

Chapter 3

Desire and Destiny

ed ène dolce così fatto scemo,
perché il ben nostro in questo ben s'affina,
che quel che vole Dio, e noi volemo.

(*Par.* XX.136-38)¹

1. Introduction: the aetiology of desire. 2. Aquinas, *desiderium naturale* and a moment's uncertainty. 3. Dante and the coincidence of being and desiring in man. 4. Dante and predestination: a preliminary statement. 5. Aquinas and destiny under the aspect of transmission. 6. Dante and destiny under the aspect of emergence.

For both Dante and Aquinas the end of the moral and religious life lies in a direct vision of God, in a *visio Dei* apt to satisfy every kind of moral and intellectual yearning; so, for example, as far as Thomas is concerned, this passage – probably familiar to Dante – from the *Contra gentiles* on man's knowing God as the final cause of all he is and of all he has it in him to be and to become:

Cum autem omnes creaturae, etiam intellectu carentes, ordinentur in Deum sicut in finem ultimum; ad hunc autem finem pertingunt omnia in quantum de similitudine eius aliquid participant: intellectuales creaturae aliquo specialiori modo ad ipsum pertingunt, scilicet per propriam operationem intelligendo ipsum. Unde oportet quod hoc sit finis intellectualis creaturae, scilicet intelligere Deum.

(*ScG* III.xxv.1)²

¹ and to us such defect is sweet, because our good in this good is refined, that what God wills we also will.

² Since all creatures, even those devoid of understanding, are ordered to God as to an ultimate end, all achieve this end to the extent that they participate somewhat in his likeness. Intellectual creatures attain it in a more special way, that is, through their proper operation of understanding him. Hence this must be the end of the intellectual creature, namely to understand God. (Translation here and throughout, A. C. Pegis, New York: Image Books, 1955-57).

while as far as Dante is concerned this from the *Convivio* (IV.xii.14) on the return of the soul to God as the author and archetype of its presence in the world:

E però che Dio è principio de le nostre anime e fattore di quelle simili a sé (sì come è scritto: “Facciamo l’uomo ad imagine e similitudine nostra”), essa anima massimamente desidera di tornare a quello.³

But the question arises as to where this yearning for God as the beginning and end of all yearning comes from. Is it from God or is it from man? Is it something which God instills in man subsequently, over and beyond his normal pattern of seeing, understanding and desiring, or is it there from the outset, as part of the original and abiding economy of specifically human being under the conditions of time and space? Aquinas wavers, but in keeping with the forces of Augustinianism and Neo-Augustinianism decisive for the shape and substance of his mature spirituality he is, with the passage of time, more inclined to the former than to the latter, to the notion that it is God himself who, bringing man home to the light of glory through a movement of grace as at once healing, illuminating and elevating, starts the whole thing off by breathing into him, as and when he so chooses, a desire to be in, through, and for his maker. Dante, by contrast, while maintaining a sense of the need for grace as the condition of every salvifically significant movement of the spirit, wishes to confirm the nature and status of that yearning as a property of what man as man already is as a creature of perception, predilection and orderly appetite. His desire for God is not instilled at some point along the way. It is there from the outset as a principle of self-interpretation.

2. Aquinas, as regards the notion of *desiderium naturale* or of man’s natural yearning for God, is, as we have noted, uncertain, at times appearing to endorse the co-extensivity of being and desiring in man while elsewhere tending to refer the soul’s desire for God to a special movement of grace. In relation, then, to his sense of the co-extensivity of these things, we may begin by noting Question 12 of the *Pars prima* of the *Summa theologiae*, a question which, concerned as it is with how far the creature is able to know the creator as of the essence (‘per essentiam’), settles on the idea that to witness an effect in the world is to be curious about its first cause, an idea leading on to that of a natural desire for God: ‘Inest enim homini naturale desiderium cognoscendi causam, cum intuetur effectum; et ex

³ And since God is the first cause of our souls, and creates them in his own likeness (for thus it is written in Scripture: “Let us make man in our own image and likeness”), the soul desires first and foremost to return to him. (Translations from the *Convivio* by Christopher Ryan, *The Banquet*, Saratoga, Calif.: Anma Libri, 1989).

hoc admiratio in hominibus consurgit. Si igitur intellectus rationalis creaturae pertingere non possit ad primam causam rerum, remanebit inane desiderium naturae' (art. 1, resp.).⁴ True, the article in question bears less on the *origin* than on the *fulfilment* of man's desire to see God, but its point of departure is unequivocal, the registering of effects in human experience carrying with it a desire to know not only their proximate but their primary cause. And this, to move on to the *Prima secundae*, is Thomas's position at 3.8, where it is a question of man's proper happiness as man. Anxious, then, to confirm how it is that the happiness proper to man as man lies in a vision of the divine essence, he proceeds to a distinction between the *that it is* ('an est') and the *what it is* ('quid est') of the Godhead as present to the created intellect, the former at once giving way to the latter as an object of concern:

Si ergo intellectus aliquis cognoscat essentiam alicuius effectus, per quam non possit cognosci essentia causae, ut scilicet sciatur de causa quid est, non dicitur intellectus attingere ad causam simpliciter, quamvis per effectum cognoscere possit de causa an sit. Et ideo remanet naturaliter homini desiderium, cum cognoscit effectum, et scit eum habere causam, ut etiam sciat de causa quid est. ... Nec ista inquisitio quiescit quousque perveniat ad cognoscendum essentiam causae. Si igitur intellectus humanus, cognoscens essentiam alicuius effectus creati, non cognoscat de Deo nisi an est, nondum perfectio eius attingit simpliciter ad causam primam, sed remanet ei adhuc naturale desiderium inquirendi causam. Unde nondum est perfecte beatus. Ad perfectam igitur beatitudinem requiritur quod intellectus pertingat ad ipsam essentiam primae causae. Et sic perfectionem suam habebit per unionem ad Deum sicut ad obiectum, in quo solo beatitudo hominis consistit, ut supra dictum est.

(*ST Ia IIae.3.8 resp.*)⁵

⁴ For there resides in man a natural desire to know the cause of any effect which he sees; and thence arises wonder. But if the intellect of the rational creature could not reach so far as to the first cause of things, natural desire would remain void. A. Finili, 'Natural desire', *Dominican Studies* 1 (1948), 313-59; 2 (1949), 1-15; and 5 (1952), 159-84 ('New light on natural desire?'); J. Laporta, 'Pour trouver le sens exact des termes *appetitus naturalis, desiderium naturale, amor naturalis* etc. chez Thomas D'Aquin', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 40 (1973), 37-95; L. Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God according to St Thomas Aquinas and his Interpreters*, 2nd edn (Naples Florida: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2010).

⁵ If, therefore, an intellect knows the essence of some effect, whereby it is not possible to know the essence of the cause, i.e. to know of the cause 'what it is', that intellect cannot be said to reach that cause simply, although it may be able to gather from the effect the knowledge that there is a cause. Consequently, when man knows an effect, and knows that it has a cause, there naturally remains in him the desire to know about the cause, 'what it is' ... Nor does this inquiry cease until he arrives at a knowledge of the essence of

Man's, therefore, inasmuch as it is a relentless seeking out of causes, is a relentless seeking out of the first cause, a notion explored in the *Contra gentiles* by way of the gathering momentum of his desire for understanding as he approaches the object of that understanding. The closer a man comes to God in point of intellection, the more eagerly he tends towards him as his point of arrival:

Amplius. Corpus, quod naturali appetitu tendit in suum ubi, tanto vehementius et velocius movetur, quanto magis appropinquat fini ... Quod igitur vehementius in aliquid tendit postea quam prius, non movetur ad infinitum, sed ad aliquid determinatum tendit. Hoc autem invenimus in desiderio sciendi: quanto enim aliquis plura scit, tanto maiori desiderio affectat scire. Tendit igitur desiderium naturale hominis in sciendo ad aliquem determinatum finem. Hoc autem non potest esse aliud quam nobilissimum scibile, quod Deus est. Est igitur cognitio divina finis ultimus hominis.

(*ScG* III.xxv.13)⁶

So much, then, is clear. Man as man, Thomas maintains, seeks out both intellection and ultimate intellection, all of which can only ever culminate in the moment of his resting in God as the alpha and omega of all intellection.

Elsewhere, however, Thomas is not so sure, other passages tending to suggest a referral of man's desire to know God, not to nature, but to grace as to its point of departure; so, for example, *ST* Ia.62.2, an article which, though concerned with angels or separate substances, reaches out to cover all reasonable creatures. The question here, then, is whether any reasonable creature, human or angelic, can turn to God without the grace whereby such turning is a possibility, Thomas's solution, secure in

the cause. If, therefore, the human intellect, knowing the essence of some created effect, knows no more of God than 'that He is', the perfection of that intellect does not yet reach simply the first cause, but there remains in it the natural desire to seek the cause. Wherefore it is not yet perfectly happy. Consequently, for perfect happiness the intellect needs to reach the very essence of the first cause. And thus it will have its perfection through union with God as with that object, in which alone man's happiness consists, as stated above [qu. 1, art. 7; qu. 2, art. 8].

⁶ Furthermore, a body tending towards its proper place by natural appetite is moved more forcibly and swiftly as it approaches its end ... So a thing that tends more forcibly later rather than earlier towards an objective, is not moved towards an indefinite objective, but tends towards some determinate thing. Now we find this situation in the desire to know. The more a person knows, the more he is moved by desire to know. Hence man's natural desire tends, in the process of knowing, towards some definite end. Now this can be none other than the most noble object of knowledge, which is God. Therefore, divine knowledge is the ultimate end of man.

its sense of grace as a condition, not simply of the fulfilment of willing, but of willing itself, running as follows:

Respondeo dicendum quod angeli indiguerunt gratia ad hoc quod converterentur in Deum, prout est obiectum beatitudinis. Sicut enim superius dictum est, naturalis motus voluntatis est principium omnium eorum quae volumus. Naturalis autem inclinatio voluntatis est ad id quod est conveniens secundum naturam. Et ideo, si aliquid sit supra naturam, voluntas in id ferri non potest, nisi ab aliquo alio supernaturali principio adiuta. Sicut patet quod ignis habet naturalem inclinationem ad calefaciendum, et ad generandum ignem, sed generare carnem est supra naturalem virtutem ignis, unde ignis ad hoc nullam inclinationem habet, nisi secundum quod movetur ut instrumentum ab anima nutritiva. Ostensum est autem supra, cum de Dei cognitione ageretur, quod videre Deum per essentiam, in quo ultima beatitudo rationalis creaturae consistit, est supra naturam cuiuslibet intellectus creati. Unde nulla creatura rationalis potest habere motum voluntatis ordinatum ad illam beatitudinem, nisi mota a supernaturali agente. Et hoc dicimus auxilium gratiae. Et ideo dicendum est quod angelus in illam beatitudinem voluntate converti non potuit, nisi per auxilium gratiae.

(*ST Ia.62.2 resp.*)⁷

Grace, then, is doubly indispensable. It is indispensable as that whereby the soul is lifted to its supernatural end (an emphasis unnegotiable in Aquinas), and it is indispensable as that whereby the soul wills that end in the first place. Man as man, in other words, has no desire of his own to seek out God, such desire as he *does* have being the product of a special ‘auxilium Dei’ as its efficient cause. And this too is the position in the

⁷ I answer that the angels stood in need of grace in order to turn to God, as the object of beatitude. For, as was observed above [qu. 60, art. 2], the natural movement of the will is the principle of all things that we will. But the will’s natural inclination is directed towards what is in keeping with its nature. Therefore, if there is anything which is above nature, the will cannot be inclined towards it, unless helped by some other supernatural principle. Thus it is clear that fire has a natural tendency to give forth heat, and to generate fire; whereas to generate flesh is beyond the natural power of fire; consequently, fire has no tendency thereto, except in so far as it is moved instrumentally by the nutritive soul. Now it was shown above [qu. 12, arts 4 and 5], when we were treating of God’s knowledge, that to see God in his essence, wherein the ultimate beatitude of the rational creature consists, is beyond the nature of every created intellect. Consequently, no rational creature can have the movement of the will directed towards such beatitude, except it be moved thereto by a supernatural agent. This is what we call the help of grace. Therefore it must be said that an angel could not of his own will be turned to such beatitude, except by the help of grace.

grace treatise of the *Prima secundae*, where again it is a question of the supernatural end exceeding not only man's capacity for knowing (for this goes without saying), but his capacity for desiring, desire, typically, not extending beyond the ordinarily accomplishable:

Actus autem cuiuscumque rei non ordinatur divinitus ad aliquid excedens proportionem virtutis quae est principium actus, hoc enim est ex institutione divinae providentiae, ut nihil agat ultra suam virtutem. Vita autem aeterna est quoddam bonum excedens proportionem naturae creatae, quia etiam excedit cognitionem et desiderium eius, secundum illud I ad Cor. II, "nec oculus vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit". Et inde est quod nulla natura creata est sufficiens principium actus meritorii vitae aeternae, nisi superaddatur aliquod supernaturale donum, quod gratia dicitur.

(*ST Ia IIae.114.2 resp.*)⁸

True, the question of desiring and of the limits of that desiring is touched upon here only in passing, Thomas's main concern in this question being whether or not man as man can, without grace, merit eternal life ('*utrum aliquis sine gratia possit mereri vitam aeternam*'). Even so, it *is* there and there explicitly, all of which has implications not least for the discipline of theology; for if there is no desire in man to see and to know God, then what use theology as a discipline of the spirit? Freefloating in respect of anything that actually matters to man as man, of anything genuinely present to him as a principle of self-interpretation, it cannot but subsist adiaphorously, somewhere on the edge of his experience as a creature of moral and ontological determination.

3. A preliminary statement of the position in Dante, of his sense of man as connaturally inclined towards communion with God as the beginning and end of his every striving on the planes of knowing and loving, occurs half way through the *Purgatorio* in the context of the great love discourses placed by Dante upon the lips of Virgil. Speaking of the overall structure of purgatory, and coming now to the middle and upper circles of the mountain (the circles of sloth, avarice, gluttony and lust), he, Virgil, notes

⁸ Now no act of anything whatsoever is divinely ordained to anything exceeding the proportion of the powers which are the principles of its act; for it is a law of divine providence that nothing shall act beyond its powers. Now everlasting life is a good exceeding the proportion of created nature; since it exceeds its knowledge and desire, according to I Corinthians 2 [v. 9]: 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man.' And hence it is that no created nature is a sufficient principle of an act meritorious of eternal life, unless there is added a supernatural gift, which we call grace.

how it is that all men, if hazily, perceive a good in which the soul might at last find rest, that good constituting henceforth the final cause of their every moral endeavour:

Ciascun confusamente un bene apprende
 nel qual si queti l'animo, e disira;
 per che di giugner lui ciascun contende.

(*Purg.* XVII.127-29)⁹

Everything, then, is present and correct, the *intuitive* moment of the text registering the inkling of a good apt at last to still the soul in its restlessness (the 'ciascun confusamente un bene apprende' of line 127), the *appetitive* moment registering the turning-back of the soul upon this same inkling in a spirit of yearning (the 'e desira' of line 128), and the *conative* moment registering the notion of being as militant in respect of its proper resolution (the 'per che di giugner lui ciascun contende' of line 129),¹⁰ the period as a whole thus giving expression to a sense of specifically human being as *projected* being, as constrained from deep within itself to its ecstatic finality. But it is above all the *Paradiso*, the canticle *par excellence* of desiring in the *Commedia*, that testifies most completely to this sense of the coincidence of being and yearning in man, of being, in man, as by nature a matter of desiring. First, then, and as preliminary in respect of the notion of yearning proper (for it is as yet a question merely of the instinctive disposition of whatever *is* in the world to its own proper finality), comes the 'cose tutte quante' passage on the threshold of the text:

Le cose tutte quante
 hanno ordine tra loro, e questo è forma

⁹ Each one apprehends vaguely a good wherein the mind may find rest, and this it desires; wherefore each one strives to attain thereto. *ScG* III.xlviii.1: 'Si ergo humana felicitas ultima non consistit in cognitione Dei qua communiter ab omnibus vel pluribus cognoscitur secundum quandam aestimationem confusam, neque iterum in cognitione Dei qua cognoscitur per viam demonstrationis in scientiis speculativis, neque in cognitione Dei qua cognoscitur per fidem ...'; *ST* Ia.2.1 ad 1: 'cognoscere Deum esse in aliquo communi, sub quadam confusione, est nobis naturaliter insertum, in quantum scilicet Deus est hominis beatitudo, homo enim naturaliter desiderat beatitudinem, et quod naturaliter desideratur ab homine, naturaliter cognoscitur ab eodem.'

¹⁰ For 'giugnere' as privileged lexis in the area of properly human being and becoming, *Par.* IV.124-32: 'Io veggio ben che già mai non si sazia / nostro intelletto, se 'l ver non lo illustra / di fuor dal qual nessun vero si spazia. / Posasi in esso, come fera in lustra, / tosto che giunto l'ha; e giugner puollo: / se non, ciascun disio sarebbe frustra. / Nasce per quello, a guisa di rampollo, / a piè del vero il dubbio; ed è natura / ch'al sommo pinge noi di collo in collo', and, in the final moments of the canticle, XXXIII.79-81: 'E' mi ricorda ch'io fui più ardito / per questo a sostener, tanto ch'i' giunsi / l'aspetto mio col valore infinito.'

che l'universo a Dio fa simigliante.

Qui veggion l'alte creature l'orma
de l'eterno valore, il qual è fine
al quale è fatta la toccata norma.

Ne l'ordine ch'io dico sono accline
tutte nature, per diverse sorti,
più al principio loro e men vicine;
onde si muovono a diversi porti
per lo gran mar de l'essere, e ciascuna
con istinto a lei dato che la porti

...

Non dei più ammirar, se bene stimo,
lo tuo salir, se non come d'un rivo
se d'alto monte scende giuso ad imo.

Maraviglia sarebbe in te se, privo
d'impedimento, giù ti fossi assiso,
com' a terra quïete in foco vivo.

(*Par.* I.103-114 and 136-41)¹¹

The model, clearly, is at once Platonizing and Peripateticizing, a sense of the nearness and farness of things from their origin (the 'più al principio loro e men vicine' of line 111) being complemented within the passage as a whole by a sense of the operational integrity of those same things in their own right, and thus of the cosmos generally as no more than the sum total of its analogical perfections. And it is this Peripateticizing aspect of the model that, for the moment at least, prevails, Dante's in this sense being an essay in movement as a matter of *self*-movement, in the will to self-actualization everywhere manifest in creation and everywhere confirming it in its likeness to God as its author and architect (the 'che l'universo a Dio fa simigliante' of line 105). But disposition thus understood is, as we have said, merely preliminary to desiring, desiring bringing to disposition an element of knowingness, at which point instinct is taken up in something closer to intentionality, to a determinate movement of the spirit; hence, moving on from Canto I, the exquisite 'concreation' tercet of Canto II,

¹¹ All things have order among themselves, and this is the form that makes the universe like God. Herein the high creatures behold the imprint of the eternal worth, which is the end for which the aforesaid ordinance is made. In the world whereof I speak all natures are inclined by different lots, nearer and less near unto their principle; wherefore they move to different ports over the great sea of being, each with an instinct given it to bear it on ... You should not wonder more at your rising, if I deem aright, than at a stream that falls from a mountain top to the base. It would be a marvel if you, being freed from hindrance, had settled down below, even as stillness would be in living fire on earth.

irradiated now by a sense of being as present to itself under the aspect of yearning:

La concreata e perpetua sete
del deiforme regno cen portava
veloci quasi come 'l ciel vedete.

(*Par.* II.19-21)¹²

to which we must add the no less exquisite love-perpetuity tercet of Canto VII:

ma vostra vita senza mezzo spira
la somma beninanza, e la innamora
di sé sì che poi sempre la disira.

(*Par.* VII.142-44)¹³

and, as an essay in their own right in the bliss of spiritual 'approximation' or drawing nigh, these lines from the very beginning and the very end of the *Paradiso*:

perché appressando sé al suo disire,
nostro intelletto sì profonda tanto,
che dietro la memoria non può ire

...

E io ch'al fine di tutt' i disii
appropinquava, sì com' io dovea,
l'ardor del desiderio in me finii.

(*Par.* I.7-9 and XXXIII.46-48)¹⁴

Everywhere, then, the pattern is the same, for everywhere it is a question of the restlessness of the soul until it rests in the One who *is* as of the essence, in God himself as the beginning and end of all yearning in the human spirit, yearning thus understood, however, pertaining to the soul, not superadditionally, but structurally, as part of what from the

¹² The concreate and perpetual thirst for the deiform realm bore us away, swift almost as you see the heavens.

¹³ but your life the supreme beneficence breathes forth without intermediary, and so enamours it of itself that it desires it ever after.

¹⁴ because, as it draws near to its desire, our intellect enters so deep that it cannot go back upon the track ... And I, who was drawing near to the end of all desires, raised to its utmost, even as I ought, the ardour of my longing. Similarly *Par.* XXXI.64-69: 'E "Ov' è ella?", subito diss' io. / Ond' elli: "A terminar lo tuo disiro / mosse Beatrice me del loco mio; / e se riguardi sù nel terzo giro / dal sommo grado, tu la rivedrai / nel trono che suoi meriti le sortiro".'

moment of its inception it always was and always will be. In short, no desiring, no being, the former entering into the latter as a principle of its recognizability.¹⁵

4. Towards the end of the justice cantos of the *Paradiso* – cantos remarkable for their sense of the soteriological issue as a matter of God's willingness to grace and to bring home even those without Christ as the long-awaited redeemer – Dante apostrophizes predestination, stressing as he does so its inscrutability and, in a purely Dantean inflexion of the line, its sweetness, the intimate congeniality of the unknown as sustained by faith in God's good purposes:

O predestinazion, quanto remota
 è la radice tua da quelli aspetti
 che la prima cagion non veggion tota!
 E voi, mortali, tenetevi stretti
 a giudicar: ché noi, che Dio vedemo,
 non conosciamo ancor tutti li eletti;
 ed ènne dolce così fatto scemo,
 perché il ben nostro in questo ben s'affina,
 che quel che vole Iddio, e noi volemo.

(*Par. XX.130-38*)¹⁶

¹⁵ F. Ferrucci, 'La dialettica del desiderio', in *Il poema del desiderio. Poetica e passione in Dante* (Milan: Leonardo, 1990), pp. 221-64 (revised in *Dante. Lo stupore e l'ordine* (Naples: Liguori, 2007), pp. 228-64); L. Pertile, "'La punta del disio': storia di una metafora dantesca', in *Lectura Dantis 7* (1990), 3-28 (revised in *La punta del disio. Semantica del desiderio nella 'Commedia'* (Florence: Cadmo, 2005), pp. 163-79); idem, 'Paradiso; a Drama of Desire', in J. C. Barnes and J. Petrie (eds), *Word and Drama in Dante* (Dublin: Irish Academic Foundation, 1993), pp. 143-80 (with a revised version in A. A. Iannucci (ed.), *Dante. Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 148-66 with the title 'A Desire of Paradise and a Paradise of Desire: Dante and Mysticism', and an Italian version entitled 'Desiderio di Paradiso' in *La punta del disio* cit., pp. 137-61); A. Brasioli, 'Il suono del desiderio', in *Dante. Lo sguardo, la realtà. Tre incontri su Dante* (Sottomarina: Il Leggio, 1995), pp. 63-96; P. A. Olson, 'Boethius's Wisdom and Dante's Architectonics of Desire', in *The Journey to Wisdom. Self-education in Patristic and Medieval Literature* (Lincoln, Neb. and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 147-71; A. M. Chiavacci Leonardi, 'Il Paradiso di Dante: l'ardore del desiderio', in *Lecture clausensi 27* (1998), pp. 101-12; D. Fasolini, "'E io ch'al fine di tutt'i disii appropinquava": un'interpretazione teologica del "desiderium" nel XXXIII canto del Paradiso', in *Forum Italicum. A Quarterly of Italian Studies 37* (2003), 2, 297-328; E. Lombardi, *The Syntax of Desire. Language and Love in Augustine, the Modistae, Dante* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

¹⁶ O predestination, how remote is your root from the vision of those who see not the first cause entire! And you mortals, keep yourselves restrained in judging, for we, who see God, know not yet all the elect. And to us such defect is sweet, because our good in this good is refined, that what God wills we also will.

But inscrutability does not exhaust Dante's meditation at this point, for the notion of inscrutability where God's purposes are concerned issues for him in something more sublime; for it is a question now, not so much of the soul's being *sent on* to something qualitatively other and out of all proportion to anything we could possibly know or even imagine here and now, but rather of *emergence*, of its at last opening out upon its proper God-likeness or deiformity. Now here, clearly, we have to be careful, for emergence thus understood is also a matter of otherness, of the soul's tasting the as yet untasted as it comes into the immediate presence of God. But for all that, the two things are not the same, predestination, for Dante, being a matter, less of *consignment*, than of *confirmation*, of the soul's at last knowing itself in the properly ecstatic substance of its humanity, at which point, relieved of its power to terrify, it is present to the individual only under the aspect of predilection.

5. Thomas's sense of predestination as a sending on of the soul to an order of experience out of all proportion to anything we could possibly know or imagine here and now, and this, moreover, on a rigorously selective basis, is readily open to documentation from the text. Take, for example, this passage from the *Pars prima* of the *Summa theologiae* at 23.1 resp., a passage sensitive, certainly, to the notion of capacity (Thomas's 'capax vitae aeternae') as a property of specifically human being, but above all to that of 'transmission', of making over the soul to something other than what it already is, as a way of developing the question of predestination:

Finis autem ad quem res creatae ordinantur a Deo, est duplex. Unus, qui excedit proportionem naturae creatae et facultatem, et hic finis est vita aeterna, quae in divina visione consistit, quae est supra naturam cuiuslibet creaturae, ut supra habitum est. Alius autem finis est naturae creatae proportionatus, quem scilicet res creata potest attingere secundum virtutem suae naturae. Ad illud autem ad quod non potest aliquid virtute suae naturae pervenire, oportet quod ab alio transmittatur; sicut sagitta a sagittante mittitur ad signum. Unde, proprie loquendo, rationalis creatura, quae est capax vitae aeternae, perducitur in ipsam quasi a Deo transmissa. Cuius quidem transmissionis ratio in Deo praeexistit; sicut et in eo est ratio ordinis omnium in finem, quam diximus esse providentiam. Ratio autem alicuius fiendi in mente actoris existens, est quaedam praeexistencia rei fiendae in eo. Unde ratio praedictae transmissionis creaturae rationalis in finem vitae aeternae, praedestinatio nominatur, nam destinare est mittere.¹⁷

¹⁷ The end towards which created things are directed by God is twofold, one of which exceeds all proportion and faculty of created nature; and this end is life eternal, that

Predestination then, for Thomas, is a matter (*a*) of God's reshaping or re-proportioning the individual in respect of the good awaiting him (the 'Unus, qui excedit proportionem naturae creatae' moment of the text), and (*b*) of this as a matter of prior determination in the recesses of the divine mind (its 'transmissionis ratio in Deo praeexistens' moment). God alone, as the archetypal archer ('sicut sagitta a sagittante mittitur ad signum'), decides and despatches, man, inasmuch as he enters into this process at all, entering into it by way of pure passivity, as ripe for onward conveyance in keeping with the primordial plan. But there is more, for Thomas's, in the *Paras prima*, is an account, not simply of the *what*, but of the *who* and of the *how many* of predestination, at which point, impressed by the near-bankruptcy of the human situation under its moral aspect, he is forced to conclude that few after all will be invited to the feast. Given the unpreparedness of the greater part of men for their own proper good, numbers, he thinks, will always be small:

bonum proportionatum communi statui naturae, accidit ut in pluribus; et defectus ab hoc bono, ut in paucioribus. Sed bonum quod excedit communem statum naturae, invenitur ut in paucioribus; et defectus ab hoc bono, ut in pluribus. Sicut patet quod plures homines sunt qui habent sufficientem scientiam ad regimen vitae

consists in seeing God, which is above the nature of every creature, as shown above [qu. 12, art 4]. The other end, however, is proportionate to created nature, to which end created being can attain according to the power of its nature. Now if a thing cannot attain to something by the power of its nature, it must be directed thereto by another; thus, an arrow is directed by the archer towards a mark. Hence, properly speaking, a rational creature, capable of eternal life, is led towards it, directed, as it were, by God. The reason of that direction pre-exists in God; as in him is the type of the order of all things towards an end, which we proved above to be providence [qu. 22 passim]. Now the type in the mind of the doer of something to be done is a kind of pre-existence in him of the thing to be done. Hence the type of the aforesaid direction of a rational creature towards the end of life eternal is called predestination. For to destine is to direct or send. Further on the terminology, *Sent.* I.40.2.1 resp.: 'Utrumque autem ex nomine praedestinationis accipi potest, in quo conjungitur actus destinationis cum hac praepositione prae per compositionem advenientem. Destinare autem significat directionem alicujus in aliquid, sicut nuntii'; *De ver.* 6.1 resp.: 'destinatio, unde nomen praedestinationis accipitur, importat directionem alicuius in finem: unde aliquis dicitur nuntium destinare qui eum dirigit ad aliquid faciendum', etc. H. J. M. J. Goris, 'Divine Foreknowledge, Providence, Predestination and Human Freedom', in R. Van Nieuwenhove and J. P. Wawrykow (eds), *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 99–122. Also, R. L. Friedman, 'The *Sentences* Commentary, 1250-1320: General Trends, the Impact of Religious Orders, and the Test Case of Predestination' and C. Schabel, 'Parisian Commentaries from Peter Auriol to Gregory of Rimini, and the Problem of Predestination', in G. R. Evans (ed.), *Mediaeval Commentaries on the Sentences of Peter Lombard: Current Research*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill: 2002), pp. 41-128 and 221–65 respectively.

suae, pauciores autem qui hac scientia carent, qui moriones vel stulti dicuntur, sed paucissimi sunt, respectu aliorum, qui attingunt ad habendam profundam scientiam intelligibilium rerum. Cum igitur beatitudo aeterna, in visione Dei consistens, excedat communem statum naturae, et praecipue secundum quod est gratia destituta per corruptionem originalis peccati, pauciores sunt qui salvantur.

(*ST Ia.23.7 ad 3*)¹⁸

It is, in fact, at this point, at the point of numbers, that Thomas appeals to what has been called the aesthetic strand in classical Christian and Augustinian soteriology, to the notion that, just as a builder settles from beforehand on the proportions of the project in hand, so also does God, determining as he does so the ratio of the reprobate to the elect:

Sicut aedificator excogitat determinatam mensuram domus, et etiam determinatum numerum mansionum quas vult facere in domo, et determinatum numerum mensurarum parietis vel tecti, non autem eligit determinatum numerum lapidum, sed accipit tot, quot sufficiunt ad explendam tantam mensuram parietis. Sic igitur considerandum est in Deo, respectu totius universitatis quae est eius effectus. Praeordinavit enim in qua mensura deberet esse totum universum, et quis numerus esset conveniens essentialibus partibus universi, quae scilicet habent aliquo modo ordinem ad perpetuitatem; quot scilicet sphaerae, quot stellae, quot elementa, quot species rerum. Individua vero corruptibilia non ordinantur ad bonum universi quasi principaliter, sed quasi secundario, inquantum in eis salvatur bonum speciei ... Unde certus est Deo numerus praedestinatorum, non solum per modum cognitionis, sed etiam per modum cuiusdam principalis praefinitionis.

(*ST Ia.23.7 resp.*)¹⁹

¹⁸ the good that is proportionate to the common state of nature is to be found in the majority and is wanting in the minority. But the good that exceeds the common state of nature is to be found in the minority, and is wanting in the majority. Thus it is clear that the majority of men have a sufficient knowledge for the conduct of life, and those who have not this knowledge are said to be half-witted or foolish; but they who attain to a profound knowledge of things intelligible are a very small minority in respect to the rest. Since their eternal happiness, consisting in the vision of God, exceeds the common state of nature, and especially in so far as this is deprived of grace through the corruption of original sin, those who are saved are in the minority.

¹⁹ For instance, a builder thinks out the definite measurements of a house, and also the definite number of rooms which he wishes to make in the house; and definite measurements of the walls and roof; he does not, however, select a definite number of stones, but accepts and uses just so many as are sufficient for the required measurements of the wall. So also must we consider concerning God in regard to the whole universe,

But whatever the exact proportion, actual numbers, as far as the elect are concerned, will, again, be small, for such is the depth and extent of man's corruption that few will ever be eligible even for consideration.

What, then, are we to say about Thomas and predestination? The first thing is that, whatever else we make of it, there can be no passing over either the affective or the free will element of the argument, over his sense (a) of God's loving and of his wishing to bring home to himself those in whom he delights as the first fruits of his handiwork, and (b) of, on the face of it any rate, man's having some say in all this. As far, then, as the first of these things is concerned, the affective moment of the argument, we have these lines from the *Parv prima* at 23.4 resp. on the notion of God's 'wishing his subjects well' as creatures of moral accountability ('inquantum vult eis hoc bonum salutis aeternae') and thus of love as preceding election in the order of divine intentionality:

praedestinatio, secundum rationem, praesupponit electionem; et electio dilectionem. Cuius ratio est, quia praedestinatio, ut dictum est, est pars providentiae. Providentia autem, sicut et prudentia, est ratio in intellectu existens, praeceptiva ordinationis aliquorum in finem, ut supra dictum est. Non autem praecipitur aliquid ordinandum in finem, nisi praeexistente voluntate finis. Unde praedestinatio aliquorum in salutem aeternam, praesupponit, secundum rationem, quod Deus illorum velit salutem. Ad quod

which is his effect. For he pre-ordained the measurements of the whole of the universe, and what number would befit the essential parts of that universe – that is to say, which have in some way been ordained in perpetuity; how many spheres, how many stars, how many elements, and how many species ... Whence the number of the predestined is certain to God; not only by way of knowledge, but also by way of a principle of pre-ordination. John Hick, with Harnack, in his *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Collins, 1966; 2nd edn, Basingtoke: Palgrave, 2007), pp. 88-89: 'What I am calling Augustine's aesthetic theme is his affirmation of faith that, seen in its totality from the ultimate standpoint of the Creator, the universe is wholly good; for even the evil within it is made to contribute to the complex perfection of the whole. As Harnack says, "Augustine never tires of realizing the beauty (pulchrum) and fitness (aptum) of creation, of regarding the universe as an ordered work of art, in which the gradations are as admirable as the contrasts. The individual and evil are lost to view in the notion of beauty ... Even hell, the damnation of sinners, is an act in the ordination of evils (ordinatio malorum), an indispensable part of the work of art" ... In similar vein we find Augustine writing, "All have their offices and limits laid down so as to ensure the beauty of the universe. That which we abhor in any part of it gives us the greatest pleasure when we consider the universe as a whole ... The very reason why some things are inferior is that though the parts may be imperfect the whole is perfect, whether its beauty is seen stationary or in movement ... The black colour in a picture may very well be beautiful if you take the picture as a whole" [*De ver. rel.* xl.76].' Hick traces the notion back into Plato (*Laws* x.903) via Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius.

pertinet electio et dilectio. Dilectio quidem, inquantum vult eis hoc bonum salutis aeternae, nam diligere est velle alicui bonum, ut supra dictum est. Electio autem, inquantum hoc bonum aliquibus prae aliis vult, cum quosdam reprobet, ut supra dictum est. Electio tamen et dilectio aliter ordinantur in nobis et in Deo, eo quod in nobis voluntas diligendo non causat bonum; sed ex bono praeeistente incitatur ad diligendum. Et ideo eligimus aliquem, quem diligamus, et sic electio dilectionem praecedat in nobis. In Deo autem est e converso. Nam voluntas eius, qua vult bonum alicui diligendo, est causa quod illud bonum ab eo prae aliis habeatur. Et sic patet quod dilectio praesupponitur electioni, secundum rationem; et electio praedestinationi. Unde omnes praedestinati sunt electi et dilecti.²⁰

while on the other hand, and as far now as the free will moment of the argument is concerned, we have these from the same question of the *Summa theologiae* at Article 6 on God's involvement of man in the shaping of his own destiny:

praedestinatio certissime et infallibiliter consequitur suum effectum, nec tamen imponit necessitatem, ut scilicet effectus eius ex necessitate proveniat. Dictum est enim supra quod praedestinatio est pars providentiae. Sed non omnia quae providentiae subduntur, necessaria sunt, sed quaedam contingenter eveniunt, secundum conditionem causarum proximarum, quas ad tales effectus divina providentia ordinavit. Et tamen providentiae ordo est infallibilis, ut supra ostensum est. Sic igitur et ordo praedestinationis est certus; et tamen libertas arbitrii non tollitur, ex qua contingenter provenit praedestinationis effectus. Ad hoc etiam consideranda sunt quae

²⁰ predestination presupposes election in the order of reason, and election presupposes love. The reason for this is that predestination, as stated above [art. 1], is a part of providence. Now providence, as also prudence, is the plan existing in the intellect directing the ordering of some things towards an end, as was proved above [qu. 22, art. 2]. But nothing is directed towards an end unless the will for that end already exists. Whence the predestination of some to eternal salvation presupposes, in the order of reason, that God wills their salvation, and to this belong both election and love: love, inasmuch as he wills them this particular good of eternal salvation, since to love is to wish well to anyone, as stated above [qu. 20, arts 2 and 3]; and election, inasmuch as he wills this good to some in preference to others, since he reprobates some, as stated above [art. 3]. Election and love, however, are differently ordered in God and in ourselves, because in us the will in loving does not cause good, but we are incited to love by the good which already exists; and therefore we choose someone to love, and so election in us precedes love. In God, however, it is the reverse. For his will, by which in loving he wishes good to someone, is the cause of that good possessed by some in preference to others. Thus it is clear that love precedes election in the order of reason, and election precedes predestination. Whence all the predestinate are objects of election and love.

supra dicta sunt de divina scientia et de divina voluntate, quae contingentiam a rebus non tollunt, licet certissima et infallibilia sint.²¹

But for all his acknowledgement both of love and of willing – of God’s love and of man’s willing – as entering into the question of predestination, it is clear that Thomas’s is a proposal of this issue in terms less of *emergence*, of the soul’s issuing at last into the unqualified truth of what it already has in it itself to be and to become, than of *election*, of God’s determining from beforehand the shape and substance of eschatological selfhood; for it is clear from these same passages (*a*) that in contemplating the goodness apt to commend the individual as a creature of free moral determination, God is simply contemplating the goodness which he himself put there in the first place (the ‘*Nam voluntas eius, qua vult bonum alicui diligendo, est causa quod illud bonum ab eo prae aliis habeatur*’ moment of *ST Ia.23.4* resp.), and (*b*) that free will as a property of personality is for Thomas nothing but the means of God’s own infallible will (the ‘*licet certissima et infallibilia sint*’ moment of *23.6* resp.), at which point the unilateralism of it all – Thomas’s commitment to the notion that what God does *for* us he does *without* us – moves fully and unambiguously into view.²²

²¹ predestination most certainly and infallibly takes effect; yet it does not impose any necessity, so that, namely, its effect should take place from necessity. For it was said above [art. 1], that predestination is a part of providence. But not all things subject to providence are necessary; some things happening from contingency, according to the nature of the proximate causes, which divine providence has ordained for such effects. Yet the order of providence is infallible, as was shown above [qu. 22, art. 4]. So also the order of predestination is certain; yet free will is not destroyed, whence the effect of predestination has its contingency. Moreover, all that has been said [qu. 14, art. 13; qu. 19, art. 4] about the divine knowledge and will must also be taken into consideration; since they do not destroy contingency in things, although they themselves are most certain and infallible.

²² Once and for all, therefore, the ‘*totum sub effectu praedestinationis*’ passage of *ST Ia.23.5* (resp.): ‘*Et sic impossibile est quod totus praedestinationis effectus in communi habeat aliquam causam ex parte nostra. Quia quidquid est in homine ordinans ipsum in salutem, comprehenditur totum sub effectu praedestinationis, etiam ipsa praeparatio ad gratiam, neque enim hoc fit nisi per auxilium divinum ...*’ See, for Thomas’s own sense of the difficulty of all this – the difficulty of finding some way of reconciling human and divine intentionality within the economy of historical selfhood without seriously prejudicing either the one or the other in the freedom and totality of its proper operation – *De ver.* 6. 3 resp.: ‘*Sed ordo praedestinationis est certus non solum respectu universalis finis, sed etiam respectu particularis et determinati, quia ille qui est ordinatus per praedestinationem ad salutem, nunquam deficit a consecutione salutis. Nec tamen hoc modo est certus ordo praedestinationis respectu particularis finis, sicut erat ordo providentiae: quia in providentia ordo non erat certus respectu particularis finis, nisi quando causa proxima necessario producebat effectum suum; in praedestinatione autem invenitur certitudo respectu singularis finis; et tamen causa proxima, scilicet liberum arbitrium, non producit effectum illum nisi contingeret. Unde*

6. Dante, when it comes to predestination, sees the issue in terms, not so much of despatching or sending on, but of something closer to an opening out of the spirit upon the kind of transhumanity (the 'trasumanar' of *Par.* I.70) proper to it as a creature called from beforehand to be in, through and for God. Now here too we have to be careful, for this commitment in Dante to predestination as a matter, less of *sending on* than of *emergence*, of knowing self in the now ecstatic truth of self, presupposes and at every point is informed by a sense of the mystery and of the grace-conditionality of it all; so, for example, as far as the first of these things is concerned, the 'ché noi, che Dio vedemo, / non conosciamo ancor tutti li eletti' passage of *Par.* XX.134-35 already noted, while as far as the second is concerned, these lines (82-84) from *Paradiso* XXXIII on the exhilaration, certainly, of ultimate intellection but, more than this, on grace as the whereabouts of every implementation of self in its deformity:

Oh abbondante grazia ond' io presunsi
 ficcar lo viso per la luce etterna,
 tanto che la veduta vi consunsi!²³

But for all the indispensability of grace to an ultimate act of intellection and to the blessedness thereof, predestination remains even so, for Dante,

difficile videtur concordare infallibilitatem praedestinationis cum arbitrii libertate [...] Quod hoc modo potest considerari. Invenimus enim ordinem infallibilem esse respectu alicuius dupliciter. Uno modo inquantum una causa singularis necessario inducit effectum suum ex ordine divinae providentiae; alio modo quando ex concursu multarum causarum contingentium, et deficere possibilem, pervenitur ad unum effectum; quarum unamquamque Deus ordinat ad consecutionem effectus loco eius quae deficit, vel ne altera deficiat; sicut videmus quod omnia singularia unius speciei sunt corruptibilia, et tamen per successionem unius ad alterum potest secundum naturam in eis salvari perpetuitas speciei, divina providentia taliter gubernante, quod non omnia deficiant uno deficiente: et hoc modo est in praedestinatione. Liberum enim arbitrium deficere potest a salute; tamen in eo quem Deus praedestinat, tot alia adminicula praeparat, quod vel non cadat, vel si cadit, quod resurgat, sicut exhortationes, suffragia orationum, gratiae donum, et omnia huiusmodi, quibus Deus adminiculatur homini ad salutem. Si ergo consideremus salutem respectu causae proximae, scilicet liberi arbitrii, non habet certitudinem, sed contingentiam; respectu autem causae primae, quae est praedestinatio, certitudinem habet.' It is likely that Dante himself contemplated Thomas on this issue in the *Contra gentiles* at III. lxxiii, a chapter variously significant in the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso* (the 'tolleretur etiam iustitia praemiantis et punientis, si non libere homo ageret bonum vel malum' of note 5 for *Purg.* XVI.70-72 and the 'in rebus autem inanimatis causarum contingentia ex imperfectione et defectu est: secundum enim suam naturam sunt determinata ad unum effectum, quem semper consequuntur nisi sit impedimentum vel ex debilitate virtutis, vel ex aliquo exteriori agente, vel ex materiae indispositione' of note 2 for *Par.* I.127-35).

²³ O abounding grace whereby I presumed to fix my look through the eternal light so far that all my sight was spent therein!

a matter less of conveying than of confirming, less of God's moving the soul on to the qualitatively other-than-self than of his admitting it to the kind of transhumanity present to it as the most immanent of its immanent possibilities. This at any rate, or something close to it, is Dante's meaning in passages such as the following from *Paradiso* XXIII (lines 40-45) and XXX (lines 55-60), passages which, turning as they do on the notions of dilation ('dilatarsi'), of amplification ('farsi più grande'), of 'issuing forth' ('uscir di sé') and of surmounting ('sormontar'), involve a sense, not so much of otherness, as of the soul's at last rejoicing in its proper power to ulteriority:

Come foco di nube si diserra
per dilatarsi sì che non vi cape,
e fuor di sua natura in giù s'atterra,
la mente mia così, tra quelle dape
fatta più grande, di sé stessa uscìo,
e che si fesse rimembrar non sape

...

Non fur più tosto dentro a me venute
queste parole brevi, ch'io compresi
me sormontar di sopr' a mia virtute;
e di novella vista mi raccesi
tale, che nulla luce è tanto mera,
che li occhi miei non si fosser difesi

...²⁴

With this, then, we are once again in the presence, not simply of good theology, but of courageous theology: of good theology in that, alongside the Pentateuchal preoccupation with fallenness as a dominant feature of the human situation, Dante makes room too for the other – and if anything still more primordial – feature of the text, namely the notion that God made it and God saw that it was good; and of courageous theology in that, here as throughout, the received emphasis is interrogated afresh with a view to testing its equality to the truth it seeks to encompass. If, then, for Dante too grace enters into human experience as the indispensable ground of its ultimate resolution, grace being that whereby the individual is lifted to an order of understanding and blessedness beyond anything he himself

²⁴ Even as fire breaks from a cloud, because it dilates so that it has not room there, and contrary to its own nature, falls down to earth, so my mind, becoming greater amid those feasts, issued from itself, and of what it became had no remembrance ... No sooner had those brief words come within me than I comprehended that I was surmounting beyond my own power, and such new vision was kindled within me that there is no light so bright that my eyes could not have withstood it.

is able to think or imagine, it enters into that experience, not magically or metaphysically, but as that whereby what already *is* as a property of historical selfhood is confirmed at last in its actuality, in the triumph of its innermost reasons. To suppose otherwise – to deliver the Dante of the *Commedia* to the more darkling and indeed to the more drastic aspects of Augustinianism either in its original form or in its subsequent elaboration – is entirely to mistake the spirit of the theological enterprise as he himself understands it. It is to deliver him to something both infinitely other and infinitely less than what he himself understood to be the case.