ITALIAN LECTURE

PREDISPOSITION AND PREVENIENCE: PROLEGOMENA TO THE STUDY OF DANTE'S MIND AND ART[1]

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THE *Divine Comedy* is about actions performed by men, about their consequences and causes. For centuries before Dante's time such actions had been grouped and classified as being, for example, instinctive, impulsive, habitual, deliberate, voluntary, coerced or 'mixed'; and Dante took delight in expounding the Aristotelian paradox that only some of the acts performed by men—deliberate or voluntary—could properly be described as 'human' (*Con.* IV. ix. 4–10). The 'humanity' of these acts had been established by a process of contrast: they alone could not be performed by other species; they alone earned admiration or disapproval; it was for them alone that men were held responsible by their fellows (*Ethics*, III. v. 7). On the assumption, further, that distinct effects must proceed from distinct causes, it was universally accepted that these distinctively human acts must have their origin or motive force in some distinctively human powers of the psyche, namely, the linked faculties of reason and will. And in so far as the actions could be described as 'free', it came to be held that the reason and the will must also be 'free' in the sense that they could act independently of any other motive forces at work in the soul.

[1] This lecture arises from work in progress on a trilogy devoted to Dante's thought and art under the general title *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher*, of which the first volume has already appeared (*Man in the Cosmos*, Cambridge University Press, 1981). More specifically, it is the premature fruit of my preparatory studies for the third volume, *Man and God*.

I feel some disquiet at the prospect of my thoughts appearing in print at this early stage 'with all their crimes broad blown, as flush as May', but I am grateful to the British Academy for giving me this opportunity to look beyond the second volume—*Man in Society*—on which I am currently engaged. I shall welcome any comments and suggestions that will enable me to make my last words on this subject better than my first.

All these elementary ideas will be as familiar as they were to schoolboys in Dante's day. And everyone knows that Dante was primarily concerned with the all-important class of voluntary actions, with the representation of their consequences in the form of a divine punishment or reward, and with the affirmation that this retribution was *just* because such actions originate in faculties—reason and will—that are indeed God-given and free: 'totius operis . . . subjectum est *homo* prout merendo et demerendo *per arbitrii libertatem* est justitiae praemiandi et puniendi obnoxius' (*Ep.* xiii. 34; cf. *Purg.* xvi. 70–2).

What Dante understood by 'voluntary' or 'free' presents no immediate difficulty to the modern reader because it coincides to a very large extent with the rough and ready notions that are put into practice a thousand times a day in the law courts of the civilized world. But Dante was probably more aware than most of his readers that not all acts performed by men are 'human'; that there are other motive forces in the psyche; and that the will's freedom is more or less severely circumscribed by these forces. And I do not believe that we shall fully understand his concept of a free and meritorious act until we can say with confidence what other forces he postulated, how he conceived their influence on human conduct, where he thought the boundaries lay between them and the will, and in what circumstances he thought they were able to cross the borders and invade the territory properly governed by the will.

I hope I have now said enough for you to grasp the context and to see the relevance of my choice of subject for this lecture. I wanted to say something about Nature and Grace, considering them as two forces acting on the psyche from below and above. The alliterating keywords of my title—Predisposition and Prevenience—were chosen to call attention to an intriguing resemblance between the two forces as they were analysed in the later thirteenth century, a resemblance which consists in a common tendency to limit the activity of the will and to downgrade it from *dominus actuum suorum* to a mere puppet dancing on two strings.

I should, however, make it clear that in the event there was neither time nor space to do more than gesticulate in the direction of Dante's treatment of human freedom. In the second part of the lecture I shall therefore confine myself to a number of minor and disjointed—although still suggestive—reflections on the role of predisposition and prevenience in Dante's thought. And if I had had the courage to introduce still more words beginning with

prae-, I should have preferred to subtitle my talk: *Quaedam praeparatoria* to a study of the *Divine Comedy*.

There is nothing startling in the suggestion that there should be parallels between the theologian's doctrine of grace and the philosopher's theory of nature. When Aquinas repeated the scholastic tag *Gratia dividitur contra naturam* he meant simply that one begins where the other ends, or that one concept is perceived as being what the other is not, rather like 'day' and 'night'. And the consequence of this kind of correlation is that whenever there is an evolution of thought affecting one member of the pair there will be a corresponding evolution in the case of the other; an extension in the realm of nature will imply a contraction in the realm of grace; a new methodology and its attendant terminology will be carried across from one to the other; a revaluation of the one will imply a devaluation of the other, just as when the dollar rises against the pound, the pound must fall against the dollar. It is therefore inherently plausible that any significant statement on the subject of grace made during Dante's formative period will represent a more or less explicit attempt to 'come to terms'—the phrase is deliberately ambiguous—with the staggering advances in the study of nature made in the universities of western Europe during the hundred years before his birth, even though the author of that statement may be doing no more than reaffirm a doctrinal point which had been formulated definitively by St Paul, St Augustine, or St Bernard.

This is obviously not the place to outline even the main developments in the study of nature in the period *c.* 1160–*c.* 1260, but I would like to focus on three aspects that are relevant to my argument. First, more than to any other factor the advances were due to the rediscovery and diffusion in the Latin West of Aristotle's *Physica*, *De caelo*, *Meteorologica*, *De generatione et corruptione*, *De anima*, *Historia animalium*, *De partibus animalium*, which were translated from the Arabic in the first instance, and which came accompanied by extensive commentaries and independent works making available the fruits of Arab philosophy and science. Secondly, the innumerable new facts to be gleaned from the translated works were less influential than the relatively small number of new ideas, methods, and modes of argument. It was these that made the study of nature so exciting and which stimulated independent thought and investigation. Thirdly, a student of Dante's generation would have been constantly aware that the 'authorities' or 'sources' for the study of natural science

were pagans—*gentiles*—and that they had been led by the all-important modes of reasoning to reach conclusions that were in some cases inimical to the Christian faith. It could not be without significance that all the points concerning nature that I am about to summarize were known to have been common ground with Moslem thinkers of the stature of Avicenna or Averroes, who had apparently rejected all the points I shall make concerning the doctrine of grace.

Let me now remind you of some of the more fundamental propositions which became current in the thirteenth century thanks ultimately to the authority of Aristotle. Nature—*physis*—was held to be the 'origin of motion and change' (*principium motus et mutationis*). The study of nature—physics or natural science—was defined, with no less economy, as the study of bodies subject to change (*corpora mobilia*). All change or motion—Aristotle often uses the terms as synonyms, and tends to prefer 'motion'—could be reduced to one of just three categories: coming into being and passing out of existence, also called substantial change (*generatio, corruptio*); qualitative change (*alteratio*); and movement from place to place (*motus localis*). This last was taken as the paradigm of the other two classes, so that substantial and qualitative change (*generatio, alteratio*) were analysed as being a middle stage (*medium*) or a series of middle stages (*media*) lying between two states of stillness and repose (*quies*) which constituted the beginning and end (*principium, finis*) of the process.

As regards the natural bodies themselves, the task of the student of nature (*physicus*) was to ascertain the answers to four questions: Who or what made it? What is it made of? What is its structure? What is its function? These were the kinds of explanation that were to be known for centuries as the four 'causes'—in order: the efficient, the material, the formal, and the final cause. And it is vital to remember that an Aristotelian would have denied the title of 'science' (*scientia*) to any attempt to account for the phenomena that did not make use of all four. When the student had mastered the four causes of the body he was investigating, he would realize that 'it could not be other than it is'; and before we go on to discuss other aspects of cause theory in their relation to the science of Nature we must dwell for a moment on the implications of 'necessity' that attach to the phrase *non aliter se posse habere*. Let me first remind you, however, that until further notice I am discussing *all* natural bodies and leaving open the question as to whether man may be studied as part of the natural order.

In Aristotle's view the formal cause of a given natural body is

determined by its final cause. In other words, the structure lacks in nothing and has nothing in excess of what is required for the body to fulfil the purpose for which it exists; and this insight was generalized into two axioms about Nature that recur again and again in scholastic debate: 'Nature is not deficient in necessaries'; and 'Nature does nothing in vain'. When the same idea is re-expressed in the terminology of locomotion and change (*principium, medium, finis*), it can be said that the end determines the means (*media*), and that the means are limited to what is necessary to attain the end (*de-fin-ita*, 'defined'). All dogs can smell and run. But a greyhound—to use one of Dante's examples—is not able to follow a scent as well as a bloodhound, and a bloodhound will never run as fast as a greyhound.

Aristotle himself was perhaps less interested in the other two causes—those that could reasonably be described as *principia* rather than as *finis* or *medium*—but he would not have included them among his requirements for 'scientific' knowledge if they had no power to delimit or define. An *efficient* cause was thought to act by communicating the likeness of its own form or a likeness of some part of itself (*agens agit sibi simile*); and it was regarded as axiomatic that it could not give what it did not possess (nothing acts *ultra speciem*). The limiting effects of the *material* cause are less easy to grasp in the case of the whole species (and any statement with pretensions to 'science' must be a general statement about a whole class rather than about an individual *substantia*, because *scientia est universalium*). But we shall see that the material cause was to become very important in the study of man and of the differences between human beings; and for the moment it may be helpful to think of an example taken from artefacts rather than from natural bodies. Imagine three series of miniature replicas of Michelangelo's *David*, as sold in a Florentine souvenir shop, manufactured in plaster, plastic, and metal; and it will be apparent that durability, appearance, and cost are closely related to the material cause.

Aristotle was confident that 'art imitates nature' and that the processes of nature resemble the more familiar modes of human production. These assumptions were to have far-reaching consequences for the theory of causality and the science of nature, as we shall see if we examine the many distinctions and conclusions that may be derived from just two of his favourite analogies.

In the smithy it is the blows of the hammer that shape the iron into a sword or ploughshare. But the hammer is no more than a tool (*instrumentum*) controlled by a man; and the man must be

a smith who has acquired the practical knowledge and skill (*ars fabrilis*) that enable him to work the metal until it conforms to the pattern or the model (*exemplar*) existing in his mind.

On the building site, there are many men at work: labourers fetch the stones and mix the mortar; a mason uses these materials to build the walls; the foreman directs his work co-ordinating it with that of the carpenter and tiler who will erect the roof; and the architect will appear from time to time to make sure that the foreman has correctly interpreted his design.

On the assumption that the general is implicit in the particular, the student of nature can learn many things from these examples (and I seize the opportunity to introduce a number of terms recurrent in scholasticism with which one simply must be familiar). He can be taught to distinguish the true 'efficient' cause from what is merely an 'instrumental' cause; an 'immediate' or 'proximate' cause from a 'remote' cause; a cause of a part (*causa particularis*) from the cause of the whole (*causa universalis*); a 'first' or 'primary' cause (which alone can be described as a cause without qualification, *per se*, *absolute*, *simpliciter*) from one or more 'secondary' or 'subordinate' causes. He will see why the 'first' cause in a chain is readily interpreted as 'higher' and more 'powerful' (*superior, potior*) than the second, while the third is 'lower' (*inferior*) than either, etc. The analogy of the relationship between architect, foreman, mason, and labourer will also explain why sequences of causes are naturally assumed to show a hierarchical structure of dependence, such that each of the lower agents could be described metaphorically as no more than an 'instrument' or even 'effect' of the agent on which it depends. The *modern* student of medieval physics will also realize how tempting it was to assume that the terms here introduced arrange themselves in two sequences of synonyms, so that *causa prima* = *causa efficiens per se* = *causa superior* (*suprema*) = *causa universalis* = *causa remota*; and *causae secundariae* = *causae instrumentales* = *causae inferiores* (*infimae*) = *causae particulares* = *causae proximae* (this seems to entail the consequence that the *causa per se* is always *remota*, and that the *causa proxima* is always *inferior*).

All these terms are relatively easy to understand if only because they all refer unequivocally to species of *efficient* causality. I say this in preparation for the next group of distinctions which were to be influential in proportion to their difficulty and ambiguity. And it is only fair to Aristotle to point out that, while these distinctions are to be found in his works, and were taken up by the scholastics on his authority, they are more Neoplatonic in character than Aristotelian.

The sword of our example pre-exists as a mental image or *exemplar* in the mind of the smith (where it would be referred to in the Middle Ages as a *causa exemplaris*). It cannot be realized unless the smith possesses the skill and practical knowledge (*ars fabrilis*) which make him a smith and which he shares with all other practitioners of his trade. Aristotle can therefore speak of the *ars fabrilis* as the cause of the sword, or the *ars sculptorea* as the cause of a statue, which would imply that the individual smith or sculptor is no more than an instrument used by the 'art'. By a similar semantic leap he can speak of the art of architecture (i.e. the architect's professional knowledge) as the cause not only of a particular house but of the lesser *artes* such as masonry or carpentry that are necessary for its construction. And even the exalted *ars architectonica* may be considered as dependent on the general category of making, *ars*, regarded as the cause of all the arts. This in turn would seem to be an instance of a general rule that any genus is the cause of its constituent species, or that any concept 'containing' others is the cause of those contained; while this is only a short step from the proposition that whatever is supreme in a given kind is the cause of the kind (the often repeated example is that of the element, Fire, which was thought to be the hottest natural body and the ultimate cause of all heat in all natural bodies).

There are three main points to notice about this last group of usages. First, they mix abstract and concrete terms, and allow abstract nouns to function as the subject of active verbs with a concrete object. Secondly, they invite confusion between *efficient* causality and formal or exemplary causality or even mere logical priorities. Thirdly, they all tend to multiply the number of causes and present them as receding in an 'ascending' sequence from the effect, with the result that the apparently self-evident and immediate cause is viewed as simply one among many inferior causes or as no more than the effect or the instrument of a higher agency.

These three tendencies can be seen as the ancestors of the comprehensive models of causality, elaborated centuries later by Neoplatonic thinkers, which purported to explain the origin of every body and every movement in the universe. Abstract categories like goodness, unity, or being are treated as independent and causally active entities; and they are joined by hypothetical 'intelligences' to form the upper section of an unbroken Chain of Being, which descends from a First Cause in such a way that each successive link in the chain is the immediate cause of the link below it.

A model of this kind, condensed in the so-called *Liber de causis*, was known at first hand in the thirteenth century, and it exerted a considerable direct influence on the use of cause-language in Dante and his contemporaries. But Neoplatonic cause-theory had also made an important contribution to the slow collective evolution of the medieval world-picture, the cosmology which will be familiar to everyone from diagrams in copies of the *Paradiso*. And it was in this *indirect* way, as an integral part of the physical model of the cosmos, that these ideas did most to modify the connotations of words like 'body', 'change', or 'cause', and thereby to modify the meaning of the word 'Nature'. The First Cause and the Intelligences took on a new dimension when they were identified with the Creator God of Genesis and the nine orders of angels in the celestial hierarchy. The study of natural bodies and natural movements was extended to take in the study of the planets and stars revolving in their concentric spheres of aether. Nature with a capital N had the shape of a capital O, since it was co-extensive with the physical cosmos. And adjectives like 'remote', 'higher', 'containing', 'moving' assumed a new concrete reality when they were referred not to men on a building site, but to the heavenly spheres considered as the efficient causes of generation, alteration, and locomotion.

The simplest case of natural 'movement' or 'change' involves two contiguous bodies, one of which is active (the agent, generant, or efficient cause) while the other is purely passive (the patient, or, sometimes, the material cause). And it is a cardinal principle of Aristotelian physics that the two bodies have to be homogeneous or 'proportioned'. More specifically, the patient has to be 'empower-ed' (*in potentia*) to receive the likeness of the agent, or nothing will happen when the two are brought into contact.

Such potentiality for change in the passive body has two aspects: it presupposes a certain structure (*causa formalis*), and it requires a particular qualitative state (*dispositio*). Wax, for example, has a capacity to receive and retain impressions that granite and water do not: it is simply a property inherent in its form. But even wax must be 'fitly disposed' by the action of heat before it can receive the likeness of a signet ring or other metal stamp.

In this example, then, it is the signet that 'generates', while the heat merely 'alters' or 'prepares'. Both are efficient causes, but there is an important difference between them which is marked in scholastic terminology by referring to the signet as the *causa perficiens* and to heat as the *causa praeparans* or *causa disponens*—the

'dispositive' cause. And with that we have reached the topic of Predisposition, because the first keyword of my title is to be understood as a portmanteau translation of *praeparatio* and *dispositio* where these are used as synonyms.

In some few cases, the form of the patient body is sufficient alone to place it in the highest state of readiness (*ultima dispositio*) to undergo change. In many situations, too, the perfective and dispositive causes are one and the same agent (it is only in do-it-yourself decoration, perhaps, that husbands burn off and rub down, while wives apply the paint). But the scholastics normally insisted that the two stages of preparation and completion are logically and temporally distinct; and in so doing they added yet another '*con*causa' to the long chain of causes I have described.

Or rather, they added a *number* of *concausae*, because even if one declined to investigate the preparatory causes of the preparatory cause, one had to distinguish at least two kinds of dispositive cause, the indirect and the direct. The first consists in the removal of an obstacle, for instance by opening the shutters to allow the sun to illuminate a room. The second demands some positive alteration to the patient; and here the standard example is the application of heat, whether this comes from a furnace in a smithy, a stove in the kitchen, or the natural warmth of the body (which permits the successive coctions in the stomach, liver, and heart by which food is eventually transformed into seed, which may eventually generate a new individual of the same species: I dwell on this as one of the best recurrent examples of a long causal chain).

At one level, then, the concept of predisposition was no more than a refinement to the analysis of the principles of movement and change, or to the understanding of generation, alteration, and locomotion. But at another level its true importance lay in its function as a 'safety-valve', releasing internal pressures that threatened to destroy the scholastic synthesis long before it reached its mature form.

Let me explain. Thirteenth-century writers repeat that 'if the cause is multiplied, the effect will be multiplied', or that 'if the cause ceases, the effect will cease', because it seems inherent in the very concept of efficient causality that 'other things being equal' a cause will always produce the same effect. On the other hand, they were well aware that there are many occasions when a given cause or causal chain either fails to produce the expected result or achieves it only imperfectly.

Such failures or imperfections could entail a number of consequences all of which were unacceptable to the scholastic

philosopher. Either his assumptions and deductions concerning efficient causality were false; or Nature did not constitute a regular system exhibiting perfect order and a perfect correlation between formal, final, and efficient causes; or again the workings of the universal machine were not subject to the benign control of divine providence. But if certain effects can be produced only when there has been due and adequate preparation, then non-existent or untoward effects could be ascribed simply to a *lack* of such preparation or to various degrees of *un*readiness in the patient body. There would therefore be no need to impugn the omnipotence and goodness of God, to doubt the order of nature, or to challenge the fundamental concepts, axioms, and modes of argument. Recognition of a distinct and necessary phase of predisposition could help to 'save the phenomena'—in Aristotle's pregnant phrase—and to save the intellectual system as well. It explained, so to speak, why 'the dog did nothing in the night-time'; which in this case was more important than explaining why it did do something.

There is a further paradox of note connected with dispositive causality. The *causa disponens*, as we have seen, is a species of *efficient* cause. But the more one stresses the need for predisposition, the more one stresses by implication the explanatory power of the *material* cause, because both *dispositio* and *indispositio*—readiness and unreadiness—are *ex parte materiae*.

Matter is the origin of individuation (*principium individuationis*); and the assumption that matter must be fitly disposed before an effect can be realized coexisted with the belief that an individual is differentiated from fellow-members of its species by its 'complexion', 'temperament', or 'constitution'. All three terms refer ultimately to the proportion of the four elements in its make-up; and it was this that was often invoked to explain its character as an individual. At another level, a monstrous birth was attributed to the *indispositio materiae* in the seed which inhibited or impeded the operation of its *virtus informativa*. Dante was tempted to draw the conclusion (*Mon.* II. ii. 3) that all imperfections or deficiencies in the universe are to be attributed to the fluctuating qualities of matter, and that they do not form part of the intention of the First Cause. And this is tantamount to saying that they are due to chance.

We should also recall that, although *indispositio* is a neutral, technical term, apparently innocent of any negative connotations, the 'unreadiness' of matter was also described from time to time as 'deafness', 'resistance', or 'disobedience'. And the emotive

metaphors remind us that the material cause was often regarded with a half-unconscious hostility or mistrust in the thirteenth century thanks to the pervasive influence of Neoplatonism.

Next, a word about the presumed influences of the planets and stars. It was almost universally agreed that the heavenly bodies played a vital role in the processes of generation. There was also general agreement that they acted both as 'dispositive' and as 'perfecting' causes in the production of *inanimate* substances (hence the famous simile in Guinizzelli's *Al cor gentil*, quoted with approval by Dante in *Con.* IV. xx. 7). In the case of *animate* beings—other than maggots—Dante sided with the orthodox Aristotelians and held that the heavens functioned as *dispositive* causes, preparing matter to receive the decisive influence of the seed (Avicenna had taken the contrary view). We may therefore conclude that the heavenly spheres were the *universal* dispositive causes.

Lastly, it must be remembered that the heavenly bodies are constantly changing position with respect to the earth and to each other. It would therefore seem that a principle of something like randomness was built into the medieval cosmos and that it was closely associated with the concept of predisposition.

I hope I have said enough about predisposition to explain why the topic is so important in itself and why I regard it as representative of the whole scholastic theory of natural causality. Rooted in Aristotle, but modified by later thinkers such as Avicenna, it was inseparable from the thirteenth-century model of the physical universe and its working. It tended to depreciate the status of the apparently self-evident cause of a given natural body or event by placing it in a context in which that cause was just one among many joint factors or antecedent agents, or just one of four possible modes of explanation. It carried the implications that some of these causes might be frustrated; that all of them could combine and interact in an unpredictable way; or that they formed chains of necessity in which each agent in turn, apart from the first, was revealed as no more than the instrument of a higher cause. Some of these implications should have excluded each other. But it will be clear that, in different ways and at different levels, plurality, negativity, chance, and necessity were all 'unfriendly' to the belief that there could be a class of acts whose unique value lay in the fact that they were unconstrained and 'free'—the voluntary acts of human beings.

The reality of human freedom was of course asserted in the thirteenth century over and against the various species of fatalism

or natural determinism which were endemic in the theory of causality. Furthermore, it was asserted in terms that would have been perfectly acceptable to Aristotle and was therefore in no way specific to Christianity.

In part it was simply a matter of definition. Nature 'divided against' intelligence. A natural act must be instinctive and predetermined in one or more of the senses we have just considered. The act of an intelligent being is by contrast conscious and free.

It is, however, important to grasp that the nature and origin of human freedom could be and was explained within the framework of the four causes and therefore within the province of Natural Science. Animals possess—by virtue of their structure or formal cause—all the properties of plant life together with two *additional* powers called sensation and locomotion that enable them to achieve *their* final cause, a goal distinct from that of plants. In the same way human beings possess all the properties of animal life together with additional powers called the intellect and the will that enable them to achieve *their* final cause, which is distinct from that of animals.

The intellect is both speculative and practical: it enables man to know the meaning of concepts such as 'good', 'end', 'means'; to know what knowledge is; to know himself in his four causes; and to know that his end must lie in the perfect operation of his *distinctive*, intellectual power, in the contemplation of the truth. In its *practical* aspect, the intellect enables man to 'deliberate'—that is, to weigh up the foreseeable consequences of different particular actions and to choose the one that seems most conducive to his known end. The will provides the indispensable motive power (*vis motiva*) to implement that choice, and in order to do this, it must be unimpeded and free to 'incline' towards the 'weightier' argument that swayed the intellect in favour of the chosen course of action. (It must also be free *not* to consent to the decision of the intellect, but this is not relevant to our enquiry.)

This paradigm of the nature and origin of human freedom also provided the wherewithal for a very comprehensive explanation of the evidence that most human beings find it difficult either to choose correctly, or to act upon the right choice, or both. The human form (*anima humana*) not only *contains* the powers found at lower levels of existence, it *depends* on them for the exercise of the distinctively human powers. Even when the agent is equably 'tempered', healthy, adult, male, well educated, well trained, and living under a benign conjunction of the heavens, the will must

share control of the organs of motion with the sense-appetites, and the intellect remains dependent on the material organs of sensation for the images from which it abstracts true knowledge. Both intellect and will are periodically suspended in sleep, a condition which resembles their earlier state of mere potentiality during infancy, and their future diminution or privation in old age. For all these reasons, it was considered prudent to define man as an animal 'capable of reason', *rationis capax*, rather than as 'rational' without further qualification.

Those Christian theologians who were in sympathy with the Aristotelian approach to the study of nature found nothing in this philosophers' model of human freedom that was incompatible with their faith. Indeed the model was strengthened rather than otherwise by acceptance of the revealed truths of Christian dogma concerning the First Creation, Divine Providence, and the immediate creation of each human soul by God. For example, the problematic origin of the distinctively human powers (How can a network of necessary causes produce a free effect?) was accounted for on the assumption that we are created individually by God in his likeness and image. And Christian belief in the immortality of the individual soul together with the hope that the soul may be united with God in the afterlife came jointly to the rescue of one of the weakest points in Aristotelian anthropology—namely, 'How can man know so little, so late, with so many interruptions, and for so short a space of time, if *natura non deficit in necessariis*?' In other words, the redefinition by Christians of man's formal cause to include personal immortality simultaneously supplied the missing means by which he may definitively achieve his *final* cause. The progressive actualization of his potentiality for knowledge and the truth—at best fragmentary during his earthly existence—may be perfected in the eternal contemplation of God, rather than extinguished at the moment of natural death.

It was therefore possible for Christians to assimilate what I am calling the philosophers' model and to formulate their modifications to it in the language of causality. We have just seen that God can be described as the efficient and the final cause of our humanity; and we are about to explore the sense in which Christians could describe him as a direct cause of 'alteration', and a direct 'dispositive' cause. Before we can do so, however, we must remind ourselves that Christian thinkers were committed by their faith to a very different kind of explanation of the obstacles that limit our freedom to choose and to act upon our choices. That explanation took the form of a narrative; and I must assume that

everyone is familiar with the 'plot' (a story of lord and servant, of prohibition defied, of punishment and reconciliation) and with the historical individuals and dated events (of which the two most important were Adam's disobedience in March 5198 BC, and the obedience unto death of Jesus on 25 March AD 34: the dates are those accepted by Dante).

The explanation was hardly very Aristotelian, but the meaning of the story could still be expounded in terms that philosophers might use. Adam was punished for his transgression by the loss or severe curtailment of the very powers that had enabled him to transgress. His intellect could no longer distinguish end and means, nor deliberate dispassionately about particulars; his will was permanently weighed down by the appetites of the senses. Deprived of the full use of his human powers, it was no longer possible for him to achieve his end as a human being; and he could not even perform the acts necessary to make atonement for his crime and thus to earn the restoration of those powers. Moreover, his diminished or 'corrupted' nature was transmitted to his descendants along with the guilt of his crime. Thanks to *his* 'original sin', no human being could be called truly free. And thus the theologians' diagnosis was far more pessimistic than that of the philosophers.

Of course medieval Catholics retold the Jewish story and accepted its diagnosis of man's fallen condition only because they believed that a remedy had been found. The penalty had been paid. Some human beings were admitted to the perfect vision of God in the afterlife, which is to say that they had achieved their final cause. What is more, they had been admitted thanks in part to their meritorious acts, which must mean 'free' or 'voluntary' acts. The *natura* of each infant at birth was still *corrupta*, but it could be healed and restored by grace. And grace could be defined in a preliminary way as the provision of a special aid (*speciale regimen, auxilium*) given directly to man by God, who intervened alongside the physical, material forces of Nature to act as an efficient cause of 'alteration' and '*re*-generation'.

You will not expect me to devote as much time to the doctrine of grace as I have done to theories of natural causality, but I must remind you of some of the main features in the thirteenth-century account, basing myself for the time being on the two *Summae* by St Thomas Aquinas. At the very least we must be able to recognize the direct and successive interventions made by God in order to help an individual soul along the 'road' to its 'homeland' (the

linked images of *via* and *patria* were commonly used as quasi-technical terms in this context). And since you are familiar with the 'journey of our life' in at least one notable case, I shall take the liberty of beginning at the end and working backwards.

The last of God's gifts is called 'consummate' or 'final' grace, and it is given *in patria*, that is, after death and after the soul has completed the process of purification in Purgatory. It confers the ability to 'see' God in his essence; and since there can be no 'seeing' without 'illumination', it is often referred to metaphorically as the *lumen gloriae*. Technically speaking, God raises man to a higher level of being, 're-creating' him so that he participates in the Divine Nature, and becomes 'like a god' or 'deiform'.

At the moment of death, the soul must have left the body in a condition that was 'pleasing' to God, because it was 'holy'. It was, however, God himself who made it *sancta* and therefore *grata*, and the grace by which he did so is called *sanctificans* or *gratum faciens*.

The soul is rendered 'acceptable' above all by the acts it performs out of its love for God, out of the desire to be united with him and to do his will. These acts have 'merit' because they are 'free' (this is still a matter of definition), but they are nevertheless dependent on God's grace as their *principium*. It was he who 'informed' the soul with the new power to love him above all other things; he that revealed to the intellect the truths about himself and his purposes for man that are distilled in the Creed (for one cannot love what one does not 'know'); and it was he who gave the intellect a new power to take those truths on trust (for they can be neither proved nor disproved by reason alone). In other words, a free and 'meritorious' act presupposes the gift of Charity, which presupposes the gift of Faith: and these two powers or virtues are said to be 'infused' by God, that is, 'poured into' the soul, as water is poured into a vessel, or as light floods into a hitherto darkened room. (I omit Hope simply for convenience of exposition.)

The will would not be capable of expressing its love for God in an act informed by Charity if God had not first set it free from the 'bonds' that tied it to the lower powers in the soul, or from the 'weight' that biased it in their favour. The liberated will is thus restored to its rightful place in the hierarchy of powers between the reinvigorated intellect and the instinctive appetites that we share with the animals. This due 'order' of the regenerated natural powers is usually referred to with metaphors drawn from the body or from the body politic such as 'health' or 'justice'; and thus the grace by which the order is reinstituted is called *gratia sanans* or *justificans*.

The concept of justice in its normal acceptation provides us with a bridge to the specifically 'legal' aspects of the doctrine. The soul will freely seek to make amends or make 'satisfaction' for the offences it has committed, and it will do this by voluntarily performing acts of penance. But it needs grace to feel the remorse from which those acts would stem, and grace to feel revulsion at the thought of sinning again. Furthermore, nothing it can do by way of reparation would have any validity unless God had freely pardoned its fault (*remissio culpae*), and unless the penalty incurred by Adam's original transgression had been paid on behalf of all men at the Crucifixion. Man cannot *earn* forgiveness, and he cannot pay the debt or ransom money by himself.

Grace is not necessarily given once and for all. The soul that uses its newly won freedom freely to reject God will thereby forfeit grace and lose its freedom once again. It therefore needs perseverance as a gift from God, and also his protection from without, an *exterior custodia*, to save it from temptation and the occasion for sin.

If the soul does remain 'santa e libera in sua potestate' (*Con.* II. i. 7), it is said to possess 'habitual grace'. The adjective *habitualis*—strongly Aristotelian in flavour—implies that the soul can acquire an inclination to love and to serve God that is so steady as to become 'second nature', just like the habits that are acquired by repetition and that Aristotle had categorized as virtues or vices. The noun *gratia* reminds us, however, that the second nature came from and depends on a principle outside the soul—a *principium exterius*—and that while it is the *principium merendi*, it is not given as the reward for previous meritorious deeds.

All these many aspects of grace as received by the soul during its earthly existence could be described metaphorically as the *lumen gratiae*, and we have seen that this 'light of grace' is no more than a preparation or disposition of the soul to receive the 'light of glory'. But it was further held that the soul had to be 'made ready' before it could receive this preparation, and that this '*pre*-preparation' or 'pre-disposition' also demanded the direct intervention of God. The will of fallen man is powerless to move him to turn his back on sin (*aversio*) or to turn towards God (*conversio*), unless God in his mercy takes the initiative and gives an *auxilium gratuitum* to stir the soul from within. The first nudge that sets the soul in motion to seek the 'diritta via' must come from God. What 'comes before' grace is also grace; and in this first preliminary phase it is called *gratia praeveniens*.

I must now enter a few well-chosen caveats to clarify the main

thrust of my argument before I pass on to examine some interesting aspects of prevenience and predisposition in the works of Dante.

In the first place, then, I have not told you everything. No reference has been made to the role of the sacraments as the normal vehicles of grace, and I have said nothing about the purely transient grace called *gratiae gratis datae*, nor about the fact that grace is given to different individuals 'secondo più e meno' without reference to their deserts. Most important of all, I have excluded all that is personal in St Thomas's thought concerning the nature and range of the distinctively human powers before the Fall, or the way in which he conceived grace as 'perfecting' nature rather than 'dividing against it'.

Secondly, I am not suggesting that the doctrine of prevenient grace first emerged in the thirteenth century as part of the theologians' response to the renewed study of nature, and under particular influence from the theory of dispositive causality. That doctrine rests on texts in the Gospel of John and in the letters of Paul, and it had been fully elaborated by Augustine in the course of his polemic with the followers of Pelagius in the early fifth century.

What I am suggesting is that, in those works of Aquinas which were written for the outsider and the beginner, and in those articles where he is saying nothing new or controversial from the theological point of view, his presentation of Christian teaching on this matter is structured in accordance with Aristotelian axioms and procedures and permeated with the terminology and examples that one finds in the discussions of causality in his commentaries to Aristotle's works. The parallelism between prevenience and predisposition is not implicit: it leaps to the eye.

Thirdly, I do not want to leave the impression that Thomas failed to stress the role of free will in man's salvation, or that he dismissed the notion of human merit. On the contrary, he insists that the will must *co*-operate before grace can become habitual, justifying, sanctifying, and 'gratifying', and that its love for the true good must be translated into action: the true end of man is not a state but an activity (*operatio*). Again, he explicitly maintains that all the many phases from the *principium* to the *finis* may occur simultaneously if such is God's will, as was the case in the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus. He also makes it clear that the distinction between some of these stages is one of logical priority not temporal succession. And lastly it is necessary for me to remind you that even where the stages follow one another

secundum prius et posterius there is only one *causa proxima* operating on the soul successively in order to infuse grace, and not a *causa universalis* working through a number of different agents at many removes.

Nevertheless, despite all these qualifications and reservations, it seems clear that, in the late thirteenth century, in the kind of text that Dante read and found congenial, there were three important similarities between the doctrine of grace and the science of nature which are all highlighted by my pairing of prevenience and predisposition. These are: first, the common language and rules of argument; secondly, a tendency to push back the analysis of an efficient cause from the *causa perficiens* to the *causa praeparans sive disponens*, with a consequent multiplication of the number of factors involved, or in the number of interventions by a single *Factor omnium*; thirdly, the 'invasion' by Grace and Nature, from above and below, of what might be regarded as the free and non-aligned territory of the will. Dante was guilty of hyperbole when he wrote in a sonnet to Cino that 'in the circle of love's arena, free will was never free':

> Però nel cerchio de la sua palestra
> libero arbitrio già mai non fu franco.
>
> (*Rime*, cxi. 9–10)

But the figure of speech was by no means unjustified as I hope to demonstrate on some future occasion through an analysis of crucial episodes in the *Comedy*.

The adjective 'preveniente' is never found in Dante's work, but 'disposto' and its synonyms and cognate forms occur quite frequently. Sometimes, too, they appear in bold metaphorical extensions of the primary meaning which demonstrate Dante's fascination with the concept itself. For example, the whole world was 'disposed' to receive the birth of the Saviour (*Con.* IV. v. 8); Henry VII failed to 'straighten' Italy because he came 'in prima ch'ella [fosse] *disposta*' (*Par.* xxx. 137–8); the Florentine vernacular brought Dante's father and mother together and was thus one of the 'dispositive causes' of his generation and being (*Con.* I. xiii. 4).

There are, of course, other and less fanciful dispositive causes of generation than language; and in its normal acceptation the concept of 'predisposition' is perhaps nowhere more prominent in Dante than in *Convivio*, IV. xx–xxiii, the chapters in which he first attempted to explain that every human being is both generated by his father and created by God, and that it is from God that the

embryo receives the distinctively human powers, the 'parte razionale' or 'intelletto possibile'.

In these chapters—unlike in the better-known exposition in *Purgatorio*, xxv—Dante is concerned with the differences between individuals. God makes all men human, but the possibility of attaining human perfection—'gentilezza'—is reserved for the happy few. This is because God's 'breath' is received unequally by different embryos depending on their state of 'readiness' (*dispositio*); and the potentially noble individual is one who has received God's goodness in the fullest possible measure because his embryo was perfectly disposed and prepared by the many natural agents—lovingly listed by Dante—which were involved in the antecedent process of generation (xx. 7; xxiii. 7 and 12).

It is fascinating to read these four chapters in the light of what I have been saying. For example, they make an explicit distinction between the 'modo naturale' and the 'modo teologico', that is, between what reason can conclude and what is believed because God has chosen to reveal it (xxi. 1). Authorities are quoted freely in both modes (notably, Aristotle and the *Liber de causis* for the natural mode, and St Paul and St Augustine for the theological). And Dante confidently assumes that reason is corroborated and completed by the dogma of faith. Above all, however, the chapters are interesting for the extraordinary fusion or 'contamination' of the two sets of ideas, a contamination symbolized in the allegorization of the Three Maries seeking Jesus at the tomb as the three sects of the active life seeking happiness in this world (xxii. 14–18).

God's intervention in the womb is repeatedly referred to with terms and metaphors that are normally reserved for justifying grace. Nobility is not just a 'divina cosa' (xx. 3) or 'dono divino' (xx. 6), but a 'grazia' or 'divina grazia' (xx. 3, 6; xxii. 5). It is said to be 'infused' (xxii. 4); it shines and is resplendent throughout the noble person's life (xxiii. 2). Beauty, health, modesty, pity, religion, and the moral and intellectual virtues derive from it in the same way that faith, hope, and charity are said to derive from grace (xix. 5–6). And most striking of all, Dante repeats with evident satisfaction the opinion of 'alcuni' that if all the natural agents were to act in concord for the production of the soul in its perfect disposition 'so much of the godhead would descend into it that it would be almost another God incarnate' (xxi. 10).

Conversely, God's decisive and continuous influence on the soul while it is on the journey through life is expressed by means of a metaphor drawn from nature and natural growth. Nobility is

a seed ('seme', 'sementa', 'semente'), 'sown at the beginning of our generation'. It throws up a 'shoot' (the 'appetito d'animo naturale', xxi. 13; xxii. 4) at first alike in all men and not dissimilar from that of beasts (xxii. 5), which then diversifies and branches into the natural virtues and other good qualities (xix. 5–6; xxii. 8–9), where it bears fruit: 'in tanti e tanti frutti fruttifica' (xix. 17). God is 'directing' the soul (xxii. 3; xxiii. 3) to a 'perfection' which is identified with our *operatio propria* (xxii. 3, 9) and which therefore constitutes our 'somma felicitade e beatitudine' (xxii. 11). It is true that there is nothing incompatible with the orthodox account of grace in this very Aristotelian terminology. But there is something decidedly unusual in the clear implication of the image that God has given the soul all the help that it will need at the very *beginning* of the journey, or even *before* the beginning.

It would be foolhardy to read too much into Dante's 'Parable of the Sower', or to seek a precise philosophical equivalent for every term in the extended metaphor. But there are significant differences of emphasis as between Dante's position and that of an Aquinas, and I think they might be paraphrased somewhat as follows. For Aquinas, God is the sole cause of what could be called man's '*third* perfection', the divinization of human nature by the *lumen gloriae* that enables the soul to see God in his essence (normally, of course, after death). God is also the primary cause of man's '*second* perfection', if this Aristotelian term be understood in a Christian sense to refer to the exercise of charity by a soul in a state of grace. Aquinas would also emphasize that the light of grace must shine out and be received continuously by the soul; and that the second perfection exists only to make the soul ready to receive the third: 'gratia gratum faciens *disponit* animam ad habendam divinam Personam' (*Summa Theol.* I. 43, 3 *ad* 2).

Dante, by contrast, stresses that God is the immediate cause of our '*first* perfection', understanding this term in its strict Aristotelian sense, since it is God who induces the 'form' that makes the foetus alive and human. He agrees that God brings about the '*second* perfection' but only as a 'seminal' cause. He does not posit any subsequent intervention by God. This second perfection, too, is presented in characteristically Aristotelian language as 'nostra *beatitudine* (questa *felicitade* di cui si parla) . . .', which we find first 'quasi imperfetta ne la vita attiva, cioè ne le operazioni de le morali virtudi, e poi perfetta quasi ne le operazioni de le intellettuali' (xxii. 18). Admittedly, Dante goes on to speak in the very next sentence of the '*somma* beatitudine, la quale qui *non* si puote avere'. But the two 'operazioni'—'quasi

imperfetta' the one, 'perfetta quasi' the other—are described as 'vie espedite e dirittissime' to this supreme beatitude, the attainment of which is taken more or less for granted. And there is no mention anywhere in these chapters of a fallen or corrupted nature which has to be healed, straightened, justified, sanctified, and saved by grace.

Assuming that my paraphrase of Dante's rather reckless use of metaphor is more or less on the right lines, how should one describe this strange amalgam of the natural and theological modes?

If 'grace' implies the influence of mind on mind in a relationship between persons—analogous to the influence of one human being on another through force of personality and in reciprocated love—then the 'production' of the soul and the 'sowing' of the seed of happiness do not form part of a theory of grace. If, on the other hand, 'nature' denotes the activity of secondary agents or God's action through intermediaries, then it is certainly not a theory of nature either. To speak of God's direct creation of the soul as 'predisposition' is clearly inadequate; to call it 'prevenience' is misleading.

If I were forced to choose—as Aristotle and Dante had to make up their minds whether an action performed under duress was more voluntary or *in*voluntary in character (*Ethics*, iii. 1; *Par.* iv. 73–114)—I would be inclined to say that the element of grace is decisive. And for the purposes of this lecture—nowhere else, *mi raccomando*—I would venture to suggest that Dante's composite theory could fairly be called 'pre-prevenience', or 'ante-prevenience': God comes (in the womb), *before* he comes (in the conscience of the adult), *before* he comes as the Spirit to dwell in the soul.

The merits of this formulation will appear if we glance at an essay by Father Kenelm Foster published nearly twenty years ago. It is called 'Religion and Philosophy in Dante' (*The Mind of Dante*, ed. U. Limentani (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 47–78), and one passage in particular has always remained sharp in my memory. Summing up the first part of his complex argument, the author concluded that Dante 'shows an inclination—even, I would say, in the *Comedy*—very closely to associate the intervention of grace with the passage from mortality to immortality'. . . . 'He rather tended to resolve the theologian's distinction between nature and grace into a philosopher's distinction between time and eternity' (p. 68: see also the same author's *The Two Dantes* (London, 1977), p. 253).

You may perhaps be surprised to find that Father Foster specifically included the *Comedy* in this characterization. One might object that the *Purgatorio* shows Dante to have had a profound understanding of grace as it operates *in via*; and that if the action of the poem is interpreted as an allegory of the conversion, sanctification, and glorification of Everyman, it would be difficult for the poet to have done more to emphasize that every stage in the process of salvation depends on God's loving-kindness. One might add, too, that there are a number of 'uncoded' references to the theology of grace in the poem, and that the only one of them which might cause us to raise a critical eyebrow proves to be a literal quotation from Peter Lombard's definition of hope (*Par.* xxv. 67–9).

Such objections, however, do nothing to invalidate Father Foster's delicately nuanced conclusion. It might be enough to reply that any interpretation of the poem must respect the literal meaning of the text; that in the *Purgatorio* the penitent souls receive and co-operate with grace *after* 'the passage from mortality to immortality'; that the poem tells the story not of Everyman but of Dante Alighieri; and that the exceptional grace ('singulariter ex privilegio') which made his journey possible was of the kind called *gratis data*, a very important species of grace to which I have alluded only briefly in this lecture.

No, if I feel any minor qualms about Father Foster's description of Dante's inclination 'very closely to associate the intervention of grace with the passage from mortality to immortality', they would arise because he does not explicitly remind the reader of what I am daring to call 'ante-prevenient' grace. In Dante's view—reiterated with greater precision in *Purgatorio*, xxv and *Paradiso*, vii—the intellect and will are given by God to each human soul at the moment of its creation. God loves the individual soul 'before it issues from his hand'; and he endows the soul with a 'concreated love for himself such that it will always desire him' (it seems pedantic to add that the intellect seeks him as the Truth and the will as the Supreme Good):

> Esce di mano a lui che la vagheggia
> prima che sia . . .
> l'anima semplicetta . . .
>
> (*Purg.* xvi. 80–5)

> Ma vostra vita sanza mezzo spira
> la somma beninanza, e la innamora
> di sé sì che poi sempre la disira.
>
> (*Par.* vii. 142–5)

Intellect and will are powers to be actualized—talents to be developed—but they are in a sense gifts of the Holy Spirit. Every addition to the soul's knowledge and every advance it makes towards union with an intellected good comes from God and is towards God: 'confusamente' or 'distintamente', he is at the beginning and at the end of every distinctly human act. It is significant too that, as late in the poem as *Paradiso* xxxii, Dante does not shy away from the word 'grace' in this context, and St Bernard is made to say that God endows all minds with grace—unequally—at the moment in which he creates them:

> Lo rege per cui questo regno pausa
> in tanto amore ed in tanto diletto,
> che nulla volontà è di più ausa,
> le menti tutte nel suo lieto aspetto
> *creando*, a suo piacer di *grazia* dota
> diversamente; e qui basti l'effetto.
>
> (*Paradiso*, xxxii, 61–6)

There are numerous intellectual difficulties in the version of creationism that Dante so wholeheartedly espoused: for example, it is hard to accept that nature is corrupt in the whole human race when the specifically human part is created directly by God for each individual. But it does seem perfectly logical that Dante should place less emphasis than orthodox theologians did on the 'light of grace', granted that he considered the 'light of reason' (*lumen rationis*) to be a gift from the Holy Spirit, and granted that he would speak of the will's freedom as God's 'greatest gift to all intellectual beings in creating them' (*Par.* v. 19–24). And in any case there are a number of disconcerting features in Dante's thought which become somewhat less puzzling when they are studied in the perspective of 'ante-prevenience'.

Let us examine just one example with reference to the intellect rather than the will. In the course of his extravagant praise of philosophy or wisdom in the third book of the *Convivio* Dante alludes to the fact that, in the gradual process of learning which is normal for human beings, we come to understand and accept as true certain propositions which on first acquaintance seemed incomprehensible or impossible. The remembered experience helps us to accept that other assertions or phenomena which still 'dazzle' the mind's eye may become intelligible to us in due course and may already be perfectly plain to a superior intelligence. In this way, the study of philosophy can help us to 'consent to the marvellous'—'a consentir ciò che par maraviglia'. Such consent

can prepare the way for Christian faith, and thus for hope, and thus for the operation of charity:

> Onde sì come per lei molto di quello si vede per ragione, e per consequente essere per ragione, che sanza lei pare maraviglia, così per lei si crede ch'ogni miracolo in più alto intelletto puote avere ragione, e per consequente può essere. Onde la nostra buona fede ha sua origine; da la quale viene la speranza, de lo provveduto desiderare; e per quella nasce l'operazione de la caritade.
>
> (*Con.* III. xiv. 14: my paraphrase of this difficult and textually corrupt passage is influenced by *Con.* III. xv. 2, 6–10.)

A more run-of-the-mill Christian would certainly have attributed this sequence of mental events to the operation of prevenient grace; but Dante might well have replied with the words of his contemporary William of Ockham that *entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem.*

The chapter from which I have just quoted moves to an extraordinary close: 'Per le quali tre virtudi si sale a filosofare a quelle Atene celestiali, dove gli Stoici e Peripatetici e Epicurii, per la luce de la veritade etterna, in uno volere concordevolemente concorrono' (section 15). This sentence reminds us that, in Dante's view, the intellectual development of the individual Christian may repeat the main stages in the intellectual history of mankind before the Incarnation. The Greek philosophers—chief among them Aristotle 'to whom nature opened her secrets most fully' (*Con.* III. v. 7)—refined the common notions of 'virtue', 'vice', and 'happiness'; they recognized the freedom of the will; and hence they were able to 'bequeath morality to the world' (cf. *Purg.* xviii. 67–9). They clarified the processes of deduction and induction, studied the phenomena of nature, and inferred that there must be a single unmoved, unmoving First Mover who was the ultimate source of all change in the universe (cf. *Par.* xxiv. 130–5). In these and other ways they prepared men's minds to believe what God had revealed about himself to his chosen people, and to believe the universal 'good tidings' of the Gospels; and they thus cleared the way of obstacles to the diffusion of Christianity.

In his more 'secular moments' (the phrase is Father Foster's) Dante would probably have gone much further than this in his apologia for reason and what it can achieve without the aid of *subsequent* grace, but he would never have countenanced lesser claims on behalf of the philosophers of Greece. I think it would also be possible to make out a similar case for the activity of 'ante-prevenient grace' in the *will*, as opposed to the intellect, by

examining Dante's convictions concerning the Romans, both collectively and individually—*tam in collegiis quam in singularibus personis* (*Mon.* II. iv. 6). Their heroes placed liberty or the common good before their individual needs (*Mon.* II. v. 5, 8). The will of a Mucius Scaevola was as 'intero' or as 'saldo' as that of a Christian martyr like St Laurence (*Par.* IV. 82–4); Cato believed himself born not just for his native land but for the whole world (*Con.* IV. xxvii. 3). Noble by descent, prepared by nature, the Romans were fitted for the active life (*Mon.* II. iii. vi); and it was God's providential intention, confirmed by miraculous interventions in crucial moments of their history, that they should bring peace to the inhabitable world under the rule of justice and law in order that human society might be 'disposed' for the birth of the Saviour (*Mon.* I. xvi; II. iii; *Con.* IV. v. 8).

The complex figure of Virgilio in the *Comedy* embodies the best of both traditions—the intellectual virtues of the Greeks, and the moral virtues of the Romans. His role in the poem shows just how far Dante thought that reason and will could go along the road to the 'celestial Athens' without further illumination from God; and the pathos of his 'eternal exile' also reveals just how far there still remained to go.

I have spoken about predisposition and prevenience first as distinct but parallel theories, then as 'paralleli convergenti', and I have argued that the ideas must be understood if we are to grasp two of the most important strands in Dante's thought: his concept of human freedom and its limits; and his beliefs concerning the origin of the soul. I can now reveal that it was my original intention to devote an equal amount of space to Dante's art, and to argue that from the point of view of a philomythes, the single most important reason for studying medieval theories concerning predisposition lies in their influence on Dante's narrative technique. It may be infuriating to look impotently on while clever men dissect a continuous *motus ad formam* or a *motus ad finem* into a score of discontinuous phases, each of which is analysed as a preparation for its successor. It may be confusing to discover that these same scholars were prepared to recognize an equal number of efficient causes—one for each phase. It may be depressing to see them approach the conclusion that every significant step along the soul's journey through life is 'programmed in advance'. But intellectual vices may prove to have aesthetic virtues. And the same qualities that make scholasticism so off-putting as a system of thought can be a source of pleasure in reading a story.

A narrator who has been trained to analyse a continuum in this way will divide and compose his material to achieve distinctness in the parts and coherence in the whole. His art will 'imitate nature' in that it will eliminate the superfluous and omit nothing that is necessary. It will show the kind of order in which every event seems in retrospect to have been 'predestined' because the *finis* has determined the *principium* and *medium*. One will expect to find formal symmetries *in numero et mensura* and subtle correspondences between remote episodes, especially of the kind in which the relationship is that of prefiguration and fulfilment, predisposition and 'perfection'.

Any reader of the *Comedy* will be familiar with the qualities I have in mind, so I will limit myself to just one example. In the last sonnet of the *Vita Nuova* the young Dante described the journey of his thought to beyond the outermost of the celestial spheres in just four and a half lines of verse; the mature Dante found it easy to articulate a similar journey so that it became exactly one thousand times as long. Or to put it another way: in the *Paradiso* Dante was able to represent his divinization by the *lumen gloriae* so that it extends from the moment at which 'day is added to day' as he is 'transhumanized' in Canto I, through countless gradations and intensifications of light, leading to dazzlings and blindings that 'dispose' his faculties, until the trans-form-ation is completed by the 'fulgore in che sua voglia venne' at the very end of the cantica. The instantaneous experience of receiving consummate grace has been, so to speak, 'subjected to the scholastic treatment' so that it lasts as long—in the narrative—as the operation of grace *in via*, as described in the *Purgatorio*. Dubious theology, but great art.

You will sense that I have not left myself time on this occasion to do more than point towards a fascinating area of study which I hope to explore in the future. And so I shall leave the theme of 'predisposition', and its complex influence on narrative technique, and turn again to prevenience, bringing the lecture to a close with a glance at the episode in which Dante gives his fullest representation of the operation of prevenient grace: I refer, of course, not to the opening cantos, but to the spiritual autobiography of Statius as told to Virgil in Cantos xxii–xxiii of the *Purgatorio*.

A brief word first about the context. In general, the episode looks forward to the story of Ripheus thirty cantos later and backwards to the encounter with Sordello fourteen cantos earlier. It is perhaps the single most important component in Dante's acknowledgement of his personal and cultural debt to the works of

Virgil—that complex act of homage which includes all the carefully signalled borrowings from the *Aeneid* in the *Comedy*, and which is expressed with such depth and finesse in the dramatic presentation of the developing relationship between 'Dante personaggio' and Virgilio in the action of the first two cantiche. The *immediate* context, by contrast, is full of direct and indirect allusions to other aspects of the doctrine of grace (even though the noun 'grazia' occurs only once (xxi. 3), and then in a non-theological acceptation). We are reminded, for example, of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ through which healing grace became available to man (xxi. 7, 82). Emphasis is laid on the unchanging customs and order of the mountain and on the process of habituation by which an inclination to evil in the will is replaced by an inclination to the opposing virtue (xxi. 40; xxii. 49). But a greater stress falls on the paradoxical role of human freedom: absolutely speaking, the soul desires to be with God; but *secundum quid* it freely wills to 'absent itself from felicity awhile' and to co-operate with Divine Grace in order to make satisfaction and to be 'cleansed' of sin ('mondizia' is the dominant metaphor in these two cantos xxi. 58–66; cf. *Par.* iv. 109–13). Similarly, we are forcefully reminded that the task of purification at which grace and the will work in conjunction may last for over a thousand years; but what Dante represents in the poem is the 'happy end'—it is a 'Comedy'—the moment at which the soul freely knows itself to be free and ready to 'change its abode' (xx. 136–41; xxi. 62–3, 70–2). At a less exalted level there are also two extended passages in the framework of Statius' story that illustrate how wrong belief is replaced by right belief, thus pointing towards the importance of 'vera credenza' in the phase of 'prevenience' (xxi. 103–29; xxii. 25–48, 77).

But now to the conversion itself. Statius tells his story in answer to questions by Virgil, and the climax is reached in the marvellous line: 'per te poeta fui, *per te cristiano*' (xxii. 73). I hope I have said enough latterly for you to find this claim on behalf of a pagan author a little less astounding, and enough in the first part of the lecture for you to be able to recognize the distinct phases by which the convert was 'prepared and matured'.

The process began, you remember, with a first moment of recoil from vice (*recessus a malo*). It was thanks to his creative misreading of Virgil's outburst against human avarice in the third book of the *Aeneid* that Statius was led to repent of his prodigality (the verb 'pentere' occurs twice: xxii. 44, 48), because he came to see that all virtue consists in the choice of a mean between two vicious extremes.

The turning away from evil (*aversio*) is followed by the expulsion of darkness, which is presented as a stage prior to and distinct from illumination, just as it is in Aquinas ('stenebrare', xxii. 62, is almost a translation of *tenebras removere*, *Summa Theol.* I–IIae, 113, 8, *ad* 1; and the metaphor of lifting a lid, xxii. 94, resembles that of opening a shutter, used as an example of the removal of an impediment). Once again the dispositive cause lay in a text by Virgil, this time the prophecy in the fourth Eclogue of a renewal of the world and a return to the Golden Age brought about by a child who would descend from heaven and bring justice to mankind (and I would interject that the conversion of Ripheus also began with a wholehearted love of *justice*, xxii. 70–2; *Par.* xx. 118–29).

From that moment on the work of preparation was continued through personal contact with men in a state of grace. Virgil's prophecy, we are told, seemed in harmony with the message of the Gospels, and it led Statius to frequent the early Christian missionaries in Rome who were 'sowing the seed of the true faith' (xxii. 76–81). Belief did not follow immediately, however. Statius makes it clear that it was the moral example of these 'messengers of the eternal kingdom' that first won him over. It was thanks to their saintliness and 'diritti costumi' that he came to their aid during the persecution of Domitian and that he came to despise all the rival sects—presumably, the Epicureans, the Stoics, and Peripatetics (xxii. 82–7; cf. *Con.* III. xiv. 15; xv. 11).

Then and only then did he come to believe what was necessary for salvation and to accept baptism, which is the sacrament through which healing grace enters the soul and begins the work of 'justification' (xxii. 88–90; cf. *Inf.* iv. 35–6). Statius' faith was only 'tepid', as he himself confesses, and his love for God correspondingly 'slow' (xxii. 90–3; cf. xvii. 130). But we need not follow the remainder of the process, nor speculate as to how many years he passed in *Ante*-Purgatory before he was admitted to the nine centuries of purification, because the gift of faith marks the end of the phase of 'prevenient' grace—long enough in all conscience—and that is the limit of our present enquiry.

I hope I may be forgiven for leaving so many loose ends and so many issues uninvestigated—not least the role of the *Comedy* in its maker's mind as a vehicle to bring prevenient grace to his readers. I hope further that you will accept this all too hasty account of the preparatory phases in Statius' conversion as a summary of the main themes of this lecture and as an exemplification of the ways in which Dante the philomythes depends upon Dante the philosopher and his thought fertilizes his art.