swabian) lineage—was indeed a decisive figure in the history of Italian politics of the Middle Ages, in that he inherited not only the crown, but dreams of world domination for his dynasty and the establishment of a secular administrative state, the details of which have been covered extensively by Kantorowicz and Abulafia, which was decisive in the institutional transition of forms of state between feudal demesnes, papal protectorates, and modern administrative secular governments.²⁰⁴ In the early 13th century, Frederick’s court was not only a cultural center, but a juridical and scientific center which produced the *Constitutions of Melfi (Liber Augustalis)*, and was responsible for particularly important juridical concepts that would contribute to secular corporate statism. These

²⁰² Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 413.

²⁰³ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 2.

²⁰⁴ On Frederick II, see David Abulafia, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) and Ernst H Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second, 1194-1250* (London: Constable, 1931). Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies; A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, 97-143; Regarding the evolution of modern states, Joseph R Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 12, gets it right saying, “The modern state, wherever we find it today, is based on the pattern which emerged in Europe in the period 1100-1600.”

concepts slowly filtered down into the legal culture of all of Italy and remained of key importance for the formation of later Italian city-states as they structured their political systems in response to mercantile culture and the broader political conflicts.²⁰⁵

Frederick was also responsible for insisting on imperial investiture over temporal affairs directly from God, and employed his jurists—including Cino da Pistoia—to fashion such arguments by reinterpreting Roman law and re-appropriating classical political philosophy for the cause.²⁰⁶ On the church side clerics employed by the “Parte guelfa” — or the papacy— were making essentially the same arguments but inverted, namely that the pope had supreme authority over all temporal matters through his spiritual office.²⁰⁷ So in addition to being pivotal in the explosion of the contest of powers, with Frederick II, as Kelsen puts it, “la lotta tra imperatore e papa si ingigantì in una lotta tra fede e miscredenza.”²⁰⁸

Innocent is followed by popes Honorius III (1217-1227) and Gregory IX (1227-1241), the latter a particularly fierce opponent of Frederick’s political dominance — who

²⁰⁵ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies; A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, 115.

²⁰⁶ Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* 426-427, remarks on this: “Frederick stated: ‘As God the father is manifested through Christ, so is justice manifested through the emperor. As Christ, has founded his church, so the emperor has founded his empire.’ The church, in this concept, insofar as it is a visible, institutional church, is within the empire, and all temporal power of the church is subordinate the emperor.”

²⁰⁷ On the hierocratic and papal supremacy arguments in medieval political thought in the 13th century, see the effective overview of Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300-1450*, 82-125.

²⁰⁸ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 3.

excommunicated Frederick for promising a crusade, then failing to commit to it.²⁰⁹ Later Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254) renewed this excommunication against the emperor, declared him deposed, and invited the German princes to participate in new imperial elections.²¹⁰ These developments mark a shift in the fortunes of imperial ambitions: Frederick's mercenaries were soon defeated and Frederick died in 1250. The papal victory over the Hohenstaufen (discussed more in chapter 3) was very significant for the political economic history of Italy, and it was effectively complete with the defeat of Manfred Hohenstaufen and the Ghibellines at the hands of Charles of Anjou in 1266,²¹¹ leaving Guelf power allied with the papacy symbolically dominant over Italy for the last third of the 13th century.²¹²

The papacy had won, but Kelsen notes that it was hardly much of a “win”:

Tuttavia era una vittoria di Pirro. Nella lotta mortale che aveva abbattuto l'impero, anche il papato si era dissanguato. Da ambedue le parti, a dire il vero, si fece ancora una volta il tentativo di rianimare le morte idee della supremazia mondiale, ma invano. Da parte papale fu Bonifacio VIII (1294-1303), che arrivò all'idea avventurosa di richiamare di nuovo in vita il tempo di Gregorio VII. Solo la dura resistenza di Filippo il Bello di Francia dovette fargli capire come questo pensiero fosse sterile.²¹³

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 3.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 3.

²¹¹ Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition*, 412-413.

²¹² Holmes, *Florence, Rome, and the Origins of the Renaissance*, 21-24.

²¹³ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 4.

In the long term, papal power went into a long-term decline after Boniface VIII, particularly with the so-called “Babylonian Captivity” in Avignon.²¹⁴ Kelsen notes that in this period, following Boniface, one further attempt was made to reconstitute the old empire on the Ghibelline side. Namely, with a Ghibelline claimant to the Holy Roman Empire, Henry VII (1308-1313), to whom Dante himself wrote and for whom Dante had such high hopes of restoring order to Italy, appeared temporarily capable of asserting German imperial authority over the popes.²¹⁵ But this attempt ended up being in vain, not just due to Henry’s death, but because it was a new “epoca della maturata coscienza nazionale dei popoli, alla quale ripugnava una signoria mondiale unitaria, che tutto livellasse.”²¹⁶

Thus, while this contest of church and empire greatly influenced the political situation in 13th century Italy, Kelsen rather succinctly characterizes its true complexity terms of the following three historical trends: 1) the “potenza nascente delle città italiane,” 2) the “straordinaria atomizzazione statale” 3) the “emancipazione dell’Italia dall’imperatore e dall’impero.”²¹⁷ The important part to understand is the extent to

²¹⁴ F. Donald Logan, *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2002), 297-314.

²¹⁵ On Dante’s *Epistles* to Henry, see Mazzoni, "Teoresi e prassi in Dante politico" and Claire E. Honess, "Introduction: 'Rome Once Had Two Suns'," in *Dante Alighieri: Four Political Letters*, auth. Dante Alighieri (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2007). On Henry VII in Italy, see William M. Bowsky, *Henry VII in Italy: The Conflict of Empire and City-state, 1310-1313* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960).

²¹⁶ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 4.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

which the first trend, the growing power of Italian cities and the institutional-political developments they introduced, is significantly related to economic and mercantile development and increasingly came to overshadow the second two factors. The power of the Italian city-states really came to “conferire ai secoli seguenti della storia italiana la sua peculiare fisionomia.”²¹⁸

This power of the cities was directly related to their economic situation:

Protette dai torbidi e dalle lotte dell'undicesimo e dodicesimo secolo, esse usurparono a poco a poco le regalie dei vescovi, lottarono vittoriosamente contro la nobiltà feudale, fondarono una vita comunale organizzata e acquistarono, mediante il commercio e l'industria, una grande prosperità e con essa potere politico.²¹⁹

This factor was very decisive, in addition to the fact that the Hohenstaufen (Swabian) dynasty, especially Frederick II, made the mistake of underestimating the cities, and the more autonomous democratic impulse that had developed in them. Frederick's failed imperial attempts were a consequence of his fundamental misunderstanding of an epochal change in political and social realities. The Peace of Constance (1183), whose signatories were Hohenstaufen Frederick Barbarossa and the Lombard League, had allowed the cities to retain regalia of local jurisdiction, elect their own councils and pass legislation, while consuls and judges still had to receive investiture from the emperor and take an oath to the Holy Roman Emperor.²²⁰ In any case, after the death of Frederick Barbarossa's son Henry VI in 1197, the cities began to

²¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 5.

²²⁰ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 65.

neglect their imperial obligations, and the Peace of Constance became the focal point of the battle between the second Lombard League and Frederick II from 1226-1250. This explains why intellectual historians like Gierke, Kantorowicz, and Berman have recognized that the new political and juridical thought of this period was premised on rearticulating traditional paradigms within a situation of cities, fragmentary power, and, above all, the new consequences of the rule of the bourgeoisie: “il nuovo pensiero giuridico-statuale, che corrisponde a questo principio, trovò la sua espressione nel fatto che la borghesia fu riconosciuta come detentrica del potere statale accanto alla nobiltà e al clero...”²²¹ Despite his desire to establish a new German imperial hegemony, this macro-level development of the power of the cities over the late 12th and early 13th centuries was unstoppable, and Frederick II was powerless against the trend of urbanization and the rise of autonomous city-state power which was to define the political and social future of Italy for some time to come, even in the traditionally less urban south.²²²

After Sicily was taken by the Angevines, the last ties that kept Italy bound to the German empire were essentially severed: the “Holy Roman Empire” became a practically empty name. In Italian politics “Guelf” came to stand generally for anti-

²²¹ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 5.

²²² Gino Luzzato, in *An Economic History of Italy: From the Fall of the Roman Empire to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century*, trans. Philip J. Jones (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 79, writes that the “revival of urban life, of which we were able to study the early phases in the eleventh-century towns of Lombardy, and which was probably common to the other towns of the Po valley and Tuscany, had also spread during the eleventh and twelfth centuries into southern Italy.” On the decisive factor of urbanization and urban centers of power in relation to the countryside and the remnants of feudal formations, see Jones, *The Italian City-state: From Commune to Signoria*, 152-159.

imperialism, as Kelsen says “principio che venne considerato nazionale,” though not anti-monarchism, as the term came to have no meaning in regards to French or Aragonese intervention and alliance with Guelf powers in Italy.²²³ Italy—albeit fragmented—was left to itself, and this emancipation from imperial control had several negative consequences. First and foremost, many cities fell, almost without exception, under the *signoria* of tyrants—almost univocally belonging to noble families that stirred up factional conflicts to secure or come into more power, through demagoguery or violence.²²⁴ Thus, after Frederick II’s death, most of northern Italy was under the influence of warring dynasties, while the rest of the peninsula was divided between the two southern kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, the papal states, various independent *signorie*, some republics of an oligarchical nature, such as Venice, or “democratic” oligarchies such as Florence. Stimulating extreme political faction in this decentralized rise of the Italian cities was the standard procedure of politics, and any precise historiography will see that by mid-century the contest between empire and papacy was but a nominal shell containing many more complex contests:

Il vecchio principio della politica italiana di stimolare il conflitto tra due signori per non servire nessuno trovava anche adesso la sua piena validità. In realtà il grande contrasto tra Impero e Papato, che aveva sconvolto per così lungo tempo il paese, era quasi del tutto estinto. Ma i partiti dei guelfi e dei ghibellini, che esso aveva generato, rimasero esistenti come prima, soltanto che essi entrarono in un

²²³ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 6.

²²⁴ On the transformation from *commune* to *signoria*, see Jones, *The Italian City-state: From Commune to Signoria*; Jones, "Communes and Despots: The City State in Late-Medieval Italy"; On violence and faction in the Italian communes see Randolph Starn, *Contrary Commonwealth: The Theme of Exile in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) and Carol Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates: Lineage and Faction in a Medieval Commune* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

nuovo stadio di sviluppo. La lotta per la Chiesa e per l'Impero cessò adesso del tutto di costituirne il programma... Gli antichi nomi di partiti dei guelfi e dei ghibellini costituirono per i più svariati contrasti di interessi, di natura politica o privata un vasto pretesto. Qui Guelfo, là Ghibellino divenne il grido di battaglia persino per le miserabili discordie tra famiglie. Dato che le più piccole controversie, private e politiche, si inserivano, per lo più nominalmente, nei due grandi principi in lotta, appariva come se l'Italia fosse divisa solo in due grandi riserve di eserciti. In verità vi erano però centinaia dei più diversi contrasti che agitavano il paese.²²⁵

²²⁵ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 6-7.

2. The Political Conditions of Florence

Burckhardt said about Florence in der *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*: “The most elevated political thought and the most varied forms of human development are found united in the history of Florence, which in this sense deserves the name of the first modern State in the world.”²²⁶ Indeed, it goes without saying that understanding the political conditions of Florence is important for understanding Dante, but it is also important for understanding the entire Italian and international political situation to which Dante was responding.

Florence, the *de facto* Tuscan capital, entered the thirteenth century not being one of the major power players in northern Italy, though it was noted “per prosperità, per una ricca attività industriale e per una popolazione dedita al commercio.”²²⁷ In Florence, as in other similar towns public life—and this is increasingly true from the middle of the 13th century and the emergence of the “primo popolo” to the end of the 13th century and the *ordinamenti di giustizia*²²⁸—becomes dominated by the opposition of two antagonistic elements: the conservative nobility eager to defend its old power, and the “borghesia” which had gradually risen up with its new wealth and was looking to make changes and attain greater political influence. Within the “borghesia” one must draw a distinction—which becomes increasingly relevant as the century wears on—

²²⁶ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy: An Essay*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (New York: New American Library of World Literature, 1960), 63.

²²⁷ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 8.

²²⁸ John M. Najemy, "Dante and Florence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

between the “aristocracy” of “denaro,” that is of the class of now rich commercial merchants, the so-called “popolo grasso” and the low, common people, this group divided into those belonging to the lesser guilds (*arti minori*) and those of the “proletariato” the so-called “plebe minuta” or “popolo minuto.”²²⁹ Within this bourgeoisie, the social structure was also subdivided into the milites and pedites, *cavalieri* and *fanti*, to the first of which belonged the blood and monied nobility (as the traditional nobility of the contado also became more urbanized and indistinct from the bourgeoisie), and the latter, the “grande massa dei meno abbienti.”²³⁰

The organizational structure and evolution of the Florentine state was driven by conflicts between classes, as well as within the wealthy class, between the nobility and the new rich for political power. At the beginning of the 13th century, at the head of the State were 12-15 consuls or a *podestà*, who from 1207 onwards, was to be a foreigner, for reasons of political precaution—given the delicate situation of political factions.²³¹ Over against these executive organs are the legislative bodies of the council and popular assembly. The “*consilium*” *generale*, was composed of about 150 members while the larger popular assembly would meet four times a year. While the structure of the early Florentine state has been explored elsewhere, these republican structures would evolve

²²⁹ Kelsen, *La Teoria Dello Stato in Dante* 8.; Luzzato, *An Economic History of Italy: From the Fall of the Roman Empire to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century* 79.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*

within the context of the importation of Guelf and Ghibelline splits within Florentine politics and become the institutional structure for political economic oligarchy.²³²

As we learn from Najemy, the mythical roots of the Florentine split into Guelf and Ghibelline are attested by chroniclers Dino Compagni and Villani, also mentioned in *Inferno* 28 and in *Paradiso* by Dante, who claim that they started in the hatred generated between the houses of Uberti and the Buondelmonti over a murder of a prominent member of the Buondelmonti family.²³³ However, this division increasingly had little to do with the larger forces to which they referred.

As Kelsen explains:

si trattava semplicemente di due partiti di nobili, che lottavano tra di loro per la signoria della città, l'uno dei quali cercava appoggio presso il papa, l'altro presso l'imperatore. Con l'altra opposizione tra nobiltà e borghesia questa divisione di fazione non aveva inizialmente nulla a che fare...solo allorché essa acquista una notevole posizione nella costituzione—nella seconda metà del tredicesimo secolo—anche essa ne è soggetta. Il miscuglio delle due opposizioni, tra guelfi e ghibellini da una parte, tra nobiltà e borghesia dall'altra, ha dato alla costituzione fiorentina la sua propria complessa impronta.²³⁴

Until the times of Frederick II, the Guelph families in alliance with the papacy and league of north-central Italian cities, controlled Florentine government.²³⁵ Frederick however, wanted to obtain control of Florence, which was quite powerful as a

²³² John M. Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus in Florentine Electoral Politics, 1280-1400* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

²³³ Najemy, "Dante and Florence", 248.; Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 16.

²³⁴ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 8-9.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 9; Najemy, "Dante and Florence", 239-240.

commercial and political center in Northern Italy, and supported the Ghibelline faction with 800 German knights. The latter managed to smash the Guelfs, and in 1248 a large number of them were banished²³⁶, setting up a Ghibelline restoration. However, this was a short-lived victory: the majority of the populace, especially the predominantly powerful class of large commercial interests (merchants and bankers), was of Guelf leanings.²³⁷ Moreover, the Ghibelline nobility then in power failed to win popular support for several reasons. First, they gave rise to significant vendettas in a largely Guelf populace by confiscating the private property of Guelf families, and destroying their prominent towers and palazzi.²³⁸ Also, they became increasingly aristocratic and reactionary. They further alienated the city's bourgeoisie, because they had obligated the city and its people, more than ever before--when imperial servitude to the "empire" was already largely nominal--to pay heavy taxation to the court and to the military forces of the emperor.²³⁹

What is sometimes called the first "democratic revolution" is better known as the *primo popolo*. In October of 1250, a new government was formed called the "the popolo" and it presented itself as formally neutral between the parties²⁴⁰ and asserted

²³⁶ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 9.; Najemy, "Dante and Florence", 240.; Abulafia, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor*.

²³⁷ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 9.

²³⁸ John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 66.

²³⁹ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 9; Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 66.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 240.

itself as capable of limiting factional influence.²⁴¹ It lasted for approximately ten years before becoming ensnarled in the very struggles it tried to avoid. But from the point of view of establishing its political relationship to the actual social classes of the time, its popular “revolutionary” connotation—as shall be clear later—is not quite popular or revolutionary, and ought to be qualified.²⁴² According to Najemy “the *primo popolo* was no social revolution; it emerged from a split within the elite, between those committed to the factions and those who saw such alliances as damaging to the economic interest of their class and city.”²⁴³

Najemy further notes:

the *primo popolo* clearly attempted to remove the families associated with the elite parties and to replace the old governing class with new men. On the other hand, most of the *Anziani* came from families associated with the major guilds and were involved in banking, trade, and the legal profession. Among those whose professions have been identified were many *Calimala* merchants, some bankers or moneylenders, a dozen from *Por Santa Maria*, twenty jurists or notaries, and five from the Wool guild. No representatives of the minor, or artisan guilds have been identified among these officeholders.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Ibid., 68.

²⁴² Ibid., 24.

²⁴³ Ibid., 67, describes the state organization thusly: “The new chief magistracy was the office of twelve *Anziani*, or Elders, two from each *sesto*, elected twice a year, probably by leaders of the military companies and the guilds. The *Anziani* ran day-to-day affairs of government and had broad judicial, financial, and administrative powers and the exclusive right to initiate legislation (as did the later priors). To become law their proposals had to gain the approval of the legislative councils, both the older ones and the new *Credentia*, with six representatives from each *sesto*, and the Council of the *Capitano del popolo*, whose twenty-four regular members were frequently joined by the 100 standard bearers and rectors of the militia companies and the consuls of the guilds.”

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 67.

The success of the *primo popolo* was based on “the support of the guilds and the military companies in exchange for some representation in government. The *primo popolo* thus foreshadows the analogous policies of later popular governments that reached even farther from the elite for support to mount more radical challenges.”²⁴⁵ This reveals clearly that though “popular” in one sense, the *popolo* was yet majorly organized around wealthy interests and though anti-elite, it demonstrates a collusion and institutional intersection of mercantile interests and political power. The social structure of this *primo popolo* was, as Raveggi characterizes it: “il ricco ceto affaristico dedito alla mercatura ed alle forme più redditizie dell’artigianato.”²⁴⁶

The *primo popolo* was an undisputed victory, however, for bourgeois and mercantile values. The inscription from 1254 on the *palazzo del podestà*, the one constructed from parts of the shortened elite towers, “exalted the city’s wealth, victories, fortune, and power, claiming for Florence the right to rule the sea, the land, and the entire world, and predicting eternal triumph, in the manner of Rome, over subjects to be ruled with justice and law.”²⁴⁷ The *primo popolo* was also responsible for a major event in economic history: the coining of the gold florin, which had the lily on one side and John the Baptist, the city’s patron saint, on the other. The *primo popolo*’s florin has thus

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 68-69.

²⁴⁶ Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del dugento*, 6.

²⁴⁷ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 70.

been noted for its role in fostering Florence's great economic prosperity.²⁴⁸ As Najemy remarks, a new currency had not been minted since Carolingian times until Frederick II imitated Roman imperial coinage, and Genoa and Florence were the first cities to do this, unprecedentedly in 1252.²⁴⁹ It was a declaration of sovereignty, imitation of Rome, and symbol of Florence's expanding wealth and influence.²⁵⁰ As Holmes points out, this economic power and political situation was interlocked with the imperial and papal conflict: "Though Florence was by this time a city of growing industrial and commercial power in which the government of the *primo popolo* minted the florin...its politics were dominated by disputes between ancient city families linked with papal-imperial rivalry."²⁵¹

The position of the Ghibellines was damaged by the revolution, and basically lost its stability entirely with the downfall, after a short-lived period of power, of the Hohenstaufen. The exiled Guelfs returned within the *primo popolo* regime and shared governance with the Ghibellines, but the Ghibelline nobility was unable to resist the twofold opposition of the *popolo* and the Guelfs. By 1258 tensions between the parties were increasing, as Frederick II's son, Manfred, was seeking to re-establish

²⁴⁸ Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del dugento*, 5.

²⁴⁹ Gino Luzzato, *An Economic History of Italy: From the Fall of the Roman Empire to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century*, trans. Philip J. Jones (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 126-129; On coinage also see Henri Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937), 115.

²⁵⁰ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 70.

²⁵¹ Holmes, *Florence, Rome, and the Origins of the Renaissance*, 6.

Hohenstaufen hegemony in Italy— and the Ghibellines saw an opportunity for revenge against the Guelfs and an opportunity to destroy the *primo popolo*.²⁵² The Ghibellines were expelled from the city in 1258, after a series of conflicts, and the discovery of a plot to overthrow the *popolo*.²⁵³ The Ghibelline faction did not give up however, and supported by Manfred, the Florentine army was defeated at the famous battle of Montaperti (*Inferno* 10) in 1260.²⁵⁴ The Ghibellines took the city without resistance after narrowly deciding against the Ghibelline League’s idea to completely destroy the city. Dante’s historiography famously attributes its salvation to Farniata degli Uberti, who “solo” and “a viso aperto,” prevented its destruction, annulled the constitution, and instated what Kelsen calls, “una oppressiva signoria nobiliare.”²⁵⁵ According to Raveggi, Manfred had solid “ragioni politiche ed economiche” for the idea of razing the city, not least of which was that the city, with its immense wealth, had been able to be intensely rebellious, also on account of its geographical location, and had repeatedly proven capable of thwarting his Ghibelline ambitions.²⁵⁶ Manfred also detested its coining of Florins without imperial approval, which gave them special economically based political

²⁵² Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 70.; Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del dugento*, 1-8.

²⁵³ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 70-71.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 71.; Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 10.; Gene A. Brucker, *Florence: The Golden Age, 1138-1737* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 34; George Holmes, *Florence, Rome, and the Origins of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 6.

²⁵⁵ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 10.

²⁵⁶ Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del dugento*, 7.

power for the first time, by linking capital and exchange to regional and super-regional politics because of Florentine state denominated currency which depended on the trust of the Florentine government.²⁵⁷ The Council of the “anziani” and the popular assembly were abolished, and instead a council of 300, mainly backed by aristocratic elements, gained power.²⁵⁸ This was also supported by a consular college of 90 members, with a board—the “credenza”— of 24.²⁵⁹

In any case, the return of the Ghibellines and their newfound power was also short lived.²⁶⁰ The feudal-aristocratic Ghibellines attracted lots of resentment by destroying the property of the exiled Guelph enemies.²⁶¹ The majority of the exiled Guelph families from the *primo popolo* regime in 1260 also enjoyed "una situazione politico-economica di rilievo, che in diversi casi si segnala addirittura come preminente nell'ambito della vita cittadina,"²⁶² which made this Ghibelline power doomed to failure. The death of Manfred, and the defeat at Benevento in 1266, badly undermined the power of the

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 7.

²⁵⁸ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 10-11.; Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del dugento*, 9.

²⁵⁹ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 11.

²⁶⁰ Brucker, *Florence: The Golden Age, 1138-1737*, 34.

²⁶¹ Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del dugento*, 9.

²⁶² Ibid., 15.

Ghibelline faction, and the downfall of Conradin put the nail in its coffin.²⁶³ Two years after Dante's birth, in 1267, the Guelfs took possession of the city again.²⁶⁴ Pope Clement IV, with the imperial throne vacant, first gave its *signoria* to Charles of Naples, pope Clement IV's peacemaker in Tuscany.²⁶⁵ The Ghibellines left the city forever, and the Guelfs came to control the state and organs of power in Florence.²⁶⁶

Holmes states the importance of this event:

The disputes between the two parties never ceased but the Guelf victory of 1266, leading eventually to half a century of general Guelf hegemony, had a profound significance for the Tuscan cities. It meant that, with the exception of the persistently Ghibelline Pisa and Arezzo, they were controlled by Guelf oligarchies. It involved most of the cities in adherence to a Guelf league which included the pope, France, and the Angevin king of Naples. It facilitated the involvement of Tuscan Guelf merchants in the business of the wealthiest part of Europe (that is, Northern France and Flanders) and in the lucrative trade with the underdeveloped kingdom of Naples. It made Tuscan Guelfs the natural bankers of the popes. It encouraged Tuscan interest in the writings and arts of France. The Guelf hegemony is thus an indispensable part of the environment which at the end of the thirteenth century became the world of Dante and Giotto.²⁶⁷

In any case, this equilibrium was short lived too, and with the separation between the Curia and Charles, the main allies of the Guelfs, some conflicts also arose within this

²⁶³ Villani, *Cronica*, 6, 83-86; Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 11; Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del dugento*, 10-11.

²⁶⁴ Brucker, *Florence: The Golden Age, 1138-1737*, 34.

²⁶⁵ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 11.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁶⁷ Holmes, *Florence, Rome, and the Origins of the Renaissance*, 6-7.

party as well.²⁶⁸ King Charles renounced his curacy in Tuscany; and pope Nicholas III—Giovani Gaetano Orsini— sent cardinal Latino Frangipani as his legate to the city to repress the conflicts and disorder that had erupted. Latino, who appears to have been a dependable associate of the Mozzi banking family, whose member Andrea Mozzi (bishop of Florence from 1287-1295) was his chief delegate, arrived in Florence on 8 October 1279.²⁶⁹ Latino was tasked both with settling the new dissension amongst the Guelfs, and ending their feud with restive Ghibelline elements. To this effect in 1279 a peace was drawn up which included the return of the Ghibellines and the restitution of their confiscated properties.²⁷⁰

Brucker notes that this phase saw the true consolidation of power amongst Guelf elites, and that the latter, moreover, was truly an *economic elite* that by the time of Dante's teenage years had solidified its power and interests over the city of Florence:

the systematic degradation and impoverishment of the Ghibelline families transformed the character of the city's elite, which had lost an important segment of its ancient feudal element. By the end of the 13th century, this elite contained a larger proportion of families of more recent origins, whose fortunes were largely, though not exclusively, mercantile. The old coalition of aristocratic *casate* had

²⁶⁸ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 12.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 12; Orsini appears in the canto of the Simoniacs in *Inferno* 19:69-78; 82-7: “sappi ch’io fui vestito del gran manto; e veramente fui figliuol dell’orsa, cupido sì per avanzar gli orsatti, che su l’avere e qui me misi in borsa...” In discussing this, Nicola Longo, *I papi, Roma e Dante: L’idea e le immagini di Roma nella Commedia dantesca* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2004), 53, writes “con questi versi Dante esprime, in forma di previsione, la sua condanna all’inferno tanto per Bonifacio VIII che raggiungerà Nicolò III (con cui egli sta dialogando) che per il guascone Clemente V de Goth, che lo seguirà nella medesima pena. Non solo si ricorda la cupidigia del papa Orsini a vantaggio della propria famiglia, ma si evidenzia il tradimento con cui il papa francese porrà la chiesa di Cristo al servizio di Filippo il Bello, in cambio della nomina papale.”

²⁷⁰ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 13.

broken down after more than a century of internal strife. Another challenge to the power and influence of the old noble families emerged gradually during the 13th century: in the rise of the *popolo* which first came to power in the 1250s (the regime of the primo popolo), and then after a temporary eclipse, created a new political order in the 1280s, the government of the guilds. The guilds were organizations of merchants, industrialists, bankers, lawyers, and other professional and craft groups. They had grown steadily in size, wealth and political influence, particularly after 1250, paralleling the expansion of the city's population and economy. The leaders of the *popolo* were recruited from families (the Medici, Strozzi, Rucelai, Peruzzi, etc.) that were very active in trade, banking and industry. The rank and file included petty merchants, shopkeepers and artisans who belonged to the middle echelons of the city's social and economic order.²⁷¹

Here we also see the beginning of rather constant ecclesiastical influence in coalition with economic Guelf interests in the particular governance of the Florentine constitution. A reform of the constitution was made in favor of the "popolo" with the "capitano del popolo" and a new "collegio" of 14 men made responsible for keeping the peace.²⁷² To make sure that the city remained under the power of the papacy, the "podestà" and the captain of the people had to be nominated by the pope every two years. However, the cardinal's mission did not have the effects that had been hoped for, as the city did not bow to papal power nor were the internal conflicts resolved.²⁷³ Both the Guelf and Ghibelline conflicts could not be resolved, and new feuds arose within the two factions of the nobility. Meanwhile, the "popolo" did not trust either faction, and was ready to rid itself of the onerous guardianship of the nobility, which in June 1282 led to a bloodless "second" democratic revolution, which limited the power of the

²⁷¹ Brucker, *Florence: The Golden Age, 1138-1737*, 34-35.

²⁷² Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 13.

²⁷³ On Nicholas III's political objectives, more indepth, see Jones, *The Italian City-state: From Commune to Signoria*, 344.

nobility to a minimum²⁷⁴ and was known as the *secondo popolo* or "priorate of the guilds": the rule of the guild corporations, united around economic and trade interests, over the political affairs of the commune.²⁷⁵

The most important progress made by the "secondo popolo" in the second popular constitution, which put all political powers into the hands of the "popolo," was the creation of the office of the "priors, which took the place of the collegio of 14 which had been founded by Fragipani, and who were elected by the "corporations."²⁷⁶ These are the guild corporations, also known as the "arti,"²⁷⁷ and this development also shows how already at this time the commercial and mercantile nature of Florence had already begun to heavily determine its politics. There were 21 guild "corporazioni"—7 major

²⁷⁴ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 13.: Brucker, *Florence: The Golden Age, 1138-1737* 35, argues that "One of the many influences conducing to this development, specified by Brucker, is that "though many popolani had been involved in the factional struggles between Ghibelline and Guelf, as partisans of the Guelf faction, they were increasingly opposed to the incessant violence arising from these conflicts. While recognizing the value of a military caste whose members, trained in warfare, could fight for the commune, they resented the arrogant and lawless behavior of these prepotent individuals. One measure designed to limit the power of these families focused upon their towers, which were limited to a height of 30 meters (98 feet)."

²⁷⁵ Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus in Florentine Electoral Politics, 1280-1400*, 17-42.

²⁷⁶ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 13; Najemy, in "Dante and Florence", 1, remarks, about the secondo popolo, that it ushered in a great new era of stability: "From the Primo Popolo of 1250-60 to the Ghibelline government of 1260-66, the popular revival of 1266-67, the Angevin protectorate of 1267-80, and finally to the papally sponsored government of the Fourteen in 1280-82, no Florentine regime had succeeded in sinking firm institutional roots into the shifting sands of communal politics. The great success of the guild-based priorate, which took hold and became the pivotal magistracy of the republic for the next two centuries, thus stands in sharp contrast to the constitutional instability of the previous thirty years."

²⁷⁷ The definitive work on the Florentine guilds remains Alfred Doren, *Le Arti Fiorentine, 2 Vols.*

“maggiori,” 5 minor “minori,” and 9 “minute”. Among the major guilds were the “giuristi,” “lanaiuoli,” “cambiavalute,” “fabbricanti di lanerie,” “medici e speciali,” “commercianti di seta,” and “commercianti di pellicce.” The minor guilds were composed of the “mercanti di ritaglio,” “macellai,” “calzolai e calzaiuoli,” “maestri falegnami e maestri di pietre,” “fabbricanti e negozianti di ferramenta.” The “minute” were composed of “piccoli maestri.”

Only members of the 7 major guilds had political rights (later with the minor guilds the 12), and for this reason, many nobles enlisted in one of the major guilds so as not to be excluded.²⁷⁸ Jones details how in fact, this exclusion of other guilds from the regime was indicative of the strong consolidation of capitalist elements in Florence.²⁷⁹ The influence of the guilds was most evident in the election of the priors, of which there were 6, one for each “sesto” or ward of the city, and each had two-month terms.²⁸⁰ Their office was to “vigilare sul tesoro (amministrazione del patrimonio comunale), esercitare la funzione giurisdizionale su tutti e prendere le difese dei deboli e dei piccoli contro i forti e i grandi.”²⁸¹ The elections of the priors took place through a board committee, in which the heads of the guilds played a decisive role along with exiting incumbent priors. There were also, besides the priors—whose main activity was involved in legislation—two “supremi uffici” of the podestà and the capitano del popolo.

²⁷⁸ Kelsen, *La Teoria Dello Stato in Dante*, 14.

²⁷⁹ Jones, *The Italian City-state: From Commune to Signoria*.

²⁸⁰ Kelsen, *La Teoria Dello Stato in Dante*, 14.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

According to Kelsen, “inoltre in apparenza niente di essenziale fu cambiato nei maggiori e minori collegi consiliari, che affiancavano i due rappresentanti supremi della città.”²⁸²

There was no long lasting tranquility or order following the implementation of this constitution, but the consolidation of the *popolo* as an economically stratified elite was continuing along with great success: in 1289 the “consiglio dei 100” was created, which was a financial commission upon whose agreement every request for funds depended, “prima che essa venisse presentata ai collegi consiliari di rito.”²⁸³ The members of this new college were nominated by the priors from a pool of citizens who paid more than 100 florins of tax. The principle undergirding this institution, namely that those who have the most tax burden are entitled to control the purse of the state, according to Kelsen (and Hartwig) is an evident departure from the earlier medieval corporative doctrine of the state.²⁸⁴

In 1290, the term of the podestà was reduced from one year to a half year. It was also established that between two priorates that there had to be a gap of three years between candidacies as an effective sort of term limit. The number of officers for “arti maggiori” was capped at 12. The nobility, however, could not bear its lack of political power before the growing affirmation of guild-republican, and popular power: it did not want to tolerate a *signoria* of the guilds that deprived it of all its traditional political rights. Thus it was able to make use of the distinction which became ever more obvious

²⁸² Ibid., 14.

²⁸³ Ibid., 14.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 14.

between the “borghesia dominante” the so called popolo grasso which had slowly taken on the “modi di fare” of the nobility, and the poorest people, completely deprived of political rights.²⁸⁵ Thus when the remnants of the traditional noble families and even the new nobles, encouraged by the warrior glory of renewed factional strife (driven by a certain fetishism of violence and pseudo-knighthood and a clash of powerful clans), and attempting to profit from this internal division within the *popolo*, then publicly and forcefully opposed itself to the existing order, another revolution took place that solidified and guaranteed the continuity of the new constitution around the interests of the wealthy bourgeois guildsmen's interests.²⁸⁶ These nobles who had opposed the existing order were labeled the Florentine “magnates” and a movement arose to punish them and limit their attempt to exert political power over and above the priorate of the guilds.²⁸⁷ This movement was led by a noble who had defected to become a popular rabble-rouser (of wealthy bourgeois rabble!) named Giano della Bella. In 1293 he helped pass the famous “ordinamenti di giustizia.”²⁸⁸

The *ordinamenti* had several effects. One of the consequences of the *ordinamenti* was the decision to admit to the office of the prior only those who were not only—as was the case with numerous nobles—members of a guild, but those who actually practiced a profession. With this rule many magnates were practically excluded from the most

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 15.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 15.

²⁸⁷ On topic of the magnates, see the important work of Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates: Lineage and Faction in a Medieval Commune*.

²⁸⁸ For comprehensive treatment of the Ordinamenti, see Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze. Vol. II, Pt. 1. Guelfi e Ghibellini*, 537-758.

influential office of the city. Furthermore, the minor guilds received political rights, albeit not to the same extent as the major guilds: the mass proletariat of workers remained almost completely excluded.²⁸⁹ In addition to exclusion from the government, the magnates were subjected to various and fairly oppressive sanctions. For example, the purchase of capital assets or land was made more difficult for “grandi,” the smallest offense against a citizen by a noble magnate was punished with the greatest severity, the responsibility of the magnate families for crimes committed by every member of their family was significantly increased, and the ability to sue or prosecute an accused noble was extraordinarily simplified. According to Brucker, “Each male member of a magnate family had to swear an oath of obedience to the commune, and to provide a surety of 2000 lire that he would keep the peace.”²⁹⁰ Magnates/nobles were also barred from being present anywhere that a “corporazione del consiglio del popolo” was meeting, so as to prevent corruption.²⁹¹ A new office was created called the “gonfalonieri di giustizia” for enforcing these *ordinamenti*, and this official had power over a special thousand-man-strong police force at his disposal for so doing.

In regards to the interpretation of the ordinances, which seems salient, Brucker argues that they “have been interpreted, by Salvemini and others, as a consequence of a

²⁸⁹ On the exclusion of the proletariat see the important contributions of Niccolò Rodolico, “The Struggle for the Right of Association in Fourteenth-Century Florence”, *History* 7, no. 27 (1922): 178-190; Niccolò Rodolico, *Il popolo minuto* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1968); Liubov A. Kotel'nikova, *Mondo contadino e città in Italia dall'XI al XIV secolo: dalle fonti dell'Italia centrale e settentrionale* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1975); Victor Rutenburg, *Popolo e movimenti popolari nell'Italia del '300 e '400*, trans. Gianpiero Borghini (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1971); and Salvemini, “Florence in the Time of Dante”.

²⁹⁰ Brucker, *Florence: The Golden Age, 1138-1737*, 36.

²⁹¹ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 16.

class conflict between a noble landed aristocracy (magnati) and a capitalist bourgeoisie (popolani)."²⁹² However, in his estimation, which seems correct and settled by historical consensus, as Nicola Ottokar has shown,

there were no significant economic or social differences between families designated as magnati and popolani. It would perhaps be more accurate to interpret the Ordinances as a product of a conflict within Florence's ruling elite, in which one potent coalition of families (popolani) sought to weaken a rival group (magnati), by keeping them out of office, and by subjecting them to severe and discriminatory judicial penalties. The ordinances were nothing less than a complete humiliation of the nobility, which had initially tolerated them without opposition.²⁹³

The point is, as Davidsohn corroborates, that the period that sees the rejection of *magnates* is in fact the period that indicates the victory of capitalist interests over the entire political system of Florence.²⁹⁴

²⁹² Brucker, *Florence: The Golden Age, 1138-1737*, 36.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁹⁴ Robert Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze. Vol. II, Pt. 2* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1972), 537.ff.

3. Dante's Entry into Politics and the Period up to and following his Exile

Dante's entry into politics takes place in the tumultuous times of the 1290s, the period that Davidsohn has characterized as seeing the triumph of capitalism in Florence, and the events surrounding the downfall of Giano della Bella.²⁹⁵ Eventually, through various plots, those labeled *magnati* managed to exile the hated demagogue Giano della Bella (1295) and to ease the restrictions stipulating that one must actually practice a profession in a guild to be eligible for the priorate, moving back to the requirement that one merely be a guild member.²⁹⁶ Giano della Bella's designs to confiscate the funds of the *Parte Guelfa* in the name of the commune hastened his downfall.²⁹⁷ As after the second democratic revolution, many members of noble families enrolled in the major guilds to be able to participate in the political process, among whom was also Dante, who was, from a "noble" Guelf family.²⁹⁸ Dante, as attested by many sources, enrolled in

²⁹⁵ The vast and expansive literature regarding Dante's political activities cannot be repeated here. For an incomplete yet comprehensive set of authorities on Dante's political life and activities see Mazzoni, "Teoresi e prassi in Dante politico"; Peter Herde, *Dante als Florentiner Politiker* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1976); John A. Scott, *Dante's Political Purgatory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Giorgio Inglese, *Vita di Dante: una biografia possibile* (Roma: Carocci, 2015); Carletti, *Dante politico: la felicità terrena secondo il pontefice, il filosofo, l'imperatore*.

²⁹⁶ Brucker, *Florence: The Golden Age, 1138-1737*, 120.

²⁹⁷ Scott, *Dante's Political Purgatory*, 15.

²⁹⁸ The question of Dante's "nobility" and his banking family roots has been discussed at length (and circuitously so) by Umberto Carpi, *La Nobiltà di Dante* (Firenze: Polistampa, 2004) and previously (succinctly) by R. Piattoli, "Gli Alighieri a Prato Nel Secolo XIII: Nuovi Documenti", *Studi Danteschi* 17 (1933): 55-96. Discussions of Dante's nobility tend to be rooted in accepting the fictionalized claims by Cacciaguیدا in *Paradiso* and tend to lack scientific rigor. From what we know to be true, it appears

the guild of “Medici e speziali,” and between 1295 and 1297, he repeatedly appears as a member of the “consiglio dei cento.”²⁹⁹

Thus his career in politics began in the aftermath of the magnates/popolo conflict and the ordinances of 1293. By the time Dante begins his active engagement in politics in 1295, the Guelf oligarchy had regained control. However, this was to give way to yet more faction: after the 1295 restoration of stability, the Guelf party itself was on the verge of splitting into two opposed factions, the Black and White Guelfs. These factions, as we shall see in the next chapter (chapter 3), were a “who's who” of elite capitalist interests.³⁰⁰ Generally speaking, the black faction—led by Corso Donati (from the old noble Donati family)—was affiliated with feuding factions in Pistoia and, skewed to the papal and magnate side. The whites represented other elite and wealthy groups of magnates and popolo/popolani and were led by a rich banker, Vieri de’ Cerchi, from the Cerchi family, a wealthy nouveaux riche, banking family.³⁰¹

Dante was from a merely bourgeois class, moderately wealthy family involved in banking, but with little known relationship to ancient noble families—the truth about which little was known even in the Florence of his day where agnatic lineages would fabricate ancient noble ancestry to embellish the knightly reputation of their families. On the latter question, see Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 10-11. For a more recent exploration of Dante’s family, see Silvia Diacciati, “Dante: Relazioni sociali e vita pubblica,” *Reti Medievali Rivista* <<http://rivista.retimedievali.it>> 15, no. 2 (2014): 243-270.

²⁹⁹ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 16.

³⁰⁰ Masi, “I banchieri fiorentini nella vita politica della città”.

³⁰¹ Brucker, *Florence: The Golden Age, 1138-1737*, 120.

It goes without saying that Dante was well connected with many politicians of his time on both sides of the eventual factions: his "amico," poet Guido Cavalcanti, not only had a public and personal vendetta with Corso Donati, but was remembered for a "contemptuously aristocratic demeanor in politics, as in poetry."³⁰² Dante also exchanged *tenzoni* (from the 1293-1295 period) with Forese Donati to whom he was related by marriage and, by extension, to family members of the eventual black faction.³⁰³ These *tenzoni* not only illustrate Dante's "position in a world in which poetry and politics were both fairly widespread activities of a social elite,"³⁰⁴ but show how much the political economic configuration in which Dante found himself influenced his own poetic production.

In a study on Dante's *tenzone* with Forese Donati, Susan Noakes investigates Dante's place "in the competition among contending socioeconomic groups."³⁰⁵ Indeed, she argues that the Dante we are often most familiar with remains "in surprising and important ways an ahistorical, decontextualized figure, read as if walled off from much

³⁰² George Holmes, *Dante* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 21-22.

³⁰³ It should be noted that, according to Holmes, *Florence, Rome, and the Origins of the Renaissance*, 119, the real Beatrice Portinari was daughter of Folco Portinari, a prominent banker and Guelf. Beatrice eventually married Simone de' Bardi, a prominent banker of the Bardi family, owners of one of the largest and wealthiest investment banking firms in Florentine history whose power in the city remained formidable well into the 15th and 16th centuries.

³⁰⁴ Holmes, *Dante*, 22-23.

³⁰⁵ Susan J. Noakes, "Virility, Nobility, and Banking: The Crossing of Discourses in the Tenzone with Forese," in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. Teodolinda Barolini and Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 244.

of the material in contemporary historical records.”³⁰⁶ Noakes thus goes “against the grain of American literary criticism,” which “banished” biography from its shores, in arguing (against Cursetti) that the structure of the *tenzone* “is best understood by reference to the biographical context, when more fully explored than previously, in terms of all its social, economic, and political dimensions.”³⁰⁷ Noakes sees the need to historicize given that “the symmetry between Dante’s first sonnet and Forese’s last” involves the deployment of the “terminology of money and commerce” and that the poems “bring together discourses of corporality and economics.”³⁰⁸ Her thesis is thus that “this series of poems is integrally connected to the late thirteenth-century Florentine context, especially by its interweaving of three discursive themes: virility, nobility, and banking, or to use less modern terms, moneylending or usury.”³⁰⁹ She insists, rightly, that “there is no need to seek the *tenzone*’s context elsewhere,” because “as with Dante’s other works, the *tenzone* with Forese is best read as an intervention in the major social, economic, literary, artistic, and political developments of his time, and that Dantists need to understand better all those contributing contexts in order to interpret this *tenzone* in all its cultural implications.”³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 244.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 243.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 243.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 244.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 244.; Noakes also insists that especially U.S. specialists “must venture outside their literary specialty to know and digest scholarship contributed by students of the broader Romance poetic tradition and of history in its many pertinent forms—social, anthropological, political cultural, economic, and art historical.”

Indeed, politics and economics--though not exclusively and often interwoven with other philosophical, theological, and literary concerns- as we have already indicated in chapter 1, reverberate through almost all of Dante's literary production. The 1295 period is also thought to be the time in which Dante wrote *Le Dolci rime*, Dante's great canzone condemning the conflation of wealth and nobility.³¹¹ While we shall return to this important *canzone*, its denunciation of greed and monetary accumulation is acute and it bears, as Holmes puts it: "the flavour of commentary on the contemporary political scene. The definition of nobility which Dante attacked in that poem, 'long-standing possession of wealth together with pleasing manners,' is just such a definition as would have suited the magnate supporters of Corso Donati."³¹²

Indeed, according to Mazzoni, Dante's writing of this period is part of his ongoing anti-magnate sentiment, but is more meaningfully seen as also signaling a shift to *political* and *moral* criticism of his own society beyond mere anti-magnate criticism:

Non avremmo sottolineato questi particolari se l'atteggiamento in ultima analisi antimagnatizio dell'Alighieri (quale appare dal suo patrocinare la quinta proposizione) non trovasse sicura conferma in scritti certamente anteriori a quel periodo: si rammentino le canzoni composte a celebrazione di due virtù morali, Nobiltà e Leggiadria (*Le dolci rime* e *Poscia ch'Amor*), ove l'analisi dell'umano comportamento, e il reciso giudizio che Nobiltà non consiste nel sangue ma nell'operare virtuoso, e il non meno acerbo giudicare sull'ormai assoluta mancanza di «leggiadria» e d'ogni altra virtù nei cavalieri, oltre che dirci la misura dell'impegno morale di Dante, ora tutto teso a divenire il cantor *rectitudinis*, rappresentano indubbiamente anche l'espressione di un preciso

³¹¹ Holmes, *Dante*, 23.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 23; Holmes also notes that Dante's more elaborate philosophical alternative derives from Aristotle's ethics and is summed up with "the seed of happiness placed by god in a well-disposed soul".

sentire « politico », nell'accostarsi aperto alla parte democratica. Ma andrà pur anche ricordato il riaffiorare, e ben acuminato, della polemica antimagnatizia, parecchi anni dopo, in un episodio indimenticabile del poema: nel pathos che anima lo scontro violentissimo con Filippo Argenti nel canto VIII dell'Inferno, con quel Filippo Argenti riconosciuto e promosso a paradigma del magnate superbo e iracondo anche dalla tradizione novellistica e aneddotica, che non necessariamente farà capo, per le notizie, al Dante della *Commedia*.³¹³

Thus during this period, Dante was elected to the *Trentasei del Capitano* (November 1295 to April 1296), and is recorded as speaking on 14 December 1295 in a council comprising members of the twelve major guilds. Here he took issue with the method for electing priors, and voted against a measure that would allow Priors to select their successors. In May 1296, Dante became part of an important body: the Council of One Hundred. On June 5, 1296 he spoke against granting political asylum to Pistoese exiles in addition to supporting a measure granting special powers for the Priors to punish anyone, but especially magnates, either guilty of or suspected of using violence or intimidating *popolani* in public offices. Though Dante is known to have been present in the councils of the next two years, records are lacking regarding his activities.³¹⁴

Going back to the splits between the whites and blacks, the origins of the split are murky but reside in the ongoing factional contrasts within the city contrasts.³¹⁵ The genesis of the names, according to Kelsen, arose from "Private controversie di due famiglie della vicina città di Pistoia, delle quali l'una, non si sa perché, si chiamava i

³¹³ Mazzoni, "Teoresi e prassi in Dante politico", xiv.

³¹⁴ Scott, *Dante's Political Purgatory*, 14.

³¹⁵ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 16-17.

'bianchi', l'altra i 'neri', offrirono l'occasione."³¹⁶ This quarrel was brought to Florence, and in any case, new names of partisanship merely concealed old divisions.³¹⁷ Kelsen remarks that initially, this new subdivision of white and black guelf had nothing to do with the old division between Guelfs and Ghibellines.³¹⁸ However, since in the city there were only meager remains of Ghibelline sympathizers, it must be understood that both the Whites and Blacks considered themselves as Guelfs. However, the disagreement, increasingly bitter, between the Whites and the papal curia brought the partisan division on the white side increasingly far from the base commitments of the Guelf party and closer to a position that would have been traditionally considered Ghibelline, if not for the fact that in a one-party state being an open Ghibelline was effectively political suicide by this time.³¹⁹ As far as the White and Black affiliations of the *popolo* and *popolani* are concerned, the situation was the following: the dominant popular party, constituted by bourgeois with political rights and opposed to submitting to the pope and magnates, was affiliated with the Cerchi White faction. According to Kelsen, "alla nobilta di denaro si unì la nobilta' intellettuale delle persone colte."³²⁰ While little record remains of the position of commoners and the proletariat, they are thought to have

³¹⁶ Ibid., 17.

³¹⁷ On the complicated history of the origins of the factions see Gino Masi, *Il nome delle fazioni fiorentine de' bianchi e de' neri* (Aquila: Officine grafiche Vecchioni, 1927).

³¹⁸ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 17.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 17.

³²⁰ Ibid., 17.

sided with the dominant wealthy bourgeois that had sided with the blacks. The latter sought support in the church and alliances with foreign powers.³²¹

At this time, Boniface VIII (Benedetto Caetani), in whom the already almost forgotten dreams of Church supremacy had been re-awakened, became a prime actor in the unfolding political drama of Florence.³²² As has been pointed out, Florence was tightly linked financially to the papacy and armies of Florentine merchants and bankers had close relations with Rome and the curia.³²³ Boniface wanted Florence as part of the papal temporal domain, as it was the most powerful city in northern Italy and was the most important center of papal Guelfism. The pope believed he could subject Florence to church supremacy by supporting the Blacks against the democratic “popular” constitution³²⁴ maintained by the Whites:

When Dante reappears in the political records in the summer of 1300, a new political crisis is developing. The conflict between the Cerchi and Donati factions, later to become known as the White and Black Guelfs respectively, had become more intense. Corso Donati had been banished. In exile he had established influence at Rome with Pope Boniface VIII, an aggressive promoter of the interests of the papacy. Corso persuaded Boniface that the present rulers of Florence were unreliable. In this way he opened a rift between the pope and the ruling Whites, which he hoped to use to secure his own restoration. In the spring of 1300...the Florentine leaders decided to prosecute a group of Florentine

³²¹ On the social-economic composition of the factions see Arias, "Il fondamento economico delle fazioni fiorentine di guelfi bianchi e dei guelfi neri e le origini dell' Ufficio della Mercanzia in Firenze" and Gino Masi, "La struttura sociale delle fazioni politiche fiorentine ai tempi di Dante", *Giornale Dantesco* 31 (1930): 3-28.

³²² Holmes, *Florence, Rome, and the Origins of the Renaissance* 164-185.; Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze. Vol. II, Pt. 2*, 694.ff.

³²³ Arias, "I banchieri italiani e la S. Sede nel XIII secolo: linee della storia esterna".

³²⁴ Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 18.

businessmen at the papal court, allies of Corso, for working against the interests of the commune. Thus, by a process of mounting distrust between the two governments at Florence and Rome, the political divisions were linked with the interests of outside powers. It was in this way that a Florentine citizen, who had taken up a position in the native politics of his city, could as a result find himself caught up in the politics of Europe.³²⁵

Thus, Boniface VIII, intending to directly intervene in the internecine disputes of the city, sent a legate under the pretenses of negotiating a "peace" between the feuding sides, but it was viewed as a disguised supporting of the Blacks, and the offer was refused. The rest of this is well known history, summarized by Holmes:

Dante was associated with the Whites. He was very likely a party to the decision to prosecute the Florentines at the Papal court. For two months in 1300 he was a Prior, that is one of the six men who held supreme office in the commune. As such he had to confirm the city's stand against the pope's intervention. He was thus deeply involved in city politics, marked out by identification with the ruling faction and already the object of a papal condemnation, directed against the rulers of the city. His political baptism of fire had been swift....For more than a year after his priorate Dante remained prominent in the city. On 1 November 1301, the brother of the King of France, Charles of Valois, acting as an agent of Boniface, entered Florence with a substantial army. Once inside he allowed the Blacks to carry out a *coup d'état* which completely reversed the political situation and led to the exile or prosecution of the White leaders. When Charles of Valois came Dante was probably away on a mission to Rome, a last-minute attempt to halt the action of the French invaders, and it is likely that he never saw the inside of Florence again after 1301. On 27 January 1302 he was sentenced, in his absence, to a fine and exile for financial corruption in office and for conspiring against the Pope, Charles of Valois, and the city. On 10 March he was condemned to death.³²⁶

³²⁵ George Holmes, *Dante* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 23-24.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 24; see also Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 18.; Holmes, *Florence, Rome, and the Origins of the Renaissance*, 167; Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 18, notes "Secondo una versione tuttavia storicamente non documentata si dice che Dante si sia recato con una ambasceria a Roma da Bonifacio VIII per mandare a vuoto l'intrigo dei neri. Questo aneddoto oggi generalmente respinto è interessante in quanto esso pone, l'uno di fronte all'altro, due uomini che si possono considerare i più eminenti rappresentanti delle due maggiori antitesi del medioevo: papato e impero."

According to Brucker, “the leading families of the triumphant Black faction, led by the Donati, used their influence with the *podestà*, messer Cante de’ Gabrielli of Gubbio (1302), who passed sentence of confiscation, exile and death on 600 members of the White party, including Dante Alighieri and Petrarch’s father.”³²⁷ Obviously there is no evidence Dante was guilty of corruption nor reasons to suppose that Dante was hostile to the papacy as such on the grounds of a general hostility to the exercise of temporal power by spiritual authority.³²⁸

Per quel che riguarda la posizione di Dante si è generalmente giunti a considerarlo, fino al suo esilio, come membro di quel partito fiorentino, che si chiamava convenzionalmente guelfo. Successivamente si avvicinò al ghibellinismo, senza tuttavia iscriversi ad alcun concreto partito politico. In realtà egli rimase al di sopra di qualsiasi movimento di partito; egli, secondo la sua propria bella espressione, si è fatto «se stesso partito». Il suo ideale imperiale trae origine non da una determinata appartenenza partitica; esso è espressione di una convinzione scientifica, che scorgeva in uno stato mondiale monarchico la salvezza dell’umanità. In questo ambiente Dante ha ideato la sua grande concezione sullo Stato e l’umanità: tutto il mondo occidentale diviso nei due campi nemici del papato e dell’impero — l’Italia frantumata in innumerevoli stati e partiti che lottano tra di loro, che si adoperano ad annullarsi l’un l’altro — la patria grondante del sangue di una nefasta guerra civile — ed egli stesso un esiliato senza patria, un uomo senza pace, che nulla brama più della pace! Pace per sè, per la sua città e per l’Italia, per tutta l’umanità!”³²⁹

³²⁷ Brucker, *Florence: The Golden Age, 1138-1737*, 35.

³²⁸ Holmes, *Dante*, 24-25; Holmes also notes, p. 25, that “this became a major concern later in his life, but it was not yet prominent in his mind.”; Kelsen, *La teoria dello stato in Dante*, 19: “in primo luogo rendersi conto dei numerosi tentennamenti e spostamenti che il significato dei nomi dei due grandi partiti hanno subito nella politica giornaliera di quel periodo. In ogni caso non si deve — come spesso avviene — identificare il contenuto dei due dubbi concetti con il contrasto papale e imperiale. Si pensi soltanto alla violenta ostilità tra i guelfi francesi e il papato! Solo finché si tratta di caratterizzare le tendenze pro e contro l’impero possono avere un senso generalmente valido i nomi dei guelfi e dei ghibellini.”

³²⁹ Kelsen, 19.

As Kelsen says, “peace” was the biggest aspiration of his life, “il concetto centrale del suo sistema politico” pointing to the end of book 1 of *Monarchia*.³³⁰

The canzone *Doglia mi reca*, from this period, was also an anti-courtly rumination on the disastrous effects of greed and monetary accumulation as connected with the notions of nobility, beauty, and elite courtly values. But this period after exile is when Dante also began to ruminate in a way beyond the moral lyrics on the problem of Justice. As Holmes points out, his political misfortune is placed in a philosophical framework in the canzone *Tre Donne*, from the 1302-1304 period. One of the ladies is Justice and her daughter and granddaughter. Although human virtues have so fallen on evil days, Love declares “let the eyes that weep and the mouths that wail be those of mankind whom it concerns, having fallen under the rays of such a heaven; not ours, who are of the eternal citadel” (piangono gli occhi e dolgasi la bocca/ de li uomini a cui tocca, che sono a’ raggi di cotal ciel giunti; / non noi, che semo de l’eterna rocca). As Holmes writes, “Love acknowledges the proper role of Justice. In the later part of the poem Dante refers more directly to his own plight. He takes pride in being an exile, like the exiled personification of Justice, but he ends by sending his poem off in search of reconciliation.

Canzone, ucella con le bianche penne;
canzone, caccia con li neri veltri,

³³⁰ Ibid., 20; *Mon.* 1: “O genus humanum, quantis procellis atque iacturis quantisque naufragiis agitari te necesse est dum, bellua multorum capitem factum, in diversa conaris! Intellectu egrotas utroque, similiter et afflectu: rationibus irrefragabilibus intellectum superiorem non curas, nec experientie vultu inferiorem sed nec affectum dulcedine divine suasionis, cum per tubam Spiritus Sancti tibi affetur: ‘Eccequam bonum et quam iocundum habitare fratres in unum.’”

che fuggir mi convenne,
ma far mi poterian di pace dono.
Però nol fan che non san quel che sono

(Song, go hawking with the white wings [White Guelfs]; song, go hunting with the black hounds [Black Guelfs]—which I have had to flee, though they could still make me the gift of peace. It is because they don't know what I am that they don't do so).³³¹

In the next chapter we shall see that Dante's interest in justice and monarchy is specifically conditioned by the complete enmeshment of political and economic interests—already partially discussed in this chapter—which will set the stage for re-examining his political thought as properly a *critique of political economy*.

³³¹ Holmes, *Dante*, 25.

Chapter 3. Florentine Political History as History of Political Economy

Se niuna lezione è utile a' cittadini che governono le repubbliche, è quella che dimostra le cagione degli odi e delle divisioni della città, acciò che possino, con il pericolo d'altri diventati savi, mantenersi uniti...e se di niuna republica furono mai le divisioni notabili, di quella di Firenze sono notabilissime: perché la maggior parte delle altre repubbliche, delle quali si ha qualche notizia, sono state contente di una divisione con la quale, secondo gli accidenti, hanno ora accresciuta ora rovinata la città loro; ma Firenze, non contenta di una, ne ha fatte molte. In Roma, come ciascuno sa, poi che i re ne furono cacciati nacque la disunione intra i nobili e la plebe, e con quella infino alla rovina sua si mantenne...Ma di Firenze in prima si dividono intra loro i nobili, di poi i nobili e il popolo, e in ultimo il popolo e la plebe; e molte volte occorse che una di queste parti, rimasa superiore, si divise in due. Dalle quali divisioni ne nacquero tante morti, tanti esili, tante destruzioni di famiglie, quante mai ne nascessero in alcuna città della quale si abbia memoria.³³²

Machiavelli, *Istorie Fiorentine*

* * *

Like Machiavelli, his predecessor in Florentine History, John Najemy too begins his *History of Florence 1200-1575* highlighting the dynamic of class conflicts, especially between rich and middle classes, but also between the latter and the poor class, as a major and decisive factor in the evolution of Florentine political and social history. Such analysis is a strong component of Aristotelian analysis (in the *Politics*, Aristotle extensively discusses class conflicts, especially linked to haves and have-nots as a motor of regime change and the transmutation of political fortunes) and Marxian analysis later. Of course, the history of actual class conflict between lower classes and wealthy classes is outside the scope of the present study, but the point is that the entire history of the city that gave birth to the explosive factionalism that saw the condemnation and exile of Dante for "monetary corruption" was characterized itself by the evolution of oligarchical formations within the Florentine republic and conflict, as we have already

³³² Niccolò Machiavelli, *Opere*, Vol. 3, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Torino: Einaudi, 2005), 308-309.

seen in outline, not just amongst the wealthy and poor generally, but predominantly amongst the extremely moneyed elite *popolo*, *popolani*, and *popolo grasso/magnati*.³³³ This complex and multilayered political conflict, as Najemy puts it, was further undergirded by the aspirations of "the 'popolo' that created the guild republic and challenged the elite to justify its power within a normative framework of law and political ethics; and the artisan and laboring classes, whose exertions and skills produced the material culture from prized textiles to the stones of rich men's homes, and who in turn challenged the *popolo* to allow the guild republic to embrace its full implications."³³⁴ Indeed, as Najemy points out, Florence's history and culture changed through these conflicts and class antagonisms, which Machiavelli termed the "divisioni."

In the previous chapter we examined the major political history of the international papal/imperial conflicts, Italy, and Florence starting in the early 13th century through the time of Dante's exile in the early 14th century. We also examined Dante's political career in the context of this history. In this chapter, I will be examining the political history of the upper classes—*popolo*, *popolani*, and *magnati*—and their affairs and evolution in the political institutions of Florence. This chapter is intended therefore to build off the previous chapter with the following aims:

³³³ For extensive discussion of these the terms, see the essays in Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del dugento*, edited by Sergio Raveggi (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1978).

³³⁴ John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 2.

1) to show that, in fact, the traditionally told history of politics in the age of Dante is but one layer of a narrative that must be historicized in terms of economic interests

2) to provide evidence of political economy as a historical object; ie. that the intersection of political and economic interest is demonstrable as a, if not *the*, major driving force of the history often told as a conflict between ideological values between city, empire, and church and the factions and conflicts within Florence itself in the 13th and 14th centuries.

My contention, in short, is that Dante's political thought—in favor of a single monarch whose prime directive is to stop the endless and regressive power of greed—is a response to the devastating injustice that he perceived was being precipitated by the intersection of politics and economics in chrematistic capitalist polities such as his own (explored in chapter 5). Thus in order to show what the object termed 'political economy' is as an historical object,³³⁵ this chapter shows—through a thoroughly historicist re-reading of the history of chapter 2—that in fact, at almost every stage of the political and social history of post-*popolo* (1250) Florence, the entire evolution of its institutional history is driven by this intersection of politics and economics: through economic interests determining and/or influencing the conflicts between church and empire and in the evolution of the institutions of the Florentine state according to the dominant prerequisites and hegemonic directives of the commercial and banking class. Given the outsized international power of the Florentine banks, this history of Florentine political economy thus also demonstrates that it is impossible to read the

³³⁵ This is very different from thinking of *political economy* according to its own ideological construction, as has been the topic of a vast literature in modern Marxism.

international history of the papal-imperial conflicts that ravished Italy during this period without grafting it upon the intersection of capital and politics taking place within Florence.

The chapter thus proceeds with the following sections, which provide the historical evidence for my thesis.

3.1) Political economy in the period of the *primo popolo* and the period of 1260-1266 that saw the Ghibelline restoration under Manfred Hohenstaufen and the pope, in collaboration with Florentine bankers and capitalist class, exiled Guelfs, and Charles of Anjou, defeat Manfred and enact the Guelf restoration in 1267.

3.2) The consolidation of political economic institutions and oligarchy in the *secondo popolo* and priorate of the guilds (1282) through Giano della Bella and the *Ordinamenti di giustizia* (1293-1295).

3.3) Papal intertwinement with Florentine (and Tuscan) capitalism, and the political economy of White and Black Guelfism (1281-1304).

3.4) The consolidation of political economic interests in the post-1308 *Mercanzia* as rule of corporations over the city of Florence.

As my aim in the chapter is to provide ample historical evidence of political economy in Italy during the period of Dante's life, the majority of my argument draws from the

secondary work of historians who have written extensively on these topics based on primary source documents from Italian archives. My aim is to integrate the work of these historians into our analysis of Dante' thought.

1. The *Primo Popolo*, Ghibelline Restoration, and Victory of the Guelfs (Florentine Bankers, French Monarchy, and Pope)

The *popolo* of Florence was not really “popular,” if popular implies socio-economically diverse or populist. In fact, to the contrary, the *popolo* government was actually the first example in Florentine history of the triumph of an explicitly mercantile-banking oligarchy. According to Najemy,

the *primo popolo* clearly attempted to remove the families associated with the elite parties and to replace the old governing class with new men. On the other hand, most of the *Anziani* came from families associated with the major guilds and were involved in banking, trade, and the legal profession. Among those whose professions have been identified were many *Calimala* merchants, some bankers or moneylenders, a dozen from *Por Santa Maria*, twenty jurists or notaries, and five from the Wool guild. No representatives of the minor, or artisan, guilds have been identified among these officeholders.³³⁶

The prominence of financial interests in the *primo popolo* is remarkable, and the extent of its being “popular” lies in the fact that the government of 1250-1260 extensively excluded most of the previous ruling class and attempted to crack down on Guelf and Ghibelline factionalism.³³⁷ The *primo popolo*, as is true for the rest of Florentine political and social history through the life of Dante, starts the pattern of consolidating influence and power with the moneyed elite, to the exclusion of the poor and less wealthy bourgeoisie. In this sense, the *primo popolo* was not a “social revolution”: “it emerged from a split within the elite, between those committed to the factions and those who saw such alliances as damaging to the economic interests of their

³³⁶ Ibid., 67.

³³⁷ Ibid., 68.

class and city.”³³⁸ The *primo popolo*’s success was enabled by the strengthened institutions of the guilds and military confraternities, which were also institutions that would become increasingly important in safeguarding the interests of the city-state’s new economic elite.

We see a concrete example of political economy, not just in the social and economic formation of the *primo popolo* state, but also as an intersection of economic and political interests actually driving international political contests, in what otherwise looks like a basic conflict over secular/church ideology and power, when the Ghibellines return to Florentine rule for six years with Guido Novello of the Counts Guidi (a cousin of Guelf Guido Guerra) governing in the name of Manfred Hohenstaufen after the Guelf loss at Montaperti in 1260. We see the heavy, and hardly “invisible,” hand of capital at work. While old Ghibelline elites return to politics, the social make-up of those participating in state organs was like that of the *primo popolo*: it was almost entirely composed of wealthy merchants and bankers; participation of non-elite guildsmen was negligible, though certain Guelf elements of the same class were essentially kept out of power and politically restricted. However, as Najemy points out, the “fatal weakness” of the Ghibelline restoration was its failure to actually control the power of the exiled and restricted Guelfs who had suffered such a humiliating loss at Montaperti. Namely, the problem lay in the state’s “inability to control the influence of Florentine merchant capital in and outside the city. The commercial and banking companies whose leading parties were exiled in 1260, such as the Bardi, Mozzi, Rossi and Scali temporarily lost

³³⁸ Ibid., 68-69.

their Florentine property but not their far-flung investments and assets, which were beyond the reach of the Ghibellines. Even companies that continued to direct operations from Florence were difficult to control.”³³⁹

This analysis highlights an aspect about the nature of state capitalism at this time, before the 16th century, that is articulated by Heilbroner, namely that

...capital, which arises within the state and which exists only at the pleasure of the state, becomes increasingly capable of defying, or of existing ‘above,’ the state. A network of commodity flows cuts through the boundaries of national sovereignty to form a ‘system’ that operates according to the dictates of its own logic, with less regard for those of politics. Such a world system came into existence originally with the rise of integrated market flows of broad dimensions in the sixteenth-century—what Wallerstein has called a ‘world-economy’—but in recent years its presence has become dramatically apparent in the emergence of supranational corporations and pools of money seemingly capable of eluding all constraints of political boundaries.³⁴⁰

Heilbroner’s analysis in turn demonstrates the world-system nature of the evolution of a capitalist society already at this time in which political and economic interests are totally intertwined, not just on the level of the internal class relations of Florence itself, with its wealthy *popolo* and super wealthy bankers, but at the level of relations with other Italian cities and political plays between monarchic, church, and seigniorial elements.³⁴¹ During this time we see the beginning of a pattern of politics being

³³⁹ Ibid., 72.

³⁴⁰ Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Nature and Logic of Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 1985), 94.

³⁴¹ On the fact that Wallerstein’s world-economic analysis of capitalism must be recognized in medieval Italy and western Europe (and further), see the important and definitive contribution of Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World*

determined by overlapping interests that cluster around bankers with sufficient capital abilities to fund military operations or hold sway at a more local or regional level. We will see this scenario repeated by Boniface VIII in extra-state level collusion with banking and industrial interests in the suppression of the White Guelfs later (see 3.3 below). However, in terms of the Angevin Alliance at this time, “no one realized the potential significance of [the restive nature of Guelf capital] more than the pope elected in August 1261, the Frenchman Urban IV, who turned his pontificate into a crusade to destroy the Hohenstaufen and put an end to their repeated attempts to control the peninsula and encircle and dominate the papacy.”³⁴²

In sum, Urban needed someone to challenge Manfred, which led him to Charles of Anjou (brother of King Louis XI). The connection here is that Charles needed a significant amount of money to fulfill this ambition, thus Urban pressured Florentine bankers to rally against the Hohenstaufen through threats to release their debtors from obligations, interrupt imports of Flemish textiles, or even imprison or confiscate their goods. According to Najemy, as the result of secret negotiations with papal officials many merchants entered a pact and pledged financial support for the Angevin campaign to avoid these punitive measures. Davidsohn reports that the Pope manipulated the *Arte della lana*, the textile guild, with the textile issue as leverage, and generally “cercò di piegare ai suoi disegni i membri delle corporazioni, minacciando i loro interessi economici” and later intensified this with “minacce all’ Arte di Calimala, la corporazione

System A.D. 1250-1350 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). For a discussion of the historiography of the history capitalism in medieval Italy, see below chapter 4.

³⁴² Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 72.

dei banchieri.”³⁴³ As Najemy puts it, what is remarkable is not just the fact that such negotiations were going on despite the Ghibelline state (that had no knowledge of it for up to two years), but that the state had no effective power to combat the movement of capital and capital linked interests. In the end 181 Florentine bankers and merchants from twenty-one major companies (including big names such as the Scali, Mozzi, Spini, Pulci-Rimbertyni, Bardi, Cerchi, Frescobaldi and Rossi firms) pledged loyalty to the papacy and the Guelf cause, and committed to the destruction of Ghibelline rule and Hohenstaufen power.³⁴⁴ As Najemy writes,

these pacts were the foundation of a momentous rearrangement of power in Italy, as the already great and still growing wealth of Florentine merchant-bankers turned decisively against the Ghibellines and Manfred, allied with the papacy and Charles of Anjou, and made Florence the financial core of a Guelf entente that linked the city to France and to what was about to become the Angevin south of Italy. The German-Hohenstaufen imperial orbit in which the commune had emerged and developed was now replaced by a papal-French-Avignon orbit that offered new and greater opportunities for Florentine commercial expansion.³⁴⁵

Najemy details these “opportunities” for Florentine bankers, in an analysis that exposes why the scholarly discussion about the conflict between spiritual or temporal realms and competing claims between them are often blurred and why even a binary like church/empire can be misleading as a heuristic category (as I have discussed at length above), and perhaps only really be helpful if we remain in the abstraction of publicist or scholastic treatises on political notions of spiritual and secular authority, which are

³⁴³ Robert Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze. Vol. II, pt. 1. Guelfi eGhibellini* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1972), 763-764.; See also *ibid.*, 764. ff., regarding the “Conquista dei banchieri fiorentini.”

³⁴⁴ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 73.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

deracinated from the actual historical reality except to the extent that they are commissioned to support one or the other side of the debate at various historical intersections of conflict between particular popes and particular national monarchs. On the papal side of the deal in financing Charles' (imperial) army, the banks provided interest-bearing loans backed by repayment in ecclesiastical (papal) taxes they collected as agents of the papacy throughout Europe, especially in France. Also since the pope declared Manfred a Muslim and Heretic, the war became a crusade and hence eligible for crusade taxes. On the other side of the ecclesiastical taxation privilege, since many church entities and prelates could not pay their assessments, the same bankers loaned them money to pay the taxes they themselves were collecting with additional loans at interest and fees. Florentine firms, thus, secured an astonishing double or triple dip profit from loans to Charles and those ecclesiastical entities taxed on the authority of the pope to repay them. Dealings such as these make the legacy of medieval investiture conflict seem quite remote and clearly irrelevant in practice, and if anything only adumbrate the sort of massive objections out of Germany that would re-emerge two centuries later in the protestant reformation. On the imperial side, the most lucrative gain of all was that Charles gained promises of influence over Tuscany and southern Italian territories and thus was in a position to grant expansive "commercial, trading, and banking privileges to his creditors in the southern Italian territories that he was about to conquer."³⁴⁶

In 1267, Charles of Anjou was made the *podestà* and the Ghibellines were effectively smashed. Ultimately (and surprisingly) this group of merchant-bankers close to Charles

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 73, "unencumbered by taxes or duties."

(and allied with the papacy) did not take complete power: of the companies that made loans to Charles only the Bardi were regularly present in the 1267-1280 Guelf councils. According to Najemy “despite their decisive role in the Guelf victory, it may have been the very fact of excessively close ties to Charles that kept these families from power.” Nonetheless the historical consensus here is that this period of the Guelf restoration marks the beginning of a shift, right during Dante’s birth and infancy in which

economic realities worked inexorably to define the ruling class...and the merchant and trading giants became the core of a newly configured elite. This was by no means the ‘triumph’ of a ‘bourgeoisie’ over an ‘aristocracy.’ It was rather a process of evolution within the elite itself, a replacement at the center of power of elite families that did not adapt to the age’s booming capitalism by equally elite, if somewhat more recent, families that did. However, simultaneously and as a consequence of economic expansion at the local level, in particular the boom in textile trades, the non-elite *popolo* of the guilds also gained strength and prepared to challenge the entire elite, both its old and new components. These two developments are sometimes confused and even conflated. Although they overlapped, they were distinct: on the one hand, a transformation of the elite from a predominantly (but never exclusively) warrior class characterized by its knighthoods, city enclaves, and countryside strongholds into a class increasingly (although still not entirely) defined by far-flung mercantile activities across Europe and the Mediterranean; and, on the other hand, the rise to unprecedented political strength through their guilds of a coalition of local merchants, manufacturers, shopkeepers, artisans, and notaries. Both processes came to full view around 1280.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 75-76.

3. Priorate of the Guilds and *Secondo Popolo* (1282) to *Ordinamenti di Giustizia* (1293-1295)

The “Piorate of the Guilds” exemplifies another stage of the development of political economy during Dante’s adolescence and young adulthood. The Priorate of the Guilds arose following a general attempt to reconcile and re-enfranchise government divided between exiled Ghibelline interests and Guelfs with the peacemaker Cardinal Latino. While I will not go into extensive detail here, what is important to recognize is that for the first time “the power of legally recognized and self-constituted guilds to generate binding collective obligations on behalf of their members was used to buttress a Florentine government,” essentially since in this context of capitalist dominance over politics the form of state began to change as the *arti*, or guild corporations, began to appear more concretely as legal entities known as “universitates.”³⁴⁸

As Angevin rule collapsed with the Sicilian Vespers (1282), the transfer of power to the guilds had popular support. Dino Compagni recalls (1.4) that he was one of six *popolani* who succeeded in winning support for the “priors of the guilds, to aid the merchants and guildsmen whenever necessary.” Within a year, the priorate of the guilds was the *de facto* governing entity in Florence.³⁴⁹ Effectively then, from the narratives of Villani and Compagni, we learn that the 1280s sees the creation of a guild regime whose

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 77-78.; For more complete definition of this issue of the *universitas*—or corporation—in the juridical history of the Middle Ages, see Otto von Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Age*, trans. Frederic William Maitland (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 10, *et passim*, and Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies; A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

³⁴⁹ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 78-79.

controlling interests are the most powerful guilds (incidentally those with the greatest world capital deposits, industrial, and financial influence): *Calimala* (international merchants, bankers, and large-scale commodity traders), *Cambio* (international merchant companies and many non-elite companies), and *Lana* (woolen cloth and textile importers, large production industrialist and smaller producers).³⁵⁰ At this time then, a large political question was that of how many guilds would be given priors to sit on the priorate. While this was resolved by eventually expanding membership to twelve of the twenty-one guilds, “over the next decade, the elite managed to control the elections and produce priorates cumulatively dominated by members of five major guilds. From 1282 to 1292, *Calimala* and *Cambio* jointly had 46% of the posts, *Giudici e Notai* 19%, *Lana* and *Por Santa Maria* each 10%” while 14/156 families (*consorterie*) appearing in the priorate during the same period held 26% or 98 of the posts.”³⁵¹ In the years that led up to Dante’s writing *Le docti rime* and *Doglia mi reca*, Florence increasingly looks like an oligarchy of capitalist interests, a true rule of the rich.

These dominant families with their grip on the priorate of the guilds “were not the ruling Guelf elite of 1267-80. With some exceptions, the politically successful families were now from the banking and commercial class...the institution of the priorate thus promoted the rise to leadership within the elite of merchant-banking families and the gradual slide into obscurity of older families.”³⁵² This transition had moral and political consequences within Florence that led to the *secondo popolo* and the *ordinamenti di*

³⁵⁰ For definitions of the guilds see, *ibid.*, 35-36.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 80.

giustizia. According to Compagni (1.5) the hope had been that the priorate would be a “non-partisan government protective of ‘the small and the weak’”, but this was not the case. Not only did it fail to reduce elite power but appeared as a controlled sort of crony capitalist oligarchy. Though the priorate was supposed to safeguard the wealth of the commune and protect the small against the powerful, the laws were corrupted. They let the smaller (*popolo/popolani*) be attacked and taken advantage of by the *grandi* (magnates) and by the rich *popolani grassi*.³⁵³ In other words, the priorate of the guilds and its super oligarchical constitution caused political and factional conflict, and even violence, to erupt between the *merely* wealthy and the *super* wealthy, but this distinction is rather weak as some of the mega-rich were not considered as a pariah class but as good “popolani”:

Compagni laments the control of the new institutions by ‘grandi’ who were just as objectionable in his eyes as the old elite: a lordly and haughty ruling group that he saw as a combination of magnates and wealthy non-magnates linked to them by marriage. In his eyes the class that had to be reined in was not limited to the magnates; it was the entire elite, magnate and non-magnate, against which his ‘good *popolani*’ of the non-elite guild community needed to marshal their forces.³⁵⁴

Another factor playing a role in these events was the ruling elite’s war with Ghibelline Pisa and Arezzo in the late 1280s. They scored a victory at Campaldino (Dante fought in it) in 1289, but the war went on for several years. This military activity

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 80.

conducted to further strengthening of minor guilds, and saw the concurrent emergence of Vieri de' Cerchi and Corso Donati as future leaders of the White and Black factions.³⁵⁵

In 1292, under pressure to represent the interests of the non-elite, that is non-super wealthy guildsmen, the council of the consuls of the twelve major guilds discussed proposals for giving an “equal say in the nomination and/or final approval of candidates to the independently elected consuls of the twelve guilds.” This question would determine whether new men would be recruited evenly from the twelve guilds into the priorate or whether to bypass the guilds and entrust the election to a body chosen by outgoing priors which would effectively limit access to the priorate to the same elite which had already been dominant for the last decade (for example, in the way that nearly every US Treasury and Federal Reserve administration is run by former Goldman Sachs bankers who in turn pick Goldman Sachs bankers to replace themselves). What was at stake was that middle and minor guildsmen might share equally in the priorate and its elections. Though the elite (represented by the five major guilds with a preponderance of bankers) was against this measure, “the debate was a breakthrough for the *popolo* and the guild community in establishing the autonomy and equality of each guild in nominating candidates and the equality of all twelve guilds in the final voting. For the next century, the autonomy and the equality of the guilds...became the hallmarks of guild republicanism.”³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 80-81.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 81

Thus the anti-magnate legislation of 1292 was intended to punish those labeled magnates and to keep egalitarian participation in the government of the priorate of the 21 guilds an institutional reality. In what Najemy calls the “most important political document in Florentine history” which was written with six priors elected in 1292, along with three jurists, and first promulgated on Jan 18, 1293, the Ordinances did “two overwhelmingly important things: they 1) created a formal federation among the guilds and placed the executive branch of Florentine government in its hands, and 2) codified and expanded existing antimagnate legislation...”³⁵⁷

...appropriating the concept of justice to legitimate both its constitutional reforms and its policy toward the magnates, the Ordinances borrowed the Roman law definition of justice as the ‘constant and perpetual desire to ensure each his right [ius]’ and declared it the foundation on which the Ordinances themselves ‘are deservedly called ‘of justice’” and promulgated “for the welfare of the *res publica*.” The first rubric created the formal federation of twenty-one guilds, claiming “that is judged most perfect which consists of all its parts and is approved by the judgment of them all.” The second part of this sentence is a loud paraphrase of a famous maxim of Roman law, *quod omnes tangit debet ab omnibus approbari* (*that which touches all must be approved by all*), which, although not applied to government in its original context, was frequently used by medieval jurists to assert that legitimate rule depended on consent. In this version, the “parts” are the guilds, and the whole that they constitute is in one sense their federation and in a larger sense the “*res publica*” whose welfare the Ordinances promote. The ordinances thus affirmed that the legitimacy of Florentine government depended on the consent of the guilds. Each of the twenty-one guilds was required to appoint a legal representative empowered to swear an oath on behalf of his guild to “construct and preserve the good, pure, and loyal society and company of these same guilds,” to honor and defend the communal magistrates, priors, guilds and the whole Florentine populus and...preserve and defend the justice and right [*iustitia* and *ius*] of the guildsmen.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 81.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 83.

The ordinances, as seen in chapter 2, also restricted the political participation of the “magnates” by requiring members of the guilds to actually practice the profession represented in it, and not merely enroll in the guild on the basis of membership in a powerful banking or mercantile *consorteria*, which had been the normal avenue to oligarchical power in the unreformed guild regime. Effectively it was like restricting membership to actually practicing executives, and excluding mere members of the corporate boardrooms and interconnected economic elite. The composition of the magnates included much of the economic elite of bankers and commercial traders, but “the presence among the magnates of so much of the economic elite makes it impossible to argue, as many have, that the ordinances mark the rise to power of the capitalists that had been pushing older ‘feudal’ families from the centers of power. Behind the popular government of 1293-5 were the non-elite guildsmen who viewed with suspicion the entire elite (old and new, Guelf and Ghibelline, bankers and landowners).” Relegating the entire economic elite to magnate status would have caused an upper class revolt, so the ordinances were mostly designed to curb their absolute power and to serve as a warning to those who did not cooperate in a more inclusive guild regime with non-elite guildsmen.³⁵⁹ As an example of this Najemy offers the Peruzzi bankers, not as rich and established as the Bardi, but included in the non-magnates because Pacino Peruzzi had argued in favor (Feb 14, 1293) of giving the consuls of the twelve guilds greater influence, and so it is no coincidence that his kinsman Giotto Peruzzi (acting head of the company) was also elected that same day and sat on the same priorate with Giano della

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 86.

Bella who expanded the list of magnate families.³⁶⁰ In any case, the history of this period has many fascinating aspects that cannot be examined here in detail, but serves to exemplify another level of political economy fully operative in the history of the development of the Florentine government.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 86.

4. Papal Intertwinement with Florentine (and Tuscan) Capitalism, and the Political Economy of White and Black Guelfism (1281-1304)

The works of scholars of the late 19th and 20th century, Robert Davidsohn,³⁶¹ Gino Arias,³⁶² Gino Masi³⁶³ and the work of the later generations of scholars following their fundamental work, George Holmes,³⁶⁴ John Najemy,³⁶⁵ and Raveggi et al.,³⁶⁶ are particularly important for understanding that the history of the relationships between the Holy See and the Italian bankers is one of the most interesting aspects of Italian economic and legal history.³⁶⁷ Gino Arias shows us that rather than being a “semplice

³⁶¹ Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze*.

³⁶² Gino Arias, "I banchieri italiani e la S. Sede nel XIII secolo: linee della storia esterna," in *Studi e documenti di storia del diritto* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1902) and "Il fondamento economico delle fazioni fiorentine de' guelfi bianchi e de' guelfi neri e le origini dell'ufficio della Mercanzia in Firenze," in *Studi e documenti di storia del diritto* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1902).

³⁶³ Gino Masi, "I banchieri fiorentini nella vita politica della città," *Archivio Giuridico "Filippo Serafini"* 9 (1931): 57-89; Gino Masi, *Il nome delle fazioni fiorentine de' bianchi e de' neri* (Aquila: Officine grafiche Vecchioni, 1927); Gino Masi, La struttura sociale delle fazioni politiche fiorentine ai tempi di Dante," *Giornale Dantesco* 31 (1930): 3-28.

³⁶⁴ George Holmes, "The Papal Revolution, 1294-1305," in *Florence, Rome, and the Origins of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 163-186.

³⁶⁵ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*.

³⁶⁶ Sergio Raveggi, Massimo Tarassi, Daniela Medici, and Patrizia Parenti, *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del dugento*, edited by Sergio Raveggi (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1978).

³⁶⁷ In what follows I base my self primarily off the account of Arias (1902), whose contact with primary documents on this question (along with that of Davidsohn and Gino Masi) remains so authoritative, despite being over 100 years old, that it is repeatedly cited by Najemy, Raveggi et al., and George Holmes in their historiographies. While the historiographical narrative of the political economy of papal banking in 13th and 14th centuries then is not “new” to the field of Italian, and particularly Florentine, economic and political history, it must be stated that it is “new” in relations to other

enumerazione dei contratti fra codesti mercanti e la Chiesa,” such a history shows a well-defined and long-term political economic relationship, and must be seen in its entirety, taking account of “lo sviluppo commerciale, con la politica pontifica, con la costituzione de’ paesi, ai quali i banchieri appartengono e nei quali, per solito, primeggiano.”³⁶⁸ In other words for Arias, the papal relationship with all the Italian city states and foreign powers is of absolutely critical importance, and must be seen as a crucial layer in the complex political economy of their institutions and social configurations.

We have already discussed the relationship (3.1) between Urban IV and the Guelfs in Florence that led the intervention of Charles of Anjou on behalf of the pope in Florence.³⁶⁹ In the era of French Pope Martin IV (1281-1285), the papacy continued its extensive relationships with the Tuscan bankers for the collection of church taxes

parallel historiographies in intellectual history as well as in Dante studies, which have tended to view church state conflicts according to their purely top-level ideological arguments in publicist literature and in terms of political clashes between church and imperial parties, without connecting the latter to either the municipal political history of Florence or the economic and social history of Florentine politics. The total imbrication of the political and economic with the church, then, needs to be retold over 100 years later in relation to Dante when it is totally absent from contemporary treatments. My inclusion of this historiography here then, predominantly based on Arias, is rooted in my conviction of its fundamental importance and that the historiographies of more recent historians on the topic (though less exhaustive on this particular question), as is obvious from their work, are reliant on Arias’ and Davdisohn’s yet unrivaled archival work on banking and papal politics in the late 13th and 14th centuries. New work remains to be done building off these historians, but would only be possible through exhaustive new research in Florentine and Roman archives.

³⁶⁸ Gino Arias, "I banchieri italiani e la S. Sede nel XIII secolo: linee della storia esterna," in *Studi e documenti di storia del diritto* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1902), 77.

³⁶⁹ See also, Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del dugento*, 56-58

(*decime*) from all over Europe, and even as far as Iceland and Greenland. In the early 1280s, the Bonsignori of Siena, the Spiliati-Spini, Pulci and Rimbartini of Florence, and the Ricciardi of Lucca were the preeminent players in the collection of *decime*, amongst dozens of firms, including the Cerchi, Frescobaldi, della Scala and del Pazzo, the latter of which Giano della Bella—hardly a populist revolutionary (!)—was an investment partner.³⁷⁰ The taxes collected by over a dozen other banking firms were eventually processed and deposited in these four.³⁷¹ According to Arias, these relationships were primarily ordered around reciprocal political and economic aims:

è, prima di tutto, da notarsi il grande numero delle compagnie, con le quali la Chiesa durante questo periodo, ha rapporti d'affari, a differenza di quanto accadeva ne' tempi anteriori. Ciò rivela l'attuazione di un'abile politica per la quale i pontefici cercano di sottrarsi alle prepotenze di una o di poche case bancarie e di provocare insieme la gelosia e la concorrenza fra i 'mercatores Romanae Ecclesiae'.³⁷²

As this was before the age of central banks, not every bank offered (nor could offer) the same guarantees of low-risk solvency and so it was, from time to time, necessary for the papacy to switch to firms that offered stronger protections on deposits.³⁷³ Arias notes that it is also not surprising during this period of particularly unstable political

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 88-91., notes the extensive church tax privilege granted to an array of Florentine and Tuscan firms; Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del dugento*, 77-78

³⁷¹ For a succinct overview of papal relationships with Florentine banking and commercial firms, which follows and corroborates Arias' narrative, see Holmes, *Florence, Rome, and the Origins of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 35-43

³⁷² Ibid., 91.

³⁷³ Ibid., 91.

conflict in Tuscany that the papacy—following a decentralized approach—selected banks in different regions and under different political authorities: besides reinforcing the political advantages of the papacy in regards to its financial and political power afforded by large deposits spread between many municipalities, firms, and locations, increasing a spread of banking relationships functioned to ensure that the church’s financial (and political) health would survive any commercial or political crisis that might arise in any particular city.³⁷⁴ It was essentially a way of guaranteeing a politically stable pipeline of ecclesiastical rent-taking and of preserving capital in investment banking corporations whose accounts tended to the least amount of risk when combined with their other financial activities, including loans and speculations based on their large deposits, of which ecclesiastical money represented a large capital base.

But the competition and political contests between Tuscan firms, though there was an increasing shift in power to the Florentine banks in this period, brought risks and uncertainties. As Arias comments,

avvenimenti improvvisi potevano ridonar nuovo vigore ai banchieri Senesi e toglier credito ai Fiorentini o anche far sì che il centro della vita bancaria si trasportasse altrove, per esempio, a Pistoia o Lucca. Nè basta: poiche non tutte le compagnie avevano credito uguale nei diversi paesi, era bene rivolgersi per le singole operazioni, a quelle che in un determinato luogo godessero maggior fiducia.³⁷⁵

One of the downsides of a decentralized system was that loans in sufficiently large quantities were less easy to secure because of the political chess involved in having allegiances so decentralized and making promises regarding collection of *decime* to

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 92.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 92.

more firms. The church needed lots of loans to assist the Angevins in Sicily at this time—again with Charles of Anjou (who had vanquished Manfred Hohenstaufen and the Florentine Ghibellines), recently returned from Middle Eastern crusading-- to fight Ghibelline elements there aligned with the Aragonese crown. As Arias puts it, underscoring the real political economy involved here (the close interlocking between political power and financial interest), “era necessario reprimere la rivolta, la quale aveva prodotto un risveglio del partito Ghibellino e minacciava di compromettere seriamente gli interessi Pontifici. Le ditte bancarie, per conto loro, non acconsentivano a far prestiti a Carlo d’ Angiò, senza la garanzia dei Pontefici, non garanzia *morale*, s’intende, ma delle decime ricevute in deposito.”³⁷⁶

Thus to ensure access to the massive loans necessary for this campaign the church gave more of a monopoly over the collection of tithing deposits to a few firms over others—as a form of incentivizing future revenues and guaranteeing the large outflows of capital involved—while still maintaining a large spread of deposits everywhere, as Arias puts it, to maintain political power and a fragile balance between Ghibelline and Guelf commitments: “Le vicende della guerra Siciliana e in genere il risveglio Ghibellino aiutano anche a spiegare la cura addimostrata da Martino IV di non prediligere questa o quella città, a favore delle altre. Così si sfuggiva il pericolo che i banchieri della città trascurata, con uno di quei loro subitanei mutamenti, si determinassero ad aiutare l’incipiente risorgimento del partito cosiddetto imperiale.”³⁷⁷

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 92-93.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 93-94.

According to Arias, this explains why the Bonsignori bank, of traditionally Ghibelline background, was granted more favors by the church at this time: to preempt with money any lack of dedication to Guelf papal causes that might erupt into Ghibellinism should insufficient capital not be persuasive enough.³⁷⁸

There was significant backlash amongst bishops given the (correct) perception that these *decime* collected for “crusading in the holy land,” especially in strongly Ghibelline Germany—fresh off the decline of Hohenstafuen power—were actually being used for other overtly nefarious political (anti-Ghibelline) purposes, as all the money was going directly to a handful of powerful Italian banks and was not deposited, as had often been traditional before this time, in monasteries and diocesan controlled institutions. This opposition, most marked in Germany, signaled an attempt to take money away from the Angevin-Papal alliance and deny Charles of Anjou the money necessary for his Sicilian campaign. For this reason, Martin IV ensured that the papacy ceased entrusting deposits of church tithes with monasteries and bishoprics entirely, and instead had it all go directly into the hands of his personally selected Italian bankers.³⁷⁹ Of course, this also had risks, as corruption was not unknown and some bankers embezzled church funds over and above the fees and commissions collected in service to the pope.

The economic-political power of the church was so strong (the equivalent of several large world governments in the modern context), however, that market forces (so to

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 94.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 95.

speak), which would otherwise have threatened the spread of deposits—that is, the risk that a preferred bank was outcompeted by another or lost money on a risky deal, or if the church withdrew too many deposits threatening the capital security of the accounts—did not even threaten its capital. Sometimes banks would ignore papal orders to transfer money to other firms, either because doing so would undermine another investment (especially in the case of smaller firms) or because of competitive rivalry. In some instances, when the church would demand to withdraw large funds from smaller banks, because of commercial relationships between the latter and larger banks, competing banks would even pay the church the demanded deposit in the name of the other bank in order to prevent some (perhaps even modest) interest of their own being ruined by the failure of the smaller bank which would occur had all the funds suddenly been withdrawn.³⁸⁰ The church withdrawing deposits of *decime* for some smaller banks was equivalent to a modern bank run, and could cause a complete failure of the institution, given the high amount of leveraged securities in relation to hard cash, that then, as today, were on the books of these companies.

Honorius IV (r. 1285-1287), Martin's successor, more or less maintained this policy of selecting banking partners based on political expediency, in this case wielding it to further Guelf interests:

Sotto Onorio IV, si affidano spesso incarichi alle compagnie Fiorentine degli Alfani e degli Spiliati-Spini. Ai primi si assegna la decima d'Ungheria e Polonia, agli Spiliati-Spini, secondo l'ordine di Martino IV, è consegnata la decima di Colonia, Brema e Magdeburgo; alle due compagnie riunite quella di

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 96.: the relevant example, according to Arias, is in A. V., *Reg. Vat.*, n XLII, anno IV, l.87. where the Ricciardi bank paid the church in the name of several more minor Lucchese firms.

Sardegna e Corsica, così per la Terra Santa, come per la Sicilia e l'altra di Norvegia. Accanto a codeste due società, si trovano due altre, pure Fiorentine, degli Abbati e dei Frescobaldi, le quali operano talora unite, talora per conto proprio. Compariscono anche in vari casi i Bonsignori, i Ricciardi, e gli Ammannati.³⁸¹

The the policy of Martin IV and Honorius IV continues in the next pontificate as well, that of Nicholas IV (r. 1288-1292), where “Non si trova... un così grande numero di compagnie, ma si vede applicato lo stesso sistema di equilibrio fra le città Toscane, e l'altro d'accaparramento delle ditte non sicuramente Guelfe. Niun altro scopo in fatti dovette avere, sotto Martino prima, e poi sotto Onorio, il favore per gli Abbati, se non quello di sottrarre i prestiti al partito Ghibellino, a cui gli Abbati stessi appartenevano per tradizione e di legare costoro e i loro adepti alla Chiesa.”³⁸²

During this period the hegemony of control over papal capital lay in these banks: the Florentine Spiliati-Spini, the Pulci, the Bonsignori (who were given all the collections from England and asked for many loans), the Ricciardi of Lucca and the Pistoian Chiarenti. Also, around 1291, the Frescobaldi entered the picture, “i quali nel settembre del 1291 avevano in deposito dodicimila fiorini di danari di Terra Santa e cinquantadue mila libre di tornesi, della ‘decima di Cestelle’.”³⁸³ From 1291-1292 the same pattern is seen: the popes gave a special privilege to the Chiarenti of Pistoia as his “speciali mercatanti” to service two hundred thousand pounds owed by the king of France—partly because of Nicolas’ links to the Colonna family, the latter also being close associates of

³⁸¹ Ibid., 97-98.

³⁸² Ibid., 99.

³⁸³ Ibid., 99-100.

the Chiarenti. But the pope also knew that giving the Chiarenti the contract would change their political commitments to the Guelf side: “avevano fino allora dimostrato tendenze piuttosto Ghibelline, le quali naturalmente scomparvero, non appena furono entrati al servizio dei pontefici.”³⁸⁴

Arias astutely notes that

Questo è uno dei sistemi dei papi: tenere al servizio costantemente banche sicuramente guelfe ed insieme, con favori di breve durata, se pure in apparenza superiori a quelli concessi agli altri, tenere a bada quelle banche, che fan credere di proseguire o intraprendere la speculazione Ghibellina. Così i Chiarenti, che sembrano giunti a tanto grande potenza, saranno poco di poi posti alla pari con altre compagnie ed anche, per qualche tempo, allontanati, non perchè ai successori di Niccola non piacessero le idee di questo papa, ma per le mutate necessità.³⁸⁵

The political power acquired through money and promises of profit reminds one of Dante's remark in *Inferno* 21 that “there, everyone's a grafter but Bonturo/ and there- for cash-they'll change a no to yes” (“ogn'uom v'è barattier, fuor che Bonturo/ del no, per li denar vi si fa ita”).³⁸⁶ There is essentially no record of papal finances at the time of Celestine V (r. 1294) due to his extremely short pontificate, but there is copious data for Boniface VIII (r. 1294-1303). Arias points out that preceding the start of this pontificate, because of the economic crisis that followed the war between Philip le Bel (Philip IV of France) and Edward I of England, “avvenne la definitiva rovina di molte case mercantili

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 101.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 101, footnote.

³⁸⁶ *Inf.* 21.41-42

di Siena, di Lucca e di Firenze.”³⁸⁷ At this time the Bonsignori fell out of favor for failing to make sufficient payments on agreed upon loans for “defensione de Regno”, and Arias reports that their agents in the Roman Curia were arrested.³⁸⁸

Around 1300, in the context of this financial crisis made more severe by war, the Bonsignori and the Ricciardi disappear mostly from papal financial dealings, the former because of mismanaging and misrepresenting the books and the latter because some of the firms’ partners seem to have attempted to pilfer funds from creditors. When discovered by the pope, he ordered the capital and property of the firms seized.³⁸⁹ For Arias the disappearance of the Bonsignori of Siena and the Ricciardi of Lucca—which represented the only non-Florentine banking relationships with the papacy--was also due to the prevalence and monopoly of Florentine financial power, but in any case the Boniface VIII era sees a decisive pivot to almost exclusively Florentine banking and political relationships.³⁹⁰ But the banks that emerge from this period of financial difficulties intact (more marginalized in dealings with the church, though not in open war with the church) came to resent the Church and felt the need for a coalition against the privileged firms—in this case the Florentine Mozzi and Spini and the Pistoian

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 102.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 103.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 103-104.

³⁹⁰ Arias, "I banchieri italiani e la S. Sede nel XIII secolo: Linee della storia esterna", 104.

Chiarenti—and their associates who benefited from the papal relationships and weathered the crisis better.³⁹¹

Arias sums up the linkage between politics and economics here during the time of Boniface's pontificate and, although writing nearly a century ago, allows us to deepen what are otherwise conventional narratives in the field of Dante studies or church state history, which give only vague reasons for the debacle and violence between Whites and Blacks at Florence and the intervention of the pope that resulted in Dante's exile along with other Whites:

non si erri nel dichiarare la genesi dei fenomeni, nè si dica che la preferenza di Bonifacio per gli Spini deriva dalla loro avversione contro Giano della Bella e dal loro favore pel papa, in altri termini dalla politica che costoro seguivano in Firenze. Il rapporto causale è proprio il contrario: il privilegio è determinato dalla potenza economica della ditta, la quale per uniformarsi ai suoi interessi, deve seguire una politica decisamente pontifica. In altri termini è il fatto economico che genera il politico, non questo che determina quello. Pei Chiarenti, il favore del papa nasce da queste cagioni: necessità di contrapporre ai Fiorentini una forte ditta straniera, in quanto era compatibile coll'utile della Chiesa...prevalenza finanziaria di costoro sulle compagne Pistoiesi. La volontà del papa di acquistare influenza su Pistoia anziché essere la causa del fatto ne era semplicemente una conseguenza: i Chiarenti, allo scopo di assodare il bilancio, facevano propaganda pontificia ed acquistavano facilmente adepti, perchè molti concittadini erano a loro uniti dagli interessi commerciali.³⁹²

In other words, the politics in which the banks were involved in Pistoia and Florence prior to the eruption of White/Black Guelf factionalism, respectively, had nothing to do with an “ideal” politics or theological-political ideological commitments of which their

³⁹¹ Ibid., 105.

³⁹² Ibid., 106-107;

relationship or preference for or against the papacy and for or against Philip le Bel was an indirect effect. It was rather the other way around!

Between 1294 and 1297 the relationship of the Spini-Mozzi-Chiarenti with the papacy remains strong, and they have a near monopoly over the collection of *decime*, with the addition of the Florentine Franzesi (who are also given a plethora of ecclesiastical *decime* in northern Italy and also happen to be the personal bankers of Philip IV of France).³⁹³ In 1298, it appears that the monopoly is placed more exclusively in the hands of the Spini, with the Chiarenti and Spillati falling out of favor.³⁹⁴ The Spini were now granted a near monopoly over the *decime*, until around August of 1300, in Italy and several European territories that year, in so far as the pope needed to grant such rights to the *decime* collection to secure from the same Spini loans necessary for the king of Sicily.³⁹⁵ During this period the pope engaged in banking relationships that involved a complex web of Florentine bankers, the king of France (Philip IV), his brother Charles of Valois, and Philip of Aragon.

The tumultuous years of 1301-1303 see the pope shifting his allegiances, seeking the greatest leverage over Florentine political outcomes in order to maintain a strong control over the city that now had the supreme control of his entire capital power. The monopoly of the Spini firm thus required intense intervention to protect the former from hostile political foes, namely their now angry competitors. Thus we see a strong

³⁹³ Ibid., 107.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 108.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 109-110.

relationship with the Bardi come into play as a counterbalance to the previous exclusivity with the Spini; after the fall of the White Guelfs in Florence, his relationship with the Cerchi firm (a white Guelf powerhouse) nearly disappears, given that the Black hegemony made it no longer necessary to maintain relationships with them.

In any case, to bring focus back on the political economy from the time of Dante around 1295 after Giano della Bella's removal, Najemy notes that the popular party did not disappear but that the factions soon split between the white and black Guelfs and as such constituted an elite resurgence: "As the elite succeeded in rebuilding vertical ties of patronage with clients from the popolo, the emboldened factions were soon at each other's throats." Najemy's opinion is that it is difficult to know why some families joined one or another of the factions.³⁹⁶ As we know Guelfs and former Ghibellines are found amongst both the whites and blacks, and "both factions included merchants and bankers." According to Najemy, "competition between rival banking families" was the major factor in this factionalism: the whites were led by major banking Cerchi family while among the blacks the Spini were Boniface VIII's most important creditors.³⁹⁷

Again Arias, writing based on primary documents and the chronicles of Dino Compagni and Giovanni Villani, presents a clear picture of how the politics of this period of factionalism between White Guelfs and Black Guelfs was determined by economic interests in an international political economy of which Florence was a

³⁹⁶ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 89.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

capitalist epicenter, as we have seen, not only for the papacy but also for foreign monarchies and their interests involving political client states. In the summer of the year 1300 the factional split emerges between the Blacks and the Whites. On the White Guelf side we find many of the banks and *consorterie* seen above in relationships with the pope: the Cerchi (the leaders of the faction), the Abbati, Rossi, some of the Frescobaldi, Mozzi, Scali, Alfani, some of the Frescobaldi, some of the Bardi, the Falconieri, and some of the Pulci.³⁹⁸ The Spini stand out (the near monopolistic papal bankers of the time) as the major heft behind the Black side. According to Compagni, the Spini, in fact, were not only the greatest adversaries of the Whites but the greatest cause of division, as Piero Spini was supposedly responsible for the nose-slicing incident committed against Ricoverino dei Cerchi on Calendimaggio, 1300.³⁹⁹

The main question is what *did* cause the furious and violent political factionalism that arose between these two groups of bankers? According to Arias,

una volta dimostrato che fra gli uni e gli altri esisteva una profonda inconciliabilità d'interessi, qua bisognerà vedere il motivo reale dell'animosità reciproca. Ormai sappiamo come i banchieri non si lasciassero facilmente trasportare da uno spirito di parte d'indole astratta, ma fossero indotti a seguire questa o quella fazione, con mutabilità tutta loro propria, a seconda dell'utile mercantile momentaneo.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Gino Arias, "Il fondamento economico delle fazioni fiorentine de' guelfi bianchi e de' guelfi neri e le origini dell'ufficio della Mercanzia in Firenze," in *Studi e documenti di storia del diritto* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1902), 123.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 123.; Compagni, *Cronica*, 1, 22.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 124; One notes that on this point and the above narrative are in strong agreement, Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del dugento*, 307-308.

This tendency is especially evident in the history of the powerful Cerchi, whose entire history as an investment banking *consorteria* engaged in political faction is that of a constant change of alignment according to the needs of their economic interests.⁴⁰¹ There should be no surprise how a political ideology such as Machiavelli's was nurtured through many centuries of his study of Florentine *Realpolitik*. During the Ghibelline restoration the Cerchi were aligned with the ruling Ghibellines, but seeing the impending downfall of Manfred and the Ghibellines, they then switched their support to the Guelfs (after 1267), backing Charles of Anjou and pope Urban—in exchange, as has been mentioned above in section 3.1, for extensive commercial privileges—while still keeping, as Arias puts it, “per maggior cautela, un piede nel partito ghibellino.”⁴⁰² In 1294, as magnates, they supported the conspiracy against Giano della Bella,⁴⁰³ only to later join forces with Giano's oldest banking friends and to become the leaders and most dedicated followers of the White Guelf faction.⁴⁰⁴

The economic logic behind the rise of the White faction is thus fairly simple,⁴⁰⁵ when seen through the political economic lens, and has little to do with abstract rivalry

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 124.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 124.

⁴⁰³ On the magnate status of the Cerchi and Donati families, see Carol Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates: Lineage and Faction in a Medieval Commune* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 232. ff.

⁴⁰⁴ Arias, "Il fondamento economico delle fazioni fiorentine de' guelfi bianchi e de' guelfi neri e le origini dell'ufficio della Mercanzia in Firenze," 124.

⁴⁰⁵ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 90-93, cites Arias and Masi on this economic motive in agreement, as do Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del dugento*, 307-309.

with other families (or for example mere outrage at the incident on the Calendimaggio, when Ricoverino dei Cerchi's nose was severed by a member of the Spini family), but with concrete economic interests. One must ask why an elaborate faction of wealthy bankers would coalesce against personal insults, if not for some serious threat to their ability to maintain capital, power, and profits. As shown above in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 2.1-2, the center of power in Florence had already shifted to a *de facto* and a *de jure* plutocracy and oligarchy—a hegemony of capitalist interests in the internal and external politics of the city. The economic crisis at the end of the 13th century, which had concluded with the collapse of important banking centers and firms in Siena and Lucca, increased the competitive tensions between the Florentine banks. At the time one of the surest ways to exit the crisis was to seek business with the papacy, and by extension, the foreign powers involved in client relationships with the papacy (which had a vast market privilege, as, by proxy, did further foreign states and municipalities). More important, the memory of the former decentralization of papal finances was strong, and the Spini-Mozzi-Chiarenti's near banking monopoly with the papacy and foreign states was viewed with envy and suspicion. To secure themselves from the downturn, as Arias puts it:

il mezzo più utile doveva sembrare la partecipazione al commercio coi Pontefici, sia perchè assicurava una fonte perpetua di guadagno, sia perchè aggiungeva credito alla ditta bancaria e la poneva in relazioni continue d'affari coi re di Sicilia e coi re stranieri, sia infine perchè, in quei momenti disastrosi, garantiva la protezione dei papi, tanto utile per ottenere i pagamenti puntuali ed in genere i più grandi privilegi mercantili.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 125.

Thus, given the power of the monopoly, the banks that were left out, as indicated above, saw the Spini and their allies an existential threat to their banking livelihoods, which explains why the Cerchi, a very old and revered banking house, saw the papal/Spini monopoly as such an economic threat that it broke its tradition of supporting the most powerful political interests, at this time papal Guelfism, in favor of forming a formidable but risky political coalition around protecting their economic interests. Thus we see that the White Guelfs (only nominally but not significantly anti-magnate) were truly formed not as a political faction but *first* as a banking coalition. In other words, the major reason behind the White Guelfs was to form a counter weight against the total control of the said monopoly and the pope, in addition to foreign powers led by the king of France, not only over Florence and the *decime* everywhere, but also over their ability to profit and maintain stable capital flows of which business with the church was almost a *sine qua non* requirement at the time.⁴⁰⁷

The proof of this thesis is that when the Mozzi's share in the monopolistic banking relationship with the pope and his international cronies also shrinks, due to increasing control by the massive Spini bank, we see Mozzi too join the white faction against the blacks, Spini, Pope and Corso Donati, their ally. Thus, by the time of the infamous event at the Calendimaggio between the Spini and the Cerchi families that has been the legendary cause of the Black and the White split we already have a solid, historically validated rationale for the increasing political tensions. In fact, following the bloodshedding factional event in Florence of that year the pope attempted to temper the

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 125-126.

monopoly and also create additional factions within the opposing White factions by reemploying and giving significant contracts again to the Mozzi, Bardi, and Cerchi banking *consorterie*—not only three of the richest Florentine banks, but amongst the richest Florentine banks then allied with the White Guelf faction. This favoritism to the *consorterie* previously left out, who had already shifted political allegiance, is also the cause of the subsequent splits between White Bardis and Black Bardis, White Cerchi and Black Cerchi, in so far as the commercial and banking operations of the family companies were so extensive that once reincorporated into economic relations with the pope, some refused to adhere to the original (new) White political faction, their economic interests having been assuaged, and became anti-partisans against other members of their family companies.⁴⁰⁸

In this way Boniface VIII managed to divide the political forces of his adversaries and secure the safety of deposits held in the Spini banks (and the other major partners re-admitted to papal service) by weaving a complicated political web of manipulated economic interests against the White Guelf regime. According to Dino Compagni's chronicle, Charles of Valois (brother of Philip Le Bel) acting in concert with Boniface VIII and the Black party, upon his arrival in Florence thus extorted massive amounts of money from the White Guelf bankers and worked to ruin them as punishment. As a consequence of this, Dante became a victim of the calumnious exile, along with many other prominent members of the White faction.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 127.

The banking conflict was not the *only* cause of the White and Guelf factionalism that erupted at this time, leading to the exile of Dante and the defeat of the Whites at the hands of Boniface and Charles of Valois, yet one must assert the strong link between economic interest and political action:

non può mettersi in dubbio il rapporto di causa ad effetto fra i fatti economici e politici ricordati...attorno alle due *coalizioni* di banchieri si aggruppano, a seconda che credono utile e per ragioni che andranno particolarmente studiate, i magnati, la borghesia industriale e commerciante, il popolo minuto. Queste tre classi, si scindono, al pari della classe bancaria, alimentando i due partiti. Dino Compagni rivela esattamente tale fenomeno: “divisesi la città di nuovo, ne’ grandi, mezzani, piccolini”...E ben si comprende come proprio i banchieri fossero, per dir così, alla direzione dei due partiti: essi ne avevano non solo la cagione più forte, ma anche il mezzo pratico più adatto, come quelli che potevano legare strettamente a sè, specialmente per mezzo dei prestiti, il maggior numero d’individui. Scrive infatti il Villani che i Cerchi: “*per lo seguito grande ch’aveano*, il reggimento della città era quasi tutto in loro podere.” E Dino Compagni dice che i Cerchi eran molto ben veduti “perchè molto serventi”; che “agevolmente avrebbero avuto [la Signoria] *per la loro bontà*, ma non lo vollono consentire” e che Berto Frescobaldi seguì la parte de’ Cerchi “perchè avea ricevuto da loro molti danari in prestanza”.⁴⁰⁹

For Davidsohn, who also examines these events more extensively, but less shortly and synthetically than Arias, the key factor in the political history of Dante’s time in this regard and surrounding these events is the rise of capitalism. It is self-evident:

Nel secolo decimoterzo in tutte le grandi città dell’ Alta e Media Italia la società assunse un nuovo assetto economico, come a Firenze, dove però le conseguenze politiche del mutato regime economico furono più manifeste che altrove. Lo sviluppo del capitalismo, di cui nei tempi moderni la scienza si è affaticata a scoprire le origini, fu quello che dette la sua impronta a quell’epoca.”⁴¹⁰

As Holmes remarks:

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 129-130.

⁴¹⁰ Robert Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze. Vol. II, Pt. 2* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1972), 538.

In the age of Dante, Florence's tradition of vendetta (a tradition shared with other Italians) acquired an enlarged political importance, because a number of the Florentine families which had local reasons for bitter hatred now also had world-wide connections as merchants and financiers which allowed them to call foreign powers into play on their behalf. This feature of the vendetta is of course already visible in the Guelf-Ghibelline disputes of the mid-thirteenth century, when enemies in Florence were able to link their disputes with the quarrels of the pope and the king of Naples. But the expansion of Florentine commerce in the later part of the century led to an extraordinary—and temporary—state of affairs in which some Florentine business firms had so great a world-wide standing that quarrels which originated in Tuscany could be transferred to distant parts of Europe, and occasionally they were so indispensable to the pope or king of France that they could call substantial papal or French help to their aid in Florence. The custom of vendetta can be found in many societies, but the linking of the family vendetta with the rivalry of firms having a dominant importance in international commerce is a peculiarity of this time and place. It is difficult to think of other cases where vendetta, local political disorder, and international commerce were bound up in this way, and it must be regarded as the product of exceptional circumstances which gave a particular colour to the Florentine scene for a few decades.⁴¹¹

While I cannot here, in the space of this study, expand more on these historical details regarding the financial connections and political economic ties between the white and black Guelfs, my goal has been to establish the *fact* of an international political economy operative over the events in the politics of Dante's time and leading up to his exile.⁴¹² In fact, one cannot read Dante's political thought without realizing it is a *direct response* to such a political economy. In the next section, we shall see how the events from the 1280s-1303/4 contributed to the consolidation of oligarchical interests in the Florentine state "Mercanzia."

⁴¹¹ Holmes, *Florence, Rome, and the Origins of the Renaissance*, 166.

⁴¹² For an exhaustive and comprehensive examination of the linkage between the political events of the period of 1294-1305 see *Ibid.*, 163-185, and the relevant sections in Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze. Vol. II, Pt. 2*.

5. The Consolidation of Political Economic Interests in the post-1308 *Mercanzia* as an Effective Rule of Corporations over the city of Florence

The fact that political instability was firmly linked to competitive economic interests in the crisis that gripped Florence in the turn of the 14th century is reflected by the formation of the “universitas mercatorum.” The period after 1308 sees the rise of the *mercanzia*, the institutional consolidation of the banking and mercantile elite in the Florentine government taken to a whole new level. This block holds power through the 1340s and on, and though Dante was in exile, he no doubt was aware of the happenings in Florence and the political-economic entwinements that it represents are certainly reflected in his writing, as it is essentially the institutionalization of wealth-getting within the state.

The *mercanzia* arose from the needs of international capital. Acerbic faction and political disorder was really bad for business, as Arias writes:

Le crisi commerciali ed economiche, le guerre fra le case di commercio, che fan capo alla divisione economico-politica dei Bianchi e dei Neri, la caduta dell'arte di Calimala, quale direttrice del grande commercio d'esportazione e d'importazione e la rivalità di quell'arte con l'arte della Lana. S'intende in primo luogo come, per uscire da quello stato anormale e pericoloso e per resistere più efficacemente alle insidie e alle persecuzioni straniere, dovesse sembrar utile raggruppare in un ufficio unico le forze delle singole arti ed avere come rappresentante all'estero un ufficio cui spettasse questa special competenza. Ma più valore ebbe la divisione interna: la discordia fra le case bancarie e la scissione della borghesia grassa, l'alternarsi al potere delle fazioni avverse, rendevano molto difficile ed incostante la protezione del grande commercio Fiorentino. Le autorità politiche del comune naturalmente dovevano ispirarsi agli immediati interessi mercantili della fazione loro, anzichè a un criterio d'utile generale. Nei tempi anteriori, la borghesia grassa era tutta concorde contro i magnati e contro il popolo minuto; ora invece si divide

in due fazioni scindendo anche le altre due classi, le quali si aggruppano rispettivamente intorno a questa or quella parte Borghese. Per la costituzione delle nuove parti politiche, il grande commercio non poteva dunque più sperare in una protezione concorde, come nei tempi precedenti. Indi la necessità d'un ufficio speciale capitanato da un forestiero e sottratto, il più possibile, alle vicende interne. In altri termini, la Mercanzia si presenterebbe come un tentativo per assicurare stabilmente, levandola all'arbitrio delle fazioni, la protezione del commercio internazionale. Dico tentativo, perchè un organismo che vive in uno stato non può interamente separarsi dalle vicende di questo.⁴⁴³

In 1308, the year that Corso Donati died, the *mercanzia* was created, which, as Najemy writes, was “destined for a long and significant role in the city’s economic and political life.” The *mercanzia*, or *universitas mercatorum*, was an organization created by the international import-export merchants and bankers of the five largest guilds (*Calimala, Cambio, Lana, Por Santa Maria, and Medici, Speziali, Merciai*) to protect their collective political and economic interests.

There were several factors behind this:

1) Given the fact that about eight high profile merchant companies had gone into bankruptcy between 1300 and 1310,⁴⁴⁴ the institution was necessary so that creditors could seek enforceable claims against insolvent debtors. Frequently in these cases, creditors—who were often foreign—would have to petition governments or guild courts which had already been created in the 13th century, whose judgments only extended to its members and often times could not render judgments against debtors beyond the

⁴⁴³ Arias, "Il fondamento economico delle fazioni fiorentine de' guelfi bianchi e de' guelfi neri e le origini dell'ufficio della Mercanzia in Firenze," 124.

⁴⁴⁴ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 110, these include the Nerli, Davanzi, Mozzi, Abati-Bacherelli, Ardinghelli and Franzesi companies.

city of Florence or Tuscany. This was problematic because capital and assets were often scattered around many states and territories and easily circulated, effectively meaning that given the international nature of capital already in existence, and particularly the international reach of Florentine banking and mercantile commerce, that Florence's international merchants wanted to protect themselves from collateral damage from foreign entities abroad: in the case that their peers were insolvent in another realm and punishment was exacted against other Florentine interests, *and* in the case that they needed to pursue claims against peer merchants or debtors who attempted to protect assets or debts from collection abroad. As Najemy says, "it thus functioned as a civil court, not unlike the guilds, but with the important difference that its jurisdiction extended to any and all Florentines, including residents of the *contado* and district, 'whether or not they are members of guilds,' thus cutting through the complex and contested limitations on the jurisdictions of individual guilds. At a creditor's request, the official of the *Mercanzia* could compel Florentine companies to submit account books for investigation."⁴¹⁵

But, as Najemy points out, the *mercanzia* was more than a simple tribunal. It emerged from a "prehistory of de facto cooperation and consultation among the consults of the major commercial guilds on such issues" and the push for formalization of such cooperation came from the merchant elite itself. This was a true consolidation of economic and political interests in the governance of the commune, representing world market "capitalism" and shows the evolution from party factionalism to a consensus on

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 100.

corporatist politics that put economic governance over the old disputes of church and empire, linked with banking rivalries, that had so damaged the city and its wealthiest corporate interests, as seen in 3.3. As Najemy explains in more depth:

the commune did little more than extend its recognition to an authority created by the international merchants of the five guilds. The new official was hired and monitored by the *Mercanzia*, not the commune. But the *Mercanzia* was more than a tribunal. As an *universitas*, or corporate association, it represented the interests of Florence's merchant community to the commune and foreign governments and protected those interests by legislating in matters of commercial law. Indeed, from at least 1312 it had its own statutes. The *Mercanzia* had no formal membership: any merchant of the five guilds who engaged in trade or banking outside the Florentine dominion could be elected to the Five or sit on any of the association's ad hoc committees that dealt with particular problems. The larger significance of the *Mercanzia* is that, for the first time, the elite was defining itself with reference to economic interests and responsibilities, representing itself as a community of merchants rather than as a warrior class or as partisans of church or empire. As a product of (a portion of) the guild community, the *Mercanzia* also signified the elite's implicit acceptance of the guilds and customs and procedures by which merchants and guildsmen typically resolved disputes, settled bankruptcies, and managed relations amongst themselves and with the outside world. Participating in the *Mercanzia* were all the city's great merchant and banking families, except for the politically significant, but numerically small, contingent of magnate merchant houses (Bardi, Scali, Spini, Mozzi, Frescobaldi, and a few others), but even they were regularly represented on the *Mercanzia's* committees by non-magnate business partners. Former Guelfs and Ghibellines, former Blacks and Whites cooperated in the association's judicial, administrative, electoral, and diplomatic functions. Venerable non-merchant families like the Donati, Cavalcanti, Della Tosa, and Adimari largely disappeared from center stage at this point, not because a new class of merchants suddenly arose, but because an already powerful economic elite finally realized that the worst possible response to their class could make to the *popolo's* challenge was a continuation of party conflicts. They decided in effect that those older non-mercantile elite families had provided singularly ineffective leadership for their class, especially in the preceding decade, and that they now needed a new collective representation of themselves grounded in the institutionalization of the economic interests and responsibilities. The *Mercanzia* represented not a new elite but rather a new image of a changing elite.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 111.; John M. Najemy, "Dante and Florence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 11, puts it this way: "The oligarchs of the great international trading and banking families tended to see themselves, despite their guild affiliations, as a class apart, united by business, patronage, and family ties that transcended their association with the various guilds."

This dominance of international capitalist elements is shown in the fact that eligibility for the *Mercanzia*'s committees was limited to members of the five guilds from export and import from abroad or those who 'engage or invest in money-changing and lending' in any part of the world. Basically, as Najemy puts it, the criterion cut through the memberships of the major guilds, while meaning that many retailers, producers, service providers, and lenders who were based only within the dominion of the Florentine government were not part of the most powerful state sanctioned institution. As Najemy writes,

this was as close as the economic elite could come to an institutionalized distinction between themselves and the rest of the guild community. By this definition, the *Mercanzia*'s constituency included some guildsmen who bought and sold within Tuscany and central Italy and did not engage in truly international trade, but the great companies found it much easier to assert their leadership within this group than they did in the more heterogeneous full membership of the five guilds, let alone the broader community of twenty-one guilds. Merchants who traded beyond the borders of the Florentine dominion...had significant interests in common...regional traders did not lack incentives for cooperation with international merchant-bankers, and from such shared interests and frequent contacts the elite was able to forge a degree of consensus within the *Mercanzia* that was unattainable in their separate guilds. The *Mercanzia* thus embraced those merchants, who even if not from great families, depended on the success of the economic elite for their prosperity. Most importantly, the *Mercanzia* could ignore

This sense of belonging to an interguild elite was, in fact, institutionalized in the *Mercanzia*, the organization of international and interregional merchants and bankers from the five major commercial guilds (Calimala, Cambio, Lana, Por Santa Maria, and the Medici, Speziali e Merciai). Although the *Mercanzia* was itself a corporation, it was never integrated into the guild federation. In fact, it was later used by the oligarchs as an instrument for imposing electoral and political controls over the guilds themselves.... it is sufficient to point out that the *Mercanzia* gave a precise institutional configuration to the merchant oligarchy's sense of itself as constituting an interguild elite whose members had more in common with each other than they did with the hundreds of non-oligarchic members of their own guilds. Throughout this book the term "oligarchy" will be used to refer to the families that formed the solid core of this mercantile elite."

the popular pressures to which the individual guilds and the full guild federation were subject.⁴¹⁷

Najemy details the make up of the *mercanzia*, the first full list of “all the companies that fell under its criterion of international trade or banking” coming from 1322, the year after Dante’s death. It lists 264 companies, sometimes with investing partners listed and some without names or precise numbers (ASF, *Mercanzia* 136). Of these 34 came from the other 16 guilds (of the 21), but “the 500-600 investing partners of all 230 major guild firms were Florence’s early fourteenth-century economic oligarchy, and these family companies were its inner core.”⁴¹⁸

In terms of what sort of political regime this was, it has many of the major features of what modern theorists regard as classic features of the state in a capitalist system.⁴¹⁹ It was an effectively open and complete institutionalization of the oligarchy of the rich without any masking of the fact. As such, the major organs of the state and conceptions of justice in the *mercanzia* were manifestly not viewed in terms of the *contrapassum* or distribution of and production of goods for the moral good of persons and ultimately for their collective intellectual perfection-- which is Aristotle’s idea and as we shall see Dante’s idea in the *Monarchia* (also see Marx on surplus value in *Grundrisse* where “the common” is coopted by capital and seems indistinct from it)— but rather reflected of the

⁴¹⁷ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 112.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Nature and Logic of Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 1985); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

state as being a super-corporate entity in which the real adjudication of interests is predominantly in representation of citizens *qua* members of guilds, business and banking corporations. In other words, the *mercanzia* represents a mode of governance where state justice is not only protecting the rights of debtors and creditors, but where individual citizens are seen *qua* their status as market agents, and not in terms of their virtuous contribution to the commune: arithmetical justice. The kind of values represented by this mercantile republic, as articulated by people like Brunetto Latini—writing before the rise of the institution—have nothing to do with Aristotelian virtue ethics and political goods.⁴²⁰

* * *

In observing the history of the bourgeoisie in Florence, no matter all the various forms of constitutional “checks and balances,” which over time, as we have seen, involved multiple iterations of priorates, councils, guild councils and priorate configurations with the guilds, through the *secondo popolo* and finally *mercanzia*, in the end, “power in the Italian communes clung obstinately to wealth and migrated with movements of wealth, and through all revolutions of political and economic regime, oligarchy, in fact or law, was the predominant form of government.”⁴²¹

⁴²⁰ On Brunetto and mercantile ethics, see Cary J. Nederman, “Brunetto Latini's Commercial Republicanism,” in *Lineages of European Political Thought: Explorations Along the Medieval/Modern Divide From John of Salisbury to Hegel* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press), 2009.

⁴²¹ Philip J. Jones, “Communes and Despots: The City State in Late-Medieval Italy.” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (Fifth Series)* 15 (1965), 75.

According to Jones “in the first century of the commune this represented, in contemporary language, government of those called *minores* or *pedites*, who constituted the *populus*, by the class of *maiores* or *milites*, a composite group of feudal gentry and merchants, who in Florence, for example, may have numbered some 100 families.”⁴²² In some towns this sort of regime, which is similar to the sort that Dante’s Cacciaguida has so much nostalgia for, survived unchallenged, but for the most part it started a long trend of disintegration after 1200, influenced as we have seen by the factors of 1) faction within the governing class (Guelf/Ghibelline etc.) rival families and *consorterie* 2) the movement of the *popolo* into a bourgeois class who, enriched by trade and enlarged after their urban migration, “began to rebel against magnate domination, and in the course of the thirteenth century secured a share...of the communal government.”

In any case, we have already seen that this history is not a history of the “whole people” or of large-scale enfranchisement, but of a system in which the emancipation of the *popolo* was actually the beginning of the stratification of the richest corporate interests that developed out of the *embourgeoisement* of the populace in the urban center of Florence—that is also of their *universitates* (corporations and guild corporations)—and the juridical victory of capitalism developing properly significant political economic institutions at every stage of the process. In the governments generated by these developments, “the groups most powerfully represented were the richer trade guilds, especially the guilds of bankers, businessmen and industrialists—the

⁴²² Ibid., 75.

popolani grassi.”⁴²³ By the 1330’s, in Florence, 70 percent of all major offices were held by members of the three wealthiest guilds of *Calimala*, *Lana*, and *Cambio*. Even in 1343 when there was a “popular revolution” and the full corporations of the 21 guilds insisted on more access to power again, at this time, according to Jones, only some 3,500 men were eligible for office of a population then of nearly 80,000, of whom at no point, was more than one tenth actually qualified. The majority of office-holders were drawn still from the upper guilds—that is capitalist elements.⁴²⁴ As Jones says, “such was the type of government described by contemporaries as *democratia* and represented by Florentines as an egalitarian, broadly-based polity.”⁴²⁵ We must keep this in mind when we hear high-minded talk about the civic mindedness of the Renaissance “humanist,” such as Alberti and Saultati, who were hardly for all of humanity but conspicuously for their class.⁴²⁶ While Florence’s republican history is unique, the point is that

the popular movements of the thirteenth century merely raised, without solving, the problem of the governing class. Nowhere did the *popolo* extinguish the magnati or even suppress their partisan divisions. In most towns their powers were undiminished. Even when disenfranchised, they retained their wealth and influence, in both church and state and their old ambition to dominate; and in this they were readily joined by the *popolani grassi*, who adopted their habits and outlook.⁴²⁷

⁴²³ Ibid., 76.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 76.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 77.

⁴²⁶ Ronald G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients the Origins of Humanism From Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill), 2000.

⁴²⁷ Philip J. Jones, "Communes and Despots: The City State in Late-Medieval Italy," 77.

This is essentially capitalist oligarchy, but in the northern Italian space almost everywhere numerous conflicts persisted between patricians and plebeians and, according to Jones, “everywhere the patrician class, whatever its social affinity, continued to fight factiously for power; and everywhere the final effect of internal dissention was the same: the large neutral majority, the ‘homines communes’ (Bartolus) who, with a civic spirit far older than humanism, kept the administration going, grew increasingly apathetic, ceased to attend councils, and left political action to their betters.” This was made easier by the “independent tendency, from the thirteenth century on, to concentrate authority, for the sake of speed and efficiency, in small executive councils, magistracies, plenipotentiary committees of *balie*. In every way, therefore, institutionally and politically, the irresistible trend, as even republicans recognized, was to restrict supreme office, the unpaid honores, to a group of dominant families....”⁴²⁸ The political creed can be summed up by Guicciardini: “government [in the Italian communes of the 13th century] belonged properly to the wealthy and wise.”⁴²⁹

Dante was squarely anti-oligarchical, anti-capitalist, and anti-wealth-getting. In the next chapter we will briefly examine the question of capitalism in 13th and 14th century Italy, and we shall conclude this study by exploring how Dante can be said to have been a *critic of political economy* according to the Aristotelian paradigm, in the final chapter.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 77-78.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 78.

Chapter 4. Capitalism or 'c'apitalism? A Brief History of the Historiography of Capitalism and its Origins in 13th and 14th Century Italy

A major question to ask is whether or not what I have shown to be the fact of something historically verifiable as *political economy* in Dante's Florence and Italy—if what constitutes this object as certified by induction—is really “Capitalism.” Undoubtedly, defining capitalism is a task riddled with major difficulties that exceeds the scope of the present study, though a deductive-analytical conception of capitalism outside the historicity of actual institutions and social-material conditions is plainly absurd. Nonetheless, it is helpful to briefly consider in this chapter how medieval Italy, as explored in chapter 3, can be said to be a ‘capitalistic’ political economy. This chapter then serves as an auxiliary supplement to the main argument and as such is a short overview of the history of the historiography of capitalism. My argument is that capitalism—with a lower case ‘c’—did exist in medieval Florence in a qualified sense and this fact is irrefutable.

There have been a wide range of definitions of capitalism—too many to catalogue here—but a brief survey of scholars’ definitions from the 19th - 21st centuries shows that they overlap with many of the features of the political economy we have observed in chapter 3. According to Bowles, a non-controversial definition of capitalism is a “system for organizing production which is based up on the institutions of private property and the market, and which relies upon the pursuit of private profit as its driving force.”⁴³⁰ In other words, 1) “private ownership of firms’ and society’s productive assets” 2) the *market*, “that is, the voluntary purchase and sale of goods, services and factors of

⁴³⁰ Paul Bowles, *Capitalism* (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2007), 8.

production such as land, labour and capital” 3) “the *profit motive* as the driving force.”⁴³¹ This definition does, in fact, match the historically verifiable conditions of 13th and 14th century Florence and medieval Italy generally. Schumpeter’s definition of capitalism also definitely attests to the 13th and 14th century Italian space, especially in its highlighting the importance of banking and credit:

A society is called capitalist if it entrusts its economic process to the guidance of the private businessman. This may be said to imply, first, private ownership of nonpersonal means of production, such as land, mines, industrial plant and equipment; and, second, production for private account, i.e. production by private initiative for private profit. But, third, the institution of bank credit is so essential to the functioning of the capitalist system that, though not strictly implied in the definition, it should be added to the other two criteria.⁴³²

While Weber is also famous for his linking of protestant religious sentiment as a serious constitutive feature of capitalism⁴³³—and this has been the object of many critiques such as that of Tawney—he elsewhere does not insist on it.⁴³⁴ In his *General Economic History* (Chapter XXII: The meaning and Presuppositions of Modern Capitalism) Weber attempts to make a functional definition of capitalism, saying that “capitalism is present wherever the industrial provision for the needs of a human group

⁴³¹ Ibid., 9.

⁴³² Joseph A. Schumpeter, "Capitalism. Reprinted From Encyclopedia Britannica, 1946, Vol. IV, 801-807," in *Essays: On Entrepreneurs, Innovations, Business Cycles, and the Evolution of Capitalism*, ed. Richard V. Clemence (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 189.

⁴³³ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁴³⁴ R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998).

is carried out by the method of enterprise, irrespective of what need is involved.”⁴³⁵ A crowning feature of capitalism for Weber is “rational calculation.” Weber defines “a rational capitalistic establishment” as one “with capital accounting, that is, an establishment which determines its income yielding power by calculation according to the methods of modern bookkeeping and the striking of a balance.”⁴³⁶ This definition more or less corresponds to medieval Italy, as the evidence of the accounting and business practices of major Italian firms of the early 14th century, such as that of the Peruzzi, shows.⁴³⁷ Despite the fact that he says “capitalism of various forms is met with in all periods of history,” he erroneously discounts the possibility of any outcropping of true Capitalism before the 16th century, as Wallerstein and others will do after him,⁴³⁸ and actually has reservations about its true existence until the middle of the 19th century.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁵ Max Weber, *General Economic History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1981), 275.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 275.; Weber goes into more detail on this in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. Talcott Parsons and A. M. Henderson (New York: Free Press, 1964), 275-289, *et passim*.

⁴³⁷ For a major case study in the accounting and business practices of the Peruzzi company in the late 13th and 14th centuries, see Edwin S. Hunt, *The Medieval Super-companies: A Study of the Peruzzi Company of Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴³⁸ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-system: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1976), 15-47.

⁴³⁹ Weber, *General Economic History*, 276.

To return to the religious issue raised by Weber, as Giacomo Todeschini has pointed out,⁴⁴⁰ there is a problem with the Weberian thesis and similar ones, which tend to be

⁴⁴⁰ Giacomo Todeschini, *Il prezzo della salvezza: lessici medievali del pensiero economico* (Roma: Nuova Italia scientifica, 1994), 13-14, argues that economics are almost totally excluded from master narratives of the middle ages from Spann to Denis “perchè si ammette in generale come presupposto che «né l'antichità né il Medioevo elaborarono dei sistemi ben definiti di teorie economiche» (Spann, 1936, p. I)”, mentre d'altra parte si riducono le eventuali osservazioni economiche medievali (Tommaso d'Aquino è di solito il termine di riferimento privilegiato) a problemi di rapporto fra società religiosa e società laica. Stabilito a priori che quest'ultima nel Medioevo non ha teorie economiche, la questione diventa naturalmente quella dei modi con i quali la società ecclesiastica ossia la cultura teologica ha condizionato e frenato lo sviluppo economico complessivo...In queste ricostruzioni generali, a ben guardare, il Medioevo è in realtà la premessa più o meno coerente di uno sviluppo successivo, che inizia, solitamente, fra XVI e XVII secolo con la Seconda Scholastica e con le teorie mercantiliste...Esiste evidentemente, in tali ricostruzioni di lunghissimo periodo, un equivoco per quanto riguarda la sezione tardo antica/medievale dalla volontà di intendere le concettualizzazioni economiche medievali come un fatto globale, indipendentemente dai periodi che compongono il Medioevo (occidentale, orientale, nordico), ma soprattutto dalla tendenza ad applicare alle fonti utilizzate per scrivere di pensiero economico medievale criteri vistosamente anacronistici, che in nessun caso sarebbero ammessi quando, per esempio, si parlasse e scrivesse di città medievale o di demografia medievale. Si crea così nei quadri generali del tema un disagio palese nei confronti di un Medioevo esterno alle categorie del discorso economico occidentale, ma ineliminabile nella storia della morale economica occidentale; la presunta perfezione di questo Medioevo nella storia della coscienza economica europea, e d'altronde la sua centralità nella storia occidentale del conflitto fra moralità ed economia non incoraggiano evidentemente a valutarne più da vicino le modalità di espressione: ad analizzarne il linguaggio economico. Parafrasando Polanyi, si potrebbe osservare che come nelle società antiche manca un termine che definisca l'economia, ciò che non “impedisce all' economia di esistere con caratteristiche differenti da quelle moderne, così nel Medioevo manca l'espressione-concetto pensiero economico, ma questo non elimina l'esistenza di un vasto e complesso sistema di definizioni e di analisi economiche all'interno del variegato universo delle fonti medievali..... queste fonti, come si vedrà, siano a tutt' oggi in parte inedite, o che la storiografia, come pure si vedrà, tenda spesso a farne un uso estremamente specifico e strumentale, relativo cioè a situazioni, autori e momenti di cui si intendono sottolineare altri aspetti, non elimina il fatto che il pensiero economico medievale come oggetto storiografico esista, ma che tuttavia appaia attualmente come complesso discorsivo da decodificarsi: esso, cioè, dovrà essere recuperato a partire da elementi che la storia del pensiero economico moderno e contemporaneo non riconosce come pertinenti, da fonti e testimonianze talvolta insospettabili, ma non per questo meno espressive di modi di verbalizzare la realtà economica medievale...Bisogna riflettere, inoltre, sulla collocazione di questo oggetto di studio nella produzione scientifica degli specialisti, cioè degli storici del Medioevo; senza

incapable of seeing the space of western Europe, Italy and France in particular (and the larger geopolitical configurations of the high Middle Ages), as playing a central role in the development of early capitalism.⁴⁴¹ This perhaps only applies to hypotheses formed without the benefit of the deep historical work done over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, by Armando Sapori,⁴⁴² Raymond De Roover,⁴⁴³ Robert Lopez,⁴⁴⁴ Henri

voler anticipare un' analisi storiografica che si svilupperà più oltre, si potrà tuttavia ricordare fin dalle prime pagine di questa esposizione quanto lo studio della riflessione economica medievale sia marginale in molta della ricerca medievistica attuale, coerente in tal senso con una consolidata tradizione. Anche da questo punto di vista si può ben osservare il disagio di cui già si è accennato: il pensiero economico medievale, lo si intenda come etica economica medievale o come lessico economico medievale, tende a non affiorare nell'analisi storiografica dei medievisti, e quando questo affioramento avvenga, esso sarà marginale alla storia di vicende econo-spirituali e teologiche viste come ben altrimenti significative. Anche la volontà enunciata di recente da uno storico come Le Goff di ricostruire il dibattito economico medievale sull'usura al di là di atemporali categorie teorico-economiche non gli impedisce tuttavia di ricondurre la questione a come un ostacolo teologico" (il divieto d'usura ecclesiastico, in questo caso) freni (o stimoli) lo sviluppo economico bassomedievale. Anche in questo caso, che si riprenderà, al centro dell'attenzione storiografica non è il modo medievale di scrivere (e parlare) di economia, ma l'economia stessa medievale intesa come realtà oggettiva in conflitto con un sistema concettuale ad essa contrapposto in quanto tale. Ma per affermare l'esistenza di questo costutto, e dunque la nozione stessa di freno (o stimolo) ideologico esercitato, per esempio, dalla morale teologica bassomedievale nei confronti della società di mercato coeva, occorrerebbe prima di tutto aver chiaro come, con quale lingua e con quale lessico parli quella morale teologica, quale linguaggio sorregga le eventuali polemiche, quanto in esse "freni" lo sviluppo e quanto invece semplicemente ne esprima le contraddizioni o ciò che ai nostri occhi sembri in esso contraddittorio."

⁴⁴¹ For a helpful overview of the debates over the existence of capitalism in the middle ages and their scholarly contexts, especially regarding the overlaps between Renaissance historiography and the historiography of Medieval Italian economy, see William Caferro, "Economy: Hard Times or Prosperity?" In *Contesting the Renaissance* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 126-147.

⁴⁴² Armando Sapori, *La crisi delle compagnie mercantili dei Bardi e dei Peruzzi* (Firenze: LS Olschki, 1926); Armando Sapori, *Il giusto prezzo nella dottrina di San Tommaso e nella pratica del suo tempo* (Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 1932); Armando Sapori, *La cultura del mercante medievale italiano* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1937); Armando Sapori, *Studi di storia economica medievale* (Firenze: G.C. Sansoni, 1946); Armando Sapori, *Studi di storia economica: secoli XIII, XIV, XV* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1967).

Pirenne,⁴⁴⁵ Fernand Braudel,⁴⁴⁶ Janet Abu-Lughod,⁴⁴⁷ and others whose work has given ample material through which one can articulate a historical and historical-intellectual picture of capitalism, with a lower case ‘c’, especially one that accepts either a strong or light version of the distinction Marx articulated between medieval “merchant’s capital” and modern “industrial capital.”⁴⁴⁸ However, a major impediment to articulating a new theory of medieval capitalism has been the same overdetermining trend that I discussed in regards to Dante studies and criticism in chapter 1, except in this case, within what I

⁴⁴³ Raymond De Roover, *Money, Banking and Credit in Mediaeval Bruges; Italian Merchant Bankers, Lombards and Money-changers*, (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1948); Raymond De Roover, "The Scholastics, Usury, and Foreign Exchange." *Business History Review* 41, no. 03 (1967): 257-271; Raymond De Roover, "Le marché monétaire au Moyen Age et au début des temps modernes. problèmes et méthodes." *Revue historique* (1970): 5-40; Raymond De Roover, *Business, Banking, and Economic Thought in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

⁴⁴⁴ Robert S. Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

⁴⁴⁵ Henri Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937).

⁴⁴⁶ Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century. Volume I: The Structures of Everyday Life, the Limits of the Possible*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th - 18th Century. Volume II: The Wheels of Commerce*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1982); Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century. Volume III: The Perspective of the World*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

⁴⁴⁷ Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 131; Karl Marx, “Chapter 20: Historical Material on Merchant's Capital,” In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Vol. 3, Introduced by Ernest Mandel*. Translated by David Fernbach (Harmondsworth: Penguin in association with New Left Review, 1981), 44off.

call the history of the historiography of capitalism: namely, the tendency to take the heavy slathering of self-consciously forwarded theological claims from scholasticism regarding everything and, additionally, every other part of the complex edifice of Roman catholic doctrine and religiosity circulating at the time as the dominant hermeneutical framework for understanding and examining all other historical phenomena, especially political and economic phenomena. This trend is perhaps related to the bias of the Weberian thesis about the “protestant” nature of capitalism, but not exclusively so, as it is also overdetermined by the official doctrines of the church regarding usury as exhaustively interpreted and developed by scholastic thinkers.

As Cave and Coulson have put it:

The medieval attitude toward usury was closely bound up with the doctrine of just price. It is a commonplace to say that usury was forbidden on the grounds that Aristotle had declared money to be barren, and that it was prohibited by the Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church. Aristotle's idea was that it was contrary to nature to exact usury since thereby the lender was making money for its own sake, thus robbing money of its proper function, i.e., that of being a medium of exchange. This idea was handed down to the Middle Ages through the Romans. With regard to the Scriptures we find that the Old Testament was interpreted as permitting usury between Jew and Gentile, but not among Jews themselves. In the New Testament there is apparently only one passage, the interpretation of which is doubtful, which can be considered as forbidding the practice, while the Fathers are vague and contradictory as to their reasons for forbidding it. At the time of the fall of the Empire some of the Fathers condemned the taking of usury as a sin against charity, but not against justice, and this was the prevailing attitude down to the twelfth century. Nevertheless, civil codes permitted it, and there were not lacking clerics who signified their approval of these codes. In A.D. 1139 the Second Lateran Council ordered excommunication of usurers, and the opposition to the practice was further strengthened by another decree in A.D. 1179. At the same time Pope Alexander III declared it to be a sin against justice, and from this time usury was condemned outright.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁹ Roy C. Cave and Herbert Henry Coulson, *A Source Book for Medieval Economic History* (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1965), 169.

One aspect of the over determined hermeneutic is to maintain that theological prohibitions against usury and denunciations of greed—whether from the patristic or scholastic tradition (often recycling the former)—actually reflect historical legal regimes, prohibitions, and societal mores at any given point.⁴⁵⁰ While it is true that over the course of the early Middle Ages, the Catholic Church developed a strong intellectual tradition—drawing from and renovating biblical and patristic sources—focused on the vice of usury and spawning canonical prohibitions to it, this ought not to be mistaken with its fact in practice nor ought it to over state the church’s power in particular political zones of authority to enforce prohibitions. Also, while it is true that in some places there were minority Jewish communities of usurers in the High Middle Ages, they were very protected by the authorities and increasingly part of a much larger Christian community of bankers and merchant companies.⁴⁵¹ An easy temptation for many generations of scholars has been to fall into the anti-historical and anti-Semitic stereotype (in my opinion much of this imagination is due to the legacy of Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*), as reflected by Arnold, that “a merchant class, slowly rising to power after the Middle Ages, had no place of prestige in the social hierarchy. Therefore, when the need for banking and credit began to be felt, only the despised Jewish moneylenders could fill it. Society tolerated them but felt compelled to establish the fact that such techniques were unworthy by laws of the Church declaring them illegal and

⁴⁵⁰ On the intellectual history of the usury prohibition, see John Thomas Noonan, *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).

⁴⁵¹ Charles R. Geisst, *Beggar Thy Neighbor: A History of Usury and Debt* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 51.ff.

immoral.”⁴⁵² At best it is only a half-truth (with some important implications), at worst it furthers anti-Semitic stereotypes.

So, as Henri Pirenne writes, although there are some scruples as to the complexity and level of advancement of credit, financial instruments, and money markets in the Middle Ages, where personal loans were hard to differentiate in species from commercial loan contracts, for example, save “in the great Italian cities, where the governing institutions of financial markets and the banks of the future were already beginning to take shape,” there is no doubt about the pervasive and widespread practice of usury and systematic profiteering by large financial institutions with the tacit or explicit support of states.⁴⁵³ There is no doubt that the rights of creditors to money made by usury were even eventually enforced by civil courts, as we have seen in the early 14th century Florentine legal system.⁴⁵⁴ The notion that the 13th-14th century canonical prohibitions against usury somehow mean that there is no early capitalism to investigate in the medieval period is totally bogus. As Pirenne writes,

the fact that this prohibition [of usury] passed from ecclesiastical into civil legislation certainly made it still more of a hindrance. In actual practice, however, it was impossible to enforce its literal observance and it was applied in full rigour only in cases of "manifest usury," i.e., of consumption loans upon pledges, in which an excessive rate of interest was stipulated. The need for credit was too great and too general for men to think of discouraging lenders. From the

⁴⁵² Thurman Wesley Arnold, *The Folklore of Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), 2-3.

⁴⁵³ On practice of usury versus the letter of usury law, see Henri Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937), 130ff.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

thirteenth century onwards the canonists were seeking to modify the absolute prohibition laid down in the text *Mutuum date nihil inde sperantes* by various expedients. It was discovered that in any advance of money involving either an eventual loss (*damnum emergens*), or a cessation of gain (*lucrum cessans*), or a risk of the capital (*periculum sortis*), an indemnity, or, in other words, interest (*interesse*), was justifiable. Thus interest was simply legitimate usury, and it is easy to understand how delicate was the distinction between this tolerated usury and the prohibited usury, and what scope it left for interpretation by the judges. In commerce the "letting out" of money was authorised by current practice. It was the rule at the fairs of Champagne and in general in the operations of commercial societies. In the fourteenth century the theologian, Alvarus Palagius, states that the prohibition of usury is not applicable to the latter. The fact remains, however, that the censure of the Church was always hanging like a permanent menace over all who concerned themselves with credit. Very often debtors were absolved by the Church from the obligation to pay interest on their debts. Consequently the utmost ingenuity was expended upon dissimulating the dangerous interest. Sometimes the lender deducted it in advance of the sum borrowed, sometimes it was concealed under the guise of a penalty for delay in repayment, sometimes the debtor acknowledged the receipt of a much greater sum than he had really received. Altogether the legislation against usury does not seem to have prevented it in practice very much more than the Volstead Act in America prevented the consumption of alcohol. It was a hindrance but not a barrier.⁴⁵⁵

However, by the time of the later 13th century, it must be noted that Italian bankers were largely unscrupulous and unconcerned with the difference between *lucrum cessans*, *periculum sortis*, *damnum emergens*, etc. and engaged in unabashed usury. The 13th and 14th centuries reflect the rise of what Joel Kaye and Peter Spufford call a monetized society.⁴⁵⁶ If anything, the development of such categories over the long 13th and 14th centuries reflected updating the theology and philosophy of what counts as

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 137-138.; On the evolution of a space for permitted profit, interest, and market actions, see Odd Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools: Wealth, Exchange, Value, Money, and Usury According to the Paris Theological Tradition, 1200-1350* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992) and Joel Kaye, *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange and the Emergence of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴⁵⁶ Peter Spufford, *Money and Its Use in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Kaye, *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange and the Emergence of Scientific Thought*, 15-36.

“natural” or properly moral (natural) behavior with regards to money, buying, selling etc. with actual practices that had already become or were increasingly becoming divergent with the tradition.⁴⁵⁷ According to Joel Kaye,

As the power and weight of the marketplace within society grew over the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, opposition between the economic order and traditional models of natural order led to continuing attempts (seen most clearly within scholastic usury theory) to force economic definitions to conform to traditional definitions of “natural” equality. The distinction between natural order and market order created great tension within an intellectual culture whose habit was to unify and synthesize. The tension grew as the power and position of the market in society grew, until, by the late thirteenth century, as a result of this continued opposition, it was the conception of the natural order that began to give way.⁴⁵⁸

Odd Langholm has also convincingly shown, in the *Merchant and the Confessional*, how this same need to update the theology with practice was also operative in the creation of procedures for guilt cleansing for the religious capitalist in an era that saw the dawn of canonically mandatory confession in the Catholic Church. Manuals and treatises were drawn up by friars and religious writers that specified how priests and penitents ought to do conscience “accounting” and gave rubrics for mortal and venial financial sins.⁴⁵⁹ It thus became possible in the 13th century to be able to participate in financial and profiteering operations that had hitherto been routinely considered *turpe*, while watching for the good of one’s eternal soul: those “who have sinned in buying and selling as to cause, time, person or place, should be told to spend their profit on the

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 13-14.

⁴⁵⁹ Odd Langholm, *The Merchant in the Confessional: Trade and Price in the Pre-reformation Penitential Handbooks* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

poor.”⁴⁶⁰ Edwin Hunt shows how this penitential practice evolved into a corporate practice of allocating a small percentage of annual profits in the super-companies to God—in the form of payments to charities—marked down in accounting ledgers as payments to “Messer Domeneddio.”⁴⁶¹

In practice, the only institution unable to engage in usury directly, by the time of the age of Dante, were Church institutions themselves, who had somewhat to adhere to their own canonical and theological prohibitions, and, as we have seen extensively in chapter 3.3, had major recourse to the Florentine and Italian banking sector to do these activities by proxy with their ecclesiastical capital. Pirenne couldn’t have been more understated in his assessment that “the Church itself was continually obliged to borrow from the financiers whose actions it reproved. It was to them that the Papacy entrusted the collection and management of the revenues, which came to it from all parts of Christendom; and it is very plain that the Popes could not have been ignorant of the sort of business in which their bankers were engaged.”⁴⁶²

Another aspect of the hermeneutical defect of viewing history through the lens of the letter of the religious or theological *forma mentis* becomes more complicated when it is combined with the notion that the medieval economy was “static” like the feudal

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁶¹ Hunt, *The Medieval Super-companies: A Study of the Peruzzi Company of Florence*, 83

⁴⁶² Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, 137-138.

economy of the early Middle Ages.⁴⁶³ Georges Bataille, the eminent French economist and anthropologist, makes the mistake of seeing the Middle Ages as “static,” if not slavishly attached to general medieval moral prohibitions on usury, which shows a shocking lack of historical rigor. For Bataille, Weber had emphasized the most essential point about capitalism in the connection between “a religious crisis and the economic turnover that gave rise to the modern world.”⁴⁶⁴ In his section “Economy in the Doctrine and Practice of the Middle Ages”—which reflects some similarities with the basic assumptions upon which Le Goff’s work *Your Money or Your Life* rests⁴⁶⁵—Bataille says

⁴⁶³ The caricature of a “static” medieval economy—which is implicit in a classical political economist like Adam Smith—in opposition to the “Renaissance” non-static economy, is best summed up by Karl H. Dannenfeldt, *The Renaissance: Medieval or Modern?* (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1959): “The mediaeval system knew in the field of economics only one type of order, the order of the small men, peasants and artisans, who by the work of their hands earned their keep, in accordance with the necessities of their rank, their traditionally fixed “needs.” Apart from this static order, which applied to the vast majority, there was the static disorder in which the great lords, the rich of pre-capitalist days, led their particular lives. It did not matter whether they were secular magnates or among those priests who, according to Alberti, desired to outdo all in splendour and display, in inclination to inactivity and the absence of all economy. As a matter of fact, such an unregulated and indolent mode of life led to the economic ruin of the majority of the old noble families. In contradistinction to the nobleman as well as the mediaeval peasant or artisan, the bourgeois entrepreneur calculates; he thinks rationally, not traditionally; he does not desire the static (i.e. he does not acquiesce in the customary and the traditional) or the disorderly but the dynamic (i.e. he is impelled towards something new) and the orderly”; also, see Bowles, *Understanding Capitalism: Competition, Command, and Change*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6. where the entire framework is based on the idea that prior to 1500, the economy was mostly unchanging and “...people’s understanding of the physical world was so rudimentary that births, deaths, and harvests, whether abundant or meager, were frequently interpreted with recourse to magic, superstition, or reference to God’s will.”

⁴⁶⁴ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy* (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 116.

⁴⁶⁵ Jacques Le Goff, *Your Money or Your Life: Economy and Religion in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 1988).

that “there were contrary types of economy corresponding to two different religious worlds: The ties between the precapitalist economy and Roman Catholicism were just as strong as those between the modern economy and Protestantism.”⁴⁶⁶ Borrowing the Smithian conception of “productive” and “unproductive labor,” the former resulting in vendible commodities which allow the reproduction of capital, according to Bataille, “what differentiates the medieval economy from the capitalist economy is that to a very large extent the former, static economy made a nonproductive consumption of the excess wealth, while the latter accumulates and determines a dynamic growth apparatus.”⁴⁶⁷ This statement, given what we know from the work showcased in this study about the massive productive, credit, and trading apparatuses geared towards profit and the recycling of that capital into massive international trading and money fructifying operations, is categorically false. Bataille also over generalizes in conflating one view of Christian economic thought—like that emphasized by Noonan on usury doctrine⁴⁶⁸—which ignores the fact that economic thought over the course of the 13th century was actually working to legitimize and make licit usurious and other business-monetary practices, with a practice that he imagines was altogether different. “Its basic principle” says Bataille, “was the subordination of productive activity to the laws of Christian morality.” It so happens that this system looks an awful lot like stereotyped feudalism of the very early Middle Ages and not 13th -14th century Florence, extensively examined in this study (ch. 2-3):

⁴⁶⁶ Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, 116.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁴⁶⁸ Noonan, *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury*.

The producers must satisfy the needs of the nobles and the priests; in exchange, from the former they would receive a share in the divine life and the moral rule to which their activity had to be strictly subordinated. The idea of an economic world independent of the service of the clerics and the nobles, having its autonomy of its own laws as a part of nature, is alien to the thought of the Middle Ages. The seller must part with the merchandise at the *just price*... Money that is lent cannot be an object of rent, and usury is expressly prohibited by canon law. The scholastics only made allowance cautiously and belatedly for the difference between loans for a business undertaking, which give the creditor the moral right to profit, and those used for the consumption of the borrower, for which no interest is justifiable. The rich man has his reserves: if the poor man becomes destitute, can the rich man who keeps him from dying of hunger, without himself being inconvenienced, demand repayment of more than he advanced? This would be to make time pay; and time, unlike space, was said to be God's domain and not that of men. But time is given in nature: if money always makes it possible somewhere to finance profitable ventures, a natural law gives to the factors "money + time" the additional value of interest (of a share of possible profit). In this way moral thought is the negation of natural laws: the Church's intervention opposed a free development of the productive forces. Production, according to Christian morality, is a service whose modalities (obligations, responsibilities, prerogatives) are determined by the ends served (by the clerics, in sum, who are the judges of those ends), not by a natural movement. This is a rational and moral—but static—conception of the economic order; it is what a divine, teleological cosmogony is to the idea of evolution determined by a play of forces.⁴⁶⁹

While Bataille does admit "formal judgments are not the only ones. And the nature of the medieval economy may not be fully disclosed in the writings of the theologians and jurists," he suggests that it "may not be defined in the real practice either" it seems, because of that society's "understanding of wealth."⁴⁷⁰ For Bataille, "before the reformation" it was not possible that society capitalistically set aside "the use of available resources to the expansion of enterprises and the increase of capital

⁴⁶⁹ Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, 117-118.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

equipment” preferring “an *increase of wealth* to its immediate use.”⁴⁷¹ Jones, however, has abundantly made clear that the stereotypes that apply to northern European formations or feudalism in this period are in fact quite different in the south, and particularly in 13th and 14th century Italy, whose middle age was anything but a “dark age.”⁴⁷² So much for Bataille’s argument, which can safely be discarded as it depends on interpreting ideological superstructures at face value as a basis for making any other material interpretation possible against a preponderance of evidence to the contrary: it is simply untenable today, as Giacomo Todeschini’s work on the categories of a proper historiography of the history of capitalism and economy has shown.⁴⁷³

But the history of capitalism is yet the domain of extensive controversies, from the debate about the transition from feudalism to capitalism, agricultural and agrarian formations, the Brenner controversy, primitive accumulation and a host of other arguments.⁴⁷⁴ While this literature cannot be examined here, one major figure in the

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 119.

⁴⁷² Philip J. Jones, "Renaissances and Revolutions: Europe and Italy Between Antiquity and Middle Ages," In *The Italian City-State: From Commune to Signoria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 1-54.

⁴⁷³ Giacomo Todeschini, *Il prezzo della salvezza: lessici medievali del pensiero economico* (Roma: Nuova Italia scientifica, 1994).

⁴⁷⁴ On the extensive debate about historical capitalism, see, for starters, Perry Anderson, *Passages From Antiquity to Feudalism* (New York: Verso, 2013); Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London: Verso, 2002); Keith Tribe, *Genealogies of Capitalism* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981); Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1975); Martha C. Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism in Europe, 1300-1600* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1964); Y. S. Brenner, *The Rise and Fall*

debate about the historical roots of capitalism is Fernand Braudel. In his *Civilization and Capitalism*, Braudel astutely writes that the word capitalism is a “fighting word”: “ambiguous, hardly scientific, and usually indiscriminately applied, it is above all, a word that cannot be used of the ages before the industrial period without being accused of anachronism.”⁴⁷⁵ But I agree with Braudel wholly, when he says that

there was nothing to be gained by throwing out along with the word the controversies it arouses, which have some pertinence to the present-day world...if capitalism is thrown out the door, it comes in the window. For whether one like it or not, there was, even in the pre-industrial era, a form of economic activity irresistibly evocative of this word and of no other. While such activity may not yet have been employing the industrial ‘mode of production’ (which I do not consider the be-all and end-all of capitalism) it cannot in any case be confused with classic market transactions.⁴⁷⁶

As Braudel notes, “since the word is so controversial” it is helpful to trace the historical etymology and development of “the words *capital*, *capitalist*, *capitalism*.”⁴⁷⁷ For Braudel, regarding the “key words of the vocabulary of history” one should ask a number of questions, “where do they come from? How have they come down to us? Are they likely to mislead us?”⁴⁷⁸ Braudel’s survey is extensive, and I’ve distilled the most

of Capitalism (Brookfield, VT: E. Elgar, 1991); T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin, *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Eric Mielants, *The Origins of Capitalism and the "Rise of the West"* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007); Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London; New York: Verso, 1994).

⁴⁷⁵ Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th - 18th Century. Volume II: The Wheels of Commerce*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 231.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 231-232.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 232.

important points that help us focus on the kinds of vocabulary used in Dante's time.⁴⁷⁹ Braudel notes that every civilization must develop a specialized vocabulary to "grapple with the necessities and disputes of exchange, production and consumption...the meanings of which were constantly deformed with the passing of time." He warns that the "word capital, the oldest of the three [capital, capitalist, capitalism]...did not take on the meaning we now associate with it, indeed did not even begin to have this sense, until about 1770, with the work of Turgot, the greatest French economist of the eighteenth century."⁴⁸⁰

But, indeed, as Braudel writes the word rises out of 13th century Italy:

Capitale (a Late Latin word based on *caput*=head) emerged in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries in the sense of funds, stock of merchandise, sum of money, or money carrying interest. It was not at first defined with any rigour, as the discussions of the time centered primarily on interest and usury (to which scholastics, moralists and jurists eventually opened the door in good conscience, because, they said of the risk run by the moneylender). Italy, the forerunner of modernity in this respect, was at the centre of such discussions. It was here that the word was first coined, made familiar and to some extent matured. It appears incontestably in 1211 and is found from 1283 in the sense of the capital assets of a trading firm. In the fourteenth century, it is to be found practically everywhere, in Giovanni Villani, in Boccaccio, in Donato Velluti. On 20 February 1399, Francesco di Marco Datini wrote from Prato to one of his correspondents: 'Of course, if you buy velvet or wollen cloth, I want you to take out an insurance on the capital (*il capitale*) and on the profit [to be made]; after that, do as you please.' The word, and the reality it stood for appear in the sermons of St Bernadino of Siena (1380-1444) '...quamdam seminalem rationem lucrosi quam communiter capitale vocamus,' 'that prolific cause of wealth we commonly call capital.'⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 231-251.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 232.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 232-23.

Specifically in regard to the “reality” of capital, Braudel writes, that while capital and capitalism in its true sense are often thought as inseparably linked to the industrial revolution, we must question “whether...capitalism in its true sense really sprang to life fully armed at the same time as the industrial revolution.”⁴⁸² He notes that “British historians are now inclined to date the origins of the industrial revolution at least as far back as 1750, if not a century earlier” and highlights the important observation of Marx, who

placed the beginnings of the ‘industrial era’ in the sixteenth century—but admitted that ‘the first attempts at capitalist production’ (not merely capital accumulation, it should be noted) appeared precociously in the Italian city-states in the Middle Ages. Any emerging organism, even if it is still far from having developed all its final characteristics bears within it the potential for such development and can already be assigned a name. All things considered then, the new notion of capital can be regarded as an indispensable theoretical concept for the understanding of the centuries covered by this book.⁴⁸³

Again, in response to Wallerstein’s “fascination” with the origins of capitalism in the sixteenth century, Braudel writes that

For Wallerstein, the European world-economy [of the sixteenth century] was the matrix of capitalism. I do not dispute this point, since to say central zone or capitalism is to talk about the same reality. By the same token however, to argue that the world-economy built in the sixteenth century on its European site was not the first to occupy this small but extraordinary continent, amounts to saying that capitalism did not wait for the sixteenth century to make its first appearance. I am therefore in agreement with the Marx who wrote...that European capitalism—indeed he even says capitalist production—began in thirteenth-century Italy.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸² Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th - 18th Century. Volume II: The Wheels of Commerce*, 239.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁴⁸⁴ Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century. Volume III: The Perspective of the World*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 57.

Braudel, in agreement with Marx puts the focus on the Italian city-states:

the merchant cities of the Middle Ages all strained to make profits and were shaped by the strain. Paul Grousset had them in mind when he claimed that ‘contemporary capitalism has invented nothing’. Armando Sapori is even more explicit: ‘Even today, it is impossible to find anything—income tax for instance—which did not have some precedent in the genius of one of the Italian republics.’ And it is true that everything seems to have been there in embryo: bills of exchange, credit, minted coins, banks, forward selling, public finance, loans, capitalism, colonialism—as well as social disturbances, a sophisticated labour force, class struggles, social oppression, political atrocities. By at least the twelfth century in Genoa and Venice, as well as in the towns of the Netherlands, extremely large payments were being made in cash. But credit was quick to follow.⁴⁸⁵

Mentioning that the only real alternative challenge to the predominance of the Italian city states was the “modern state foreshadowed by Frederick II’s achievements in southern Italy,” but that it “had got off to a poor or at any rate a slow start, and was in addition to be adversely affected by the fourteenth-century recession,”⁴⁸⁶ Braudel goes on to say that “the predominance of the city-states can only be explained in the context of the first world-economy ever to take shape in Europe, between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. It was in this period that the extensive trading-zones were established of which the cities were at once the instruments, the articulations and the beneficiaries. The birth of Europe, that monstrous shaper of world history, took place not in 1400, the starting-point of this book, but at least two hundred years earlier.”⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 92.

There is, of course, before Braudel, much consensus that the birthplace of capitalism was medieval Italy. Marx discusses this, as cited by Braudel (n 54), in *Capital* vol. 1.8.26, the section on primitive accumulation, where he maintained that “capitalist production developed earliest” in medieval Italy.⁴⁸⁸ But Sombart in *The Quintessence of Capitalism* (1915), goes even further, calling Florence “the Bethlehem of the capitalist spirit.”⁴⁸⁹ The spirit of capitalism, he writes:

first manifested itself in Italy. From the 13th century onward it extended over all the trading republics of Lombardy; by the 14th century it was fully developed there; and throughout the Middle Ages its intensive growth in Italy was unparalleled in Europe. As we have already observed, the evidence that is available for Italy during this period is abundant enough. It was just that state of mind which I have termed the ‘bourgeois spirit’ that was found in the Italian cities earlier than elsewhere, and it reached its highest development in the Tuscan republics.⁴⁹⁰

Noting the differences between Tuscany and the great sea trading powers of Genoa and Venice, Sombart emphasizes

that it was from Florence that the strongest impulse for the development of the ‘bourgeois’ outlook came. As early as the 14th century the Florentines were filled with a feverish (I had almost said American) desire for gain, and a devotion to business that almost amounted to a passionate love. Florence was that state [according to Burkhardt] ‘which was requested by dying fathers in their last wills and testaments to fine their sons one thousand florins if they had no regular occupation.’⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin in association with New Left Review, 1976), 876.

⁴⁸⁹ Werner Sombart, *The Quintessence of Capitalism: A Study of the History and Psychology of the Modern Business Man*, trans. Mordecai Epstein (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1915), 229.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 132; it must be noted that 1000 florins is a large quantity of money, perhaps equivalent to \$1 million US dollars.

In his monumental work, *Der Moderne Kapitalismus*, Sombart also perhaps insists on these points more strongly,⁴⁹² and none other than Davidsohn, in his *Geschichte von Florenz (Storia di Firenze, vol. 2, II, 538 ff.)* discusses “La genesi del capitalismo” (the birth of capitalism) in the context of the 1293-1295 Ordinances of Justice that coincide with the start of Dante’s own political career, in a level of detail that merits its own study on the history of the historiography of capitalism that goes beyond this study.

There is thus wide consensus on something called “capitalism” or “proto-capitalism” existing in fact in medieval Italy. Going back to Braudel’s discussion of the roots of the word “capital,” I would like to here lay to rest any doubt and prevent any obfuscation of the facts about the existence of the word capital and its meaning in practice in 13th and 14th century northern Italy. To update Braudel’s etymological research, a few simple searches in the online *Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini* reveals potentially *thousands* of uses of derivatives of the word “capitale” in unpublished Italian language and Italian dialect documents from the 13th-14th centuries, reveals that it the word “capital” was in use and that it clearly refers to monetary capital.⁴⁹³ In vernacular Italian forms, such as *capetale, capitagli, capitaie, capital,*

⁴⁹² Werner Sombart, *Der Moderne Kapitalismus: Historisch-systematische Darstellung des gesamteuropäischen Wirtschaftslebens Von Seinen Anfängen Bis Zur Gegenwart. Die Theorie Der Kapitalistischen Entwicklung, 2* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1902). Werner Sombart, *Der Moderne Kapitalismus: Historisch-systematische Darstellung Des Gesamteuropäischen Wirtschaftslebens Von Seinen Anfängen Bis Zur Gegenwart. Die Genesis Des Kapitalismus, 1* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1902).

⁴⁹³ "CAPITALE (2) S.m./s.f." *Tesoro Della Lingua Italiana Delle Origini*, <http://tlio.ovi.cnr.it/TLIO/> (accessed December 15, 2015).

capitale, capitali, cavadal, cavaldal, cavar, cavear, cavedal, cavedale, cavedhal, chapitagli, chapitale, chapitali, chapjtale, chavadal, chavedal, kapitale, and kapitali, from the period between 1200-1400, the word takes on the exact range of meanings a modern reader would expect in its conceptual denotations.

Capital is

- 1) as a noun, “patrimonio fruttifero in denaro accantonato da un singolo o da un gruppo di individui” (profitable assets/holdings in money set aside by an individual person or group of individuals)
- 2) as a noun, “qualsiasi bene o patrimonio, mobile o immobile” (any property or asset, movable or immovable)
- 3) As a verbal expression “fare capitale: accantonare un bene per il futuro, arricchirsi (anche fig.)” (to make capital: to store an asset for the future, to enrich oneself (also figuratively))
- 4) As a noun, “somma di denaro prestata a uno, al netto degli interessi” (a sum of money loaned to someone, after interest)
- 5) As a noun, “Qualsiasi bene dato in prestito” (any good or property loaned to someone)
- 6) “Prezzo di una merce” (the price of a good)

* * *

Heilbroner, in *The Nature and Logic of Capitalism*, helps us to think better about what the significance of capitalism is in terms of Dante and his critique of medieval political economy. Referring to Braudel, Heilbroner says “in his immense panorama of

economic life that leads from the late middle ages through the industrial revolution into modern times, the doyen of French economic historians, Fernand Braudel, mentions capitalism only in passing in his first volume, traces the etymology of *capital* and *capitalist* but not *capitalism* in his second volume, and manages to avoid an explicit definition of the term in his third, where capitalism appears as a congress of trading and commercial activities but is curiously absent in any sense of a clearly defined social order.”⁴⁹⁴ Indeed, whatever capital-ism is, the consensus is that particular entwinement of political and economic realms is inherent to capitalistic systems, due to the social formations of such a society at a particular stage of its historical development.

Heilbroner offers us here a sort of road map to chart some of the issues, however briefly and inadequately (because such an exploration, again, trespasses the boundaries of this study), especially because while it is easy to cluster lots of descriptive analysis of multiple “trading” or “commercial” phenomena that are clearly capitalist or involve capital, ultimately “capitalism” is an institutional and social reality whose complexity is embodied in a form and habit of state (as we shall see in the next chapter in an Aristotelian sense). This state formation contrasts with tributary and feudal social and state formations which, respectively, embody the logic of those systems. Heilbroner points out that “capitalism cannot be understood in terms of its structure of production alone, any more than tributary states can be grasped exclusively in political, or primitive

⁴⁹⁴ Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Nature and Logic of Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 1985), 15.

societies in communal, terms.”⁴⁹⁵ Basically he says that we have to look at the totality of the social formation beyond only its most visible elements:

In capitalism as in other regimes, a central organizing principle and its institutions influence all aspects of the social formation, whether these be concerned with material life, justice and social order, or custom and belief. In primitive societies that organizing principle is kinship with its networks of reciprocity; in tributary societies it is the principle of centralized rulership with its associated aristocratic or priestly hierarchies; and in capitalism, as we have so often discussed, it is capital with its self-expanding attributes.⁴⁹⁶

Critiquing Daniel Bell’s “multi-axial” analysis of capitalism in *The cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, which divides society into “*techno-economic* structure, the *polity*, and the *culture*”⁴⁹⁷ —almost akin to Gramsci’s withering criticism of some political theorists’ tendency to make rigid distinctions between civil society and the state⁴⁹⁸ —Heilbroner poses the question: “if the realms coexist in an unordered, equivalent manner, how shall we distinguish the trials and tribulations of modern capitalism from those of other societies in the throes of their contradictions? Did not the Roman empire or late feudalism or Ming China have their techno-economic structures, their polities and their cultures, each with its axial principle? Were not the conflicts and contradictions among those realms decisive in changing, perhaps even in destroying, these societies?”⁴⁹⁹ Heilbroner’s answer to this line of questioning opens up his larger

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁹⁷ Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 10.

⁴⁹⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 208.ff.

⁴⁹⁹ Heilbroner, *The Nature and Logic of Capitalism*, 82.

analysis: “the answer—and I think it is an answer which Bell would agree—is that the contradictions of capitalism somehow arise from the nature and logic of the system—that is, from the unfolding of a society under the peculiar stresses and strains generated by its historically unique search for generalized [monetary] surplus.”⁵⁰⁰ While other societies can have different sorts of contradictions—cultural, political, religious—and capitalist societies are not spared or immune from those sorts of traditional sources of “disruption,” Heilbroner’s point is that capitalism has a unique sort of tendency, such that “the failure to accord centrality to one principle and its embodying institutions...robs social analysis of its classificatory potential as gravely as the dogmatic insistence that all attributes of any given society can be explained as mere epiphenomena of its mode of production or of any other organizing structure.”⁵⁰¹

In this key passage, Heilbroner frames the entwinement of political and economic realms in regards to the state as a particularly *capitalist logic* (cf. the entire analysis of chapter 3):

From this perspective it is a matter of course that capital, as the dominating principle of the society identified by its presence, must color and infiltrate the institutions and beliefs that lie beyond its immediate ambit of operation. The state that carries on the formal tasks of government, or the ideational structures that contain and convey its world views, could no more escape being recognizable as ‘capitalist’ than could the governing institutions or the ideational creations of earlier formations escape being identifiable as belonging to tributary or feudal forms of historical society. The influence of the economic realm on its intertwined political and social realms does not therefore involve any mechanical dependency or slavish passivity of the latter but only their congruence with, and complementarity to, the operating relationships of capital. Such a view is

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 83.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 83.

perfectly compatible with the obvious fact that the hand of state, although generally exercised on behalf of the regime of capital, is also stayed by notions of fairness and justice, as well as political expediency. By utilizing its power to the hilt, for example, it might be possible for the state to depress wages dramatically, thereby assisting the accumulation of capital, but the full force of state power is normally held back by considerations of bourgeois morality itself, or simply by the calculations of prudence. It is therefore not only possible, but necessary, to accord to the political and ideological realms a degree of freedom to act on behalf of motives that antedate those of capital accumulation and that persist along side it, although generally subordinated to it. What is needed is no more—and of greater importance, no less—than a recognition of the existence of general priorities and interests without which no social formation has any historical center of gravity.⁵⁰²

One important point thus is that there clearly are, in the case of Dante's time several motives in "political and ideological realms" such as the investiture conflict, Boniface's pursuit of re-igniting papal power almost a century after Innocent III, transitional ideas of nobility, theological and ideological elements pertaining to secular and church powers, ideologies and political theories about monarchy in the political thought of the time and, as Lansing has shown in the *Florentine Magnates*, sociological motives regarding knighthood and nobility in elite violence that antedate motives of capital accumulation. There are also clear indications of the development, as Joel Kaye and Odd Langholm have shown, of a bourgeois morality that is firmly rooted in religious traditions, cultural phenomena, and intellectual strands that ante-date the predominance of a capitalist logic. But as I have shown extensively in the previous chapter—in the case of Florentine history of Dante's time, especially from the 1290s onwards—the preponderance of historical evidence shows decisively that these phenomena are "generally subordinated to [capital]" as the main historical dynamic characterizing the material and social relationships they embody. This is another way of saying that in the capitalism, with a little 'c' of Dante's time, the "motives that antedate

⁵⁰² Ibid., 85.

those of capital accumulation” and the developing ideological, religious, philosophical, and cultural responses to the increasing hold of capitalist logic in 13th and 14th century Italy, constitute a “superstructure” which is reciprocally interactive with, but largely subordinated to (in the force of its historical development) the economic/material relationships innested in the base of the state institutions, configurations of property, and economic power: a less ideologically manifested, but still very clear, base whose main characteristic is the “capitalist” logic.⁵⁰³

What is this base and superstructure? As Marx famously defines them in the Preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859):

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely [the] relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite *forms of social consciousness*. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or — this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms — with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces, these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead, sooner or later, to the transformation of the whole, immense, superstructure. In studying such transformations, it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic, or philosophic — in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness

⁵⁰³ I unapologetically use and appropriate the concept of base and superstructure here despite many 20th century Marxists’ objection to the validity of the concept in regards to Marx’s more developed, later thought.

must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production.⁵⁰⁴

Thus Dante's political prescriptions and critiques can be better understood as a critique of "political economy" (though I think critique of capitalism would be good). Thus in book 3 of *Monarchia* Dante is critiquing the self-conscious ideological content (superstructure) of his Florentine and medieval Italian political economy—especially regarding the theological claims to Church power over the state—while in Book 1 he is offering a normative political theory rooted in the material and economic foundations in the base including a strong moral argument against the power of greed to divert human beings as a society seeking a common end from the fulfillment of that end. While this is only one part of the way of understanding Dante's conceptual framework, we will in the next chapter examine Dante's Aristotelian critique of "political economy" as a more precise mode of approaching the particular problem of "political economy." In any case, the critique of political economy is heavily involved in defeating the fiction of the separation of the political realm and the economic realm, and calling into question the intertwining of politics with a certain form of capitalistic wealth-getting that subjects justice and social goods to economic modes of the logic of monetary accumulation not present in *non-capitalist* systems.

⁵⁰⁴ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977); Marx ends this preface on the critique of political economy by invoking Dante: "This sketch of the course of my studies in the domain of political economy is intended merely to show that my views – no matter how they may be judged and how little they conform to the interested prejudices of the ruling classes – are the outcome of conscientious research carried on over many years. At the entrance to science, as at the entrance to hell, the demand must be made: Qui si convien lasciare ogni sospetto / Ogni vilta convien che qui sia morta."

For Heilbroner, key to a critique of a capitalist political economy, therefore, is a careful examination of the “properties of the economic and political spheres themselves, in particular those that comprise the productive and distributive activities of the social formation, and those that define the realm charged with governance.”⁵⁰⁵ In other words, he is looking at how the capitalist logic operates through the state—as we have done in chapter 3. He notes, 1) that one of the chief characteristics of pre-capitalist orders is that there is no truly “clear-cut division” between economic and political activities. In fact, in these pre-capitalist formations, “nothing like an economic ‘realm’ can be discovered in any of them.” Although he does not mention Aristotle, the point he makes is very Aristotelian (which we will examine shortly), in that the economic factor, that is the social provisioning for needs “for material survival” are indeed visible in all societies as well as the “technical and organizational problems of altering or channeling” them.⁵⁰⁶ Thus according to Heilbroner, the lack of “formal boundaries that exclude the exercise of state power over the organization or direction of production or distribution” is what precludes these activities from “constituting a realm”:

The economic domain is simply of one piece with the political...the crucial relationship of domination in tributary systems is applied alike with regard to the allocation of labor or the administration of justice, to the extraction of rents or the inflicting of punishment. There is no essential difference between the disciplining or the marshaling of a labor force and an army, although the former generally requires less effort because it can rely on the inertia of tradition.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁵ Heilbroner, *The Nature and Logic of Capitalism*, 85.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

It seems that Heilbroner's "tributary" closely resembles the despotic or paterfamilias notion of "oikonomia." In all "tributary" systems there is only one "political" order, one realm, in any case because at times in early systems "this aspect of domination has not acquired a distinctive association with 'the state' and its apparatus, as opposed to the mere expression of a single ruler's will."⁵⁰⁸ Indeed, in this model the prominent feature is that power, whether exercised by a bureaucracy or a monarch, "combines the enforcement of political relations of sub- and super-ordination with the economic performance of various tasks." For Heilbroner, "thus the warlord collecting his tribute, part of which will be conveyed to the imperium, is at one and the same time manifesting a political relationship of domination and obedience, and carrying out an economic function of surplus collection and distribution."⁵⁰⁹ As he puts it, in tributary systems, it is not really an exaggeration to claim "there is no activity that results in the production or the allocation of material wealth that is not also the embodiment of the hierarchical principle of the system."⁵¹⁰

While there could be an interesting investigation into the relationship between a tributary state (Roman imperial) model and the sort of imperium by right that Dante traces as legitimate Roman power in *Monarchia* 2, we instead recall Dino Compagni's comment about Florence being a "merchants republic" and say with certainty that the system Dante is critiquing in his political realm is defined by the capitalist logic. Both a

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 86.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 86.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 86-87.

“political” and “economic” realm are wrapped up into the Florentine state (and its firms and banking houses) and in its dealings with other powers such as the papacy and French and German monarchs. Heilbroner pivots to define what it means for an “economic realm” to emerge:

For an economic realm to emerge, that pervasive and unchallenged rulership must yield up some portion of its sovereignty, recognizing, so to speak, the existence of an *autonomous republic of commerce and production* within its own territory (and even stretching beyond it). As we know, this momentous internal secession was the consequence of the political fragmentation that followed the collapse of the Roman empire. Beginning as early as the tenth century, the mercantile estate found the protective shelter it needed in the rubble of fiefdoms that emerged from that enormous collapse. Very gradually, there arose from the widening importance of mercantile dealings, and from the increasing dependence of all levels of society on the market mechanism, the foundations of a regime of capital itself. On the land, surplus more and more welled up in the form of profits accruing to merchant traders, later in merchant guilds. Guildsmen who constituted briefly a kind of open society of independent producers in the twelfth century were the rich masters of many trades, and the dominant group in all cities, by the sixteenth century. Thus even before capitalism emerged in full dress, the appearance of a world of business presaged its entrance within late feudal Europe.⁵¹¹

In another work, Braudel goes into some of the institutional distinctions, particularly important for this study, that show that the main feature of capitalism as pertaining to medieval Italy is the embryonic form of the state with the political and economic realms intertwined, but clearly defined, in such a way that capital cannot exist without the state yet exists *as if* in an naturally autonomous economic realm. However we try to define capitalism, one of its most striking features, which some would call “crony capitalism,” is economy’s close interlocking relationship with the state, political systems of clientele and patronage, and a “series of ensembles.” Braudel says “the preserve of the few,

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 87; emphasis mine.

capitalism is unthinkable without society's active complicity. It is of necessity a reality of the social order, a reality of the political order, and even a reality of civilization. For in a certain manner, society as a whole must more or less consciously accept capitalism's values. But this does not always happen."⁵¹² Indeed, there are multiple layers and "ensembles" that define capitalism, and in any case, Braudel realizes the need for something like Marx's framework in the *Critique of Political Economy* of base and superstructure:

Any highly developed society can be broken down into several "ensembles": the economy, politics, culture, and the social hierarchy. The economy can only be understood in terms of the other "ensembles," for it both spreads itself about and opens its own doors to its neighbors. There is action and interaction. That rather special and partial form of the economy that is capitalism can only be fully explained in the light of these contiguous "ensembles" and their encroachments; only then will it reveal its true face.⁵¹³

For Braudel, however difficult it may be to put one's finger on the exact nature of these superstructure ensembles with their economic bases, there is no doubt 1) that we can find one of the earliest forms of capitalism in medieval Italian city-states of Florence, Venice, and Genoa, and 2) that "capitalism only triumphs when it becomes identified with the state":

Thus, the modern state, which did not create capitalism but only inherited it, sometimes acts in its favor and at other times acts against it; it sometimes allows capitalism to expand and at other times destroys its mainspring. Capitalism only triumphs when it becomes identified with the state, when it is the state. In its first great phase, that of the Italian city-states of Venice, Genoa and Florence power lay in the hands of the moneyed elite. In seventeenth century Holland the aristocracy of the Regents governed for the benefit and even according to the directives of the businessmen, merchants, and money lenders. Likewise, in England the Glorious Revolution of 1688 marked the accession of business

⁵¹² 63-64.

⁵¹³ Ibid., 64.

similar to that in Holland. France was more than a century behind; only with the July Revolution of 1830 did the commercial bourgeoisie become comfortably ensconced in the government.⁵¹⁴

Leaving this discussion behind, my contention is that the real way to see capitalism as *political economy* in the time of Dante, without committing a conceptual anachronism (here we have shown that there is no anachronism in talking about capital or capitalism) by importing modern theories of political economy on to Dante's time, actually requires going back to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, where we shall see that Aristotle already provided such a concept, however in a different form from that of modern political economist's definitions of their own field. The next chapter shows that, given the centrality of Aristotelian language for constructing a valid and accepted monetary society at the time, we examine Aristotle's texts to see how Aristotle can be said to provide a paradigm of valid and invalid wealth-getting, and how wealth-getting is linked to political categories and notions of virtuous activity and *telois* of the household and the state. Having seen Aristotle's paradigm, the chapter will conclude by reading Dante through the lens of this Aristotelian analysis. Having understood the historical reality of political economy in his time, I show that Dante is its critic.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 64-65.

**Chapter 5. Aristotle's Paradigm and Dante's Critique of Political Economy
in *Monarchia* and *Convivio*: Wealth-getting, Greed, Chrematistic states,
and Justice**

1. Aristotle as Political Economist

Aristotle has been widely recognized as one of the first major economic thinkers in the west.⁵¹⁵ In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis of contemporary capitalism, Aristotle, in fact, has re-emerged in some circles of modern economics as relevant for offering a sort of “moral fix” for the contradictions of capitalism.⁵¹⁶ In times like ours, in which economic decisions so clearly lack moral foundations and the economy is seen as something like a force of nature that moves autonomously—to use the words of Adam Smith, as if by an “invisible hand” severed from the moral and political decisions of human beings—Argentine economist Ricardo Crespo has proposed that to “reinststate economics as a moral science is to start by understanding the groundwork laid by its primitive founder, Aristotle.”⁵¹⁷ Though Aristotle wasn’t an economist in the same ways (eg. quantitative, financial-analytical) the modern field of economics now defines itself, he conceived of the economy as a “natural human reality with enough universality to warrant universal conclusions. The deepest and most relevant knowledge on any subject-matter is philosophical, and Aristotle did pave the way for a philosophy of

⁵¹⁵ For detailed analysis of Aristotle as an economic thinker in the primary texts of Aristotle, see Scott Meikle, *Aristotle’s Economic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁵¹⁶ See Robert Skidelsky and Edward Skidelsky, *How Much Is Enough?: Money and the Good Life* (New York: Other Press, 2012) and Spencer J. Pack, *Aristotle, Adam Smith and Karl Marx on Some Fundamental Issues in 21st Century Political Economy* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2010).

⁵¹⁷ Ricardo F. Crespo, *A Re-assessment of Aristotle’s Economic Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 4.

economy.”⁵¹⁸ Both Joseph Schumpeter and Karl Polanyi acknowledge that Aristotle, to use the title of Polanyi’s work, “discovered the economy.”⁵¹⁹ Schumpeter, in fact, says that Aristotle’s work counts as among the first of “the intellectual efforts that men have made in order to *understand* economic phenomena.”⁵²⁰

As Schumpeter acknowledges, however, the most unique aspect of Aristotle’s discovery of the economy is perhaps the too-obvious truth that—if the economy is *something*—it is inseparable from or rather, to be more precise, a natural part of the social reality of human life in civilization in which it arises from anthropological constants. Aristotle’s sees the “economy” in just this way, as a series of social and political phenomena, and thus economic science is inseparable from the moral and the political science. For this reason, Aristotle did not make the “economy” the main object of his philosophy per se, even if he made substantial contributions to our conception of it. As Schumpeter writes:

...only a small part of his analytic performance is concerned with economic problems. His main work as well as his main interest, so far as social phenomena are concerned, was in the field we have decided to call economic sociology or rather it was in the field of political sociology to which he subordinated both economic sociology and technical economics. It is as a treatise or textbook on state and society that his *Politics* must be appraised. And his *Nicomachean Ethics*—a comprehensive treatise on human behavior presented from the normative angle—also deals so preponderantly with political man, with man in the city-state, that it should be considered as a companion volume to the *Politics*,

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁵¹⁹ Karl Polanyi, "Aristotle Discovers the Economy," in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* (The Free Press Glencoe, IL, 1957).

⁵²⁰ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 2.

making up together with the latter the first known systematic presentation of a unitary Social Science.⁵²¹

How, then, does Aristotle present his social scientific categories? Aristotle's economic thought lies within his political thought as does his ethical thought, which as Aristotle says in the *Ethics* is subservient to the architectonic science of politics. Whether we are talking about arts—like shipbuilding, strategy, or economics—or practical sciences

if...there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake...and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else...clearly this must be the good and the chief good...we must try...to determine what it is...it would seem to belong to the most authoritative art and that which is most truly the master art. And politics appears to be of this nature; for it is this that ordains which of the sciences should be studied in a state, and which each class of citizens should learn and up to what point they should learn them; and we see even the most highly esteemed of capacities to fall under this, eg. strategy, economics, rhetoric; now, since politics uses the rest of the sciences, and since, again it legislates as to what we are to do and what we are to abstain from, the end of this science must include those of the others, so that this end must be the good for man. For even if the end is the same for a single man and for a state, that of the state seems at all events something greater and more complete both to attain and to preserve; for though it is worth while to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation or for city-states. These then, are the ends at which our inquiry, being concerned with politics, aims.⁵²²

As Crespo puts it,

...according to Aristotle, if we do not have the economy serve the *polis*' common good, we cannot judge if economics is fulfilling its mission, and neither can we determine if individual economic behaviours are just. For [Aristotle], it would be a conceptual error to think of economics aside from politics—in the classical sense of the most architectonical moral science. The marriage between economics

⁵²¹ Ibid., 55; Crespo, *A Re-assessment of Aristotle's Economic Thought*, 4.

⁵²² *NE* 1.2.1094a18-1094b12

and politics, indissoluble by nature, went through a divorce in the nineteenth century. The time has come for a reconciliation.⁵²³

Indeed, Aristotle's notion of economics is based on the virtue ethics that grew out Platonic school and democratic Athenian age of the 5th century B.C.E:

Aristotle was not an economist, and he did not develop a discipline similar to current economic analysis. However, he did provide core ideas about the economy and its tie to ethics and politics. While he did not influence the modern development of economics, he did have a significant influence on medieval economic thinking and some bearing on contemporary economists' foundations. What seems paradoxical, as Polanyi also notes, is that 'the last word on the nature of the economic life should have been spoken by a thinker who hardly saw its beginnings.'⁵²⁴

Crespo, bringing up the work of Eduoard Will, Karl Polanyi and, Jean Jacques Maffre, argues that debates over whether or not the Ancient Greek economy was really primitive or modern misses the point: ⁵²⁵

economic reality was not a separate reality for ancient Greeks. Economic functions were immersed in social and political tasks. As defined by Aristotle, man is a political animal, and all human activities are conditioned by or subsumed under political goals, which are moral goals. Therefore, as Werner Jaeger explains, '[p]oliteia means not only the constitution of the state but the entire life of the state [...] *politeia* covers the entire content of private and public life: economics, morals, culture and education.'⁵²⁶

⁵²³ Crespo, *A Re-assessment of Aristotle's Economic Thought*, 5

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 11-14.; For a comprehensive examination of economy and culture in Ancient Greece, see Richard Seaford, *Money and the Early Greek Mind: Homer, Philosophy, Tragedy* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁵²⁶ Crespo, *A Re-assessment of Aristotle's Economic Thought*, 12.

Thus, while Aristotle, of course, recognized the complexities of monetary value and the danger of unnatural usury and monetary accumulation being against the model of justice,⁵²⁷ which is the “bond of men in states,” Aristotle’s conception of wealth-getting (*chrematistike*) was limited in its “natural” teleology to the notion of household management or procurement of the things necessary for social life in the city-state.⁵²⁸ As Barker points out, the formulation of “political economy” is somewhat of a tautology in an Aristotelian conception:

the *polis* included everything; and in the same way the theory of the *polis* included studies to which we should now give a separate existence—in particular the theory of economics[...] There is much writing on ‘economics’ in the fourth century [...] Such economic theory, subordinated as it is to political theory, which in turn is subordinated to (or, perhaps one should rather say, is the crown of) ethics, admits of no isolation of the economic motive, and of no abstraction of economic facts as a separate branch of inquiry. It is a theory of the ways in which households and cities can properly use the means at their disposal for the better living of a good life. Wealth, on this basis, is a means to a moral end.⁵²⁹

This moral end, in the Aristotelian conception, is *eudaimonia* and human flourishing, not for an individual, but for a society and state (the two things being one and the same) as a whole.

⁵²⁷ *Pol.* 1.11.1258b

⁵²⁸ *Pol.* 1.2.1253a37-38

⁵²⁹ Ernest Barker, "Introduction," in *The Politics of Aristotle*, ed. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), lv-lvi.

2. Aristotle's Critique of Political Economy in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*

In order to understand what we mean by *political economy*, and how to conceptualize it in an Aristotelian framework, the first half of this chapter will examine Aristotle's political economic thought and show that Aristotle provides a framework for *critique* of the political economic formations that I have shown in the previous chapters of this study to constitute a major phenomenon in the political history of Dante's time. Thus, understanding how Aristotle conceives of the polity and the economy, and their linkages, allows us to reexamine Dante's political thought, as seen in Chapter 1.2, as a *critique of political economy*: a critique of the intertwinement of politics and economics, confusion of their proper moral ends, and unnatural wealth-getting driving the legislation and constitutional form of a society and state.

Aristotle's writings on economics stem mostly from the *Politics*, where "the economy," as a general topic of discussion as household management and wealth-getting, is discussed in *Pol.* 1.3-13. In *Pol.* 1.1-2, he introduces *oikonomike* ("the economic") and "oikonomia," as made up of relationships of authority (ruler and ruled) and relationships of need and exchange that aim towards self-sufficiency for the household (*autarchia*). In *Pol.* 1.3, Aristotle states that a discussion of *oikonomia* is a prerequisite for speaking about the state (*polis*) and insists that it will be necessary to consider its composite elements, that is, of the family, master and slave, husband and wife, father and children. Here he is also very clear that there are two central aspects of *oikonomia*, namely 1) as literally the law of the household and 2) as chrematistics. In its literal sense, the household is a unity composed of relationships of authority and

subservience, mutual need, and sexual binary, with individuals arranged in social divisions of labor under the monarchical or despotic rule of the oldest male member of the household for fulfillment of mutual *teloi*. The household is also an analogue of the city. But perhaps more famously, *oikonomia* presupposes the necessity, but is not the exclusive purpose of the economy, of *chrematistike* (or wealth-getting). For Aristotle, this second realm of *oikonomia* is particularly problematic because it is *not* identical with household management but appears to be so, and thus requires further consideration: “the so-called art of getting wealth...according to some, is identical with household management, according to others, a principal part of it; the nature of this art will also have to be considered by us.”⁵³⁰

In *Pol.* 1.4, he discusses how property is part of the household and that wealth-getting involves the acquisition property necessary for life:

Property is a part of the household, and the art of acquiring property is a part of the art of managing the household; for no man can live well, or indeed live at all, unless he is provided with necessaries. And as in the arts which have a definite sphere the workers must have their own proper instruments for the accomplishment of their work, so it is in the management of a household. Now instruments are of various sorts; some are living, others lifeless; in the rudder, the pilot of a ship has a lifeless, in the look-out man, a living instrument; for in the arts the servant is a kind of instrument. Thus, too, a possession is an instrument for maintaining life.⁵³¹

⁵³⁰ *Pol.* 1.3.1253b11-14; the Moerbeka translation of this passage, in "Politica," *Aristoteles Latinus Database*, edited by Traditio Litterarum Centre, translated by William Moerbeka (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011), <http://clt.brepolis.net/ALD/> (accessed March 5, 2015), reads: “est autem quaedam pars, quae videtur hiis quidem esse yconomia, hiis autem maxima pars ipsius: quomodo autem se habet, considerandum dico autem de vocata <chrematistica>.”

⁵³¹ *Pol.* 1.4.1253b24-31

In *Pol.* 1.5-7 Aristotle deals with slavery and the forms of despotic or monarchical rule, a topic that also broaches interesting ideas regarding base passions and contemplation, and how masterly or slavish sorts of dispositions could impact one's practical wisdom (*praxis*) or production (*poesis*). But it is unmistakable that slavery is linked to a conception of production and property, as a slave is not only a *living tool* (*organon*) under the despotic authority of the *oikonomos*, but given that the second aspect of *oikonomia* is wealth-getting, that a living tool is involved in a social division of labor for the procurement of necessities and potentially the unnecessary and unnatural procurement of wealth as an end in itself. Aristotle's examination of the economic art (*oikonomike*), wealth-getting (*chrematistike*), property, and money spans the chapters of *Pol.* 1.8-11, in which he details usury and his judgments about natural and unnatural wealth-getting. In *Pol.* 1.12 and 13, he returns to questions regarding the proper relationships that make up household management.

Thus we see that Aristotle links economics to politics from the beginning, and his anthropological and philosophical categories are the strong foundation of their unity. Aristotle treats economy in his other writings, especially in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁵³² Here, as we saw above, Aristotle writes about *oikonomike* as subordinated to politics, and lays the framework for us to understand *chrematistike*—wealth-getting—as either

⁵³² On Aristotle's other economic works, see Crespo, *A Re-assessment of Aristotle's Economic Thought*, 14: "The *Oeconomica* or Economics (Oikonomikon, literally 'of the things that are economic') is an apocryphal work by Aristotle. However, a distinction must be made between Book I - probably written by a close disciple of Aristotle (and thus worthy of consideration) - and Books II and III, dating from many years after Aristotle's death (and thus not considered here). Topics (Book III) and Rhetoric (Books I, VII and VIII) include elements to analyse human action that could be applied to economic behaviour, with the most important passages being *Politics* I and *Nicomachean Ethics* V, 5."

pertaining to productive arts (*poesis; techne*) or practical wisdom (*phronesis; praxis*), concerned with living well. Book IV of the *Ethics* treats the virtues and vices related to the use of wealth, and, in Book V, Aristotle devotes the majority of the discussion to the difference between arithmetical justice and proportional justice, monetary exchange, and the vice of the greedy person (or the grasping nature; *pleonektes*) as a particular perversion of justice entire.⁵³³ As Spencer Pack points out,⁵³⁴ the venerable scholar of medieval Aristotelian economic thought, Odd Langholm, summed it up best when he said that “value theory can be read as a history of comments on *Ethics*, V.5”⁵³⁵

For Aristotle, economics is a subsection of the practical sciences. In the Aristotelian categorization of the sciences, the theoretical sciences are first: first philosophy or theology (metaphysics), mathematics, and the natural sciences. Then come the practical sciences: ethics, household management (*oikonomia*), and statesmanship or politics. For Aristotle, “statesmanship is divided into legislative science and routine politics (which deals with day-to-day political matters). Routine politics is further divided into deliberative science and judicial science. These sciences are concerned with action, in Aristotle’s strict sense of the term. The third category are the “poetic” or “productive sciences (crafts): medicine, housebuilding, etc.”⁵³⁶ Thus how

⁵³³ *NE* 5.1.1129a1-10

⁵³⁴ Pack, *Aristotle, Adam Smith and Karl Marx on Some Fundamental Issues in 21st Century Political Economy* 6., n. 7

⁵³⁵ Langholm, *The Legacy of Scholasticism in Economic Thought: Antecedents of Choice and Power*, vii-viii.

⁵³⁶ C. D. C. Reeve, "Introduction," in *Politics* (Hackett Publishing, 1997), xxiv.

are we to understand the difference between statesmanship, ethics, and household management as practical sciences as opposed to theoretical sciences?

Reeve helps us clear up this confusion from one angle. He notes that we (moderns) “distinguish politics from the intellectual study of it, which we call political science or political philosophy. The former is a hard-headed, practical matter engaged in by politicians; the latter is often a rather speculative and abstract one engaged in by professors and intellectuals. This distinction is alien to Aristotle. On his view, statesmanship or political science (*politike episteme*) is the practical science that genuine doctors use in treating the sick.”⁵³⁷ He goes on to observe that we (moderns) also distinguish to some degree or another, and “not always sharply” between “political philosophy and ethics or moral philosophy” in which the “former deals with the nature of the just or good society” and the “latter...with individual rights and duties, personal good and evil, virtue and vice.”⁵³⁸ However,

this distinction is too foreign to Aristotle. On his view, ethics pretty much just is statesmanship: ethics aims to define the human good, which is happiness or *eudaimonia*, so that aimed with a dialectically clarified conception of our end in life we can do a better job of achieving it; statesmanship aims at achieving that same good not just for an individual but for an entire community. But because we are by nature social or political animals...we can achieve our ends as individuals only in the context of a political community or city-state (*polis*), only in the context of a life with others. Hence ethics and statesmanship coincide, and the practical wisdom that enables an individual to attain happiness is more or less the same thing as the statesmanship that enables a ruler to achieve happiness for a community. A certain conception of ethics, then together with a certain conception of human nature, leads to a certain conception of statesmanship.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁷ Ibid., xxv.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., xxv.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., xxv.

We can draw two important conclusions from the intertwining of ethics and politics according to Aristotle's eudaemonist teleology. From a theoretical point of view, ethics (moral philosophy), politics, and economics are all intertwined as practical sciences. "Political economy" for Aristotle then is somewhat of a strange notion to begin with, undoubtedly since it comes from the age of modern thought, but on the other hand is perfectly intelligible within Aristotle's own philosophy without being an anachronism in the sense that it is a tautology. When Aristotle says that ethics (and economics) is governed by the architectonic science of politics—once we understand Aristotle's condemnation of bad wealth-getting and that he conceives of economic tasks (esp. productive/poetic) as exercised either well or badly in practical science for the well-being of households and states, for self-sufficiency (and we understand that "statesmanship aims at achieving" the good for an entire community)—we get closer to understanding how Dante will ground his argument for universal imperium or temporal monarchy as the most just system. For Aristotle, the best or worst political regime comes about through a combination of "certain conception of ethics" and a certain conception of "statesmanship." Ideal statesmanship in a pleonexic society of medieval Italy, for Dante, is one that turns the polis from organization centered around acquisitive wealth-getting (and its requisite forms of power) and turns it to man's highest (intellectual) good by stopping the regressive power of greed.

More on this point in the second half of this chapter. Here it only needs to be pointed out that with Aristotle's ethical and political categories we can begin to see that Dante's insistence on the end of the multitude and his belief that politics must serve the intellectual development of all of humanity (however much it may be related to an

Averroism on that point) are also firmly rooted in an Aristotelian conception of the hierarchy of the sciences. Dante believes in the primacy of the good oriented to scientific development which is also parallel to and concomitant with man's highest good as organized in the polis. Neither can exist without the other. For Dante, as for Aristotle, this highest good is either severely undermined or moved closer to realization because of the ethical, i.e. virtuous or vicious, mode in which politics is conducted, and thus depends on a correct view of what the political science actually is. If, as we are showing here, politics is conceived of as a particular type of authority in a state combined with the prime goal of unnatural wealth-getting, the polis is in jeopardy, and the soul of the polis (so to speak), or its regime/form of state, will reflect the priorities of acquisitiveness and the more base part of the soul.⁵⁴⁰ If the ruling elements of the state, in other words, are properly virtuous and seeking the right *teloi*—for example, the state is ruled by a virtuous (philosophical) monarch or legislator in the highest degree, as Aristotle sees it, then it will be oriented through the craft of lawgiving to make men good:

...the man who is to be good must be well trained and habituated, and go on to spend his time in worthy occupations and neither willingly nor unwillingly do bad actions, and if this can be brought about if men live in accordance with a sort of intellect and right order, provided this has force—if this be so, the paternal command indeed has not the required force or compulsive power (nor in general has the command of one man, unless he be a king or something similar), but the law *has* compulsive power, while it is at the same time an account proceeding from a sort of practical wisdom and intellect...now it is best that there should be a

⁵⁴⁰ Aristotle of course was a student of Plato. For Plato's view of the form of state reflecting the virtuous or vicious form of the soul, see Socrates' discussion of the five regimes in *Republic* 8; on the forms of constitution or state in Aristotle's *Politics* and the intersection of Aristotle's doctrine of causes with the former, see Fred Miller, "Aristotle's Political Theory," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2012 Edition)*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/aristotle-politics/> (accessed May 5, 2015).

public and proper care for such matters... for public care is plainly effected by laws, and good care by good laws; whether written or unwritten would seem to make no difference, nor whether they are laws providing for the education of individuals or groups....for as in cities laws and character have force, so in households do the injunctions and the habits of the father...⁵⁴¹

The good for Aristotle, the human good, “consists in rational activity expressing virtue. This activity...can be either practical or theoretical or some mix of the two,”⁵⁴² but the point is that as in a household and as in a state, good comes about through proper habituation and politics based on the correct ethical conceptions about human goods, and good habits, the prerequisites, in other words, of justice. This must be effectuated through a legal regime and exercise of authority.

Thus, the reason chrematistic wealth-getting is bad is because it is, for Aristotle, a case in which the common appetite is directed towards goods, but not in the right way. Some people (virtuous, self-controlled, and strong-willed) have true conceptions of the good, while others (vicious people) have false conceptions, though there may be a spectrum of degree of falsity and viciousness (malicious or incontinent). For Aristotle, appetite for these goods is determined by habits developed early in life, though nature and reason also play a role.⁵⁴³ There are three broad patterns of lives that emerge in relation to habits, 1) lives of gratification, 2) lives of political activity, and, 3) lives of study and contemplation, and through these kinds of lives people reach their conception

⁵⁴¹ *NE* 10.9.1180a5-1180b5

⁵⁴² C. D. C. Reeve, "Introduction," xxxv.

⁵⁴³ *NE* 1.2.1095b4-8; *Pol.* 7.13.1332a38-b8

of the good, ie. happiness.⁵⁴⁴ A political constitution oriented towards pleonexic wealth getting, which as we will see shortly, we might call a political economy, “wishes for the good, but...mistakenly believes that the good consists (say) in gratifying...appetites.”⁵⁴⁵ The habits formed by the state thus play a definitive role in the way people are formed in their appetites, and the kinds of laws that are set up in the state can either adhere to justice or violate proper justice, though for Aristotle, it is not easy to alter bad ethical conceptions that have been formed through habit.⁵⁴⁶ Therefore it is crucial for Aristotle that the laws and constitution are well arranged, so that it forms good habits in citizens.

As he writes in the *Ethics*:

it is difficult to get from youth up a right training for excellence if one has not been brought up under right laws; for to live temperately and hardily is not pleasant to most people, especially when they are young. For this reason their nurture and occupations should be fixed by law; for they will not be painful when they have become customary. But it is surely not enough that when they are young they should get the right nurture and attention; since they must, even when they are grown up, practice and be habituated to them, we shall need laws for this as well and generally speaking to cover the whole of life; for most people obey necessity rather than argument, and punishments rather than what is noble.⁵⁴⁷

The political significance of virtues is therefore a quite marked aspect of Aristotle’s thought. But again, following Reeve, we must return to the problem of how, according to Aristotle, we properly conceive of the good. The doctrine of the mean is so important here because often our moral relationship to external goods (of which we do have a necessity in many cases) is relative to our particular dispositions and can be very closely

⁵⁴⁴ *NE* 1.2.1095b14-30

⁵⁴⁵ C. D. C. Reeve, "Introduction," xxxvi

⁵⁴⁶ *NE* 10.8.1179b16-18

⁵⁴⁷ *NE* 10.9.1179b31-1180a3

influenced by feelings of pleasure or pain. If we conceive of the good as the mere fulfillment of bodily goods or other kinds of external goods outside of moderation (linked with pleasure), this could lead to a warped and damaging conception of a good qua pleasure. Likewise, it can be problematic if the form of state has bad laws or is skewed towards bad wealth-getting or—because the good is conceived of as wealth-getting—is ruled by laws which benefit the translation of the polis into a household model in which citizens are sorts of living tools or slaves organized into labor for the purpose of pleasurable acquisitiveness, pleasure consisting in the unlimited acquisition, possession, and potential exchangeability of monetary wealth. A person or people, or even multitude could mistakenly conceive of the good as gratifying appetites, specifically through pursuit of money, rather than as pursuing them in accordance with the mean relative to their needs and conception of *eudaimonia* as living well.

As Reeve explains

feelings are concerned with external goods; that is to say, with "goods of competition," which include money, honor, bodily pleasure, and in general goods that people tend to fight over; and with having friends, which "seems to be the greatest external good." We would expect, therefore, that the virtues of character would be particularly concerned with external goods. And indeed they are. The vast majority are concerned with the goods of competition. Courage is concerned with painful feelings of fear and pleasant feelings of confidence; temperance, with the pleasures of taste and touch; generosity and magnificence, with wealth; magnanimity, with honor; special justice, with acquisitiveness (*pleonexia*), with wanting more and more without limit of the external goods of competition. General justice is especially concerned with friendship and community. It is our needs for these goods that lead us to form communities that are characterized as much by mutuality of interest as by competition. But it is these same needs that often bring us into conflict with one another. The single major cause of political instability, indeed, is competition, especially between the rich and the poor, for external goods such as wealth and honor. The political significance of the virtues is therefore assured; without them no constitution can long be stable. For "the law has no power to secure obedience except habit."⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., xxxix.; *NE* 9.9.1169b9-10

Thus there is a serious problem if the statesman thinks that wealth, for example, confers nobility—the topic of *Le dolci rime*: it shows an idea that the highest good is wealth and could sanction competitive wealth-getting as a primary focus of the political process otherwise often concerned with getting honors. Thus it also is in tune with oligarchy. All the competitive impulses without virtue can very quickly pervert the state. The mistaken statesman would see politics as an extension of the economic art of pursuing wealth. But for Aristotle and Dante, the good statesman ought to be armed with virtue and wisdom, and what the virtues of character are, and a correct understanding of politics as practical wisdom. This will look very different from a chrematistic and pleonexic regime:

So far we have been focusing primarily on practical wisdom as it is manifested in the life of an individual, in order to understand what practical wisdom and the virtues of character are, and how they guarantee a correct conception of happiness. Armed with that understanding, we are in a position to understand why, when practical wisdom assumes the role of statesmanship... Its primary task is to study the best constitution: Pol. II, VII, and VIII are devoted to this task. To carry it out successfully a statesman must know what happiness is. For happiness is the same thing for a city-state or constitution as for an individual, and the ideal constitution is precisely the one in which all the citizens are as happy as possible.⁵⁴⁹

At the beginning of his *Politics*, Aristotle begins to describe the constituent parts of the state as a way of defining the best constitution, which he calls *polity* and is not a mixed constitution, but rather one with a stable mode of authority, with a largely equal

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., xli.

distribution of property and honors. In any case, in *Politics* 1, Aristotle starts by describing *oikonomike* along with the various “modes of authority”:

Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for everyone always acts in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good. Some people think that the qualifications of a statesman, king, householder, and master are the same, and that they differ, not in kind, but only in the number of their subjects. For example, the ruler over a few is called a master; over more, the manager of a household; over a still larger number, a statesman or king, as if there were no difference between a great household and a small state. The distinction which is made between the king and the statesman is as follows: When the government is personal, the ruler is a king; when, according to the rules of the political science, the citizens rule and are ruled in turn, then he is called a statesman. But all this is a mistake, as will be evident to any one who considers the matter according to the method which has hitherto guided us. As in other departments of science, so in politics, the compound should always be resolved into the simple elements or least parts of the whole. We must therefore look at the elements of which the state is composed, in order that we may see in what the different kinds of rule differ from one another, and whether any scientific result can be attained about each one of them.⁵⁵⁰

Thus we see that from the beginning Aristotle intends to make several important distinctions. Aristotle asserts, to start, that the polis is the highest form of all human communities and he does so on grounds familiar based on his moral philosophy, as we shall see shortly. As is the hallmark of Aristotelian thought, Aristotle is also thinking teleologically: the state/polis exists as the prior natural *end* of any sort of human associations, starting with the relationship between man and woman, master and slave, etc., and it comes about, specifically to attain some “good.” In this case, for Aristotle this good is the state itself, that is, the active political life of free people in interdependent relationships—which is the living well required for human actualization of capacities and

⁵⁵⁰ *Pol.* 1.1.1252a1-a23

eudaimonia. Anyone outside the state is either a beast or a god, there is no such thing as a solitary individual outside the state.⁵⁵¹ But Aristotle also wants, at the outset, to disassociate a theory of political rule, or government, from a theory of one of the composite relationships and community associations that make up the city and the thing, the good, for the sake of which it exists abstracted from the composite. In other words, as seen in the passage above, with which Aristotle opens the *Politics*, the philosopher recognizes the risk that by confusing a certain aspect of human sociality and relationships, for example the economic relationship, with the state, we might then confuse the teleology of the part with the teleology of the whole—all of society as a state—which is the more important and prior end.

Aristotle goes to great pains in his political thought to resolve this issue of mistaking the household for the state, and it runs throughout the first book's discussion of wealth-getting. Specifically dangerous is confusing the "economic" mode of authority (which also includes despotic, regal etc.) and one of the activities concomitant with it, namely acquiring external goods, the necessary things (*chremata*) or wealth, for life. Aristotle sees that that is there is a danger in confusing the theory and practice of rulership and government generally with a composite part of the state at the family or household level, and especially if wealth-getting is taken to be "economics" entire, in making the household analogically merely a smaller scale of a form which is political society. As a result, one might come to see the art of household or state management as analogous to despotic rule and think that the prime function within it is merely wealth-getting and consider it natural. From the start, as in the passage cited above at the very

⁵⁵¹ *Pol.* 1.2.1253a28-29

beginning of the *Politics*, Aristotle goes to pains to disambiguate these concepts, as they directly have a moral impact on the potential for the most sovereign political association, the state to aim at the most supreme good: “those then who think that the natures of the statesman, the royal ruler, the head of an estate (oikonomos), and the master of a family are the same are mistaken; they imagine that the difference between these various forms of authority is one of greater and smaller numbers, not a difference in kind—that is, that the ruler over a few people is a master, over more the head of an estate, over more still a statesman or royal ruler, *as if there were no difference between a large household and a small city.*”⁵⁵² Aristotle insists that the notion that the difference between kingly rule and that of a statesman is equal to the difference between sole rule and that of “political science,” where the citizens rule and are ruled in turn, is a mistake.⁵⁵³ He criticizes the fact that “some thinkers hold the function of the master to be a definitive science, and moreover think that household management, mastership, statesmanship and monarchy are the same thing, as we said at the beginning of the treatise.”

⁵⁵² Pol. 1.1252a6-17: “διαφέρειν ἀλλ’ οὐκ εἶδει τούτων ἕκαστον, οἷον ἂν μὲν ὀλίγων, δεσπότην, ἂν δὲ πλειόνων, οἰκονόμον, ἂν δ’ ἔτι πλειόνων, πολιτικὸν ἢ βασιλικόν, ὡς οὐδὲν διαφέρουσαν μεγάλην οἰκίαν ἢ μικρὰν πόλιν.”

⁵⁵³ In terms of medieval politics and the legacy of Aristotle on this, the question of Moerbeka’s translation of the Greek “meros” or “in turn” as “in part” has been discussed extensively by both Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Citizens to Lords: A Social History of Western Political Thought From Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (London: Verso, 2008), and James M Blythe, *Ideal Government and the Mixed Constitution in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992). At this juncture it is not singularly important. Also on this, see, Pol. 3.1278b31-1279a12

Dante's own association of the "imperial" majesty in *Convivio* directly hints both to this overlap and its dangers, and is unmistakably close to the natural teleology and priority of the state over and above the household. Dante declares the real function of political authority as rooted in "need" and shows that the social and political forms are from the ground up—the household, family, and village—organized in terms of need and the anthropological schemata of Aristotle, but also oriented towards the end of friendship and flourishing. We shall return to Dante soon, but it's useful to take a look at this passage from the *Convivio* here as well:

Lo fondamento radicale de la imperiale maiestade, secondo lo vero, è la necessità de la umana civiltade, che a uno fine è ordinata, cioè a vita felice; a la quale nullo per sé è sufficiente a venire senza l'aiutorio d'alcuno, con ciò sia cosa che l'uomo abbisogna di molte cose, a le quali uno solo soddisfare non può. E però dice lo Filosofo che l'uomo naturalmente è compagnevole animale. E sì come un uomo a sua sufficienza richiede compagnia dimestica di famiglia, così una casa a sua sufficienza richiede una vicinanza; altrimenti molti difetti sosterrebbe che sarebbero impedimento di felicitade. E però che una vicinanza non può sé in tutto soddisfare, conviene a satisfacimento di quella essere la cittade. Ancora: la cittade richiede a le sue arti e a le sue difensioni vicenda avere e fratellanza con le circavicine cittadi; e però fu fatto lo regno. (The root foundation underlying the Imperial Majesty is, in truth, man's need for human society, which is established for a single end: namely, a life of happiness, which no one is able to attain by himself without the aid of someone else, since one has need of many things which no single individual is able to provide. Therefore the Philosopher says that man is by nature a social animal. And just as for his well-being an individual requires the domestic companionship provided by family, so for its well-being a household requires a community, for otherwise it would suffer many defects that would hinder happiness. And since a community could not provide for its own well-being completely by itself, it is necessary for this well-being that there be a city. Moreover, a city requires for the sake of its culture and its defense mutual relations and brotherhood with the surrounding cities, and for this reason kingdoms were created.)⁵⁵⁴

Thus for Aristotle, in order to show that *oikonomia* is not the same as the state, that is against the Platonists, who, as Crespo writes, "did not make any distinctions

⁵⁵⁴ *Conv.* 4.4.1-3

among the roles of slave master, the manager of a house and the ruler of a polis. For Plato, the difference between them was only a matter of degree—number of subordinates—and not of different kinds of authorities,” Aristotle will set out to show their key differences by breaking down as we have shown in the passage above, the “core components” of the city.⁵⁵⁵ For Aristotle, the city is formed following this composition and with certain ends in mind (and conditions for ends). We notice his anthropology aligns closely with Dante’s. Thinking about ends inherently involves thinking about the reason human beings do things. To bring the “political economy” to its anthropological roots, the most basic reason that people associate, according to Aristotle, is because of necessity: “there must be a union of those who cannot exist without each other; namely that of male and female, that the race may continue.”⁵⁵⁶ For Aristotle the household is composed of “these two partnerships” namely, male and female and master and slave, biological and sexual need (perpetuation of species; coupling) and need for security:⁵⁵⁷ “The partnership therefore that comes about in the course of nature for everyday purposes is the ‘house’....” This is how Aristotle defines the first level of association at the level of the family, of the household. We see here that “the family is the association established by nature for the supply of men’s everyday wants, and the members of it are called by Charondas, ‘companions of the cupboard,’ and by Epimenides the Cretan, ‘companions of the manger’.”⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁵ Crespo, *A Re-assessment of Aristotle’s Economic Thought*, 15.

⁵⁵⁶ *Pol.* 1.2.1252a

⁵⁵⁷ *Pol.* 1.2.1252b10

⁵⁵⁸ *Pol.* 1.2.1252b13-16

At this point it is important to note that for Aristotle here we start to see that human association is from the beginning, anthropologically, so to speak, linked to needs, wants and desires. Before we even discuss the individual or money at all, for Aristotle, at the level of the family, “economic motives,” far from the modern capitalist profit mindset, are there when men and women and other associates united to supply wants and needs. As Aristotle puts it himself, this is because “the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing.”⁵⁵⁹ Thus for Aristotle, the progression is first the household, then “several villages,”⁵⁶⁰ and “when several villages are united in a single community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing (autarcheia), the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life. And therefore if the earlier forms of society are natural, so is the state, for it is the end of them and the nature of the thing is its end. For what each thing is when fully developed, we call its nature...”⁵⁶¹ Aristotle’s major point here, as Crespo writes, is that

man’s end goes beyond the necessary, beyond simply living (tou zen), which is done at home, as men should strive to live well (tou eu zen), which is only possible at the polis. Living well is a lofty ideal — a life of virtue. Men need to live in the polis to manage to live well. Hence, Aristotle concluded that man is by nature a ‘political animal’. In other words, men are called by their own nature to a level of perfection that exceeds the possibilities of the house and requires the polis. Indeed, Aristotle provided an additional argument for the natural priority of the polis: ‘the reason for this is that the whole is necessarily prior [in nature] to the part’.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁹ *Pol.* 1.2.1253a26

⁵⁶⁰ *Pol.* 1.2.1253b28

⁵⁶¹ *Pol.* 1.2.1253a28-33

⁵⁶² Crespo, *A Re-assessment of Aristotle’s Economic Thought*, 15.

Thus, for Aristotle, there is a meaningful difference between merely living (which is the association of the household), *economics*, and living well, *politics*: economics is purely subordinate to ethics and politics as an instrument to provide sufficiency for communities to attain other higher ends, the highest being contemplation and intellectual fulfillment. Whether this happens or not depends on the kind of justice that exists between free human beings and virtuous human beings in the polis. In order to understand what justice is, which is “the bond of men in states” we will need to understand virtues, and how humans use their desires and live well or badly. A life dictated by lust and gluttony, if it infects the state, can infect justice. As Aristotle puts it, connecting the ethical dimensions of politics with the social nature of man,

the proof that the state is a creation of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole. But he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state. A social instinct is implanted in all men by nature, and yet he who first founded the state was the greatest of benefactors. For man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all; since armed injustice is the more dangerous, and he is equipped at birth with arms, meant to be used by intelligence and excellence, which he may use for the worst ends. That is why, if he has not excellence, he is the most unholy and the most savage of animals, and the most full of lust and gluttony. But justice is the bond of men in states; for the administration of justice, which is the determination of what is just, is the principle of order in political society.⁵⁶³

Therefore, Aristotle sees the imminent importance of discussing household management (*oikonomia*) and the other aspect of it, “the art of getting wealth” and property, as a prerequisite to understanding the particular forms of state—which he will analyze largely as characterized by how property is managed and distributed. As we

⁵⁶³ *Pol.* 1.2.1253a25-39

said, for Aristotle, “property is a part of the household, and the art of acquiring property is a part of the art of managing the household; for no man can live well, or indeed live at all, unless he is provided with necessaries.”⁵⁶⁴ In any case for Aristotle, “the amount of property which is needed for the good life is not unlimited” and he instructs us that riches “can be defined as a number of instruments to be used in a household or a state.”⁵⁶⁵ In other words, natural property are teleological use values, not exchange values.

So, to understand *chrematistics* we need to understand how Aristotle views wealth and property within his ethical framework, the framework without which we would fail to understand Aristotle’s thought entirely. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle opens by explaining that “every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice is thought to aim at some good.”⁵⁶⁶ He explains that the end of *oikonomia*, which appears to be a practical science, is wealth: “now as there are many actions, arts, and sciences, their ends are also many; the end of the medical art is health, that of shipbuilding a vessel, that of strategy victory, that of economics wealth.”⁵⁶⁷ For Aristotle *chrematistics* is a subordinated part of *oikonomia*, it is the art of providing useful things, *ta chremata*. Properly speaking, *oikonomike* as a practical science, uses things for the good life:

Of the art of acquisition then there is one kind which by nature is a part of the management of a household, in so far as the art of household management must

⁵⁶⁴ *Pol.* 1.2.1253b24-26

⁵⁶⁵ *Pol.* 1.8.1256b39

⁵⁶⁶ *NE* 1.1.1094a2

⁵⁶⁷ *NE* 1.1.1094a9

either find ready to hand, or itself provide, such things necessary to life, and useful for the community of the family or state, as can be stored. They are the elements of true riches.⁵⁶⁸

For Aristotle, then, “true riches” will be opposed to something else. The object of household management, the acquisition of things necessary for life, *is possible* to be analogous between the state and the household; the things that are true riches in so far as they are *use values* and instrumental commodities that provide the sustenance for life. Such things can be stored and provisioned, and money as such is the storing up of value that is exchangeable, but Aristotle writes, continuing, “the amount of property which is needed for a good life” however “is not unlimited, although Solon in one of his poems says that *no bound for riches has been fixed for man.*”⁵⁶⁹ In other words, “natural” (*kata physein*) chrematistics is limited:

...there is a boundary fixed, just as there is in the other arts; for the instruments of any art are never unlimited, either in number or size, and riches may be defined as a number of instruments to be used in a household or in a state. And so we see that there is a natural art of acquisition which is practiced by managers of households and by statesmen, and the reason for this.⁵⁷⁰

This notion of “limited means” appears also in *Politics* 7 where it is linked to moral dangers inherent to the attachment to and desire for external goods:

certainly no one will dispute the propriety of that partition of goods which separates them into three classes, viz. external goods, goods of the body, and goods of the soul, or deny that the happy man must have all three...some think that a very moderate amount of excellence is enough, but set no limit to their desires for wealth, property, power, reputation, and the like. To them we shall reply by appeal to facts, which easily prove that mankind does not acquire or preserve the excellences by the help of external goods, but external goods by the

⁵⁶⁸ *Pol.* 1.8.1256b27-31

⁵⁶⁹ *Pol.* 1.8.1256b31-33

⁵⁷⁰ *Pol.* 1.8.1256b34-39

help of the excellences, and that happiness, whether consisting in pleasure or excellence, or both, is more often found with those who are most highly cultivated in their mind and in their character, and have only a moderate share of external goods, than among those who possess external goods to a useless extent but are deficient in higher qualities; and this is not only a matter of experience, but, if reflected upon, will easily appear to be in accordance with reason. For, whereas external goods have a limit, like any other instrument, and all things useful are useful for a purpose, and where there is too much of them they must either do harm, or at any rate be of no use, to their possessors, every good of the soul, the greater it is, is also of greater use...⁵⁷¹

In *Politics* 1.9 we find Aristotle's seminal discussion of the other kind of acquisitiveness (*yenos ktetikos*) also called *chrematistike*, but *chrematistike in malo*. This kind trespasses acquisition of use values (as means), which are merely external goods for the instrumental use of the *telos* of the flourishing of human life. As Aristotle says:

There is another variety of the art of acquisition which is commonly and rightly called an art of wealth-getting, and has in fact suggested the notion that riches and property have no limit. Being nearly connected with the preceding, it is often identified with it. But though they are not very different, neither are they the same. The kind already described is given by nature, the other is gained by experience and art.

This second kind of chrematistics is unnatural—because it makes an inappropriate use of objects meant for use and consumption— and has no limits. It also allows money to be used not as mere token of equalization in the exchange of commodities or labor, but for the storing up of money itself as a useful thing, as something that holds all potential value in exchange. This second definition is what is mostly understood as *chrematistics* or wealth-getting after Aristotle, the acquisition, possession, and accumulation of money as an end and good in itself. To understand wealth-getting (chrematistics) depends on understanding how use and exchange are natural or

⁵⁷¹ *Pol.* 7.1323a22-1323b16

unnatural. The origin of money is indeed natural, but sets the stage for unnatural wealth-getting:

Let us begin our discussion of the question with the following considerations. Of everything which we possess there are two uses: both belong to the thing as such, but not in the same manner, for one is the proper, and the other the improper use of it. For example, a shoe is used for wear, and is used for exchange; both are uses of the shoe. He who gives a shoe in exchange for money or food to him who wants one, does indeed use the shoe as a shoe, but this is not its proper use, for a shoe is not made to be an object of barter. The same may be said of all possessions, for the art of exchange extends to all of them, and it arises at first from what is natural, from the circumstance that some have too little, others too much. Hence we may infer that retail trade is not a natural part of the art of getting wealth; had it been so, men would have ceased to exchange when they had enough. In the first community, indeed, which is the family, this art is obviously of no use, but it begins to be useful when the society increases. For the members of the family originally had all things in common; later, when the family divided into parts, the parts shared in many things, and different parts in different things, which they had to give in exchange for what they wanted, a kind of barter which is still practised among barbarous nations who exchange with one another the necessaries of life and nothing more; giving and receiving wine, for example, in exchange for corn, and the like. This sort of barter is not part of the wealth-getting art and is not contrary to nature, but is needed for the satisfaction of men's natural wants.⁵⁷²

In other words, Aristotle is not against trade—when he talks about barter trade—(it can be natural, since this arises from unequal storing of useful things) but definitely casts it as a second form of wealth-getting that arises when things are used as tokens of exchange. This he calls retail trade: using objects against their nature not as use values but as exchange values. In Marxian terms, it is the inversion of the C-M-C to M-C-M (commodity-money-commodity to money-commodity-money). This inversion happens in the context of an explicitly monetary economy. In other words, trade (or barter) is not unnatural, that is part of general social intercourse, and as we shall see is firmly linked to the idea of justice as *contrapassum*, or proportional exchange based on need. In

⁵⁷² *Pol.* 1.9.1257a7-a27

Ethics 5, proportional exchange based on need is the model for exchange between unequal parties, their inequality being equalized in regards to the need, dictated by the usefulness to the person. Retail trade however, for Aristotle, arises from the use of money, where money's usefulness as a token of exchange becomes the foundation for money to become a "useful" thing itself.

Let us examine how this sort of retail trade is unnatural, and then we can circle back to the crucial question of the modes of authority and how the overlap between a function of the housekeeping, or economic mode, anthropologically as wealth-getting with the governance of the state (which we have just seen Aristotle says are somewhat analogous in terms of the "community of the family or state") can conduce to a completely different idea of what politics is or should be.

Aristotle explains:

The other form of exchange grew, as might have been inferred, out of this one. When the inhabitants of one country became more dependent on those of another, and they imported what they needed, and exported what they had too much of, money necessarily came into use. For the various necessities of life are not easily carried about, and hence men agreed to employ in their dealings with each other something which was intrinsically useful and easily applicable to the purposes of life, for example, iron, silver, and the like. Of this the value was at first measured simply by size and weight, but in process of time they put a stamp upon it, to save the trouble of weighing and to mark the value.⁵⁷³

This is a sort of anthropology and genealogy of money. Aristotle does not object to this, but the entire problem is related to using money itself to produce unnecessary, unlimited wealth: "When the use of coin had once been discovered, out of the barter of necessary articles arose the other art of wealth-getting, namely retail trade." Aristotle

⁵⁷³ *Pol.* 1.9.1257a27-41

says that, while this was at first a “simple matter” quickly it became problematic, “as soon as men learned by experience whence and by what exchanges the greatest profit might be made.”⁵⁷⁴ Aristotle is pointing to one of the most abiding features of capitalism, especially articulated by Marx, who of course derives it from Aristotle: the money-commodity-money’ (repeat) chain:

Originating in the use of coin, the art of getting wealth is generally thought to be chiefly concerned with it, and to be the art which produces riches and wealth, having to consider how they may be accumulated. Indeed, riches is assumed by many to be only a quantity of coin, because the arts of getting wealth and retail trade are concerned with coin. Others maintain that coined money is a mere sham, a thing not natural, but conventional only, because, if the users substitute another commodity for it, it is worthless, and because it is not useful as a means to any of the necessities of life, and, indeed, he who is rich in coin may often be in want of necessary food. But how can that be wealth of which a man may have a great abundance and yet perish with hunger, like Midas in the fable, whose insatiable prayer turned everything that was set before him into gold?⁵⁷⁵

For Aristotle, one of the biggest problems is that people come to believe that wealth getting consists in the procurement of wealth qua coin, qua money, and that the basic economic function is not exchange of goods between diverse and unequally needy individuals, houses, families in a division of labor or social intercourse, and their exhaustion and use, but actually that the basic and primary economic function is actually the accumulation of wealth as money. As he points out, there is a basic difference between “natural riches” and “the natural art of getting wealth” for use value, to fulfill needs for human life, while “retail trade” is the “art of producing wealth, not in every way, but by exchange,” the exchange of commodities and money for the sake of making money. This second kind of wealth-getting

⁵⁷⁴ *Pol.* 1.9.1257b1-5

⁵⁷⁵ *Pol.* 1.9.1257b5-17

is thought to be concerned with coin; for coin is the unit of exchange and the limit of it. And there is no bound to the riches which spring from this art of wealth-getting. As in the art of medicine there is no limit to the pursuit of health, and as in the other arts there is no limit to the pursuit of their several ends, for they aim at accomplishing their ends to the uttermost (but of the means there is a limit, for the end is always the limit), so, too, in this art of wealth-getting there is no limit of the end, which is riches of the spurious kind, and the acquisition of wealth. But the art of wealth-getting which consists in household management, on the other hand, has a limit; the unlimited acquisition of wealth is not its business. And, therefore, from one point of view, all riches must have a limit; nevertheless, as a matter of fact, we find the opposite to be the case; for all getters of wealth increase their hoard of coin without limit. The source of the confusion is the near connexion between the two kinds of wealth-getting; in both, the instrument is the same, although the use is different, and so they pass into one another; for each is a use of the same property, but with a difference: accumulation is the end in the one case, but there is a further end in the other. Hence some persons are led to believe that getting wealth is the object of household management, and the whole idea of their lives is that they ought either to increase their money without limit, or at any rate not to lose it. The origin of this disposition in men is that they are intent upon living only, and not upon living well; and, as their desires are unlimited, they also desire that the means of gratifying them should be without limit. Those who do aim at a good life seek the means of obtaining bodily pleasures; and, since the enjoyment of these appears to depend on property, they are absorbed in getting wealth: and so there arises the second species of wealth-getting.⁵⁷⁶

This passage is key: “hence some persons are led to believe that getting wealth is the object of household management, and the whole idea of their lives is that they ought either to increase their money without limit, or at any rate not to lose it.” We have now arrived at the point at which we departed: political economy, i.e. the confusion of a notion of wealth-getting and a mode of authority. For Aristotle this wealth-getting brings about the ruin of states.

In his section “Consumption, chrematistics, choice, and character,” Spencer Pack notes that this kind of wealth-getting severely impacts the character of individuals and

⁵⁷⁶ *Pol.* 1.9.1257b18-1258a14

ultimately that of society. The primary goal of human life is *living well*. We do need wealth to care for the body, and thus the procurement of useful things is necessary to care for the body, but we also must realize that while in this sense the care of the body is prior to the care for the soul, in Aristotle's ethical framework the most godly capacity in human beings is the intellectual development, reason, and living out virtues of which friendship is one of the highest.⁵⁷⁷ In order to do this, though

we need to train our appetites (or 'tastes'), and not follow them blindly as most animals do, and as most neoclassical models of 'economic man' assume. Thus, humans need leisure and education and control of our base appetites so that we can develop our minds, 'for deficiencies of nature are what art and education seek to fill up.' Consequently, it is not easy to be a good consumer or to make the right consumption choices...⁵⁷⁸

But chrematistic culture, of this second kind, looks a lot like capitalist ethics in which rational calculation for profit is considered natural and even praiseworthy. The common opinion being that more riches, as in more money, is equivalent to great wealth, nobility, and status. This perspective has a lot in common with the social and political culture of Dante's Florence, where the entire organization of the political regime was geared to accumulation of money and the consolidation of power in the hands of the wealthy few—which does not minimize base desires. In fact, the chrematistically-geared state not only fails to minimize desires, it maximizes base desires and uncontrolled *pleonexia* (desire to accumulate wealth). It makes a virtue out of non-virtuous deviations of the mean in giving and taking of money (avarice and

⁵⁷⁷ Spencer J. Pack, *Aristotle, Adam Smith and Karl Marx on Some Fundamental Issues in 21st Century Political Economy*, (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2010), 38

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

prodigality). In the chrematistic state, greed is good. But, as we see from the beginning of the *Convivio*, and in Dante's canzone *Doglia mi reca*, greed has bad social consequences as well. Chrematistic impulses have a self-reinforcing habit-forming effect on the character of the state that is directly related to Aristotle's characterization of regimes,⁵⁷⁹ as well as influencing and defining the way people see justice, and how justice works. The pleonexic character will be more tyrannical and will use the power to find itself more opportunities to accumulate—which in fact involves seeing others as living tools and maintaining hierarchies of authority that do in fact resemble the basic wealth getting authority of a commanding *pater familias*, and not an association of free citizens pursuing higher ends.

It is in the nature of a chrematistic and monetized society that people come to believe that they ought develop bodily and animal needs almost exclusively and prior to the intellectual ones (we see how passionate Dante is on this point). As Spencer Pack summarizes:

Mistakes in how to live and what to consume are exacerbated by the monetized or commercialized sectors of society. Because money can purchase most anything, people are led to believe that their internal and external bodily needs are infinite. People misled by the power of money to accumulate more money spend their days trying to acquire money and more money to satisfy their internal and external bodily desires, rather than using the money to aid in the development of their uniquely human capabilities and powers. For Aristotle, 'the life of money-making is one undertaken under compulsion, and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else'. Thus wealth is not an end, it is a means to an end, and the 'instruments of any art are never unlimited, either in number or in size, and riches may be defined as a number of instruments to be used in a household or in a state. Therefore riches or wealth should be mere means towards the living of the good life. However, when the accumulation of money, wealth and riches

⁵⁷⁹ Pack, *Aristotle, Adam Smith and Karl Marx on Some Fundamental Issues in 21st Century Political Economy*, 37-39.

becomes an end in itself, people become ruled by their desires and passions. People seek to get a hold of money so they can purchase more and more goods for the body. Unfortunately, this use of money to acquire more money may lead to the corruption of all aspects of society: “For, as their enjoyment is in excess, they seek an art which produces the excess of enjoyment; and, if they are not able to supply their pleasures by the art of getting wealth, they try other causes, using in turn every faculty in a manner contrary to nature. The quality of courage, for example, is not intended to make wealth, but to inspire confidence; neither is this the aim of the general’s or of the physician’s art; but the one aims at victory and the other at health. Nevertheless, some men turn every quality or art into a means of getting wealth; this they conceive to be the end, and to the promotion of the end they think all things must contribute. Thus, then, we have considered the art of wealth-getting which is unnecessary, and why men want it; and also the necessary art of wealth-getting, which we have seen to be different from the other, and to be a natural part of the art of managing a household, concerned with the provision of food, not, however, like the former kind, unlimited, but having a limit.”⁵⁸⁰

This phenomenon is aptly described by Dante in *Convivio* as stemming from a lack of philosophical grounding in the pursuit of true goods:

Onde vedemo li parvuli desiderare massimamente un pomo; e poi, più procedendo, desiderare uno augellino; e poi, più oltre, desiderare bel vestimento; e poi lo cavallo; e poi una donna; e poi ricchezza non grande, e poi grande, e poi più. E questo incontra perché in nulla di queste cose truova quella che va cercando, e credela trovare più oltre. (Because its knowledge is at first imperfect through lack of experience and instruction, small goods appear great, and so from these it conceives its first desires. Thus we see little children setting their desire first of all on an apple, and then growing older desiring to possess a little bird, and then still later desiring to possess fine clothes, then a horse, and then a woman, and then modest wealth, then greater riches, and then still more. This comes about because in none of these things does one find what one is searching after, but hopes to find it further on).⁵⁸¹

The best way to describe the vicious and unregulated desire for wealth, however, requires only one word: greed.

⁵⁸⁰ Pack, *Aristotle, Adam Smith and Karl Marx on Some Fundamental Issues in 21st Century Political Economy*, 28-29.

⁵⁸¹ *Conv.* 4.12.16

3. Dante vs. Greed: Wealth, Virtue, and *Incontinenza* in *Doglia mi reca* and *Inferno*

Nobility and Beauty, the topics Dante declares as the objects of his *canzoni* in *Doglia mi reca* and *Le dolci rime*, both go to the heart of the Aristotelian question of virtue, and set up the current exploration of Dante as a critic of political economy.⁵⁸² Indeed, the *Nicomachean Ethics* can give us an interesting perspective on these poems as their topics correspond to the foundational objects of choice and avoidance in Aristotle's attempt to define virtues as "concerned with actions and passions, and every passion and every action is accompanied by pleasure and pain:"

There being three objects of choice and three of avoidance, the noble, the advantageous, the pleasant, and their contraries, the base, the injurious, the painful, about all of these the good man tends to go right and the bad man to go wrong, and especially about pleasure; for this is common to the animals, and also it accompanies all objects of choice; for even the noble and the advantageous appear pleasant.⁵⁸³

Aristotle goes on to say, echoing his statement from *Nicomachean Ethics* 1, that ethics is integral to political science and that "legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them...and it is in this good that a good constitution differs from a bad one"⁵⁸⁴ and that "the whole concern of both excellence and of political science is with pleasures and pains; for the man who uses these well will be good, he who uses them

⁵⁸² For the text and translations of *Doglia mi reca*, I have used the translation of Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde, *Dante's Lyric Poetry, Vol. 1*. Written by Dante Alighieri. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) and for text and translation of *Le dolci rime*, I have used the text and translation of Richard Lansing provided by *Columbia University Digital Dante*, <http://digitaldante.columbia.edu/> (accessed December 1, 2015).

⁵⁸³ *NE* 2.3.1104b13-14; *NE* 2.3.1104b29-1105a1

⁵⁸⁴ *NE* 2.1 1103b3-6

badly bad.”⁵⁸⁵ In book 2 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle articulates this further. We learn that there are two kinds of excellence (virtù), intellectual and moral, one that results from teaching (theoretical instruction) and requires “experience and time” and another, moral excellence, that “comes about as a result of habit.”⁵⁸⁶ For Aristotle, “actuality precedes potentiality”: it is by doing activities that excellences are produced and destroyed.⁵⁸⁷ Specifically, Aristotle puts a social emphasis on this, it is by “*doing the acts that we do in our transactions* with other men we become just or unjust.”⁵⁸⁸ Therefore we see that virtue has to do not only with pursuing the good and external goods correctly, but in doing good or bad actions in regards to and embedded in transactions with other men in such pursuits of pleasure, goods, and happiness. Thus the relationship of virtue to our actions regarding the pursuit of external goods will be central to book 5 of the *Ethics*, and Dante’s conception of justice (*equitade* or *distributiva giustiza*) both in Book IV of *Convivio* and throughout the *Monarchia*. In book 4 of the *Ethics*, Aristotle speaks of “liberality,” in connection with the proper ethical relationship to wealth, which he defines as “the mean with regard to wealth.”⁵⁸⁹ The liberal man, he says, is “praised not in respect of military matters, nor of those in respect of which the temperate man is praised, nor of judicial decisions, but with regard to the giving and taking of wealth, and especially in respect of giving. Now by wealth we

⁵⁸⁵ *NE* 2.3.1105a11-13

⁵⁸⁶ *NE* 2.1.1103a16-17

⁵⁸⁷ *Met.* 1049b18–19; *NE* 2.1.1103a26

⁵⁸⁸ *NE* 2.1.1103b12-15 (emphasis mine)

⁵⁸⁹ *NE* 4.1.1119b22-23

mean all the things whose value is measured by money.”⁵⁹⁰ In short, Aristotle’s teaching on virtuous use of money depends on the chrematistic analysis he articulates in *Politics* and the ethical one examined throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Dante takes this ethical paradigm from Aristotle and takes on greed as the major topic of his two poems *Doglia mi reca* and *Le dolci rime*. *Le dolci rime*, which will be the main focus of my analysis below—as it is Dante’s object of commentary in the political book 4 of *Convivio*—was written in the 1290s amidst the bitter conflicts involving the anti-magnate legislation and the contestation of political power by rival groups of wealthy bankers and businessmen, notorious for vicious public misbehavior, and as Barolini points out, the “Aristotelian template allows for an easy turn on Dante’s part from ethics in the moral and philosophical sphere to ethics in the social and historical sphere.”⁵⁹¹ In *Le dolci rime*, which deals with nobility, but essentially a conception of nobility that hinges upon possession of wealth and a validation of greed as virtue, Dante gives up “the pleasant style / which I’ve sustained in writing poems of love” (soave stile/ ch’i’ ho tenuto nel trattar d’amore) to speak “with harsh and subtle rhyme” (rima aspr’e sottile) about the value—with ringing overlap with the idea of monetary value (valor)— “which makes a person truly noble” (veramente omo è

⁵⁹⁰ *NE* 4.1.1119b20-b24

⁵⁹¹ On the dating of the poem and an analysis of Dante’s debts to Aristotelian virtue ethics in a similar vein, see Teodolinda Barolini, “Aristotle’s *Mezzo*, Courtly *Misura*, and Dante’s *canzone Le dolci rime*: Humanism, Ethics, and Social Anxiety,” In *Dante and the Greeks*. Edited by Jan M. Ziolkowski (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2014), 176 *et passim*.

gentile).⁵⁹² Dismissing the “belief” (giudicio) that “wealth” (ricchezza) is the origin of nobility as false, Dante’s *canzone* moves towards an Aristotelian model of nobility based on the proper selection and performance of good actions according to the mean:

Dico ch'ogni virtù principalmente
vien da una radice:
vertute, dico, che fa l'uom felice
in sua operazione. Questo è, secondo che l'Etica dice,
un abito eligente,
lo qual dimora in mezzo solamente,
e tai parole pone.
(I affirm that every virtue stems ultimately from one root, meaning by virtue that which makes a man happy in his actions. This is, as the Ethics states, a ‘habit of choosing which keeps steadily to the mean’—those are the very words.)⁵⁹³

Where *Le dolci rime* deals with virtue as the ability to conceive of and follow goods properly and denounces the mistaking of virtue for acquisition, possession, and accumulation of wealth (which we will examine in more detail in terms of Dante’s commentary in *Convivio* 4 below), within the equation of nobility, gentility, and the status of being rich, *Doglia mi reca* deals with the debilitating vice of avarice in the courtly context.⁵⁹⁴ As such, *Doglia mi reca* is a poem about wealth, a reflection on the social consequences of the lack of the virtue of liberality, and a denunciation of the vice of greed. Foster and Boyde put its composition, along with “Tre donne” as written around 1304-1305 at the time of Dante’s exile.⁵⁹⁵ It is clearly a social and political

⁵⁹² *Le dolci rime*, 1-20

⁵⁹³ *Le dolci rime*, 81-88

⁵⁹⁴ I here only point to *Doglia mi reca* as a vociferous denunciation of greed and point the reader to the careful and masterful analysis of its courtly context and Aristotelian imbrications, in the above cited article, Teodolinda Barolini, “Aristotle’s *Mezzo*, Courtly *Misura*, and Dante’s *canzone Le dolci rime*: Humanism, Ethics, and Social Anxiety.”

⁵⁹⁵ Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde, *Dante’s Lyric Poetry, Vol. 2*. Written by Dante Alighieri (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 296.

commentary at root, and in any case, regardless of the time of its composition, fits in a pattern in Dante's *oeuvre* demonstrating a longstanding focus on greed as the locus of such commentary.

The poem starts off with Dante declaring that "grief brings boldness to my heart on behalf of a desire that is friend to truth" (*doglia mi reca ne lo core ardire / a voler ch'è di veritate amico*) invoking the Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*' reference to preferring the truth over his friends (the Platonists) that "piety requires us to honour truth above our friends."⁵⁹⁶ In the second half of the poem, Dante goes directly into a social critique of greed, showing his debt to the Aristotelian notion of natural and unnatural wealth-getting and the Aristotelian conception of virtue as a situational mean in controlling dispositions between extremes, in this case moderation between giving and taking of wealth that must be linked to true goods and ends. The greedy man is a slave to a base desire:

Chi è servo è come quello ch'è seguace
ratto a signore, e non sa dove vada,
per dolorosa strada;
come l'avarò seguitando avere,
ch'a tutti signoreggia.
Corre l'avarò, ma più fugge pace:
oh mente cieca, che non pò vedere
lo suo folle volere
che 'l numero, ch'ognora a passar bada,
che 'nfinìto vaneggia!
Ecco giunta colei che ne pareggia:
dimmi, che hai tu fatto,
cieco avaro disfatto?
Rispondimi, se puoi, altro che "Nulla".

⁵⁹⁶ *NE* 1.6.1096a16

Maladetta tua culla,
che lusingò cotanti sonni invano!
Maladetto lo tuo perduto pane,
che non si perde al cane!
ché da sera e da mane
hai raunato e stretto ad ambo mano
ciò che sì tosto si rifà lontano.

(a man so enslaved is like someone following headlong after his master along a painful road without knowing where he goes; like a miser following riches, the master of all. The miser runs, only to be ever further away from peace. O blinded mind, for its insane desire cannot see that the sum which every moment it strives to pass stretches on to empty infinity! See, the one who makes us all equal has come. Tell me, what have you done, blind, undone miser? Answer me—if you can—other than ‘Nothing’. Cursed be your cradle which beguiled so many dreams in vain; cursed be the bread you’ve wasted, that’s not wasted on a dog; for evening and morning you have gathered and hoarded with both hands that which so quickly slips from your grasp.)⁵⁹⁷

Like Aristotle in *Politics 1*, Dante sees that there is no limit to the pursuit of money: there is no amount that can satisfy the greedy man who gives himself up to the second, bad kind of chrematistics. Such greed is particularly pernicious because, as Aristotle says in book 5 of the *Ethics*, it is the vice most opposed to justice generally. Dante concurs with this in *Monarchia*:

Ad evidentiam primi notandum quod iustitie maxime contrariatur cupiditas, ut innuit Aristotiles in quinto *ad Nicomacum*. Remota cupiditate onmino, nichil iustitie restate adversum (To clarify the first of these it must be noted that the thing most contrary to justice is greed, as Aristotle states in the fifth book of the *Ethics*, when greed is entirely eliminated, nothing remains which is opposed to justice).⁵⁹⁸

Greed is so opposed to justice because the greedy man not only never satisfies his desire, but through his all consumptive and ceaseless gathering and hoarding of money, only wastes resources that could be used to actually feed and care for himself and others. Here bread—with perhaps an allusion to the Midas fable, where Midas ultimately cannot

⁵⁹⁷ *Dolgia mi reca*, 64-84

⁵⁹⁸ *Mon.* 1.11.11

eat the gold that he has touched and transformed into gold —becomes a metaphor for the potential use value in accumulated riches, that could be socially useful or consumed, but are cursed because the greedy man’s own greed prevents him from even “wasting” riches on the dogs, and also makes him, in other words, deficient in giving to the extent he is also deficient in taking. The desire for riches is thus a bestial “undoing” (disfare) of the “greedy man” (avaro) and converts everything in his life to “following riches” (seguitando avere), showing that greed is opposed to justice too because everything, including other people, becomes merely instrumental to his wealth-getting. For Dante, then, greed as bad wealth-getting is thus completely contrary to reason, and the greedy man has failed to use his reason to correct the vice:

Come con dismisura si rauna,
 così con dismisura si distringe:
 questo è quello che pinge
 molti in servaggio; e s’alcun si difende,
 non è senza gran briga.
 Morte, che fai? che fai, fera Fortuna,
 che non solvete quel che non si spende?
 se ‘l fate, a cui si rende?
 Non so, poscia che tal cerchio ne cinge
 che di là su ne riga.
 Colpa è de la ragion che nol gastiga.
 Se vol dire “I’ son presa”,
 ah com poca difesa
 mostra segnore, a cui servo sormonta

(Just as they gather immoderately, so they hoard immoderately: this is what drives many into slavery; and if any put up resistance, it is not without a great struggle. What are you doing, Death? Unfeeling Fortune, what are you doing—that you don’t disperse what is left unspent? And if you were to, to whom should it go? I don’t know—for there’s a circle enclosing us that marks our limits from above. It’s reason’s fault for not correcting this: and if reason says “I am captive”—of how paltry a defence a master puts up, who is overpowered by a slave!)⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁹ *Doglia mi reca*, 85-98

Lamenting the fact that accumulation happens with as much “dismisura”—that is lack of moderation—as the hoarding of the wealth, Dante in this stanza thus moves his critique back to the domain of reason with “moderation” (misura) as a foil for “immoderation” (dismisura). He also associates greed, as the all consuming pursuit of wealth, with the courtly love tradition’s self-justifying notion of seizure by love and rejects it: ‘I’ son presa’, / ah com poca difesa/ mostra segnore, a cui servo sormonta.” In other words, Dante’s critique of the greedy man consists of his insistence that such greed is a violation of natural law and contrary to moderation, hence either a purely malicious vice or *incontinenza*, as the weak-willed or incontinent person thinks he ought not to do something, but eventually gives in to the desire because of the pain of deprivation. When Dante refers to the “cerchio” above that specifies our limits (tal cerchio ne cinge/ che di là su ne riga) which I read as the natural order of things, he suggests that nature gives reason ample example through the self-evident natural law to see that a defense of wealth-getting premised on the idea that the wealth-getting was done under compulsion by the objects of desire—“the riches made me pursue them” (I’ son presa) –is invalid, and that instead should be seen as a fallacious defense for lack of moderation by reason as “incontinenza.” Dante also wants to show too that works of nature (death, fortune etc.) cannot correct a socially instantiated and morally deformed situation by redistributing wealth perfectly. Only people can *choose* to give and take wealth moderately and virtuously in accordance with rational justice: nature only does so haphazardly. On the other hand, this stanza overlaps with *Inferno* 11, where Dante’s reliance on Aristotelian virtue ethics and philosophical categories for the structuring of hell enriches our reading of *Doglia mi reca*.

In *Inferno* 11, Virgil teaches Dante that injustice is the coercion of something in such a way that violates nature and is form of a violence against order or proportion through harming others: “Of every malice that earns hate in Heaven/ injustice is the end; and each such end / by force or fraud brings harm to other men” (d’ogne malizia, ch’odio in cielo acquista/ ingiura è ‘l fine, ed ogne fin cotale / o con forza o con frode altrui contrista).⁶⁰⁰ We learn from Virgil that the culpability of the various sins in upper and lower hell varies according to the degree that they stem from “incontinzena,” “malizia,” or “matta bestialitade.” Thus the incontinent sins in upper hell depart from a more involuntary defect rooted in bodily desire (love of money which departs from love of external goods stemming from natural bodily needs) moving, as across a spectrum, to sins of violence, then fraud and malice in lower hell (like simony, barratry, falsifiers, thieves, and pandering), all of which share a deliberate and calculated destruction of the just order of community—the bond of love that nature forges (lo vinco d’amor che fa natura) —and are hence ‘unnatural’ but supremely so because of their willful nature.⁶⁰¹ The sins of violence, fraud, and betrayal, the sins that offend God the most, form the seventh, eighth, and ninth circles of hell. While it is not my intention to go into a detailed analysis of the comedy on the complex motivation of the deployment of sins within the *Inferno*, I only mean to point out that for Dante a sin is worse because the sinner *willingly* destroys natural social bonds. Virgil’s discussion of Aristotle takes place in relation to the circle of the violent, where we learn that besides doing violence against others and oneself, violence takes the form of harm against the possessions of others

⁶⁰⁰ *Inf.* 11.22-23

⁶⁰¹ *Inf.* 11.56

(adumbrating fraud in the eighth circle),⁶⁰² because following nature's model in the Aristotelian sense all possessions, property, and wealth are to be used for the good of individuals and communities for human ends, not the ends of accumulating wealth itself or for any other improper end, and takes advantage of otherwise good social relationships for this end: "fraud.../ is practiced by a man against another/ who trusts in him, or one who has no trust/ This latter way seems only to cut off / the bond of love that nature forges" (frode.../ puo l'omo usare in colui che 'n lui fida/ e in quell che fidanza non imborsa/ Questo modo di retro par ch'incida/ pur lo vinco d'amor che fa la natura).⁶⁰³ The point is that when Dante asks why "those the dense marsh holds" (quei de la palude pingue; the fifth circle, *Inf.* 7-8's angry and wrathful), "those driven before the wind" (che mena il vento; the second circle, *Inf.* 5's lustful), "those on whom rain falls" (che batte la pioggia; the third circle, *Inf.* 6's gluttonous), "those who clash with such harsh tongues" (che s'incontran con si' aspre lingue; the fourth circle, *Inf.* 7's avaricious and prodigal), are not "not all punished in the city of flaming red if God is angry with them?" (dentro de la città roggia sono ei puniti, se Dio li ha in ira?...), Virgil's response gives us the specific invocation of the *Ethics* in reference to the incontinent,

⁶⁰² Barolini astutely remarks in her commentary on *Inferno* 11, *Columbia University Digital Dante*, <http://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/inferno/inferno-11/> (accessed January 29, 2016), "The first two kinds of violence, violence against others and violence against the self, place a significant stress on possessions and material goods, very apparent in Dante's language: "in lor cose" (in their things [*Inf.* 11.32]), "nel suo avere" (in his possessions [35]), and "ne' suoi beni" (in his goods [41]). Both violence against others and violence against the self feature the abuse of material goods, which need to be protected from violent depredation. Material goods, in other words, are here viewed not as objects of disdain and reprehension, but rather as objects of human violence, and it is that violence that must be curtailed and punished."

⁶⁰³ *Inf.* 11.52-56

explaining that it is really a matter of its degree of willful choosing.⁶⁰⁴ Hence Virgil:

Non ti rimembra di quelle parole
con le quai la tua Etica pertratta
le tre disposizion che 'l ciel non vole,

incontenenza, malizia e la matta
bestialitade? e come incontenenza
men Dio offende e men biasimo accatta?

Se tu riguardi ben questa sentenza,
e rechiti a la mente chi son quelli
che sù di fuor sostegnon penitenza,

tu vedrai ben perché da questi felli
sien dipartiti, e perché men crucciata
la divina vendetta li martelli

(Have you forgotten, then, the words with which / your Ethics treats of those three dispositions/ that strike at Heaven's will: incontinence/ and malice and mad bestiality? / And how the fault that is the least condemned / and least offends God is incontinence?/ If you consider carefully this judgment/ and call to mind the souls of upper Hell/ who bear their penalties outside this city/ you'll see why they have been set off from these / unrighteous ones, and why, when heaven's vengeance / hammers at them, it carries lesser anger.)⁶⁰⁵

This 'road map' to the *Inferno* is Aristotelian. It explicitly comes from Ethics 7, where Aristotle says that

...of moral states to be avoided there are three kinds—vice, incontinence, brutishness. The contraries of two of these are evident—one we call excellence, the other continence; to brutishness it would be most fitting to oppose superhuman excellence, something heroic and divine, as Homer has represented Priam [Iliad, XXIV, 258] saying of Hector that he was very good, For he seemed not, he, The child of a mortal man, but as one that of God's seed came. Therefore if, as they say, men become gods by excess of excellence, of this kind must evidently be the state opposed to the brutish state; for as a brute has no vice or

⁶⁰⁴ *Inf.* 11.70-75

⁶⁰⁵ *Inf.* 11.78-90

excellence, so neither has a god; his state is higher than excellence, and that of a brute is a different kind of state from vice.⁶⁰⁶

Following these chains of Aristotle, we see that the structuring principle of *Inferno* is consistent with Aristotle's view that all "folle volere" starts in lust and gluttony, or incontinent desire. It helps us understand, furthermore, why the origin of the perversion of order quickly moves into grasping (avarice proper), and then an intellectual and deliberate perversion of nature that takes the form of chrematistics (usury) that offends divine goodness, this latter condemned as a subversion of nature in *Inferno* 11 – basically represented as the antithesis of the 'minister' of goods –Fortuna—in *Inferno* 7.

To bring it back to Aristotle again, in an ancillary passage of the *Politics*, from book 1 –in the context of how we might conceive of political science, chrematistics, and ultimately define just rulers as well as think about cases that demonstrate just orders— Aristotle will call our minds to the passages in Dante, in so far as he reminds us that incontinent cupidity is the root of all forms of inordinate desire which leads to greed, the ultimate destroyer of social order and justice:

The proof that the state is a creation of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole. But he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state. A social instinct is implanted in all men by nature, and yet he who first founded the state was the greatest of benefactors. For man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all; since armed injustice is the more dangerous, and he is equipped at birth with arms, meant to be used by intelligence and excellence, which he may use for the worst ends. That is why, *if he has not excellence, he is the most unholy and the most savage of animals, and the most full of lust and gluttony. But justice is the*

⁶⁰⁶ *NE* 7.1.1145a14-1145a27

*bond of men in states; for the administration of justice, which is the determination of what is just, is the principle of order in political society.*⁶⁰⁷

Returning to *Doglia mi reca*, the idea of the “cerchio”—the “a circle enclosing us that marks our limits from above” that guides us through natural law to virtue and justice (refraining from avarice and prodigality), is reflected in the structure of hell and the maxim that one must properly imitate nature. The transformation of the art of securing good things for the purpose of higher ends (social needs/contemplative) into vicious wealth-getting is thus the transformation of all goods into the proliferation of tools—and hence is like chrematistics, usury. Nature, in its inherent order, clearly provides self-sufficiency for human beings, which they actualize with language, expression, etc. in the meeting of unequal needs with each other. This is why Dante relates Virgil’s lesson on the Aristotelian philosophical conception of virtuous and natural acts in such crystal clear moral terms:

«Filosofia», mi disse, «a chi la 'ntende,
nota, non pure in una sola parte,
come natura lo suo corso prende
dal divino 'ntelletto e da sua arte;
e se tu ben la tua Fisica note,
tu troverai, non dopo molte carte
che l'arte vostra quella, quanto pote,
segue, come 'l maestro fa 'l discente;
sì che vostr'arte a Dio qu⁶⁰⁸asi è nepote.
Da queste due, se tu ti rechi a mente
lo Genesi dal principio, convene
prender sua vita e avanzar la gente;
e perché l'usuriere altra via tene,
per sé natura e per la sua seguace
dispregia, poi ch'in altro pon la spene.

⁶⁰⁷ *Pol.* 1.1253a19-1253a39 (emphasis mine)

⁶⁰⁸ *Inf.* 11.97-111

(Philosophy, for one who understands/ points out, and not in just one place.../ how nature follows as she takes her course/ the Divine Intellect and Divine Art/ and if you read your Physics carefully/ not many pages from the start, you'll see/ that when it can, your art would follow nature/ just as a pupil imitates his master/ so that your art is almost God's grandchild/ From these two, art and nature, it is fitting/ if you recall how Genesis begins/ for men to make their way, to gain their living/ and since the usurer prefers another/ pathway, he scorns both nature in herself / and art, her follower; his hope is elsewhere).⁶⁰⁹

Thus, bringing this back to *Doglia mi reca*, we can clearly see that the force of Dante's critique of greed leads directly to the manifestly political concerns of *Convivio* and *Monarchia*. In the sixth and seventh stanzas of the *canzone*, Dante accentuates the social consequences of greed as injustices against society: "some by delaying, some by their look of complacency / others by sullen looks / turn the gift into a sale, and at a price so high/ as only he knows who pays for such a purchase" (chi con tardare, e chi con vana vista / chi con sembianza trista / volge il donare in vender tanto caro / quanto sa sol chi tal compera paga).⁶¹⁰ For Dante, greed is the reason that "mutual love in the world is all in confusion" (amistà nel mondo si confonde) and one should not give the name of love to the incontinent and bestial appetite for riches, but one should seek love and beauty within the garden of reason.⁶¹¹

Dante contrasts this greed with the idea of "complete generosity" (pronta liberalitate) that his philosophical reflection of the *Convivio* seeks to mirror:

Puotesi adunque la pronta liberalitate in tre cose notare, le quali seguitano questo volgare, e lo latino non averebbeno seguitato. La prima è dare a molti; la seconda

⁶⁰⁹ *Inf.* 11.97-115

⁶¹⁰ *Doglia mi reca*, 119-122

⁶¹¹ *Doglia mi reca*, 127-146

è dare utili cose; la terza è, senza essere domandato lo dono, dare quello. Ché dare a uno e giovare a uno è bene; ma dare a molti e giovare a molti è pronto bene, in quanto prende simiglianza da li benefici di Dio, che è universalissimo benefattore. E ancora, dare a molti è impossibile senza dare a uno, acciò che uno in molti sia inchiuso; ma dare a uno si può bene, senza dare a molti. Però chi giova a molti fa l'uno bene e l'altro; chi giova a uno, fa pur un bene: onde vedemo li ponitori de le leggi massimamente pur a li più comuni beni tenere confisi li occhi, quelle componendo. Ancora, dare cose non utili al prenditore pure è bene, in quanto colui che dà mostra almeno sé essere amico; ma non è perfetto bene, e così non è pronto: come quando uno cavaliere donasse ad uno medico uno scudo, e quando uno medico donasse a uno cavaliere inscritti li Aphorismi d'Ipocras ovvero li Tegni di Galieno. Per che li savi dicono che la faccia del dono dee essere simigliante a quella del ricevente, cioè a dire che si convegna con lui, e che sia utile: e in quello è detta pronta liberalitate di colui che così dicerne donando (Now complete generosity may be observed in three things which are a consequence of using the vernacular and which would not have been a consequence of using Latin. The first is giving to many; the second is giving useful things; the third is giving a gift without its being asked. It is good to give to and to help one, but it is complete goodness to give to and to help many in that it resembles the beneficence of God, who is the most universal benefactor. Moreover, to give to many without giving to one is impossible, since the one is included in the many; however, it is quite possible to give to one without giving to many. Therefore he who helps many does the one good and the other as well; he who helps one does only the one good; and hence we see that lawmakers keep their eyes fixed chiefly on the common good when making laws. Moreover, to give things that are not useful to the recipient is also good, in that he who gives knows at least that he is a friend; but it is not perfectly good, and so it is not complete, as, for example, if a knight were to give a shield to a doctor, or a doctor were to give a knight a copy of Hippocrates' Aphorisms or Galen's Art. Therefore the wise say that the face of a gift must resemble that of the recipient, that is to say, it should be appropriate and useful to him; and in this the generosity of him who is discerning in his gifts is called complete).⁶¹²

⁶¹² *Conv. 1.8.2-6*

4. Dante's Critique of Political Economy in *Convivio* and *Monarchia*

Convivio 4 is an extended commentary on his poem *Le dolci rime d'amor, ch'io solia*, but also follows many of Aristotle's key arguments and conceptions closely, as in other places of Dante's *oeuvre*. *Le dolci rime* really opens up what I call Dante's Aristotelian based critique of medieval Italian and Florentine political economy, which has been the focus of this study, in a more overt and explicit manner. In *Conv.* 4.1, Dante begins his commentary on the poem. Chapter one is political at heart in that it brings the courtly thematic of love, as in *Doglia mi reca*, deftly into the realm of reflection on social bonds and friendship which, though perhaps more aggressively made explicit in *Monarchia*, is here already shaped both by an Averroist conception of the unity of the human multitude in intellect and the corollary notion of friendship in book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. But here particularly, Dante really re-capitulates some of the core arguments of *Politics* 1, where we originally find them.

Dante opens with the Pythagorean remark that "friendship binds many into one" (ne l'amistà si fa uno di più),⁶¹³ and articulates a view of society whose core foundation is based on love. For Dante, the linguistic capacity of human beings is one of the key vehicles for the exchange of emotions, communication of needs, and desires between people, echoing Aristotle's placement of man and woman, then the household, and the fact of human language as original evidence of the natural teleological priority of the polis in the *Politics*.

⁶¹³ This is surely borrowed from Cicero, *De off.* 1.16.51.

E però che le cose congiunte comunicano naturalmente intra sé le loro qualità, in tanto che talvolta è che l'una torna del tutto ne la natura de l'altra, incontra che le passioni de la persona amata entrano ne la persona amante, sì che l'amore de l'una si comunica ne l'altra, e così l'odio e lo desiderio e ogni passione. Per che li amici de l'uno sono d[a] l'altr[o] amati, e li nemini odiati; per che in greco proverbio è detto: «de li amici essere deono tutte le cose comuni». (Since things that are joined by nature have their qualities in common with one another, to the extent that one is at times completely transformed into the nature of the other, it follows that the passions of the person loved enter into the person who loves, so that the love of the one is communicated to the other, as are hatred and desire and all other passions. Consequently the friends of the one are loved by the other, and the enemies hated; hence the Greek proverb says: "Among friends all things must be shared.")⁶¹⁴

Dante here is already making a prelude to his argument that humanity is, or ought to be, connected in friendship and that at all levels of human relationships the linguistic sign (as in *DVE*) is a bearer of *exchange* between persons naturally connected and mutually dependent. Part of this argument has a moral and political aim in setting up the rest of the content of this very rich and eclectic commentary on *Le dolci rime*, which though seemingly banal when viewed in the context of the history Dante is writing, redoubles on his insistence that all human beings are *naturalmente* bound together. In the quote, "de li amici essere deono tutte le cose comuni,"⁶¹⁵ articulated in Cicero's *De*

⁶¹⁴ Dante goes back here at *Conv.* 4.2.6-10 "This is why great discretion must be shown in using or in avoiding the use of words—which are, as it were, the seed of our activity—so that they may be well received and fruitful in effect, so as to avoid any defect of sterility on their part. The right moment must therefore be predetermined, both for the one who speaks as well as the one who must listen; because if the speaker is ill disposed his words are often harmful, and if the hearer is ill disposed even good words will be poorly received. And therefore Solomon says in the book of Ecclesiastes that 'there is a time to speak and a time to keep silence.'"

⁶¹⁵ We also find this statement in Aristotle, *Pol.* 2.5.263a21-30: "These, then, and others are the difficulties involved in the common ownership of property. The present practice, provided it was enhanced by virtuous character and a system of correct laws, would be much superior. For it would have the good of both-by "of both" I mean of the common

officiis—Cicero’s magisterial treatise on the common good—we find not a mere commonplace, but a definitive normative statement about the nature of property and exchange that links into Dante’s later arguments, and in particular the argument for imperial authority in *Convivio* 4.4, in which Dante invokes human need (bisogno/necessità) and the fact that human beings are not self-sufficient as individuals as the “the root foundation underlying the Imperial Majesty” (fondamento radicale de la imperiale maistade). As we shall see shortly, Dante’s recognition that people are necessarily social and political, and that such a society must be modeled on friendship and commonly shared goods necessary for this life in common, shows that the question of economics and wealth-getting will be absolutely essential to the question of justice and, hence, the achievement of that common good of living in friendship. Thus at root, according to the Aristotelian paradigm, *Convivio* 4 can also be said to be fundamentally concerned with the major questions of political economy as seen in *Convivio* 4.4:

lo fondamento radicale de la imperiale maistade, secondo lo vero, è la necessità de la umana civiltade, che a uno fine è ordinata, cioè a vita felice; a la quale nullo per sé è sufficiente a venire senza l’auitorio d’alcuno, con ciò sià cosa che l’uomo abbisogna di molte cose, a le quali uno solo soddisfare non può. E però dice lo Filosofo che l’uomo naturalmente è compagnevole animale. E sì come un uomo a sua sufficienza richiede compagnia dimestica di famiglia, così una casa a sua sufficienza richiede una vicinanza; altrimenti molti difetti sosterrebbe che sarebbero impedimento di felicitade. E però che una vicinanza non può sé in tutto soddisfare, conviene a satisfacimento di quella essere la cittade (The root foundation underlying the Imperial Majesty is, in truth, man’s need for human society, which is established for a single end: namely, a life of happiness, which no one is able to attain by himself without the aid of someone else, since one has need of many things which no single individual is able to provide. Therefore the Philosopher says that man is by nature a social animal. And just as for his well-

ownership of property and of private ownership. For while property should be in some way communal, in general it should be private. For when care for property is divided up, it leads not to those mutual accusations, but rather to greater care being given, as each will be attending to what is his own. But where use is concerned, virtue will ensure that it is governed by the proverb “friends share everything in common.”

being an individual requires the domestic companionship provided by family, so for its well-being a household requires a community, for otherwise it would suffer many defects that would hinder happiness. And since a community could not provide for its own well-being completely by itself, it is necessary for this well-being that there be a city).⁶¹⁶

In any case, Dante clearly hooks onto the Aristotelian anthropological principles of what an inherently natural human society looks like, and sees mutual dependence and a division of labor. As seen in the virtue ethics analysis of the previous section, the problem Dante identifies, as Aristotle does, is not with nature, but with moral behavior that diverges from and thwarts the proper fulfillment of the ends of our social nature. In *Convivio* 1, human beings have needs both material and intellectual that can be left unfulfilled either because of a lack of virtue or a wrong emphasis on the pursuit of certain goods, on the one hand, or otherwise involuntarily by circumstance and various “domestic and civic responsibilities” (read, economic and political responsibilities) on the other. Thus in framing his discussion here in terms of his conversion to “lady philosophy” (*Convivio* 3), Dante focuses his social critique not as a critique of society per se, but as we saw in *Doglia mi reca* and *Inferno* 11, as a social critique of flawed behavior and actions because of a defect of virtue. Dante’s love for the truth, brought through his conversion to philosophy, leads him to hate “not the things themselves but the malice within them” (*non le cose, ma le malizie de le cose*).⁶¹⁷ Similarly, Dante sees people as blinded under a spell of false values, “errors” in judgment related to what the good is, and he wants to set out to correct and “biasimare” a perversion of “human goodness” (*l’umana bondade*) by hating the error and not those who err — the “erranti.”

⁶¹⁶ *Conv.* 4.4

⁶¹⁷ *Conv.* 4.1.4

Dante explicitly states that an error of human “bontade” is fatal in no uncertain terms, and we shall have to explore exactly what he means by that (it might be said that in *Conv.* 3 one of the moral defects he discusses at length is a defect of desire):

Intra li quali errori uno io massimamente riprende, lo quale non solamente è dannoso e pericoloso a coloro che in esso stanno, ma eziando a li altri, che lui riprendano, p[o]rt[a] d[o]lor[e] e danno. Questo è l'errore de l'umana bontade, in quanto in noi è da la natura seminata, e che «nobilitade» chiamare si dee; che [per] mala consuetudine e per poco intelletto era tanto fortificato, che [l']opinione quasi di tutti n'era falsificata; e de la falsa opinione nascevano li falsi giudicii, e de' falsi giudicii nascevano le non giuste reverenze e vilipensioni; per che li buoni erano in villano dispetto tenuti, e li malvagi onorati ed essaltati. La qual cosa era pessima confusione del mondo; sì come veder puote chi mira quello che di ciò può seguitare, sottilmente (Among these errors was one that I condemned more than any other, one which is harmful and dangerous not only to those who are caught up in it but also to those who condemn it, to whom it brings pain and suffering. This is the error concerning human goodness insofar as it is sown in us by nature, and which should be called “nobility,” an error that was so entrenched as a result of evil habit and lack of intelligence that the opinion of almost everyone was thereby rendered fallacious. From this fallacious opinion sprang fallacious judgments, and from fallacious judgments sprang unjust reverence and disdain, with the result that the good were held in base contempt and the bad were honored and exalted. This constituted the worst confusion in the world, as is apparent to anyone who carefully considers what the consequences of such confusion might be).⁶¹⁸

In *Le dolci rime*, Dante literally wants to “bring men back to the right way regarding the proper conception of true nobility” (riducer la gente in diritta via sopra la propria conoscenza de la verace nobilitade), to rectify the social and political situation he sees.⁶¹⁹

In *Le dolci rime*, as in *Doglia mi reca*, this means, in a strictly Aristotelian vein, reasserting virtue and reason as the prime categories by which one should understand proper ethical categories, and as we will see below, the proper governance of a state.

Let's read the poem taking Dante's suggestion that the only allegorical piece is that the

⁶¹⁸ *Conv.* 3.15.8-10

⁶¹⁹ *Conv.* 4.1.9;

lady means philosophy, or truth, but that otherwise it has literal meanings. First of all, the poem is framed as an acerbic moral criticism: he departs the love poetry genre that he is accustomed to (*com'io solia*), “not that I do not hope / To return to them anew/ But because the proud and scornful manner /That my lady bears /Has barred my access/ To my customary speech” (*non perch'io non spero ad esse ritornare, ma perché li atti disdegnosi e feri, che ne la donna mia sono appariti, m'han chiusa la via de l'usato parlare*). My suggestion is that given the historicizing of Dante's time that has been done in the preceding chapters, and Dante's continual insistence here that we take him literally, that what he is referring to are real historical “*atti disdegnosi e feri*,” especially when *fiero* (*fero*, lat. *ferum*) is also taken to mean violent and/or bold—which we have seen in chapter 3—that he has been able to see through the prism of the philosophical and moral erudition that came out of his “conversion” to philosophy (*che ne la donna mia sono appariti*). In other words, if one refuses the double entendre, whether the “acts” are the scornful and violent or his lady's acts/manner are scornful and proud, it seems his point is to depart his courtly genre to talk specifics about political and social values and in reference to specific actions and social facts, about which “*usato parlare*” of the courtly love lyric in usual mode is insufficient. He does this similarly in *Doglia mi reca*, as seen above. Given his identification of lady philosophy with peripatetic philosophy represented above all by Aristotle, what has appeared in the eyes of his lady is thus arguably through the lens of Aristotelian categories.

He explicitly states too that in putting aside his “pleasant style” (*lo mio soave stile*) he will speak “about the quality/ Which makes a person truly noble/ By refuting the false and base beliefs of those who claim that riches/ Are the source of true nobility” (*del*

valore per lo qual veramente omo è gentile, con rima aspr'e sottile; riprovando 'l giudicio falso e vile di quei che voglion che di gentilezza sia principio ricchezza).⁶²⁰ Thus we clearly see here that there is an ethical critique related to a conception of “value” and “wealth.” Dante has linked this to refuting not only the lady’s “atti disdegnosi e ferì” but notes too that these are clearly tied up with 1) ideas of social nobility (nobiltà e gentilezza) and class 2) the link between that and the accumulation, use, and, in sum, whole range of activities related to wealth. With the word “quality” or value (valore) too, Dante means “a natural capacity, or a goodness conferred by nature” (quasi potenza di natura, o vero bontade da quella data), suggesting that Dante is thinking about human capacity for action, potentiality in regards to action which is another way of saying the good or bad decisions we can make, either *in bono* or *in malo*, which as we will see are rooted in his discussion of wealth.⁶²¹ Specifically, Dante here veers into what appears at first to be a social critique of those who claim that wealth is the origin of nobility, which we see quickly in the text, also goes into a critique of the idea that there is a legitimate claim of the rich to rule society or that social station of nobility in addition to wealth has anything to do with what he sees as true value. The identification of nobility with riches unmistakably reflects the historical reality of the composition of the *canzone*.

The next stanza opens with the formulation, “one ruler held that nobility, According to his view, Consisted of ancestral wealth together with fine manners” (Tale imperò che gentilezza volse, secondo 'l suo parere, che fosse antica possession d'aver con

⁶²⁰ *Le dolci rime*, 13-15

⁶²¹ *Conv.* 4.2.12

reggimenti belli).⁶²² Beginning with “tale imperò,” here Dante, in an Aristotelian fashion, begins with refuting the errors of others before defining true nobility, and Dante also cites this Aristotelian definition from the *Politics*, also repeated in book 2.3.4 of *Monarchia*: “For 'nobility is virtue and ancient wealth' as Aristotle says in the *Politics* and according to Juvenal: nobility of mind is the sole and only virtue” (est enim nobilitas virtus et divitie antique, iuxta Phylosophum in *Politiciis*; et iuxta Iuvenalem: Nobilitas animi sola est atqua unica virtus).⁶²³ It is worth citing this passage and then returning to it, because it will be central for our understanding of Dante’s political conceptions later:

The distribution of offices according to excellence is a special characteristic of aristocracy, for the principle of an aristocracy is excellence, as wealth is of an oligarchy, and freedom of a democracy. In all of them there of course exists the right of the majority, and whatever seems good to the majority of those who share in the government has authority, whether in an oligarchy, an aristocracy or a democracy. Now in most states the form called polity exists, for the fusion goes no further than the attempt to unite the freedom of the poor and the wealth of the rich, who commonly take the place of the noble. But as there are three grounds on which men claim an equal share in the government, freedom, wealth, and excellence (for the fourth, what is called good birth, is the result of the two last, being only *ancient wealth and excellence*), it is clear that the admixture of the two elements, that is to say, of the rich and poor, is to be called a polity or constitutional government; and the union of the three is to be called aristocracy, and more than any other form of government, except the true and ideal, has a right to this name. Thus far I have shown the existence of forms of states other than monarchy, democracy, and oligarchy, and what they are, and in what aristocracies differ from one another, and polities from aristocracies—that the two latter are not very unlike is obvious.⁶²⁴

The point for now is that this goes to the heart of the question of how wealth and its use effects the relationships within the polity, as Dante asserts in *Monarchia* that his polity saves men from all the bad regimes, especially democracy, oligarchies, and

⁶²² *Le dolci rime*, 21-24

⁶²³ *Mon. 2.3.4*

⁶²⁴ *Pol. 4.8.1294a9-29* (emphasis mine)

tyrannies, the main defects of which are related to inequities and bad habits in wealth.

In any case, Dante here in the next part of the *canzone* goes on to explicitly link this

“errore” to problems with wealth.

Tale imperò che gentilezza volse,
secondo 'l suo parere,
che fosse antica possession d'aver
con reggimenti belli
e altri fu di più lieve savere,
che tal detto rivolse,
e l'ultima particula ne tolse,
ché non l'avea fors'elli!
Di retro da costui van tutti quelli
che fan gentile per ischiatta altrui
che lungiamente in gran ricchezza è stata;
ed è tanto durata la così falsa oppinïon tra nui,
che l'uom chiama colui
omo gentil che può dicere: “io fui
nepote, o figlio, di cotal valente,”
benché sia da niente.

Ma vilissimo sembra, a chi 'l ver guata,
cui è scorto 'l cammino e poscia l'erra,
e tocca a tal, ch'è morto e va per terra!

(One ruler held that nobility / According to his view / Consisted of ancestral
wealth / Together with fine manners / And someone else of lesser wit / Recast this
saying / Dispensing with the second half / Since he himself was likely lacking! /
There follow in his wake all those / Who count a man as noble if his stock / Has
had great wealth for quite some time. And so ingrained / Has this false view
become among us / That one calls another noble / If he can say / `I am the son /
Or grandson, of such and such / A famous man, despite his lack of worth / But he
appears the basest, to those who see the truth / Who having been shown the way
still goes astray / And walks the earth like one who's dead.)⁶²⁵

This sets up the next section as an unmistakable critique of political economy because here Dante challenges directly the linkage of political imperium and the possession of wealth, as well as the linkage between political rule and a conception of wealth-getting that sharply diverges with friendship and common possession of money and property, recognizing that the root of imperial authority is the provision of needs for

⁶²⁵ *Le dolci rime*, 21-40

people in a state so that they can achieve their highest perfections. If the oligarchs or ruler of the state make the ideological argument (or embody it as justification for vicious or incontinent wealth-getting) that nobility consists in pursuit and possession of wealth, according to the emperor's opinion that "gentilezza" is "antica possession d'avere con reggimenti belli," this is an opinion that reduces nobility to long held richness.⁶²⁶ In other words: the opinion of the Emperor goes astray. A "second way" of going astray is the one "in which the opinion of the common people, which is devoid of reason, goes astray" (e dico che questa oppinione è quasi di tutti, dicendo che dietro da costui vanno tutti coloro che fanno altrui gentile per essere di progenie lungamente stata ricca, con ciò sia cosa che quasi tutti così latrano).⁶²⁷ The masses follow the Emperor in his error. This is the reason Dante makes these two opinions the topic of his investigation: to prepare his critique of chrematistic states that combine a mode of authority with a bad sort of wealth-getting, to be able to correct the bad ideas of the masses:

Queste due oppinioni – avvegna che l'una, come detto è, del tutto sia da non curare – due gravissime ragioni pare che abbiano in aiuto: la prima è che dice lo Filosofo che quello che pare a li più, impossibile è del tutto essere falso; la seconda ragione è l'autoritade de la diffinizione de lo imperadore. E perché meglio si veggia poi la vertude de la veritade, che ogni autoritade convince, ragionare intendo quanto l'una e l'altra di queste ragioni aiutatrice e possente è. E prima, [poi che] de la imperiale autoritade sapere non si può se non si ritruovano le sue radici, di quelle per intenzione in capitolo speciale è da trattare. (These two opinions—although one, as has been said, is of no concern to us—seem to have two very weighty reasons to support them. The first is the Philosopher's belief that what appears true to the majority cannot be entirely false; the second reasoning

⁶²⁶ For a sociological analysis of the conflation of wealth and nobility in late 13th century Florence, see the essential contributions of Carol Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates: Lineage and Faction in a Medieval Commune* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991) and Randolph Starn, *Contrary Commonwealth: The Theme of Exile in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

⁶²⁷ *Conv.* 4.3.8

stems from the most excellent authority of the Imperial Majesty. In order that the power of truth, which outweighs all authority, may be more clearly seen, I intend to discuss to what extent each of these reasons is useful and valid. Since nothing can be known about the imperial authority unless its roots are found, it is first necessary to discuss them expressly in a special chapter.)⁶²⁸

So Dante is going here to treat two different issues. First of all, he is going to re-elaborate what are the true roots of imperial authority based on his Aristotelian conception of the properly governed city-state. Secondly, this will depend on debunking commonly held views about the idea that accumulating wealth is virtuous, which he treats in the stanza of *Le dolci rime*, specifically in verses 41-60. In short, Dante is challenging a definition of nobility which ties nobility to wealth and is framed by the authority of the ruler of the state—according to imperial fiat—which is no small authority, as well as challenging the common opinion, which appears to most, in an unexamined state, to be true, namely that nobility is in fact related to long held wealth. The important thing regarding Dante’s attempt to rebuke these opinions is that they both hinge on an understanding on bad or good relations to wealth in the Aristotelian vein discussed in 5.2.

Here Dante is also seeking to illustrate (*ne la prima si pongono le oppinioni altrui*) a class configuration and class definition of nobility as a link of wealth and “*reggimenti belli*” and even the idea that “*ricchezza*” itself defines social standing and nobility generally.⁶²⁹ For Aristotle, if the constitution becomes oligarchical and the mode of authority appropriate to the household “*oikonomia*” is mixed with political authority, as

⁶²⁸ *Conv.* 4.3.9-10

⁶²⁹ *Conv.* 4.3.4

we have seen, and the bad form of wealth getting, the configuration and conduct of the state will reflect such values. Dante does in fact seem to be lamenting a habitual and ingrained state of affairs. From an Aristotelian point of view the laws and form of the regime will influence the people, as we saw in 5.2, and this is a major source of the error which will come through really clearly in the next stanza. Here Dante asserts (ne la seconda si ripruovano)⁶³⁰ that the organization of the state—in this case a state form in which people believe that accumulation and possession of wealth defines nobility—not only influences the citizens’ habits but that the values that form that organization are in error, thus also contributing to the common error which makes people have “la falsa oppinion tra noi” that wealth or long possession of wealth is a definition of nobility. Dante is beginning to critique one of the fundamental things that makes political economy problematic: the conflation of public honors and political organization around the bad sort of chrematistic wealth-getting; the naturalization of greed. This has moral consequences for the polis and encourages a pursuit of wealth that can never end, and as language and values in a community actually have an effect on everyone else, the entire state is infected with greed and incontinence (if not calculatingly malicious desires) to acquire, possess, and accumulate money.

For this reason, Dante’s critique of greed is a central aspect of the more normatively political content of *Monarchia* and *Convivio*, where Dante shows his deeply Aristotelian critique of the capitalist political economy of his time both in his normative political treatise (examined in 1.2) and in his commentary on the poem about the equation of nobility and riches, *Le dolci rime*. He repeatedly argues in *Monarchia* (using

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

the word *cupiditas* sixteen times), and harking back to the Aristotelian virtue ethics framework we have examined so extensively, that greed destroys justice and that there needs to be one world monarch to stop it. In fact, stopping the destructive power of greed is the central argument of Dante’s entire political thought.⁶³¹ The main way one stops greed, and its deleterious effects, depends on *not* confounding the purpose of a polity writ large and according to proper ends with mere wealth-getting which—in Aristotelian terms—appears sometimes analogous to the purpose of the polity.

Dante goes to great trouble to make this point in the fourth book of *Convivio*, where in his commentary on *Le dolci rime*, he challenges —while referring to Aristotle’s *Politics* 4.8—the linking of imperial authority with the possession of “ancestral wealth and fine manners” (*antica ricchezza e belli costumi*). As we have seen, he vigorously disputes the notion that the wealthy have some implicit or natural nobility (accentuated by time)— “riches cannot, as others believe, confer nobility” (*le divizie, sì come si crede...non possono causare nobilitade*)—and therefore authority to rule because of their capital holdings (reflected in Florentine political reality).⁶³² He argues, moreover, that

⁶³¹ My position is well grounded and attested to textually and historically, but for an overview of differing views on what constitutes the central argument of Dante’s political thought, see the essays in John Robert Woodhouse ed., *Dante and Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). See also the contributions of John A. Scott, *Dante's Political Purgatory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Umberto Carpi, Umberto, *L'Inferno dei guelfi e i principi del Purgatorio*. (Milano: Angeli, 2013); Guglielmo Gorni, *Dante: Storia di un visionario* (Roma: Laterza, 2008); Antonio Tafuro, *Il pensiero politico di Dante Alighieri: storia, dottrina, poesia* (Napoli: Libreria Dante & Descartes, 2012).

⁶³² *Conv.* 4.10.7; for a reading of Dante that centers on the link between “florins” and nobility in an new biographical mode, see Umberto Carpi, *La nobiltà di Dante, 2 vols* (Firenze: Polistampa, 2004).

the first function of the state is to meet actual social needs, based on the Aristotelian idea that reciprocal exchange and distributive (proportional) justice binds the city together, and that therefore the state must prevent greed and the “glory of acquiring” (gloria d’aquistare) as it operates against justice. In the later chapters of *Convivio* 4, particularly chapters 11-14, he links the need for this sort of governance to stopping the deleterious and vicious mania for monetary accumulation, which goes beyond any social or individual need, and in fact generates injustice.

Riches, he says, are “base” (vili) and “imperfect” (imperfette).⁶³³ Their defect lies “in the lack of discretion attending their appropriation; second, in the danger that accompanies their increment; thirdly, in the ruin resulting from their possession” (ne lo indiscreto loro avvenimento; secondamente, nel pericoloso loro accrescimento; terziamente, ne la dannosa loro possessione).⁶³⁴ In this section, after clarifying that gold and pearls as objects have no actual use value, but as money only social or exchange value— “that insofar as they are considered in themselves, they are perfect things, and are not riches but gold or pearls; but insofar as they are conceived as a possession of man, they are riches” (quanto è per esse in loro considerate, cose pefette sono, ma non sono ricchezze, ma oro e margherite; ma in quanto sono ordinate a la possessione de

⁶³³ *Conv.* 4.11.2; Here I analyse Dante’s response to monetary accumulation in the *Convivio*, for an exhaustive and erudite discussion of money and economy in the *Comedy*, see Joan Ferrante, “Exchange and Communication, Commerce and Language in the *Comedy*,” in the *Political Vision of the Divine Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 311-380 and Giuseppe Garin, *Il pensiero di Dante in tema di economia monetaria e creditizia* (Palermo: Fondazione culturale “Lauro Chiazzese” della Cassa di risparmio V.E. per le province siciliane, 1967).

⁶³⁴ *Conv.* 4.11.4

l'uomo, sono ricchezze)—an insight which would much later be central to Marx's notion of commodity fetishism, Dante says that their appropriation lacks discretion.⁶³⁵ Why? Because through various kinds of business and most of the “ways in which riches are acquired” (*modi per li quali esse vegnono*) of an either licit or illicit nature—that is wealth getting—“no distributive justice is present, while injustice...almost always is” (*nulla distributiva giustiza risplende, ma tutta iniquitade...*)⁶³⁶ Thus, for Dante, the radical position is that all wealth-getting, of money for its own sake, understood here as Aristotle's *unnatural* type of chrematistics— “the appropriation of these riches in whatever way results in injustice” (*in ciascuno modo quelle ricchezze iniquamente avvenire*)—violates Aristotle's definition of the kind of distributive justice that binds political communities in friendship, one in which just distribution of property and resources, and settlements of disputes are done proportionally according to need of individuals and through virtue.⁶³⁷

Dante's arguments about the accumulation of wealth in *Convivio* 4.12-13 are clearly indebted to Aristotle because he sees that there is one kind of wealth-getting that is natural, and another that lies in a habit of greed (chrematistic wealth-getting) and *specifically* is related to *monetary accumulation*. Speaking of the accumulation of riches and their possession, Dante says that they are “dangerous” (*pericolose*) because

⁶³⁵ *Conv.* 4.11; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin in association with New Left Review, 1976), 163.ff.

⁶³⁶ *Conv.* 4.11.6-7

⁶³⁷ *Pol.* 2.1261a29-31; *Eth.* 5.5.1132b30-1133a15

“these false traitresses always promise to bring complete satisfaction to the person who gathers them in sufficient quantity, and by this promise they lead the human will into the vice of avarice” (promettono le false traditrici sempre, in certo numero adunate, rendere lo raunatore pieno d’ogni appagamento; e con questa promissione conducono l’umana voluntade in vizio d’avarizia).⁶³⁸ But, their promises are always illusory: though they promise “fulfillment of this promise when they have increased to a certain amount...in place of sufficiency they set up a new goal: that is, a greater quantity to be desired, and once this has been realized, they instill a great fear and concern for what has been acquired” (certa quantità di loro accrescimento...in loco di bastanza recando nuovo termine, cioè maggiore quantitate a desiderio, e, conquista, paura grande e sollicitudine sopra l’acquisto).⁶³⁹

Citing a canon of authorities denouncing greed from Cicero and Boethius, to the Scriptures and Roman poets, Dante links this *acquisition*, *accumulation*, and *possession* of capital to destructive political and social consequences: to use a stronger word, “injustice” (iniquitate)⁶⁴⁰. In short, in this mania of wealth-getting, all means are taken to get, accumulate more, and hold on to riches without any limit or ethical consideration because of the common error about what constitutes the human good. Dante challenges his readers to consider the lives of those who chase after and accumulate riches and to think about the consequences of run-away wealth-getting: “And what imperils and destroys cities, territories, and individuals day by day more than the accumulation of

⁶³⁸ *Conv.* 4.12.3-4

⁶³⁹ *Conv.* 4.12.5

⁶⁴⁰ *Conv.* 4.11.6

wealth by some new person? Such an accumulation uncovers new desires which cannot be satiated without causing injury to someone” (E che altro cotidianamente pericola e uccide le cittadi, le contrade, le singolari persone, tanto quanto lo nuovo raunamento d’avere appo alcuno? Lo quale raunamento nuovi desiderii discuopre, a lo fine de li quali senza ingiuria d’alcuno venire non si può).⁶⁴¹

Dante, for this reason, puts a great deal of emphasis in *Monarchia* and *Convivio* on the issue of just lawmaking: to prevent injury to all. Just laws are the foundation of a just political order that can stop the disastrous effects of greed, as he will say repeatedly in *Monarchia*. For Dante the laws were founded to curb the effects of greed: “What else were the two categories of Law, namely Canon Law and Civil Law, intended to curb if not the surge of greed brought about by the amassing of wealth? Certainly both categories of Law make this quite evident if we read their beginnings, that is, the beginnings of their written record” (E che altro intende di meditare l’una e l’altra Ragione, Canonica dico e Civile, tanto quanto a riparare a la cupiditate che, raunando ricchezze, cresce? Certo assai lo manifesta, e l’una e l’altra Ragione, se li loro cominciamente, dico de la loro scrittura, si leggono).⁶⁴² It is thus necessary to have one world authority, one monarch,

lo quale, tutto possedendo e più desiderare non possendo, li regi tegna contenti ne li termini de li regni, sì che pace intra loro sia, ne la quale si posino le cittadi, e in questa posa le vicinanze s’ amino, in questo amore le case prendano ogni loro bisogno, lo qual preso, l’uomo viva felicemente; che è quello per che esso è nato. E a queste ragioni si possono ridurre parole del Filosofo ch’egli ne la Politica dice, che quando più cose ad uno fine sono ordinate, una di quelle conviene

⁶⁴¹ *Conv* 4.12.8-9

⁶⁴² *Conv.* 4.12.9-10

essere regolante, o vero reggente, e tutte l'altre rette e regolate. Sì come vedemo una nave, che diversi officii e diversi fini di quella a uno solo fine sono ordinati, cioè a prendere loro desiderato porto per salutevole via: dove, sì come ciascuno ufficiale ordina la propria operazione nel proprio fine, così è uno che tutti questi fini considera, e ordina quelli ne l'ultimo di tutti; e questo è lo nocchiero, a la cui voce tutti obedire deono. Questo vedemo ne le religioni, ne li esserciti, in tutte quelle cose che sono, come detto è, a fine ordinate. Per che manifestamente vedere si può che a perfezione de la universale religione de la umana spezie conviene essere uno, quasi nocchiero, che considerando le diverse condizioni del mondo, a li diversi e necessari officii ordinare abbia del tutto universale e inrepugnabile officio di comandare. E questo officio per eccellenza Imperio è chiamato, senza nulla addizione, però che esso è di tutti li altri comandamenti comandamento. (who, possessing all things and being unable to desire anything else, would keep the kings content within the boundaries of their kingdoms and preserve among them the peace in which the cities might rest. Through this peace the communities would come to love one another, and by this love all households would provide for their needs, which when provided would bring man happiness, for this is the end for which he is born. In regard to this argument we may refer to the words of the Philosopher when he says in the *Politics* that when many are directed to a single end, one of them should be a governor or a ruler, and all the rest should be ruled or governed. This is what we observe on a ship, where the different offices and objectives are directed to a single end: namely, that of reaching the desired port by a safe route. Just as each officer directs his own activity to its own end, so there is one individual who takes account of all these ends and directs them to their final end: and this is the captain, whose commands all must obey. We see this in religious orders, in armies, and in all things, as has been said, which are directed to an end. Consequently it is evident that, in order to bring to perfection the universal social order of the human species, it is necessary to have a single individual who, like a captain, upon considering the different conditions in the world, should have, in order to direct the different and necessary offices, the universal and indisputable office of complete command.)⁶⁴³

Significant here, besides the monarch's role as being directly involved in stopping monetary greed, and his exaltation of the very secular notion of a "universal social order of the human species"—where for social order in Lansing's rendering, Dante is using the word "religion"—is that Dante is speaking of "need" (*bisogno*), since *bisogno* goes to the idea of meeting economic needs in a state (the first, *natural* type of wealth-getting according to Aristotle), rather than a state merely being a platform in which

⁶⁴³ *Conv.* 4.4.4-6

individuals, entities, or groups set about acquiring, amassing, and possessing riches. Good economy is *using* and *providing* riches—true riches as wealth, that is, as use values—while bad economic wealth-getting is merely acquiring, amassing, and possessing money.⁶⁴⁴

In the *Aristoteles latinus*, Moerbeke translates the passage that Dante alludes to here in *Convivio* 4.4, from *Politics* 1 as “the rule of a household is a monarchy” (yconomica quidem monarchia).⁶⁴⁵ We need to understand right political rule as involving distribution and regulation of property for self-sufficiency, social need, and the good life while preventing greed from turning the laws to bad ends. Invoking Aristotle’s maxim that “man is a political animal,”⁶⁴⁶ Dante says, as we examined above, that the root of “imperial majesty” (la imperial maistade) is “the need for human society, which is established for a single end: namely, a life of happiness, which no one is able to attain by himself without the aid of someone else, since one has need of many things which no single individual is able to provide” (la necessità de la umana civiltade, che a uno fine è ordinata, cioè a vita felice; a la quale nullo per sé è sufficiente a venire senza l’aiutorio d’alcuno, con ciò sia cosa che l’uomo abbisogna di molte cose, a le quali uno solo soddisfare non può).⁶⁴⁷ The authority of *imperium* is to regulate *dominium*, the

⁶⁴⁴ *Pol.* 1.7 1256a11-18

⁶⁴⁵ *Pol.* 1.7. 1255b14-20; Aristotle, “Politica”, *Aristoteles Latinus Database*, Web, ed. Traditio Litterarum Centre, trans. William Moerbeka (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011), <http://clt.brepolis.net/ALD/> (accessed March 5, 2015).

⁶⁴⁶ *Pol.* 1.2.1253a2-4

⁶⁴⁷ *Conv.* 4.4.1

distribution of property, and regulating just exchange according to Aristotelian moral ends.⁶⁴⁸

What does Dante have in mind, then, if the “*yconomica*” is like a “*monarchia*”? First of all, as we have seen, Aristotle in the beginning of the *Politics* goes to great lengths to clarify that *oikonomia* is not the exact same thing as the art of politics.⁶⁴⁹ This distinction is important in so far as it rejects the equation of politics—the attainment of human social ends—to mere wealth-getting, while also placing economy squarely underneath political authority as a subsidiary role of the latter’s regulation. Secondly, if Dante intends to suggest that a single monarch is necessary to prevent uncontrollable greed in the world, as he does in the above passages of *Convivio* and in *Monarchia* 1.5 and 1.11, then in regards to the political role over economics, it would inherently involve the idea that the polity has to exert a single authority over wealth-getting, as Dante argues, for the sake of the proper ends and good life of the entire human race. The *Monarch* will be of superior intellect and able to rule in so far as he thinks in proper ethical political categories—that is, “in conformity with the teachings of philosophy”

⁶⁴⁸ For an overview of the complicated issue of the Dominican and Franciscan disputes regarding property and the complexities of the terms *dominium* and *imperium* in legal (civil and canon) and in medieval publicist texts see Janet Coleman, *A History of Political Thought: From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) and Janet Coleman, “Property and Poverty,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought C. 350-c. 1450*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For the definitive account of the broader implications of Dante’s concept of *imperium* in relation to medieval political thought, see Bruno Nardi, “Il Concetto Dell’Impero Nello Svolgimento Del Pensiero Dantesco,” in *Saggi Di Filosofia Dantesca* (La Nuova Italia, 1967); Donna Mancusi-Ungaro, *Dante and the Empire* (New York: P. Lang, 1987); Gennaro Sasso, *Dante, l’imperatore e Aristotele* (Roma: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 2002).

⁶⁴⁹ *Pol.* 1.1.1255a8-24; *Pol.* 1.8.1256aff.

(secundum philosophica documenta)—as a law giver, or “oikonomos” over the state, and he does so because “none...or few...can reach this harbour...unless the waves of seductive greed are calmed and the human race rests free in the tranquility of peace” (...ad hunc portum vel nulli vel pauci...pervenire possint, nisi sedatis fluctibus blande cupiditatis genus humanum liberum in pacis tranquillitate possit).⁶⁵⁰

For Aristotle, one of the biggest problems for the health of the state is that people come to believe that wealth getting consists in the procurement of wealth qua coin, qua money (the second, bad chrematistics). The consequence of this belief is that they thus take the basic economic function not to be exchange of goods between diverse and unequally needy individuals, houses, families in a division of labor or social intercourse, of the sort Dante describes in *Convivio* 4.4, again we could call it friendship bound by proportional equality or distributive justice,⁶⁵¹ but rather the mere procurement and accumulation of monetary wealth. Some people are led, Aristotle says, in a passage that shows Dante’s debt to the philosopher’s economic thought in *Convivio*, “to believe that getting wealth is the object of household management, and the whole idea of their lives is that they ought either to increase their money without limit, or at any rate not to lose it.”⁶⁵² We have now arrived at the point at which we started: political economy, in other words, is the confusion of a notion of wealth-getting and a mode of authority. Bad chrematistics happens in the context of an explicitly monetary economy, where money’s

⁶⁵⁰ *Mon.* 3.16.10

⁶⁵¹ *Pol.* 2.1261a29-31; *Eth.* 5.5.1132b30-1133a15

⁶⁵² *Pol.* 1.9.1257b35-40

usefulness as a token of exchange becomes the foundation for money to become a “useful” thing itself qua exchange and to breed more money, starting the infamous Money-Commodity-Money chain that Marx identifies in *Capital* on the basis of Aristotle’s very discussion here in *Politics* 1.9. And it is on these grounds that Marx, Aristotle, and Dante all coincide.⁶⁵³ In Dante’s time monetary exchange of this second sort was fully developed, as we have seen above.

As Dante puts it in *Monarchia*, referring directly to the above noted passages in Aristotle on distributive/proportional justice and monetary exchange “it must be noted that the thing most contrary to justice is greed, as Aristotle states in the fifth book of the *Ethics*” (ad evidentiam primi notandum quod iustitie maxime contrariatur cupiditas, ut innuit Aristotiles in quinto *ad Nicomacum*).⁶⁵⁴ Dante goes, as has been seen, to great lengths to make clear that the *Monarchy* is necessary, through law and state power,⁶⁵⁵ to stop greed and install “universal peace” (pax universalis)⁶⁵⁶ and, as a corollary of this argument, that the purpose of the state is not wealth-getting because it obstructs mankind from engaging in the activities most proper to humanity.⁶⁵⁷ At the outset of the treatise, we can observe that Dante desires to bear fruit for public benefit, which is

⁶⁵³ See Karl Marx, *Capital*, 248; In fact, one of Marx’s earliest attempts Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International Publishers, 1981 [1859]) to articulate a “critique” of political economy, in the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, starts with a discussion of Aristotle’s *Politics* 1.9.1257a.

⁶⁵⁴ *Mon.* 1.11.11

⁶⁵⁵ *Mon.* 1.11.11

⁶⁵⁶ *Mon.* 1.4

⁶⁵⁷ *Mon.* 1.4.5

contrasted with the individual who does not care for the common good, like “a destructive whirlpool which forever swallows things down” (*perniciosa vorago semper ingurgitans*).⁶⁵⁸ He also says that temporal monarchy has not been investigated “on account of its not leading directly to material gain” (*propter se non habere ad lucrum*), thus immediately opening the book by opposing his idea of monarchy to a chrematistic state in which the exercise of politics is linked to profit. It was, after all, his *Ser Brunetto*, as Cary Nederman has shown, who advocated for a conception of politics in his *Tresor*, based upon a totally perverse reading of Aristotle, that supports the idea that “increasing wealth may serve as a positive blessing to the city” and that politics and justice in the city are concomitant with the good desire for personal profit.⁶⁵⁹ As Brunetto writes, adumbrating classical political economists like Adam Smith, commercial exchange and market relationship is real friendship, and seeking money and personal advantage is a natural thing to do: “Among them [...citizens...], there is a common thing that is loved, through which they arrange and conform their business, and that is gold and silver.”⁶⁶⁰

Thus, if one does not like Brunetto’s inversion of the Aristotelian teleology—that is that merely *living* as market exchange actors in a political economy pursuing sterile

⁶⁵⁸ *Mon.* 1.3

⁶⁵⁹ Cary J. Nederman, “Brunetto Latini’s Commercial Republicanism,” in *Lineages of European Political Thought: Explorations Along the Medieval/Modern Divide From John of Salisbury to Hegel* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 143

⁶⁶⁰ Brunetto Latini, *Tresor* 2.5.2, as quoted in Cary J. Nederman, “Brunetto Latini’s Commercial Republicanism,” 148.

monetary accumulation is truly living *well*—Dante argues that we can choose to reject such a situation as ‘unnatural’ and change it. In *Monarchia* 1, he asserts clearly that the political realm is under our deliberative control: “now since our present subject is political, indeed is the source and starting-point of just forms of government, and everything in the political sphere comes under human control, it is clear that the present subject is not directed primarily towards theoretical understanding but towards action” (cum ergo materia prasens politica sit, ymo fons atque principium reclarum politiarum, et omne politicum nostre potestati subiaceat, manifestum est quod materia prasens non ad speculationem per prius, sed ad operationem ordinatur).⁶⁶¹ Dante is here adumbrating Marx’s aphorism on theory and praxis, from the *Theses on Feurbach*, that “the Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world...the point is to *change* it.”⁶⁶² Since it is changeable and under our control, Dante’s argument develops in *Monarchia* 1.3-7, that we can change it for the good only by understanding humanity’s real political and moral ends as distinct from the ceaseless activity and damage of the ends of wealth-getting.

For Dante, this end of humanity is intellectual development and fulfillment (which is ultimately the end of the human political community), and a core component of that is freedom. This is why he says that living under the monarch the human race is “supremely free” (potissime liberum), because it exists “for its own sake and not for the sake of something else,’ as Aristotle states in the *Metaphysics*” (‘sui met et non alterius

⁶⁶¹ *Mon.* 1.2.5-8

⁶⁶² Karl Marx, *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), 571.

gratia[...] ut Pylosopho placet in hiis que *De simpliciter ente*).⁶⁶³ It is fairly clear now that “something else” is perverted authority’s desire to accumulate wealth and hence the deployment of all the organs of the polis in all its diversity as instruments to its ends; wealth-getting. Freedom from this, for Dante, meditating on later books of the *Politics* (where Aristotle discusses the role of money in the form of just and unjust regimes), comes about only under the rule of the monarch as only in that form of government is man secure from *bad forms* of government—democracies, oligarchies, and tyrannies—“which force mankind into slavery” (que in servitutum cogunt genus humanum).⁶⁶⁴ For Dante, just governments seek freedom so that “men should exist for their own sake. For citizens do not exist for the sake of consuls, nor the people for the sake of the king” (homines propter se sint. Non enim cives propter consules nec gens propter regem, sed e converso consules propter cives et rex propter gentem).⁶⁶⁵ The laws are there for the sake of the common good, not for the disordered ends of the authorities. Given the Aristotelian conception that politics is among *free* men and that *slaves* are *living-tools* under a purely household (oikonomical-regal) despotism, Dante’s is an unmistakably political-economic critique.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶³ *Mon.* 1.12.8

⁶⁶⁴ *Mon.* 1.12.9

⁶⁶⁵ *Mon.* 1.12.10-12

⁶⁶⁶ *Pol.* 1.1253b1-39

For Dante, under the monarch the laws are framed for the benefit of the community, which must, as we understand now, have basic economic needs met.⁶⁶⁷ Justice is, then, fulfilling unequal needs in community not according to money, but according to the actual need of persons, and with a view to the intellectual fulfillment of all men, which has often been called Dante's "Averroism."⁶⁶⁸ For Dante this simply doesn't come about in chrematistic states—namely because people (especially the *popolo minuto*) are treated like living tools for wealth-getting, pure labor commodities which involves them in extraordinary "domestic and civic responsibilities" (*cura familiare e civile*),⁶⁶⁹ not to mention the other myriad social ills that come about related to the mania for monetary wealth, which Dante illustrates, for example, in his poem *Doglia mi reca*.

But at the world level, there is no doubt that the monarch is necessary so that, as Dante puts it in *Mon.* 1.10, there is no regression of conflict between the interests of parties, motivated by greed—as was so obviously the case in the expansive political and social troubles of his time that unfolded under the guise of conflicts between city-states,

⁶⁶⁷ For an eridute conceptual framing of Dante's juridical conceptions, see Vittorio Russo, *Impero e stato di diritto: studio su «Monarchia» ed «Epistole» politiche di Dante* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1987); also see Claudia di Fonzo, "Dante tra diritto, letteratura e politica," *Forum Italicum: A Journal of Italian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2007): 5-22 and Piero Fiorelli, "Sul senso del diritto nella Monarchia," *Lecture classensi* 16 (1987): 79-97; for a reading of Dante and the law in the literature of the *Comedy*, see Justin Steinberg, *Dante and the Limits of the Law* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁶⁶⁸ For a discussion of Dante's "Averroism," see Richard Kay's discussion in the notes of *Dante's Monarchia*, written by Dante Alighieri (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), 21-24.

⁶⁶⁹ *Conv.* 1.1

the church, and empire—the institutional, political, and social history of which we have examined extensively in this study. He writes “either this situation will continue *ad infinitum*... or else we must come to a first and supreme judge, whose judgment resolves all disputes either directly or indirectly, and this man will be the monarch or emperor” (et sic aut erit processus in infinitum, quod esse non potest, aut oportebit devenire ad iudicem primum et summum de cuius iudicio cuncta litigia dirimantur sive mediate sive immediate: et hic erit Monarcha sive Imperator). Dante undoubtedly has in mind stopping the sort of disputes such as the one between Boniface and Charles of Valois, and the playing out of claims to authority, such as we saw in the example of Charles of Anjou, the Florentine bankers, and Urban IV and Clement IV. Dante also has in mind calling into question, certainly, the Florentine political institutions that had throughout his lifetime become solidly oligarchical and the greedy citizens lining up behind these powers for profit. A just state can only come about with a monarch who understands that chrematistic accumulation is not the end of the polity and who is willing to use universal authority or *imperium*, that trumps *dominium*, to stop the fires, regressive conflict, and destruction of greed. In other words, without having a modern anticapitalist vocabulary, Dante was addressing just this sort of a problem in his *Monarchia*.

We are in a position now to conclude: Dante’s political thought involves other elements, but at its root it is a searing “critique of political economy.” In the situation we have historicized of a capitalist church/imperial/city-state superstructure and economic base underlying the traditional claims to authority, we now can better understand why Dante says that only under the monarch can we have true justice: Dante’s monarch

subverts not only the traditional city-state, imperial, and church claims to power, but also rejects the capitalist wealth-getting value structure inhering in all of them ethically and politically. Dante's ideal monarch, perhaps "utopian," at least in his normative political theory, is a figure who is supposed to be a good economist, in the right way, which leads me back to Aristotle's observation that "the rule of a household is a monarchy"—"yconomica quidem monarchia." Dante's monarchy is to be a polity ruled like a just household, in which the monarch exercises all *imperium* over wealth-getting, and at the world-wide level—an idea that would be vigorously taken up again by Trotsky. All wealth-getting and exchange ought to be according to proportional justice, or the *contrapassum*, as in Aristotle's *Ethics* 5, which is based on need and with the end of making good citizens, not better claimants to church or empire all of which are illegitimate if society is not rightly governed according to the virtues and perfection of the "multitudo."

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