

# Dante, *Monarchia*

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## Introduction

Why read the *Monarchia*, Dante's treatise on political theory? A minor work by one of the world's great poets, written in the moribund language which he wisely rejected in favour of the vernacular when writing at full creative pressure, argued in a manner which can seem needlessly pedantic and repetitive in its procedures and its formulations, it expresses ideas which have been described as backward-looking, utopian and even fanatical. Yet a recent book on the political thought of the period can unselfconsciously refer to the *Monarchia* as a masterpiece,<sup>1</sup> and it is surely a text of remarkable interest. The originality and power of the political vision it embodies, the passion with which that vision is experienced and expressed, shine through the alien language and the alienating methodology. The small effort the text requires of its modern readers is amply repaid by the sense it conveys of a man passionately engaged in the political debates of his age, but equally passionate in his determination that the pressure of present concerns should not blind us to underlying principles. Only a grasp of universal truths about human beings and human life will furnish an answer to the fundamental question of how people should live together and what form of political organization best suits human nature.

The attempt to argue from first principles is one of the most strikingly original aspects of the *Monarchia*, but it is not a work of ivory-tower idealism, of theory divorced from political experience. Dante had been actively involved in the political life of Florence in the closing years of the thirteenth century and the early years of the fourteenth; he had enrolled in a Guild in order to be eligible for public office, had served on important councils, and had been elected in due course as one of the six priors who governed the city for periods of two months at a time. In October 1301 he had been sent as one of three ambassadors representing the commune to the papal curia in Rome, on a peace-keeping mission to Pope Boniface VIII, whose

<sup>1</sup> Antony Black, *Political Thought in Europe 1250-1450*, Cambridge 1992, p. 96.

aggressive and duplicitous intervention in the affairs of Dante's native city threatened its independence and stability. He was never to see Florence again. As the competing factions within the Guef party which controlled the city manoeuvred for power, a trumped-up charge of corruption in office was brought against him in his absence; the Black Guelfs had secretly made a treacherous alliance with the unscrupulous pope and so were able to oust the Whites (of whom Dante at this stage was one). A decree of January 1302 condemned him to a large fine, two years banishment from Tuscany and permanent exclusion from public office. The fine remaining unpaid within the stipulated three days, in March he was condemned to death at the stake should he ever return.

A political exile for the remaining twenty years of his life, he travelled throughout Italy, observing at first hand the devastating effects of factional intrigue and papal meddling in temporal affairs. What he had already experienced directly in Florence – public disorder, lawlessness, treachery, lust for power subverting any possibility of peaceful and orderly public life conducted according to principle and not shameless self-interest – he now saw as endemic in the whole country. His horizons broadened in exile to the point where he no longer identified himself with any political grouping, although the pro-imperial stance of his later years is closer to the Ghibellines than the Guelfs. Whether he wrote the *Monarchia* while there was still hope that the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII could unite Italy (and provide effective secular leadership for a country whose fragmentation into smaller political units and endless interne-cine warfare were exploited by a ruthlessly ambitious papacy), or whether he wrote it after these hopes had evaporated, is a question to which scholarship can give only a conjectural answer. But it is certain that when Dante engages with the centuries-long debate on the relative powers of pope and emperor (or 'monarch', as Dante usually calls him), his conclusions are born of direct and bitter experience.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Excellent brief accounts of Dante's political career up to the time of his exile are to be found in G. Padoan, *Introduzione a Dante*, Firenze 1975; R. Migliorini Fissi, *Dante*, Firenze 1979; and G. Holmes, *Dante*, Oxford 1980. A magisterial survey of Dante's political activity and thinking throughout his life is given by F. Mazzoni, 'Teoresi e prassi in Dante politico', the introductory essay in the volume Dante Alighieri, *Monarchia. Epistole politiche*, Torino 1966, pp. ix–cxi. All three Italian scholars give extensive bibliographical references. The archival material which enables us to document Dante's political career is collected in the *Codice diplomatico dantesco*, edito da R. Piattoli, Firenze 1940.

In this sense, then, the *Monarchia* is not a work of theory divorced from practical experience of politics; rather, it grows out of painful personal experience of political life, and a thwarted desire to participate effectively in the public life of his native city. In another sense, though, the treatise is purely theoretical. Dante is arguing about principles and the conclusions to be drawn from them. The arguments are abstract, concerned to elucidate fundamental truths. At no point does he consider how his conclusions might be implemented in practice. Where Aristotle famously collected and examined the constitutions of 158 city-states as a preliminary to the elaboration of his *Politics*, and frequently refers to specific instances of actual political practice, Dante's argument is conducted on a different plane altogether, and can seem curiously devoid of concrete detail. He is interested not in how things are, but how they ought to be, though how they ought to be reflects, at a more profound level, how they really are, being based on a true understanding of human nature.

Although he is treading well-trodden ground – the relationship of papacy and empire is the central subject of political debate in the later Middle Ages – Dante's conclusions are entirely his own. This is especially true of the first two books of the treatise. Each of the three books addresses one of the issues identified in the opening pages as a source of confusion and therefore a proper subject of investigation: Is monarchy necessary to the well-being of the world? Did the Roman people take on the office of the monarch by right? Does the monarch derive his authority directly from God, or from some other source? Book I offers us a meditation on political theory, Book II an interpretation of human history, and Book III a contribution to the most fiercely debated political issue of Dante's own lifetime, the role of the papacy in relation to secular power.

The arguments developed in the first book to prove that mankind is best governed by a single world-ruler or monarch, whose sovereignty and jurisdiction encompass and override those of all lesser kingdoms and their rulers, are largely derived from Aristotle. But before these arguments can be advanced and defended, a principle must be established which provides the point of reference to which we return for validation and confirmation that our arguments are sound. (Each of the books will start with the enunciation of such a principle: the sense of an ordering and shaping intelligence which imposes a meaningful pattern on complex material is strong throughout. There is no point, Dante will remind us later, again echoing Aristotle, in arguing with those who deny first principles.)

The principle enunciated in the first book is this: mankind considered as a totality has its own function or purpose, a purpose which cannot be fulfilled by any individual, however brilliant, or by any single group or race, however gifted, but only by the whole of humanity considered precisely as a whole. That purpose is to realize human intellectual potential, *simul* (all at once) and *semper* (all the time). Man is set above the animals by his capacity to reason, and below the angels by the limitations placed on that capacity by his earthly body. His knowledge of the world comes to him through his senses; his reason interprets the data they supply. It is man's unique hybrid status in the created world – the combination in him, and in him alone, of mind and body – which defines his essential nature and identifies humanity's purpose, whose fulfilment is thus a collective enterprise. The means necessary to achieve this goal is peace, for only peace enables human beings to realize their potential fully and continuously.

Any collective enterprise will require an individual to lead, guide and direct those engaged in it. This is true of any social grouping, from the smallest (the individual household or extended family) to the largest (the state). Here Dante is closely following Aristotle, whose authority he explicitly invokes, but for Aristotle the city-state was the largest political entity. Dante adds the kingdom to Aristotle's list, following medieval theorists like Aquinas and Giles of Rome, and reflecting the political reality of medieval Europe, where the independent Italian communes or city-republics provided a parallel to the Greek city-state, but where larger kingdoms included many cities within their borders. Dante's final step brings him to a conclusion which is not Aristotelian at all: if humanity as a whole is engaged in a collective enterprise, it too will need a leader or ruler to ensure that it achieves its goal. A single sovereign authority set over all lesser rulers is thus a logical necessity, given the nature of human beings and the meaning and purpose of their lives.

A first group of arguments in support of this thesis turns on the ordering or structuring of reality, and the relationship of that ordering to final ends or goals. Again the argument is Aristotelian, but the conclusion is not. Wholes consist of the sum of their parts and are prior to and superior to any single constituent element. This is true of any aspect of the natural world (of the human body, for example; of an army; of any political grouping of whatever size). If we consider humanity as a whole made up of lesser parts (kingdoms, cities, communities, families), we find that each of these parts requires a

leader; logically then the whole must also require a leader. Equally and inversely, if we consider humanity as one part of a larger whole (the universe or created world), then again we find that a single ordering principle operates in the cosmos; it ought also therefore to operate in each of its component parts, of which the human race is one. Humanity so ordered will most closely resemble God, by mirroring the principle of oneness or unity of which he is the supreme example. The analogy from macrocosm to microcosm (which lies at the very centre of Book I) is now extended to include the concept of law: just as the whole sphere of heaven, which contains the created universe in Ptolemaic astronomy, is governed by a single movement (that of the *Primum Mobile*) and a single source of motion (God), so the human race is best ordered if it reflects this pattern or structure by having a single ruler and a single law emanating from him.

A second group of arguments addresses the issues raised by this first intimation of the monarch's function, which is that of peace-keeper and lawgiver. Without a world-ruler there will be no way of resolving the conflicts which inevitably arise among lesser kings and princes competing for territory and power. There must be a supreme authority capable of resolving such disputes or else mankind is condemned to endemic conflict. The resolution of conflict must be just, but the person most able to enact justice is a world-ruler: his will alone will not be incapacitated by greed or acquisitiveness, and his power, being absolute, can ensure that justice is enforced. The meticulous examination of the concepts of justice, volition, appetite, power, greed, love, and their complex interrelationships, is grounded in Aristotle; the conclusion is Dante's own.

The function of the monarch is next clarified in relation to freedom. Freedom, which comes from free will, is the source of human happiness both on earth and in the afterlife. The human race is at its best when it is most free. But it is most free when it is governed by a world-ruler, because only then does humanity exist for its own sake. This fundamental point about autonomy and means and ends takes us to the heart of Dante's argument: laws and legislators, political regimes and those who wield power in them, exist for the sake of the citizens and not vice versa. Their power should be neither a means to personal aggrandizement, nor an end in itself, but a means to ensure that their fellow human beings can achieve self-fulfilment individually and collectively. Only a world-ruler can guarantee this. Dante draws on Aristotle in identifying three forms of faulty or perverted government (tyranny, oligarchy

and mob-rule), under which men do not exist for their own sake, but become instruments serving some other end (the interests of the tyrant, the few in power, or the mob). Under the overlordship of a world-ruler these three forms of government (the rule of one, of a few, of the majority) can function as they ought and aim at freedom, and thus the happiness and self-fulfilment of their subjects. The monarch as overlord will be best able to dispose other kings and princes, for he alone can, by virtue of his rôle, be free of greed, which perverts judgment and obstructs justice.

The monarch's function as lawgiver is next considered in terms of the Aristotelian principle of efficiency or economy of effort. The unnecessary multiplication of means is bad: what can be achieved by a single agent is better so achieved. The law must come from a single source, even though in practice there will be regional variations in the implementation of laws to accord with local circumstances.

Dante's final argument is the argument from unity. We come full circle back to our first principle, humanity's collective endeavour, but now seen in terms of how wills can most effectively be directed collectively. Again the reasoning is Aristotelian: unity is logically prior to goodness; humanity as a whole is a kind of concord, and concord is a good; concord therefore has its root in unity; thus the collective will of humanity requires a single guide, and this need can only be met in the person of a world-ruler.

Aristotle's science provides the view of the world which underpins Dante's political theory, which is grounded in Aristotelian notions of causation, potentiality, priority, number, and order. But Dante owes to Aristotle not just his assumptions about the nature of the world and the way it is to be described and understood, but also the methodology of his treatise. The discipline of Aristotelian formal logic underpins Dante's argument in this sense, providing the procedures and the terminology around which it is constructed: the sense of how an investigation should be conducted and what constitutes a sound argument; the need to agree first principles and use syllogistic reasoning to reach conclusions whose validity is unimpugnable; the technique of disposing of opponents' arguments by identifying and naming the fallacies they embody. Paradoxically, if one were asked to nominate the single medieval text which throws most light on the *Monarchia*, it would have to be not the Latin version of the *Politics* (of which Dante may or may not have had first-hand knowledge), nor even William of Moerbeke's translation of the *Ethics* (which he certainly knew, along with Aquinas' commentary on it), but the

*Summule logicales* of Petrus Hispanus (later Pope John XXI), which not only detail with painstaking thoroughness the procedures of dialectic and disputation, but also function as a compendium of definitions of the basic concepts of Aristotelian philosophy (genus, species, substance, accident, agent, patient, generation, corruption, form, matter, the four kinds of cause and the five kinds of priority).

Dante of course sees Aristotle through a Christian filter – the filter of his own Catholic faith, his knowledge of the Bible and the writings of the church fathers, the commentaries on Aristotle of Aquinas and others. Although there are striking points of convergence between Aristotelian and Christian thinking on such central questions of ethics as *cupiditas* and its destructive role in human social life, there is little in the arguments of Book I that is specifically Christian – even the argument from the unity of God and the discussion of free will have Aristotelian parallels. But if we look at the opening and closing chapters which frame these central arguments the Christian focus is insistent and determining.

The opening chapter, in which Dante explains his purpose, is rich in biblical allusions, explicit and implicit. The fruit-bearing tree, the buried talent, the disinterested pursuit of truth with no thought of financial gain, the prize honourably won and bringing deserved glory, the confident trust in help from on high: all these are resonant images for a reader familiar with the Bible. Indeed the opening words of the treatise reveal the quintessential amalgam of Aristotelianism and Christianity which is to be its most distinctive feature. The Aristotelian observation that all men have a natural desire to know – already used by Dante as the opening sentence of another work, the *Convivio*: 'As the Philosopher says at the beginning of the *Metaphysics*, all men naturally desire to have knowledge' – is here expressed in terms of their relationship to their maker, for it is God who has 'stamped' or 'imprinted' human beings with this love of knowledge.

The final chapter of Book I, where the philosophical arguments are for the first time linked to history, is marked by the same fervent sense of Christian witness. We are reminded of that moment in time when humanity did briefly enjoy universal peace, when the world was ruled as God intended it should be and a universal monarchy existed: the moment of Christ's birth under the reign of Augustus. The chapter ends with an impassioned apostrophe to the human race to recognize the error of its ways and to heed the lessons of philosophy, of history and of Scripture (which correspond in broad



terms, as we shall see, to the three books of Dante's treatise). With perfect symmetry Book I closes, as it had opened, with a quotation from the Psalms.

Book II is a powerful, poetic, if at times perplexing, demonstration or 'proof' of Dante's deeply held conviction that the role of the Roman Empire in human history was crucial, its successful world domination a part of God's providential plan for mankind, and its authority therefore legitimate and legitimately exercised. The monarchy described in Book I is no idealized philosophical abstraction, but a concrete reality which once existed and could exist again. Dante now draws extensively on the work of historians, especially Orosius and Livy (although his knowledge of Livy may not be firsthand). But also, and arrestingly, he draws on the classical poets Virgil and Lucan, whose great epic poems the *Aeneid* and the *Pharsalia* are repeatedly cited as uniquely valuable testimony for the role in human history of the city and people whose story they celebrate. While the historians are mentioned briefly and by way of corroboration, the poets are quoted verbatim and their words are made central. These poetic fragments set into the prose text give an absolutely distinctive character to this book, a resonance and intensity which set it off both from what precedes and what follows.<sup>3</sup> Pagan poetry stands alongside the Bible as true testimony to God's intentions: the *Aeneid* becomes, in Bruno Nardi's memorable phrase, 'la Bibbia dell'Impero', the Bible of the Empire. Where Book I was dominated by the Philosopher, Book II will be dominated by the Poet.

The structure of Book II is pleasingly symmetrical. At its heart are seven chapters of Roman history – not an orderly account, and only approximately chronological – organized around themes according to the development of Dante's argument. They are flanked by two introductory chapters which lay down principles and procedures, and two concluding chapters which bring us back to the point we had reached at the end of Book I. Book I invited us to contemplate humanity's place in the natural order in the timeless present of philosophical speculation; it anchored those abstractions to history only in the last chapter. Now we approach that same turning-point in time from the opposite direction, as we consider episodes and figures in Roman history from the legendary origins of the city to the reign of Augustus, and seek to understand their significance. Pagan

<sup>3</sup> This heightened quality is lost in English versions of the *Monarchia* which translate these lines as prose.

history is presented as an indispensable element in a Christian understanding of the world, only truly intelligible when seen in this perspective. But equally and conversely the full significance of Christ's mission on earth only becomes apparent when seen against the pagan background. We must see Christ's birth and death not simply in terms of redemption and salvation, as theology teaches us to; not simply as the culmination of two thousand years of biblical history, with the New Testament fulfilling the prophecies of the Old; but as events which give the stamp of divine approval to a secular institution, the empire, and which thus have profound implications for our understanding of how the world should be governed – in short, for political theory.

Dante starts, as we have seen him do in Book I, by enunciating a general principle whose truth is self-evident, and on which his whole argument will be based: what God wills in human society is right. To prove that the Roman Empire was founded on right we must therefore prove that God willed it. We must not however expect the same degree of certainty in pursuing this line of enquiry (another Aristotelian principle Dante will remind us of more than once as he proceeds). God's will is revealed through his works: in the words of St Paul *voluntas quidem Dei per se invisibilis est; et invisibilia Dei 'per ea que facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur'* [the will of God in itself is indeed invisible; but the invisible things of God 'are clearly perceived by being understood through the things he has made']. The wax-and-seal metaphor for the relationship of Creator to creation which has been implicit from the opening sentence of the treatise becomes the central metaphor in Book II, which invites us to contemplate the course of Roman history and see in it clear and unmistakable signs of God's will in operation. Dante now argues not just from principles to conclusions, but from events to their meaning. To determine their meaning we need, in addition to Aristotle's philosophy, the theological notions of the miracle and the *iudicium Dei*.

The first three arguments can be summarized as the argument from nobility (ch. iii); the argument from miracles (ch. iv); and the argument from Roman civic unselfishness (ch. v). The Romans deserved their world dominion because of their nobility, their inherent superiority as a race. The argument is a syllogistic one, which correlates rightful dominion or overlordship with natural distinction. The major premiss ('it is appropriate that the noblest race should rule over all the others') is quickly proved by reference to Aristotle, with supporting testimony from Juvenal and the New Testament. The

minor premiss ('the Roman people was the noblest') requires a much more extended survey of the evidence. It is presented as an argument about origins: Aeneas was the father of the Roman people, as both Livy and Virgil agree. His nobility can be measured on three parameters, personal, ancestral and matrimonial. No fewer than nine quotations from the *Aeneid* substantiate these claims.

The argument from miracles gives us direct evidence of God's will. Certain famous episodes in Roman history must be understood as divine interventions in the natural course of events: when the holy shield fell from the sky in the reign of Numa, successor to Romulus, marking the site of the empire that was to arise; when the Capitol under siege by the Gauls was saved by the goose whose cackling awakened the temple guard; when a sudden hailstorm at the critical moment threw the enemy troops into confusion during the siege of Hannibal; when Cloelia escaped from her captors and swam the Tiber to safety during the siege of Porsenna. Dante's interpretation of these episodes as miracles is consciously though not explicitly polemical. Augustine, for example, in the *De civitate Dei* had been scathing about the role of the geese in saving Rome: 'Having extremely sharp ears and extremely fast legs, at the scream of the geese they [i.e. the gods of Ilium] were back in a flash to protect at least the Capitoline Hill, which had escaped capture. Too bad that the warning was heard too late to save the rest of the city!'<sup>4</sup> Where Augustine belittles with irony, Dante uses Virgil's lines on the saving of the Capitol to engage us imaginatively and emotionally with a sense of the miraculous.

The argument from Roman selflessness turns on the relationship between right and the good of the community. The conduct of Roman institutions and citizens in pursuit of the common good is a pursuit of right. The great Romans lived by the ideals expressed in Book I: the suppression of greed, the pursuit of peace and liberty. The litany of famous names of Roman heroes who sacrificed personal advancement and even their lives to the good of the community – Cincinnatus, Fabritius, Camillus, Brutus, Mutius, the Decii – makes stirring reading, culminating in the memory of Cato, whose suicide is for Dante (paradoxically, for suicide is a sin) a supreme example of heroic self-sacrifice in the name of liberty. (Again it is illuminating to compare this with Augustine's less than enthusiastic account in the *De civitate Dei*: 'Of Cato's action I must say, in the first place, that his

<sup>4</sup> *De civitate Dei* 3, 8.

own friends, some of them learned, very wisely tried to dissuade him from his action, and judged it to be the action of a cowardly rather than a brave spirit.<sup>5</sup>) The chapter concludes with the demonstration of the technical point that in aiming at right the Romans behaved rightfully, legitimately. Aristotle's logic and philosophy come briefly to centre stage again, though in fact we have never lost sight of either of them, for the syllogistic method remains the chief principle of organization of Dante's rich material, which continues to be informed by Aristotelian notions of causation and purpose.

We have now reached the central chapter of Book II. The argument is from nature's provisions: it is right to preserve what nature has ordained, for nature orders things according to their capacities, and this is the basis of right in the natural world. The principle of Book I – humanity's collective purpose – is fitted into a cosmic framework. Humanity must fulfil its goal if nature is to fulfil her broader purpose, to which it is a necessary means and of which it is a necessary part. Nature's purpose requires a multiplicity of people and nations, and this in turn means there must be a ruling nation. Certain nations are born fitted to rule, others to be subservient (Aristotle confirms this). Nature herself fitted the Romans to rule (and this is confirmed by Virgil). The seal is triumphantly set on the argument with two quotations from the *Aeneid*, including what may well be the most majestic lines in the poem, where Anchises foretells to Aeneas the future glory of the Roman Empire: not chance, but destiny; no mere accident of time and circumstance, but Providence in operation. The Philosopher and the Poet come together with compelling force at the heart of Book II, which is the heart of the whole treatise.

The next three chapters take a more problematical approach to the question of how God's will is to be detected. Ch. vii reviews the varied ways in which that will has been revealed to human beings, based on the evidence to be gleaned from biblical accounts. Of the many forms of revelation outlined, two lend themselves to Dante's purposes, both involving strenuous competitive effort. These are the race and the *duellum*: the race between athletes competing in the arena to win a prize, and single combat or trial by champion. We are now invited to recognize both these forms of revelation operating in Roman history.

Chapter viii surveys the history of the ancient world before Roman

<sup>5</sup> *De civitate Dei* I, 23.

supremacy was achieved, showing how earlier attempts at global domination – by the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Persians, Alexander of Macedon – all failed. Only the Romans succeeded; they won the race. The point is underscored with the testimony of poets (Virgil, Lucan and Boethius all testify to the fact of Roman world domination) and of the evangelist St Luke, whose Gospel tells how Augustus decreed that a universal census should be drawn up, reflecting the reality of Roman imperial power.

Chapter ix develops the argument from *duellum* or trial by combat, a concept Dante applies not just to single combat but to any armed engagement which observes certain strict rules. (It must be a solution of last resort; it must be freely agreed on by both parties; and it must be motivated solely by a passionate concern for justice.) From the prehistory of the city, through the early battles with local tribes (the Albans, the Sabines and the Samnites), up to the great wars with foreign enemies (the Greeks and the Carthaginians), the decisive armed encounters in Roman history are seen as a form of trial by combat, their favourable outcome a divine judgment (*iudicium Dei*). The notion of trial by champion as a way of resolving disputes between nations is both biblical and classical: David and Goliath have their counterpart in Aeneas and Turnus, whose single combat to settle the conflict between the Romans (as they will become) and the Rutuli is the climactic encounter at the end of the *Aeneid*.<sup>6</sup> The fight between the Roman and Alban triplets as recounted by Livy is a second key episode in early Roman history which conforms to the pattern of trial by combat, extending the notion to evenly matched teams rather than individuals. (Again we can compare Augustine's account, which emphasizes the barbarity of this episode when judged by Christian or even just by humane standards.<sup>7</sup>) We may baulk at

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, in Dante's chronology these two events are almost contemporaneous: see *Conv.* iv, v, 6 ('David was born and Rome was born at the same time') and the commentaries of Busnelli-Vandelli and Vasoli *ad loc.* Single combat or trial by champion has a minor role in the history of medieval warfare, yet it appears to have had a long history as a concept or ideal if not as a reality. William the Conqueror is reported by William of Malmesbury to have offered King Harold the chance of resolving their differences by single combat; Harold refused (cited by G. Neilson, *Trial by Combat*, Glasgow 1890, p. 29); Louis VI of France challenged Henry I of England to single combat; he also refused (cited in P. Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages* (translated by M. Jones), Oxford 1984, p. 41; other examples on pp. 260–1). Almost eight hundred years later Tolstoy surveying the carnage of the Crimean war in Sebastopol wondered whether single combat would not be a less destructive and no more arbitrary way of settling disputes between nations than full-scale war (Leo Tolstoy, *The Sebastopol Sketches*, translated by D. McDuff, London 1986, p. 60).

<sup>7</sup> *De civitate Dei* 3, 14.

Dante's equating the Second Punic War with single combat – his interpretative grid sits uncomfortably with our sense of history – but for a believer there must presumably be a sense in which the outcome of any battle is a *iudicium Dei*.<sup>8</sup>

Dante has now completed his survey of Roman history. He has evoked the great episodes and the great figures, in an allusive rather than a discursive way, his account built around poetic testimony which conveys with extraordinary power the sense of destiny, mission and greatness of the Roman Empire. In the last two chapters of Book II there is a change in direction. He will now argue, he tells us, not from rational principles, as he has largely done hitherto, but from principles of the Christian faith. Two related and parallel arguments echo the close of Book I, both in their content and in their climactic force. Again we are reminded of the point at which Christ entered human history, the moment of contact between divinity and humanity. If Roman imperial authority had not been legitimate, then not only would Christ by his birth have sanctioned an injustice, but the Crucifixion would not have been a true punishment in Christ's person for the sin of Adam, and humanity would not have been redeemed.<sup>9</sup> The coinciding of Christ's birth with the peaceful reign of Augustus is a fact of history whose importance had been emphasized by Augustine's contemporary Orosius in his *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, but Dante goes far beyond his source in the significance he attaches to it and the conclusions he draws.

There is a sense in which Books I and II are merely a prelude to Book III, a preliminary exercise preparing the ground for Dante's main thesis. In Book III he engages directly with the arguments of papal and imperial polemicists on the central political issue of his age: the relationship of religious to secular power, the relative autonomy of pope and emperor. In the main body of this book he considers and rebuts arguments for the primacy of papal authority and the dependence of the imperial office on the pope: six arguments based on the scriptures; two based on historical actions of emperors and

<sup>8</sup> See for example the letter of St Augustine quoted by F. Patetta, *Le ordalie*, Torino 1890, p. 327 n. 3: Quia quando pugnatur Deus apertis celis expectat, et partem quam inspicit iustam, defendit. A useful overview of the subject is given in the final chapter of Contamine, *War, Juridical, Ethical and Religious Aspects of War*.

<sup>9</sup> For Dante's earliest critic, the Dominican Guido Vernani in his *De reprobatione Monarchiae*, this last was a particularly outrageous claim ('vile et derisibile argumentum'). A detailed account of the arguments of II, x and II, xi is given in P. Shaw, 'Some proposed emendations to the text of Dante's *Monarchia*', forthcoming in *Italian Studies*.

popes; and a final argument from reason. Before engaging with his opponents, he not only establishes his first principle (just as he had done in the first two books), but also carefully identifies exactly who his argument is addressed to. His first chapter is a restatement of his faith in his mission, now emphasizing not its difficulty (as in 1, 1) but its danger, implicitly evoked by the opening epigraph (which reminds us that Daniel remained unharmed in the lions' den because of his righteousness, his *iustitia*), and reinforced with an extraordinary density of scriptural allusion suggesting combativeness and risk. Dante presents himself as a gladiator armed with shield and breast-plate – the shield of divine power which protects those who defend the truth, the breast-plate of faith – who fights in defence of truth and who must actively cast out the wicked and the lying from the arena.

The first principle on which his arguments are now to be based is this: what is contrary to nature's intention is against God's will. This principle is proved by default (in technical terms, by an argument *ad impossibile*), i.e. by showing that patently absurd consequences would follow if its opposite were true. Dante's task will be to show that if the emperor were subject to the pope's authority, this would be in conflict with nature's intention and hence with God's will. The special difficulty of this subject is emphasized: the matter is so fiercely disputed that the disputes generate ignorance, in contrast with the more usual sequence where ignorance generates debate. Three classes of people oppose the truth Dante wishes to show: the pope and other prelates, whose motivation is their zealous concern for the church and who are honest if misguided; a second group, motivated by greed, who claim to be sons of the church yet deny first principles, and with whom discussion would be futile; and a third group, the decretalists, who regard the decretals (the corpus of papal decrees and epistles which form the basis of ecclesiastical law) as the only authoritative source of enlightenment on this question. They are entirely mistaken, for the decretals post-date the church and therefore cannot be the source of its authority. Dante's arguments are addressed only to the first group, who sincerely and for the best of motives believe that the authority of the empire is dependent on that of the church, and who are urged to accept Dante's arguments in the spirit in which they are offered, that of a devout and dutiful son of the church who speaks out in the cause of truth.

Of the six arguments based on scripture, three are from the Old Testament and three from the New. The arguments are dealt with in the order in which they occur in the Bible, rather than in the order of

their inherent forcefulness or their popularity among papal supporters: this order, as we shall see, has certain advantages. Dante's refutations are precise and technical: in ch. iv he reminds us both of the various kinds of refutation possible in syllogistic argument, as set out by Aristotle in the *Sophistical Refutations*, and of the ways in which it is possible to misinterpret the mystical or allegorical sense of scripture, as clarified by Augustine in the *De civitate Dei* and the *De doctrina christiana*. Syllogistic arguments can be unsound in form or in content; the logic may be faulty, or a premiss untrue (either wholly false or false in some respect). Two kinds of interpretative error can be made in relation to the allegorical sense: either looking for a mystical sense where there is none, or interpreting in a way which misrepresents the intention of the original writer or speaker. Armed with these methodological weapons, Dante now engages with the first group of arguments, all of which involve a tendentious interpretation of a scriptural passage from which inadmissible inferences are drawn.

The argument from the 'two great lights' spoken of in the first book of Genesis is that the sun and the moon allegorically represent spiritual and temporal power; the moon receives its light from the sun; therefore the empire receives its authority from the church. This was one of the oldest and most widely used of hierocratic arguments, and had become a commonplace of papal propaganda in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, culminating in its use in both the *Allegacio* to Boniface VIII's *Unam sanctam*, and Clement V's letter to Henry VII.<sup>10</sup> The hierocratic interpretation of Genesis is refuted by Dante on grounds of chronology (sun and moon were created on the fourth day, man on the sixth): it requires God to have created accidents before their subject (an absurdity) and a remedy before the condition which it is meant to correct (equally preposterous). (The Augustinian idea of the state as a *remedium peccati*, a consequence of man's Fall, is touched on but not developed; the possible conflict with the Aristotelian notion of the state as a natural construct, necessary because of human nature – the basis of the thesis developed in Book I – is not explored.) A less damning refutation can be made by drawing a distinction: the sun is not the source of the moon's existence or its light (i.e. its power), but it may cause the moon to operate more efficaciously; equally the pope is not the source or cause of the

<sup>10</sup> V. Pizzica's commentary *ad loc.*, and M. Maccarrone, 'Il terzo libro della *Monarchia*', in *Studi danteschi* 33, 1955, pp. 5–142. Dante himself had used the image in two of his letters (v and vi), evidently echoing Clement.



emperor's existence or power (i.e. his authority), but he may help the emperor function more effectively (*virtuosius*). This suggestion that a cooperative and enriching relationship might be possible between papal and imperial authority sounds a moderate and conciliatory note at the end of this first refutation. It is an idea Dante will return to in the closing lines of the treatise.

The second argument (based on Genesis 29) takes the figures of Levi and Judah, the sons of Jacob, who were the father of the priesthood and the father of temporal rule respectively; they are held to prefigure the spiritual and temporal powers, the second being subordinate to the first as younger son is to older. Again there is a technical demonstration of the invalidity of the argument, which uses four terms instead of three, confusing seniority by birth with seniority in authority, and adducing the first to be the cause of the second, which clearly it is not.

The next argument is based on the account in Kings of the anointing and deposing of Saul by Samuel, God's vicar, who is shown there to have the power both to give and to take away temporal authority. Dante's refutation is based on the distinction between the roles of vicar and messenger. Samuel on this occasion functioned as God's messenger on an *ad hoc* mission to perform a specific task, not as a vicar in the sense in which the pope is God's vicar. No legitimate conclusion can be drawn from this episode about the powers of God's vicar.

The first of the scriptural arguments from the New Testament takes the story in Matthew of the offerings of the Magi at Christ's birth. The frankincense and gold are held to represent the spiritual and the temporal spheres in human life. Both were offered to Christ; Christ's vicar is thus lord and ruler over both. Again there is a formal error in the argument: the syllogism uses four terms instead of three. Christ and Christ's vicar are not interchangeable terms. This crucial distinction in a sense underlies the whole of Book III.<sup>11</sup>

The last two arguments from biblical exegesis focus on a pair of texts whose significance had been expounded and debated for centuries to justify the supremacy of papal authority: Matthew 16,19

<sup>11</sup> It was already implicit in III, iii, 7 ('... 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...'). In the debates of the decretalists the term *vicarius Christi* had become intimately connected with the argument for papal *plenitudo potestatis* (a term not used by Dante, interestingly), based on the assumption of an absolute equivalence between Christ and his vicar; see J. A. Watt, 'The Theory of Papal Monarchy in the Thirteenth Century. The Contribution of the Canonists', in *Traditio* 20, 1964, pp. 179-317.

and Luke 22,38. These are Christ's words to Peter on handing him the keys: 'Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven . . .'; and Peter's words to Christ: 'Behold, here are two swords.' Dante's treatment of these two key Petrine texts takes us to the heart of papal claims for power in temporal affairs and occupies the very centre of Book III.

The power of binding and loosing conferred by Christ on Peter is taken by papal apologists to include the laws and decrees of empire. Once again Dante points to a technical error in their argument. The exact scope of the word 'whatsoever' is delimited by what it refers to: the word was not used by Christ in an absolute sense, but in relation to something quite specific, namely Peter's role as keeper of the keys. If Peter's powers to bind and loose were unlimited, as is claimed, he would have the power to do things which he clearly cannot do, like divorcing husband from wife and forgiving the unrepentant. (A whole section of the *Summule – De distributionibus* – deals with just this issue, the need for meticulous care in interpreting universals and their range of reference. With a simple argument from logic Dante cuts through a centuries-long tradition of legalistic debate and commentary.)

The swords of which Peter speaks when he says to Christ 'Behold, here are two swords' were taken by papal supporters to represent the two powers, which (they allege) are here clearly identified as belonging to Peter. The allegorical interpretation which equates the two swords with the two powers must be rejected, Dante argues, and for two reasons. (By questioning the validity of the initial assumption he again cuts straight to the heart of his opponents' case.) It is at odds with Christ's intention when he first spoke of the swords, for he clearly meant that the disciples should have one sword each; and it is incompatible with Peter's simple and ingenuous nature and his well-documented habit of answering impulsively and unreflectingly, in a way which precludes any deeper meaning. A long list of examples engagingly illustrates this propensity: it would have been quite out of character for Peter to answer with the intention the papal supporters claim. Dante's rebuttal finishes with a counter argument: if the swords are to be interpreted figuratively, it is in a quite different sense, with reference to the sword mentioned by Christ in Matthew: 'I came not to send peace, but a sword . . .'. On this view the swords would represent a willingness to engage actively with the world to spread the Christian message by word and deed – an allegorical

interpretation for which scholars have not identified a source and which appears to be Dante's own.

Dante has given a dazzling display of his command of formal logic and its procedures, demolishing his opponents' arguments by demonstrating that they embody a series of identifiable fallacies: the *fallacia accidentis*, the *fallacia secundum non causam ut causam*, the *fallacia secundum quid et simpliciter*, the error of false distribution, the formal error of using four terms instead of the mandatory three in a syllogism. Equally remarkable is his boldness of attack in handling biblical interpretation, reflecting a confident familiarity with the Bible and a sense of real intimacy with biblical figures, whose intentions and personality he assesses with complete self-assurance.<sup>12</sup>

Dante's demolition of the six arguments based on 'the word of God' serves as a preliminary clearing of the ground; he is now ready to tackle the thorniest issue of all, the arguments based on history. The first of these concerns the so-called 'donation of Constantine',<sup>13</sup> the gift supposedly made to pope Sylvester by the emperor Constantine – out of gratitude for his miraculous cure from leprosy and as a sign of his conversion to the Christian faith – of territory which included the city of Rome and of many imperial prerogatives and privileges. Since that time, the argument runs, these things have belonged to the church and been subject to the church's authority. The document which records this gift is spurious, but Dante like most of his contemporaries believed it to be genuine, and believed the 'donation' itself to be a matter of historical fact. His argument is concerned with its validity in a far more profound sense: was an emperor entitled to do what Constantine did? Dante argues that Constantine was not in a position to give away imperial territory or privileges, nor was the church in a position to accept them. His action was in conflict with the nature of imperial office, which is by definition – the whole of Books I and II have demonstrated this – a single and indivisible rule over the whole human race. The foundation of empire is human right; the emperor must therefore not do anything in conflict with human right; but human right requires an

<sup>12</sup> B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, Oxford 1941, pp. 239–40, speaks of the 'incisiveness of (his) genius' à propos of Dante's approach to biblical exegesis in these chapters.

<sup>13</sup> More properly, the *Constitutum Constantini*. The arguments from history had become increasingly important for the hierocrats as the debate developed in the course of the thirteenth century; see D. Maffei, *La donazione di Costantino nei giuristi medievali*, Milano 1964. King Robert of Naples cited the donation of Constantine when opposing Henry VII in 1313.

undivided worldwide empire; to divide that empire is to destroy it. The emperor cannot destroy the very thing which makes him what he is: his being and function are defined precisely in terms of universality. Equally, the church is unsuited to receiving temporal assets, in accordance with Christ's express injunction ('Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses . . .') as recorded by the evangelists. All that could be legitimately done by an emperor is the consigning of a patrimony into the guardianship of the church, for the benefit of the poor. Constantine's action was well-meaning, but it undermined and called into question the very nature of empire and imperial authority.

There is a second argument from history, but it is summarily dismissed. Charlemagne was crowned emperor by pope Hadrian, who called on him for protection against the incursions of the Longobards; since that time emperors are legitimately considered to be defenders of the church and subject to the church's authority.<sup>14</sup> But, Dante counters, the usurpation of a right does not establish a right. If it did, then the contrary case could be argued with equal force, for the emperor Otto restored pope Leo to power when he had been displaced by Benedict, suggesting that papal office and authority were in the gift of the emperor. The terseness of Dante's rebuttal is striking, for the *translatio imperii* was one of the principal arguments used by the hierocrats as confirmation of papal possession of both swords, and the juridical significance of papal coronation of an emperor had been a focus of debate for centuries.<sup>15</sup>

The last of the arguments used by the papal apologists is the argument from reason, which draws on the Aristotelian principle of *reductio ad unum*, i.e. the principle that all things belonging to one species are referable to a single entity which is the measure or exemplar for all members of the species. In the case of men, this must be to a man. The pope cannot be referred to any other man, so he must be the one to whom all others, including the emperor, are referred. But this argument too commits the accidental fallacy, i.e. it confuses accident with substance. Again it is logic which enables Dante to cut through obfuscation to a simple truth. Pope and

<sup>14</sup> The crowning of Charlemagne by the pope (in fact Leo III, not Hadrian) re-established the Western Empire by a *translatio imperii* from the East; the anointing could be seen as a historical parallel to Samuel's anointing of Saul, although Dante does not say this explicitly.

<sup>15</sup> V. J. A. Watt, 'The Theory of Papal Monarchy', pp. 204-5. The word 'usurpation' had been used by the Emperor Frederick II in his opposition to the assumption of papal power in temporal affairs, *ibid.* p. 240.

emperor are what they are by virtue of their relationships to other people, which are relationships of authority, whereas man is a substance, defined in terms of his essential nature. As men, they are referred to a single man; as pope and emperor, they are referred not to a person, but to the principle of authority: either God himself, or some lower principle of authority emanating from him. *Reductio ad unum* has been described as the fundamental imperative of medieval culture; the whole of Book I of the *Monarchia* could be seen as a working out of this principle. Here Dante dismisses the hierocratic version of the same argument, which misapplies the principle by using faulty logic. Having disposed of it, he is ready to develop his own arguments in support of imperial independence of papal authority, which occupy the final chapters of the treatise.

The first of these is the chronological argument: the empire functioned with all its power and authority before the church existed. The church *cannot* therefore be the source of that power and authority. The second concerns the source of the church's alleged temporal power. This power does not come from God (whether from natural law or divine law); nor can it have come from the church itself (a logical impossibility); nor did it come from the empire, as we have seen in relation to Constantine; nor did it come from mankind as a whole, or the majority of mankind (Asians and Africans and even most Europeans do not acknowledge the church's authority). There is no identifiable source for this alleged power of the church, which does not, in fact, exist.

The most important argument Dante saves until last. If the church had power over temporal concerns, this would be in conflict with its very nature. Christ's life is a model for the church, its pastors and the pope. But Christ himself specifically renounced the kingdom of this world, as the Bible makes unequivocally clear; the church would be in conflict with its own nature if it were to do otherwise. The principle enunciated at the beginning of Book III is thus doubly negated or violated by the hierocratic case: it is against nature's intention that the empire should be divided, just as it is against nature's intention that the church should exercise power *in temporalibus*.

Dante's last chapter offers a final 'positive' proof that the emperor's authority comes to him directly from God and not from an intermediary. We come full circle to our starting-point, the fact of man's double nature, the combination in human beings of body and mind, corruptible and incorruptible. Every nature has its own 'final

end' or ultimate goal. Mankind, having two natures, must necessarily have two such goals. These are the happiness of this life and the happiness of the eternal life, signified respectively by the earthly and the heavenly paradise. These goals are achieved by different means: on the one hand, the teachings of philosophy and the exercise of the moral and intellectual virtues; on the other, spiritual teachings and the practice of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. Humanity needs two guides corresponding to these two goals: emperor and pope. We are reminded for the last time of the need for peace if human beings are to find fulfilment, and of the function of the emperor as a guarantor of peace and freedom. We are reminded too of the reflection of the cosmic order in the ordering of our human world. The point made so powerfully at the very centre of the treatise – humanity's purpose seen as a part of nature's broader purpose – is now linked to the creator of both the human and the natural order. Only God takes in the cosmic order at a glance. He alone therefore can make provision for the emperor. God alone chooses, he alone confirms. The so-called 'electors' to imperial office – the college of German princes responsible for choosing the emperor – are no more than mouthpieces of divine providence. It is inevitable that there will be occasional disagreements among them, for some will perceive God's will less clearly than others, and some not at all. There is a direct line of authority, with no intermediary, from God the Fountainhead of universal authority to the emperor, which parallels and is distinct from the direct line of authority from God to the pope.

The task is now complete. The three points of inquiry have been clarified and resolved. We have seen that the well-being of the world requires a supreme world-ruler set over all lesser kings and princes; that the rise to power of the Roman Empire was a part of God's providential plan for humanity; and that the emperor's authority, which comes to him directly from God, is independent of the pope. But in his final paragraph Dante adds a coda which has caused some perplexity – the emperor is 'in some respect' (*in aliquo*) subject to the pope, just as earthly happiness is 'in some sense' (*quodammodo*) ordered to immortal happiness. Let the emperor treat the pope with the respect and reverence a first-born son owes his father, so that he may the better (*virtuosius*) light up the world with his guidance and example. The positive relationship between the two powers first hinted at as Dante embarked on his demolition of the case for papal supremacy in temporal affairs in III, iv is echoed here: the spirit of cooperation and reconciliation there adumbrated is urged again

in Dante's concluding sentence, whose final words, however, remind us of God's role as the only source of both imperial and papal power.

Before we turn our attention to the *fortuna* of the *Monarchia* – both its impact on contemporaries and near contemporaries, and its history in the longer term as an object of scholarly study – we should pause briefly to reflect on the text we have just described. It is equally remarkable as an argument and as an artefact. The richness and originality of the arguments Dante uses to defend his thesis are matched by the intellectual rigour with which they are developed, and the incisiveness and energy with which the debate is conducted. But equally striking, on reflection, is the sense the *Monarchia* gives of a carefully constructed whole, where formal considerations relating to how the material is organized, considerations of symmetry and balance, of sequence and order, play an important part. We have noted the parallels between the three books, both in the laying out of the argument and in the framing effect of the opening and closing chapters – chapters noticeable both for their density of scriptural allusion, and for their insistent use of the *cursus* or rhythmical patterning of the prose to produce an effect of rhetorical heightening. There are also thematic links and echoes from book to book, for although each is self-contained, there are recurring motifs which underlie all three, and which create a powerfully unifying effect. The donation of Constantine, on which Dante focuses with the full force of reasoned argument only in III, x, is alluded to in Books I and II, each of which in its concluding chapter had a veiled allusion to the destructive folly of the emperor's action – equated in I, xvi with the rending of Christ's seamless garment and identified in II, xi as the source of all of Italy's present misfortunes. *Iustitia* is a recurring theme: it is the supreme good in human affairs, in terms of which the emperor's function can be defined; it is a key to understanding certain aspects of Roman history; it is the measure of the church's corruption, for the church makes only a pretence of justice; Dante's concern for justice identifies him as the heir to Daniel and to David. The most insistent and powerful of all these recurring themes is *cupiditas*, which signifies both the desire for self-enrichment and the *libido dominandi*, and which is condemned for its damaging and divisive effects on society and political organization. It prevents lesser rulers from achieving peace and stability; it was repudiated by the great Romans whose lives were lived by the ideals of selflessness and austerity; it prevents Dante's opponents from acknowledging the

force of his arguments, since it blinds them to first principles. On the opening page of the treatise, it is the reason this subject has been neglected by other writers, for it will not lead to wealth or material advantage. On the closing page it is identified once again as the reason the world will always need an emperor. The simplicity and power of Dante's vision of a political order which could curb and direct the impulses of frail humanity towards an achievable goal of human fulfilment and happiness comes from a profoundly ethical basis.

Another linking or unifying principle in the *Monarchia* is its intertextuality. When confronted with the richness and variety of Dante's allusions to other writers and other works – the omnipresence of Aristotle and (in Book II) of Virgil, and alongside them the many lesser yet still great figures such as Lucan, Livy, Cicero, Orosius, Boethius, Aquinas and Augustine – it is easy to overlook the fact that the Bible is textually represented in the *Monarchia* with extraordinary fullness and completeness. (One of the paradoxes the treatise confronts us with is that a writer so steeped in the works of others, and so acutely conscious of and eager to acknowledge his indebtedness, can have produced a work of such startling originality.) The Psalms alone are cited more often than Aristotle's *Politics*; each of the five books of the Pentateuch is quoted or referred to explicitly, as are all of St Paul's major epistles (to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy and Hebrews); the Gospels, of course, are everywhere. It can hardly be doubted that this was a deliberate authorial strategy. In the extraordinarily rich intellectual humus out of which the *Monarchia* grows and to which Dante explicitly pays tribute, the most important authority of all remains the Bible. And it is the words of Christ himself which stand at the centre of Dante's political philosophy and which guarantee the conclusions of Book III: Take no gold or silver . . . My kingdom is not of this world . . . Peter, follow me.

In structuring his book so carefully Dante is imitating the world he lives in, which in its turn mirrors its Creator:

Le cose tutte quante  
hanno ordine tra loro, e questo è forma  
che l'universo a Dio fa simigliante. *Paradiso* I, 103–5

[All things have an order which relates them one to another, and this is the form which makes the universe resemble God.]



The symmetries and patterning detectable in the *Monarchia* may well have been planned by Dante around a numerical model.<sup>16</sup> With the restoration of the chapter division at III, x, 18, which Ricci in his edition suppressed but which earlier editors had unanimously approved,<sup>17</sup> we have a first and third book of 16 chapters each, framing a central book of 11 chapters<sup>18</sup> – and that central book is itself symmetrical in structure, as we have seen. However we add up these figures, we always get the result 7 (thus  $16 + 11 + 16 = 43$  and  $4 + 3 = 7$ ; or, even more suggestively,  $1 + 6 = 7$ ,  $1 + 1 = 2$ ,  $1 + 6 = 7$  and  $7 + 2 + 7 = 16$  and  $1 + 6 = 7$ ). That his treatise was structured around the numbers 3 and 7 would have been a source of profound satisfaction to Dante, 3 being the number of the Trinity, and 7 the number of creation, of holiness (the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit), of morality (the seven virtues – cardinal and theological), of knowledge (the seven liberal arts), of the planets and of time (the seven days of the week).<sup>19</sup> Two traditionally signifies 'both the antithesis of good and evil and its conquest by the two natures of Christ';<sup>20</sup> in this context it might well suggest also the double nature of human beings and the twofold guidance they require to find fulfilment – the starting-point of Dante's argument, and its conclusion. Syllogistic reasoning itself conforms to the pattern or principle of three-in-one: one argument, three terms, three propositions, one conclusion. Indeed the *Monarchia* itself can be seen as a kind of syllogism, the conclusion of Book III being the inevitable con-

<sup>16</sup> On number symbolism as a principle of composition in medieval texts, see E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, translated by W. R. Trask, ch. xv: 'Numerical Composition', New York 1953, pp. 501–9; and V. H. Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism*, New York 1938. The subject has been explored in detail in relation to the *Vita nuova* and the *Comedy* (see, for example, C. S. Singleton, *An Essay on the Vita Nuova*, Cambridge, Mass. 1949, pp. 78–9, and 'The Poet's Number at the Centre', in *Modern Language Notes* 80, 1965, pp. 1–10) but never, I think, in relation to the *Monarchia*.

<sup>17</sup> Witte, Bertalot and Rostagno all begin a new chapter with the words *Adhuc dicunt quod Adrianus papa*, separating the argument based on Constantine and his donation from the quite separate argument (the *translatio imperii*) based on Charlemagne. The available evidence, as I shall argue elsewhere, supports the traditional division.

<sup>18</sup> The manuscript in the Biblioteca Trivulziana (T) preserves this pattern exactly.

<sup>19</sup> For St Augustine (*De civitate Dei* II, 31) 7 was also the number of wholeness or universality (*universitas*): the concept of *humana universitas* lies at the heart of Dante's argument in Book I. For others 7 was the number of earthly life and mutability, see G. R. Sarolli, *Analitica della 'Divina Commedia', I: Struttura numerologica e poesia*, Bari 1974, pp. 52, 83, 143, 157–61, 196.

<sup>20</sup> Curtius, *European Literature*, p. 503.

sequence of acknowledging the truth of the propositions advanced in Books I and II.<sup>21</sup>

The numerical consideration perhaps helps to explain what some scholars have found puzzling, the inclusion among the scriptural arguments in Book III of several which had very little currency in the political debates of the time. Dante's choice of arguments is in any case highly selective,<sup>22</sup> but it should be noted that he has used three from the Old and three from the New Testament, making a total of nine hierocratic arguments altogether. Once one is alerted to the presence of significant numbers, they seem to be everywhere: seven heroes of ancient Rome (or nine if we count the Decii as individuals and not as a family unit), nine quotations from the Aeneid à propos of Aeneas' nobility, which comes from three sources (personal, ancestral, matrimonial) and which draws on the 'three parts of the world' as medieval cartographers represented it (see map between pages 82 and 83). This last is not a trivial point: the origin of numerical composition and the source of its significance, as Curtius reminded us, was the belief that these patterns echoed the very structure or ordering of reality itself, with its biblical seal in the Wisdom of Solomon 11, 21: *omnia mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti* [you have arranged all things by measure and number and weight]. The strangeness of Dante's treatise, but also its power, depend in part on factors of which modern readers are scarcely aware.

The *Monarchia*, so often described by later historians as backward-looking and hopelessly unrealistic as a solution to the problems of his age – an age when the restoration of an empire was becoming an increasingly remote likelihood as perceptions of national identity and state boundaries were hardening – was nonetheless judged sufficiently dangerous by Dante's immediate and near contemporaries to merit a detailed rebuttal by a Dominican friar (c. 1327), a ritual burning on the orders of a higher prelate in 1329, only a few years after Dante's death, and, in the fullness of time, a place on the Vatican's Index of prohibited books (1554), where it remained until 1881. On the positive side, it inspired Cola di Rienzo to write a commentary, and Marsilio Ficino to make a translation (probably

<sup>21</sup> A. Chiavacci Leonardi interestingly locates the originality of Dante's view of Roman history not so much in the substance of particular arguments as in the function of the second book as a link between the first and third ('La *Monarchia* di Dante alla luce della *Commedia*', in *Studi medievali* 18, 1977, p. 161, n. 30).

<sup>22</sup> Maccarrone, 'Il terzo libro', p. 32, reminds us that John of Paris lists no fewer than 42 hierocratic arguments.

out of frustration with an earlier anonymous version which obscured rather than clarified Dante's meaning). It was first printed at Basle (a centre of activity for the Reformation) in 1559, just five years after being placed on the Index.

Scholarly interest in the *Monarchia* has tended to focus on three main issues: text, interpretation and dating. These issues are interconnected and cannot easily be separated one from another; each involves questions of some complexity. All that will be attempted here will be a brief review of some of the problems and an indication of the relevant bibliography.

Our knowledge and understanding of the text and how it is constituted has increased steadily with the successive publication over the last 120 years of four major critical editions: those of Witte (1874), Bertalot (1918), Rostagno (1921) and Ricci (1965).<sup>23</sup> Leaving aside the very real improvements that each of these editors introduced to the text, as more manuscripts came to light and more ambitious attempts were made to understand their interrelationships, a crucial focus of debate has always been the status of the parenthetical comment in 1, xii where Dante, discussing free will, makes a cross-reference to the *Paradiso*: *sicut in Paradiso Comedie iam dixi* [as I have already said in the *Paradiso* of the *Comedy*]. If authentic, this cross-reference means a dating of the *Monarchia* not earlier than 1314, the very earliest date by which, in the opinion of most scholars, Dante could have completed *Paradiso* v, the canto in which he talks of free will. Critics for whom such a late dating of the treatise is problematical, conflicting either with their sense of how Dante develops as writer and thinker, or with their sense of how his treatise is most plausibly located in relation to the complex historical background, are unable to accept this as an authentic part of Dante's original text – at best, they say, it must be a gloss added by Dante himself at a later date, at worst an outright falsification and not by Dante at all (though quite why anyone would want to fabricate a cross-reference of this kind is not a question which has received a satisfactory answer, just as it is difficult to imagine why Dante, if he added the reference at a later date, would want deliberately to mislead by using the word *iam*). Some critics have felt equally uncomfortable with the final paragraph of the treatise, as though Dante were at the last moment compromising his vision of the two equal and autonomous powers with the vague and unspecified

<sup>23</sup> Details of these editions are given in the Bibliography.

*quodammodo* and *in aliquo*. Bruno Nardi, better qualified than most to judge Dante's relationship to his intellectual background, suggested that this too must be a later addition.

All such arguments are of course hypothetical, having no basis in the textual evidence. The *editio princeps* omits the parenthesis, but this, as Ricci argues, appears to have been a deliberate suppression by the first editor, given that in his preface he says the work is not by the 'old Florentine poet' but by a philosopher contemporary of Angiolo Poliziano. The two closely related manuscripts in which the parenthesis is only partly present leave a blank space of an appropriate size for the missing words, which presumably were illegible in their exemplar.<sup>24</sup> There is no good reason to suppose the cross-reference inauthentic; its inauthenticity is urged only by scholars – but there are many of them – who for other reasons are unwilling to countenance a late date.

Interpretation of the *Monarchia* has focused on the extent (if any) to which Dante's thinking can be described as Averroistic, and on the implications of the answer to this question for its relationship to his other works. The explicit reference to Averroes in I, iii is the starting-point of the debate, which is again inextricably linked to the questions of dating and Dante's intellectual development. Does the *Monarchia* represent an intermediate stage between the *Convivio* and the *Comedy* – a stage where Dante sees a split between reason and faith, the earthly and the spiritual, rather than the subordination of the first to the second – or is it compatible with his political and philosophical ideas as he was bringing the *Comedy* to completion? Nardi argued repeatedly and at length for the first view, suggesting a dating of 1307–8 for the treatise. Few scholars have felt able to accept his conclusions, and the history of scholarly engagement with the treatise over the last six decades can be charted as a series of responses to the views of this most *preparato* and prolific of *dantisti*. Many scholars – perhaps most – have preferred a dating which links the *Monarchia* more closely to historical circumstances – to the period of the newly elected Emperor Henry VII's descent into Italy or the years close to it, and to the letters Dante wrote at this time (1310–11) urging the emperor to come and urging Italians to

<sup>24</sup> Nardi is mistaken when he says (see his commentary *ad loc.*) that the parenthesis is not present in Ficino's translation, see P. Shaw, 'Per l'edizione del volgarizzamento ficiniano della *Monarchia*', in *Testi e Interpretazioni. Studi del seminario di filologia romanza dell'università di Firenze*, Milano 1978, pp. 927–39; and 'La versione ficiniana della *Monarchia*', in *Studi danteschi* 51, 1978, p. 342.

welcome him.<sup>25</sup> (When Henry's expedition, of which Dante had such high hopes, failed, the cause was once again the recalcitrance of the Florentines and the duplicity of a pope, Clement V.)

If we accept the authenticity and contemporaneity of both cross-reference and final paragraph – and the final paragraph, as we have seen, merely reiterates the desirability of a cooperative relationship between pope and emperor already touched on by Dante in III, iv – are there really any insuperable difficulties associated with a late dating of the treatise? The points of resemblance between the *Monarchia* and the letters Dante wrote at the time of Henry's Italian expedition are no more striking than the differences between them – differences in method and above all in tone: rousing exhortation and a dramatic sense of the immediacy of events in the letters, calm and objective philosophical analysis in the treatise. These differences, eloquently described by Nardi himself, can fit at least as plausibly with a late date as with the earlier one Nardi favoured. In the *Monarchia*, as Etienne Gilson succinctly put it, Dante is not fighting for a man, but for an idea.<sup>26</sup>

It seems at least as plausible in terms of psychology that Dante would compose a treatise demonstrating the need for an emperor when his hopes in practical terms of ever seeing this come about in his own lifetime had been definitively dashed. The opening sentence of the treatise makes it incontrovertibly clear that he is writing with his eye on and for the benefit of posterity. This is his legacy to the world: a philosophical demonstration of the way humanity ought to be ordered politically as a collectivity, to stand alongside his poetic masterpiece, which shows individuals how to achieve salvation.<sup>27</sup> The two visions are inextricably linked, and there is much overlapping of material between them. There is no conflict at all between poem and treatise in what Dante advocated in terms of practical politics: the separation of secular from ecclesiastical power, and a return to apostolic poverty for the church, whose greed and manifest corruption were the cause of Italy's turbulence and lawlessness. It

<sup>25</sup> This connection was first made by Boccaccio in his *Trattatello in laude di Dante* (in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio, a cura di V. Branca*, vol. VI, p. 487).

<sup>26</sup> E. Gilson, *Dante e la philosophie*, second edn, Paris 1953, p. 173. (English translation: *Dante the Philosopher*, translated by D. Moore, London 1948, p. 172.)

<sup>27</sup> P. G. Ricci points out that the epitaphs composed by contemporaries at the time of Dante's death all mention the *Monarchia* alongside the *Comedy*; in two of them the *Monarchia* is the only minor work so mentioned, see 'L'ultima fase del pensiero politico di Dante', in *Dante e la cultura veneta. Atti del Convegno di Studi organizzato dalla Fondazione Cini, a cura di V. Branca e G. Padoan*, Firenze 1967, p. 371.

does not seem too wide of the mark to suggest that the *Monarchia* stands in relation to the *Comedy* as Aristotle's *Politics* stands in relation to his *Ethics*<sup>28</sup> – a text which grows out of an earlier one, clarifying and developing one aspect of it, introducing new emphases which some commentators have found problematical, but a product of the same searching and tirelessly creative mind whose primary concern was always doing and making (*agere et facere*) rather than theory: *materia presens non ad speculationem per prius, sed ad operationem ordinatur* [the present subject is not directed primarily towards theoretical understanding but towards action]. Compressed, bitter, spare, energetic and beautifully crafted, it bears the unmistakable imprint of his genius.

<sup>28</sup> It is intriguing to note that Aristotle several times in the later text refers back to the earlier one, once (*Politics* 3, 9 1280a 17–18) in terms very close to those used by Dante in his cross-reference: *sicut dictum est prius in Ethicis* [as I have already said in the *Ethics*].