Giornale di filosofia, vol. 1/2025 • ISSN 1827-5834 • DOI 10.7413/1827-5834086

*Gregory B. Stone*

# Rational Desire and the Human Essence in Boccaccio's *Amorosa visione*: An Averrorist Perspective

Like its model, Dante's *Commedia*, Boccaccio's *Amorosa visione* aims to accomplish many things[1]. Also like the former, the latter "resists easy interpretation", emits "apparently conflicting signals", and generates a "tension between […] two […] opposed perspectives" that "is not likely to be banished by any reading of the poem"[2]. Unlike the *Commedia*, however, *Amorosa visione* seems unlikely ever to provide a coherent, systematic allegory legible from beginning to end[3].

Benvenuto da Imola, in his commentary on Dante's *Commedia* (1375-1383), refers to "the two lights of Florence – the one [i.e., Guido Cavalcanti] a philosopher, the other [i.e., Dante] a poet [*unus philosophus, alter poeta*]"[4]. This is an interesting but rather misleading distinction.

[1] The borrowings, calques, and recastings of the *Commedia* are everywhere and frequently obvious in *Amorosa visione*. Besides the copious notes in the edition in Vittore Branca's *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio* (cited below), one will find material on Boccaccio's imitations and alterations of Dante's poem in virtually all good scholarship on *Amorosa visione*. Perhaps the best recent treatment of *Amorosa visione* (including an exhaustive bibliography) is K. McKinley's in her *Chaucer's* House of Fame *and Its Boccaccian Intertexts*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto 2016, pp. 16-47. As McKinley says, "Boccaccio's story is not exclusively about love; instead, love appears to be a framework for his exploration of many other subjects" (p. 19). See also J. Usher, *Mural Morality in Tableaux Vivants: Amorosa visione*, in *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, ed. V. Kirkham, M. Sherberg, and J.L. Smarr, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2013, pp. 119-129. Useful bibliography is provided by J.C. Kreisel in his *Boccaccio's Corpus: Allegory, Ethics, and Vernacularity*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 2019, pp. 300-306.

[2] S. Huot, *Poetic Ambiguity and Reader Response in Boccacio's 'Amorosa Visione'*, in "Modern Philology", LXXXIII, no. 2, 1985, pp. 109-122 [p. 109]. The chief tension between two opposed perspectives in the *Commedia* is, broadly speaking, that between philosophy and religion.

[3] As V. Branca remarks, *Amorosa visione* displays a "sfaldarsi continuo di ogni preciso senso allegorico"; *L'Amorosa visione: tradizione, significati, fortuna*, in "Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa: Lettere, Storia e Filosofia", XI, no. 1, 1942, pp. 20-47 [p. 33].

[4] See R. Rea, *La 'Vita nuova' e le 'Rime'. 'Unus philosophus alter poeta': Un'ipotesi per Cavalcanti e Dante*, in E. Malato and A. Mazzucchi (a cura di), *Dante fra il settecentocinquantenario della nascita (2015) e il settecentenario della morte (2021)*, Salerno, Rome 2016, pp. 351-381.

The "philosopher" Cavalcanti wrote only poetry, while the "poet" Dante wrote a substantial amount of philosophy (*De monarchia*, *Convivio*, *Questio de aqua et terra*), alongside, of course, his highly philosophical *chef-d'oeuvre*. It is more accurate to say that both Cavalcanti and Dante aimed to be and were poet-philosophers or philosopher-poets. Now, whether Boccaccio was or considered himself a philosopher is an open question, much too large for the present brief article. Similarly, whether *Amorosa visione* is a philosophical allegory is too large a question to tackle here. Even narrowing the question down to an examination of the claim that *Amorosa visione* is a thoroughly Averroist allegory would exceed the limits of this article[5]. Instead, I will make the following more specific argument: influenced by Dante (himself influenced by Cavalcanti and Averroes), Boccaccio regards love and reason as two sides of the same coin[6]. Rationality – the essence of the human species – is an operation of loving and is a faculty of the imaginative-sensitive soul. *Amorosa visione* is not a parody of the *Commedia*; it is fully consonant with Dante's Cavalcantian-Averroist understanding of rational love.[7] Moreover, like Dante, Boccaccio insists that the highest human felicity is ethical, not intellectual.

There is some evidence that Boccaccio was conversant with neo-Aristotelian (i.e., Averroist/Radical Aristotelian) philosophy. In *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*, Boccaccio says that for centuries Aristotle had been unjustly overshadowed by a cloud of envy that greatly overvalued Plato and severely undervalued Aristotle; it is only thanks to Averroes that the clouds broke so that the sun of Aristotelian science might shine:

> È il vero che la scienza di questo famosissimo filosofo lungo tempo sotto il velamento d'una nuvola d'invidia di fortuna stette nascosa, in maraviglioso

[5] This claim is made by Antonio Gagliardi in the chapter on *Amorosa visione* in his *Giovanni Boccaccio: Poeta, filosofo, averroísta*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 1999. As is the case in his many highly valuable books on Averroism in late medieval Italian literature, Gagliardi's reading is somewhat limited by its failure to treat Averroes's thinking thoroughly and deeply. The gist of his reading of *Amorosa visione* is that Boccaccio rejects absolute chastity in favor of the lover's mental fantasy of loving and copulating with the lady; "Averroism", in this chapter, is understood very superficially, as meaning nothing more than sexual desire for an image rather than for a physical body.

[6] In *Amorosa visione*, Boccaccio flaunts his allegiance to Dante and praises his master in the strongest terms. In an episode highly reminiscent of Dante's Limbo and which begins in Canto 4 (just as Limbo is depicted in Canto 4 of *Inferno*), the narrator witnesses Dante, "a great poet" and "the glory of the muses", being crowned with laurel (5.70-88). Praise for Dante continues in the verses that open the following canto: he is the "*gloria de' Fiorentin*" (6.14), and there is a *terzina* that seems to represent Dante as a kind of Christ (6.16-18).

[7] For rational love in Cavalcanti, with some reference to Dante, see G.B. Stone, *Guido Cavalcanti: Poet of the Rational Animal*, Routledge, New York 2020. Further references to *Guido Cavalcanti: Poet of the Rational Animal* will be indicated with the abbreviation *RA*.

> prezo continuandosi appo i valenti uomini la scienza di Platone; né è assai certo, se a venire ancora fosse Averois, se ella sotto quella medesima si dimorasse. Costui adunque, se vero è quello che io ho talvolta udito, fu colui che prima; rotta la nuvola, fece aparir la sua luce e venirla in pregio; in tanto che oggi quasi altra filosofia che la sua non è dagl'intendenti seguita.[8]
>
> (It is true that, for a long time, the science of this most famous philosopher [i.e., Aristotle] remained hidden under a cloud of jealousy for glory, with Plato's science continuing to be extraordinarily prized by worthy men of science; nor is it certain that [Aristotle's science] would not still remain hidden under that veil if Averroes had not come along. Thus, if what I have sometimes heard is true, this latter [i.e., Averroes] was the first who chased away the cloud and made the light [of Aristotle's science] shine and become prized–so much so that today virtually no philosophy other than [Aristotle's] is pursued by intelligent people.)

Here Boccaccio reports what he has heard ("*udito*") others say about Averroes; yet this does not amount to his denying having read or read about Averroes, since what he has learned through hearsay is an account pertaining to intellectual history: Averroes's distinction as the revelator of Aristotle's science. Boccaccio refrains from saying that he only knows about Averroes's or Averroist teachings through hearsay.

The *Decameron*'s tale about Cavalcanti attests that Boccaccio, as a man of letters, had at the very least read some Averroist texts: the tale is generated by a passage from Siger of Brabant, one of the leading Radical Aristotelians at Paris in the age of Aquinas: *cum vivere sine litteris mors sit et vivi hominis sepultura* ("For to live without letters is death and is the grave of living men")[9]. I will begin my treatment of rational love in *Amorosa visione* by discussing its revision of this Latin Averroist commonplace. First, however, a look at *Decameron* 6.9 will be helpful.

In the *Decameron*'s brief tale about Cavalcanti, Guido subtly mocks a band of young aristocrats who are menacing him. After launching a sharp insult that only one among the gang understands, Guido leaps over a sepulcher and escapes:

[8] G. Padoan (a cura di), *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*, vol. 6 of V. Branca (a cura di), *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, Mondadori, Milan 1965, p. 233; trans. mine.
[9] See G. Inglese, *L'intelletto e l'amore: Studi sulla letteratura italiana del Due e Trecento*, La Nuova Italia, Milano 2000, p. 223; see also K. Flasch, *Attributionsatheismus in Boccaccios 'Decameron' VI, 9: Guido Cavalcanti*, in F. Niewöhner and O. Pluta (a cura di), *Atheismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1999, p. 126. On the Averroism of *Decameron* VI.9, see *RA*, pp. 34-37. For a Heideggerian reading of the tale, see G.B. Stone, *The Ethics of Nature in the Middle Ages: On Boccaccio's Poetaphysics*. St. Martin's Press, New York 1998, pp. 107-12.

> A' quali Guido, da lor veggendosi chiuso prestamente disse: "Signori, voi mi potete dire a casa vostra ciò che vi piace"; e posta la mano sopra una di quelle arche, che grandi erano, sì come colui che leggerissimo era, prese un salto e fusi gittato dall'altra parte, e sviluppatosi da loro se n'andò.[10]
>
> (Guido, seeing himself hemmed in by them, answered promptly, "Gentleman, you may say to me what you please in your own house"; then, laying his hand on one of those great tombs and being very nimble of body, he took a leap and, alighting on the other side, made off, having rid himself of them.)

A certain Messer Bruno Brunelleschi, as his fellows are saying that Guido is out of his mind and his words nonsense, explains precisely the point of the "outstanding natural philosopher" (*ottimo filosofo naturale*) Cavalcanti's insult:

> "Gli smemorati siete voi, se voi non l'avete inteso: egli ci ha onestamente e in poche parole detta la maggior villania del mondo, per ciò che, se voi riguarderete bene, queste arche sono le case de' morti, per ciò che in esse si pongono e dimorano i morti; le quali egli dice che son nostra casa, a dimostrarci che noi e gli altri uomini idioti e non letterati siamo, a comparazion di lui e degli altri uomini scienziati, peggio che uomini morti, e per ciò, qui essendo, noi siamo a casa nostra".[11]
>
> ("It is you who are the dimwits, if you have not understood him. He has courteously and in a few words given us the sharpest rebuke in the world; for, if you consider aright, these tombs are the houses of the dead, seeing that the dead are laid and abide therein, and these, says he, are our house, meaning thus to show us that we and other ignorant and unlettered men are, compared with him and other men of learning, worse than dead folk; wherefore, being here, we are in our own house.")

Boccaccio's tale attributes to Guido a distinction between the living and the dead that is not merely literal and trivial: while it is true that everyone does die, the "life" that really matters does not mean life, and "death" does not mean death. Rather, through study and intellectual effort, humans who acquire knowledge in the arts and sciences (*uomini scienziati*), people of letters, may enjoy some degree of connection – if only temporarily – with the realm of eternal realities. To quote Siger once more: *cum vivere sine litteris mors sit et vivi hominis sepultura*.

More importantly, "life" in Cavalcanti's *Donna me prega* does not mean merely living; rather, it means living up to the essence and perfection of

[10] V. Branca (a cura di), *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, cit., p, 564; trans. quoted from G.B. Stone, *The Ethics of Nature*, cit., p. 112.
[11] *Ibid*.

the human species: living ethically, loving rationally, freely desiring and choosing to pursue this image rather than that one[12]. (What is the narrator's itinerary in *Amorosa visione* other than the pursuit of images – paintings – through which he gradually elevates his ethical aims?) This is precisely the *libero arbitrio* that symmetrically frames the core of Dante's *Purgatorio*, and it is the very lesson on ethics that Virgil teaches in the eighteenth canto of that canticle. The narrator-protagonist of *Amorosa visione* is one who, faced with a choice between this and that, puts into practice his autonomous *libero arbitrio* at every crossroads from beginning to end.

From the mid-thirteenth century and after, the thought expressed by Siger's phrase goes hand-in-hand with a distinction between humans who are truly human and humans who are animals, "brutes" or "beasts". Grounded in two passages from Averroes (one from his *Long Commentary on Aristotle's 'De anima',* the other in the Prooemium to his *Long Commentary on Aristotle's 'Physics'*), this is a distinction between humans who have made their possible intellect actual and those (sub-human) humans who have not[13]. For James of Douai (circa 1275 CE), asserting that each human has a possible intellect is by no means an assertion that each human is thereby immortal, since only the full actualization of the possible intellect that all non-defective humans are born with might endow humans with a degree of immortality. Speaking of humans who fail to make their possible intellects actual, James says this:

> *They are beasts, and they scarcely differ at all from beasts.* And they have only possible intellect. And that is exceedingly little, nor do these humans merit being called humans, just as a possible bench does not merit being called a bench. In fact, *such humans are worse than beasts*, because they do not pursue that for which they were born.[14]

Albertus Magnus, the primary progenitor of Latin Averroism (owing in large part to his fully embracing the teachings of al-Farabi's "Letter on Intellect"[15]), constantly reiterates that only those humans who, through philosophizing, transform their possible intellects into actual or "acquired" (*adeptus*) intellects, ultimately intellecting not just the intelligible forms of natural entities but also the separate substances (i.e., divine Intelligences), are truly human: "For only in this way is a human human [*homo est homo*] and only thus are [specifically] human things per-

[12] See *RA*, pp. 210-213.
[13] See L.M. Bianchi, *Filosofi, uomini e bruti: Note per la storia di un'antropologia 'averroista'*, in "Rinascimento", XXXII, 1992, pp. 185-201.
[14] Quoted in L.M. Bianchi, *op. cit.*, p. 110; English trans. mine; emphasis added.
[15] See *RA*, pp. 85-96 and p. 117, note 35.

formed. Indeed, observe that those who have not acquired this intellect […] do not understand any more than beasts [*bestiae*] do"[16].

Now, in all these instances of Latin Averroism, what separates felicitous humans from beasts, truly living humans from dead humans, is *intellect*. Thus, Boethius of Dacia says the following in his *De summo bono*:

> Consequently, the greatest possible felicity for humans is to be found in their intellect. For this reason, humans who devote themselves solely to the pleasures of the senses, to such a degree that they neglect the goods of the intellect, are to be pitied greatly. In fact, they are so dedicated to the pleasures of the senses that they never seek to learn what is the good of the intellect itself. Aristotle rails against such people when he asserts: "Woe to you *humans who are numbered on par with beasts*, for you don't understand that there is something in you that is divine." The Philosopher himself, then, calls intellect something divine in humans; only intellect, in truth, is worthy of being such. Just as only that which is best among the totality of all beings can be divine, so do we call that which is best in humans [i.e., intellect] divine.[17]

It is this identification of the non-bestial in humans as *intellect* the Boccaccio challenges in *Amorosa visione*. Surely – given the unceasing late medieval debate concerning love versus intellect – it is no coincidence that the work's title begins with *Amor*.

As we turn to *Amorosa visione*, in lieu of a summary (those may be found elsewhere[18]), here I will simply make some remarks relevant to what follows below. The narrative is a dream-vision wherein the narrator (explicitly named as Giovanni Boccaccio in the three lyric poems that precede Canto 1) continually balks at and frequently rejects following the advice of a would-be guide, a lady who means to save him by leading him briskly to a summit that seems to represent salvation and the attainment of the highest good, which in her view demands renunciation of worldly goods and pleasure. Throughout, the narrator goes wherever he wants to go; his will is autonomous, and his guide has little or no power to make him act as she wishes. At various moments the narrator finds his guide quite annoying. At the opening of Canto 38, for example, he shows her no deference; when she warns him not to enter a beautiful garden, he in effect tells her to mind her own business: "*A te che face/l'entrar là dentro*

[16] Albertus Magnus, *De anima* 3.3.11; quoted in B. Nardi, *Studi di filosofia medieval*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome 1979, p. 116; English translation mine.
[17] English translation mine, from F. Bottin (a cura di), *Boezio di Dacia Giacomo da Pistoia: Ricerca della felicitá e piaceri dell'intelletto*, Nardini Editore, Florence 1989, p. 50; emphasis added.
[18] See McKinley, *op. cit.,* pp. 25-28; Usher, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-122.

*ed un poco vedere*" ("Why do you care/if I enter and look around a bit?"; [38.1-2]). Thus, one of the poem's allegorical facets is the insistence that humans are in charge of their own actions: virtue must be freely chosen. The fact that two-thirds of the poem's fifty cantos consist in the narrator's ekphrastic accounts of his experiences viewing painted murals indicates the preeminent importance of images as motors of freely willed actions. In two separate parts of the poem the narrator encounters his beloved lady, she whom he truly loves beyond compare and who exceeds all others in beauty, nobility, virtue, and wisdom. He first encounters her as a painted image, accompanied by Love, in one of the murals that he views (15.1-16.51); toward the end of the poem, he meets and spends time with his beloved lady "in the flesh" (so to speak, bearing in mind that the narrative is a dream-vision.) This encounter, which begins in Canto 44, is preceded in Canto 43 by the narrator's catching a glimpse of his beloved seated among a number of other ladies, "discoursing together of love" ("*insieme d'amor ragionando*" [43.12]); this phrase is virtually a quotation from one of Dante's sonnets addressed to Cavalcanti (*Guido, i' vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io*; Dante's phrase is "*ragionar sempre d'amore*"), a phrase notable for its joining together *amor* and *ragione*, love and [discursive] reason). This scene is preceded by a prelude of two cantos (41 and 42) in which the narrator, hearing music and song, views a number of lovely ladies – his beloved lady's retinue – dancing and enjoying themselves in a green meadow. The three brief passages from *Amorosa visione* that I will treat below (42.73-75; 16.25-36; 41.73-81) are all located in these two parts of the poem that revolve around the narrator's presence with or near his beloved lady.

Let us first look at a *terzina* from Canto 42. These are words from "a sweet song" (*un dolce cantare*; 42.58) that the narrator hears while gazing at his beloved lady's lovely companions:

> "Vita ch'è *senza amore* nulla vale,
> non altrimente che se quella fosse
> *priva di senso* o di *bruto animale*".[19] (42.73-75)
>
> ("A life that is *without love* is worth nothing, no different than if it were *deprived of sense* or than the life of a *brute animal*".)

[19] Quotations of *Amorosa visione* are from the "B" text, A. Balduino and P.G. Ricci (a cura di), in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, cit.; emphases mine. English translations are based on (but sometimes modified from) the English verse translation in the bilingual Italian-English edition: Giovanni Boccaccio, *Amorosa Visione*, trans. R. Hollander, T. Hampton, and M. Frankel, University Press of New England, Hanover and London 1986. On the "A" and "B" texts, see McKinley, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-25. See also F. Collussi, *Sulla seconda redazione dell'Amorosa visione*, in "Studi sul Boccaccio", vol. XXVI, 1998, pp. 187-263.

This *terzina* invokes two of the three Aristotelian levels of natural living beings (i.e., the three general types of soul): the vegetative and the sensitive-imaginative; it does not mention the highest of the three – the one that is human. A plant is "*priva di senso*", possessing the powers of reproduction and nutrition but not sense perception. Animals possess, in addition to those vegetative powers, the powers of sense perception, and some also possess powers of locomotion, while some also possess an additional power: imagination. The human soul possesses all the vegetative and animal powers, plus the power or powers that are human, normally called "rational".

I say the powers that are human because of the ambiguity and equivocity of "rational soul". The rational animal has two powers that are often both loosely referred to as "rational". Aristotle calls these *nous* (intelligence, understanding, thought) and *logos* (reason, speech, discourse). In late medieval Latin philosophy, this becomes the distinction between *intellectus* and *ratio*. These terms – especially *ratio* – are often used loosely, as if they were interchangeable. Strictly speaking, *intellectus* is the power to grasp the fully abstracted universal forms of things – i.e., to think without images or words, to see and know intelligible forms. *Ratio* is the faculty that, discerning among images, reasons to determine what things one ought to do and how to do those things. *Intellectus* pertains to the theoretical sciences (physics [natural science], mathematics, and metaphysics); *ratio* pertains to practical philosophy – i.e., ethics.

Averroes denies that humans have *intellectus* that is divine, eternal, immortal. The highest essential human power for Averroes is *ratio*. He is willing to call this power "practical intellect", but only with the caveat that this is not really intellect.

Averroes's most radical teaching is that there is not, strictly speaking, a third and highest level of soul, a "rational soul" that belongs only to humans, is intellectual, and automatically makes all humans immortal. In consonance with Averroes, Boccaccio refers to only two of the three categories of soul in this *terzina*: the plant soul, which has no powers of sense perception, and the animal soul, which has no capacity to love. By implication, Boccaccio characterizes the power that is human as the power to love. Boccaccio does not refer to a third and higher level of soul because there is no such thing. A person who loves operates with the sensitive-imaginative (i.e., animal) soul. The so-called "rational soul", for Averroes, is a specifically human faculty of the animal soul – of, that is, the sensitive-imaginative soul. It is a mode of imagination that operates at a level higher than that of all other animals – a mode that nonetheless belongs to an animal soul and that entails that humans

necessarily share animality with beasts[20]. (The Latin Averroists's distinction between truly human humans – who are truly human because they make their possible intellects actual – and animals is a betrayal of Averroes's actual teachings). Thus, both our theoretical science and our practical actions are without exception bound up with imagination, not with intellect[21]. Moreover, ethics/virtue simply cannot exist without this solely human mode of animal imagination.

We can see, then, that Boccaccio rejects the Latin Averroists' slogan proclaiming that the authentic human essence is *intellectus*: The slogan "A life that is without *intellect* is worth nothing, no different than if were deprived of sense or than the life of a brute animal" becomes, in *Amorosa visione*, "A life that is without *love* is worth nothing, no different than if it were deprived of sense or than the life of a brute animal". Love supplants intellect. At the same time ethical happiness/perfection supplants scientific happiness/perfection as the ultimate felicity, the essence, of the human species.

The key to understanding Averroes's anthropology is to recognize that he does not regard the acquisition of theoretical knowledge (natural science, mathematics, and above all, metaphysics) as the *telos* common to all members of the human species. Hence, the capacity for intellection cannot be the essential human form. This is crystal clear in a passage from Averroes's *Long Commentary on Aristotle's 'Metaphysics'*:

> The perfection of humans [*complementum hominum*] is achieved only in a community, and the community is only achieved through goodness [*bonitatem*; ethical excellence]. Thus, *it is necessary that humans be good*, but *it is not necessary that they know the truth* [*Esse igitur bonos est necessarium, et non est necessarium eos scire veritatem*].[22]

The human faculty to know the truth is not necessary for the perfection of humans; not being necessary, it is accidental and cannot possibly

[20] "Man remains man just as little when we take away his animality as when we take away his rationality, for animality is a condition of rationality and when the condition is removed the conditioned is removed equally"; *Averroes' Tahafut Al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence) Volumes I and II*, trans. S. Van Den Bergh, The E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, Cambridge 1954 [reprinted in paperback, 2008], p. 331.

[21] For Averroes, the highest attainment of human science provides nearly, but not entirely, imageless abstracted intelligible forms that are eternally illuminated by the Active Intellect and eternally intellected by the Possible Intellect. In other words, Averroes answers "no" to Aristotle's wondering whether humans can ever think without images. On Aristotle's question, see *RA*, pp. 80-81, p. 133.

[22] Averroes's commentary on Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 994b32ff, in *Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois Commentariis*, 11 vols., Venice 1562-74; repr. Minerva, Frankfurt am Main 1962; trans. mine; emphases added.

be the human essence. Since *intellectus* is not essential for humans, human immortality (if there is such a thing) can only be accidental, since it is *intellectus* that, the philosophers agree, is the divine element of humans. Rather, it is goodness (ethical virtue) that is necessary for human perfection. The human essence is ethical, not intellectual. Ethics is the specifically human mode of loving; hence, the human essence is the possession of the faculty for the actual operation of loving: the rational (not intellectual) faculty. Replacing intellect with practical reason as the defining essential human form is precisely the core of Averroes's anthropology and of Cavalcanti's and Dante's ethics.

In the neo-Aristotelian tradition, from al-Farabi through Maimonides to late medieval and Renaissance European Jewish rationalism, goodness (virtue, ethics) is always distinct and separate from truth/science (just as the *Commedia*'s Virgil is distinct and separate from its Beatrice[23]) and is always inextricably bound up with imagination. Averroes is certainly no exception in this regard[24].

[23] This separation of the good from the true is the basis for the tension in the *Commedia* between two opposed perspectives that I mentioned in the opening paragraph above. Virgil teaches virtue, and Beatrice teaches truth. It can be maintained that, for Dante, his poem's most serious and authentic distinction (represented allegorically by the distinction between Virgil and Beatrice) is not that between reason and faith (i.e., religion and science; philosophy and theology; natural reason and divinely inspired knowledge of "things unseen") but rather the distinction *within philosophy alone* between ethics and science (i.e., practical philosophy and theoretical philosophy; *praxis* and *theoria*; doing/acting and seeing/knowing). The two happinesses that Aristotle regards (in Book One of *Nicomachean Ethics*) as the only real ones – politics and contemplation – are never far from Dante's mind; they are, one might say, the environment within which the *Commedia* dwells. The tension to which I refer is not between the good and the true (neither of which can substitute for the other) but between two possible readings of the *Commedia*: a Christian one and a Radical Aristotelian one. Both readings are valid, both are in accordance with the text, because Dante intended both; but he did so for two different audiences – the former including multitudes and the latter only an elite few. See G.B. Stone, *Dante's 'Commedia', Islamic Rationalism, and the Enumeration of the Sciences*, in "Doctor Virtualis", XII, 2013, pp. 135-67; G.B. Stone, *Dante's Pluralism and the Islamic Philosophy of Religion*, Palgrave, New York 2006.

[24] As Roger Arnaldez explains, for Averroes, the faculty of practical intellect is always bound up with imagination: "In humans, images are the moving force of the practical rational faculty. Practical intelligibles are thus always linked with images, which permits reasonable action to take place in the world of perceptions and experience. Thus the 'practical intelligibles' are not to be thought of as eternal truths that can be the objects contemplated by speculative [theoretical] knowledge; rather, they can be 'generated' and are 'corruptible', and they only appear to humans in concrete situations […] Averroes concludes: 'If these practical intelligibles existed without the imaginative soul, their existence would be vain and useless'. Thanks to this faculty [of practical intellect], humans love and hate, live in society and form bonds of friendship. It is the source of the moral virtues, 'because the existence of these virtues is nothing more than that of the images by which we are moved to practice virtuous deeds'" (*Averroes, un rationaliste en Islam*, Editions Balland, Paris 1998, pp. 86-88, trans. mine).

If ethics/virtue/rational action is always bound up with images, so also is it always bound up with love/desire. The foundation for the reciprocity of reason and love is grounded on Aristotle's insistence that virtuous action, freely chosen, results from the interaction or symbiosis between desire (love) and thinking (reasoning): "Good action is an end [*telos*], and desire aims at this. Hence choice is either desiderative thought or thinking desire"[25]. In other words, as Cavalcanti teaches so magisterially in *Donna me prega*, love and reason are inseparable[26].

Now that we have established that rationality, the human essence, rather than being set apart from or in opposition to desire/love, is instead an element belonging to a tripartite nexus (Desire [Love] – Reason [Virtue/Ethics] – Imagination), we will turn to reading three brief passages from the narrative of *Amorosa visione*.

The three acrostic lyric poems that precede the narrative do not only foreshadow and dictate the form of the poem that follows; they also foreshadow the most important of its themes. For it is precisely the above-mentioned nexus that stands out thematically in the three lyrics taken as a whole. The first stanza of the opening sonnet speaks of both the form and the content of the work that follows. This content is termed "*la fantasia ch'è nella mente*" ("the imaged construct in my mind"; verse 4). Just as Dante does in the *Commedia*'s central canto (*Purgatorio* 17), Boccaccio here uses *fantasia*, the Greek-derived synonym for *imaginatio*, *once* and in proximity to multiple uses of his preferred Latin-derived lexicon, of which there are two instances in the second acrostic sonnet: "*Il dolce immaginar che 'l mio chor face* ("the sweet imagining that my heart[27] makes"; verse 1); "*pur nello 'immaginar vostra biltate*" ("nonetheless by imagining your beauty"; verse 10)[28]. This is probably not a coincidence, given the remarkable extent and depth of Boccaccio's mining the *Commedia* for

[25] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139b4-5. See *RA*, pp. 187-188.

[26] Readers familiar with the history of interpretations of *Donna me prega* and the host of complacent second-hand characterizations of the poem's meaning will realize that my claim here is unprecedented, since all previous interpretations, whether sophisticated or simplistic, agree that Cavalcanti's point is that love is irrational and destroys our reasoning faculty. I make my case at great length in *RA*, Part Five ("Long Commentary on *Donna me prega*").

[27] It would be an error to take "heart" in the common modern sense of the seat of emotion and to read into Boccacio's text the "heart versus head", "love versus reason" dichotomy, since for Aristotle the heart is the locus of mind, while the brain functions merely as a sort of air-conditioner that cools pneumatic spirits. See M. Oleksowicz, *Aristotle on the Heart and Brain*, in "European Journal of Science and Theology", XIV, 2018, pp. 77-94. For the brain's refrigerative function, see Aristotle, *Parts of Animals* 652a31-652b27.

[28] These are the instances of the lexicon of image/imagination in *Purgatorio* 17: *imagine* (verse 7); *imaginativa* (verse 13); *imagine* (verse 21); *fantasia* (verse 25); *imagine* (verse 31); *imaginar* (verse 43).

resources used in composing *Amorosa visione*.[29] Following these three mentions of imagination, the second sonnet introduces the word *amore* for the first time (verse 14). Then the opening lines of the third and final acrostic lyric, which name Boccaccio's intended audience, introduce virtue for the first time ("*o gratiosi/animi virtuosi*"; "O gracious virtuous minds"; verses 1-2), and the lines that follow re-emphasize love ("*amor*" [verse 3], "*amorosi*" [verse 6]; "*Amor*" [verse 18]). There is a very similar movement and constellation at the heart of the *Commedia*: from imagination in the first part of Canto 17, to Virgil's lecture on love and ethics in the latter part of Canto 17, to Virgil's treatise on ethics/virtue in the first half of Canto 18. Moreover, that treatise itself recapitulates the nexus "Imagination – Love – Virtue": Virgil explains that this nexus is the foundation of Aristotelian ethics.[30]

The following passage is from the narrator's first encounter with his beloved lady, who is accompanied by Love. Here the narrator is gaz-

[29] Stunningly, Boccaccio appears to have perceived one of the *Commedia*'s most nearly invisible mathematical secrets. In *Vita nuova*, Dante tells us that Beatrice's special number is 9. He takes this to signify that, just like Christ, she is her own maker (*fattore* ["factor"]), since 3 multiplied by itself makes 9: the factors of 9 (3 times 3) are self-identical. In *Inferno*, the number of verses between the first use and the last use of the word *amor/amore* is 3993. Dante intentionally and brilliantly contrived to delimit love in the *Commedia*'s first canticle in accordance with Beatrice's numbers (3 and 9) such that a totality, 3993, would unify two units that mirror each other: 39 ↔ 93. Not content to stop here, Dante makes sure that the first and last use of "love" occur in the 39th verse of their respective cantos (*Inf*. 1.39: *amor*; *Inf*. 30.39: *amore*). Moreover, *amor/amore* appear 5 times before *Inferno* 5 and 5 times after *Inferno* 5, while in *Inferno* 5 (the famous canto of love) the word occurs 9 times. The numbers with which Dante plays this spectacular game are 5, 3, and 9. Boccaccio knew this: the narrator of *Amorosa visione* tells us that he courted his beloved lady for "Five [5 ] times three [3] by nine [9]days" ("*Cinque fiate tre via nove giorni*"; 46.16). These three factors, 5, 3, and 9, are the elements of Dante's astonishing mathematical game in *Inferno*. How else can one account for Boccaccio's strange and enigmatic verse other than to regard it as informed by Dante's seemingly divine artistry? We cannot say whether Boccaccio discovered this secret on his own or whether this knowledge was transmitted orally, kabbalistically, from its source, its creator, Dante himself, whom Boccaccio regards as a sort of Christ (see note 7, above). The note to the bilingual Italian-English edition of *Amorosa visione* puts the reader on the right path, but it severely underestimates the magnificence of Boccaccio's verse (46.16), viewing it as a vaguely suggestive allusion to *Vita nuova*: "Perhaps these 135 days […] are meant to offer a sort of playful response to similar precise calculations found throughout Dante's *Vita Nuova*" (Giovanni Boccaccio, *Amorosa Visione*, trans. Hollander et al., p. 245.)

[30] Virgil explains that we are moved to virtuous action by producing an image (*intenzione*: *Purg*. 18.23) in the mind and by loving/desiring to pursue the imagined thing, provided that doing so is in accord with the first principles of *praxis* (*le prime notizie*; *Purg*. 18.56). I discuss first principles of *praxis* in the main body of this article below. On *intentio imaginata* as the motor of ethics, and *intentio* as a scientific term for "image", see *RA*, pp. 178-85, pp. 204-11. Virgil concludes his lecture on rational love as the foundation (*fondo*) of ethics by paying homage to Aristotle and the Peripatetics for giving the world a scientific psychological explanation of that foundation (*Purg*. 18.67-69).

ing at her image painted on a mural. The first three verses are spoken by his beloved; as in *Purgatorio*, not only can the narrator see a depiction, but he can also hear the depicted figure's speech, a phenomenon that Dante calls "*visible parlare*" (*Purg.* 10.95):

> "Tal qual or mi vedete giovinetta
> *quivi* accompagno *Amor che mi disia*:
> al ciel ritornarò po' che m'aspetta".
> Ancor più intesi, ma la fantasia
> nol mi ridice, sì gran parte presi
> di gioia dentro nella mente mia
> lei rimirando e' suoi modi cortesi,
> il dolce sguardo e la mira biltate,
> della qual mai a pien dir non porriesi.
> Dallato a lei Amor con *voglie innate*
> vidi miralla, che nel bello aspetto
> tutto si dipingeva di *pietate*. (*Amorosa visione* 16.25-36)

("Youthful, as you now see me, *here* I accompany *Love, who desires me*: then I will return to heaven, which is waiting for me". I heard even more, but my imagination does not retell it to me, since so much joy took a place in my mind, looking at her and her courteous manners, her sweet glance and wonderful beauty, of which enough could never be said. Beside her, I saw Love looking at her with innate desires – at she whose beautiful face was entirely painted with *compassion* [*pietate*].)

The relation between Love and the narrator's beloved in *Amorosa visione* is quite unique. In the previous canto, the narrator tells us that Love seemed as if he were falling in love with the narrator's lady: "*Amore parea di lei s'inamorasse*" ("Love seemed to be falling in love with her"; 15.75). Here in Canto 16 the lady proclaims that Love loves her: "*quivi accompagno Amor che mi disia*" ("Here I accompany Love who desires me"; verse 26). Whereas Cavalcanti's enigmatic Love most often functions as a mediator between the lover and the lady, that Love nonetheless can come and go with the lady, whether she is "up there" in the superlunary realm of the divine or "down here" in the sublunary realm of nature; Love scarcely is compelled to desire her[31]. What stands out here in *Amorosa visione* is the separate *loci* wherein dwell the lady and Love: she dwells in the sky (*al ciel* [in heaven]; verse 27); Love is down here (*quivi*; verse 26) on earth. This world, our human world, is the only realm where Love accompanies the lady, who will soon return to her appointed super-terrestri-

[31] See, for example, *RA,* pp. 130-134, a reading of Cavalcanti's *Chi è questa che vèn, ch'ogn'om la mira*.

al dwelling. And this is necessarily the case, since only humans are ethical (i.e., loving)[32]. This passage also tells us how Love operates and identifies Love's actions and aim: Love looks at an image (the lady's painted face; recall that Love itself here is in a painting [the mural], and so the lady's face appears as a painting in a painting, an image in an image), a painting depicting *pietade* (verses 34-36). This is the compassion, charity, and positive social/political engagement exemplified by the famous "pious Aeneas." *Pietade*, Dante tells us, is nothing less than that which activates all virtuous actions, which "*fa risplendere ogni altra bontade col lume suo*" ("with its light makes all other goodnesses shine"); more than that, *pietade* is for Dante nothing less than practical intellect (i.e., reason) itself, and thus nothing less than the human essence[33]. Positing that the narrator's beloved is virtue/ethics, we can see the virtual identity of love and virtue. As the lady tells us regarding Love: "*risplende in me tanto il suo fuoco,/ che talor molti credon ch'io sia ello/avenga che da lui a me sia poco*" ("his flame so shines in me that at times many believe that I am he, since there is little that separates me from him"; 16.13-15). Here we detect Aristotle's refusal to decouple reason and desire, and we confirm the bond between the first two terms of the nexus discussed above: Love – Reason (i.e., Virtue/Ethics). The third term is present here as the lady's painted face, and thus the passage displays the tripartite nexus: (Love – Reason [i.e., Virtue/Ethics] – Imagination). Images move us to pursue acts of *pietade*, and all virtuous (and vile) actions are moved by images. The reader cannot help but recall *Purgatorio* 10, where, along with *Purgatorio* 17, Dante most emphatically marks the *Commedia*'s second canticle as the canticle of imagination[34]. Boccaccio, writing a poem that largely comprises the narrator's relating his experience of viewing sculpted images, in effect conceives *Amorosa visione* as a supersized version of *Purgatorio*'s fundamental canto of the image: *imagine* (*Purg.* 10.39); *imaginata* (*Purg.*10.4); *imaginato* (*Purg.* 10.62); *imagini* (*Purg.* 10.98). *Purgatorio* is the canticle of imaged virtues and vices (i.e., imaged ethics) and that of love/reason: Virgil's major philosophical lecture, delivered at the center of Dante's poem and framed symmetrically by the phrase *libero arbitrio*[35], explains

[32] The notion that only humans are ethical is a commonplace of Islamic and Jewish rationalism: animals don't choose freely, and separate substances never change, never desire something other, and hence never make choices.

[33] *Convivio* 2.10.6. Text from A. Frisardi (a cura di), Dante, *Convivio: A Dual-Language Critical Edition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2018, p. 94.

[34] See G.B. Stone, *Dante and the 'Falasifa': Religion as Imagination*, in "Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society", CXXV, 2007, pp. 133-56 (reprinted with slight revisions in G.B Stone, *Dante and the Falasifa: Religion as Imagination*, in J.M. Ziolkowski, ed., *Dante and Islam*, Fordham University Press, New York 2014, pp. 114-132).

[35] As Charles Singleton was apparently the first to disclose (*The Poet's Number at the*

the rationality of loving. The gist of Virgil's explanation is precisely the gist of Cavalcanti's *Donna me prega*: an insistence on the ethical faculty – the human essence – as the capacity for loving rationally.

Let us return to the last *terzina* of the passage from *Amorosa visione* 16 quoted just above:

> Dallato a lei Amor con *voglie innate*
> vidi miralla, che nel bello aspetto
> tutto *si dipingeva* di *pietate*.
>
> (Beside her, I saw Love looking at her with *innate desires* – at she whose beautiful face was entirely painted with *compassion* [*pietate*].)

Love's desires (*voglie*) for images of *pietate*, images of that which gives a light that "makes all other goodnesses shine" (Dante from *Convivio*, quoted above) are *innate* (*innate*; verse 34). Ethics is a matter of innate desires/loves/wishes, the proximate causes of which are images (for example, the painted image of *pietate* that is the lady's face in the eyes – and then in the imagination – of the lover, who in this case is Love itself).

With the presence of *innate* here (verse 34), deployed in the context of will/love/desire (*voglie*; verse 34), image (*si dipingeva*; verse 36), and goodness (*pietate*; verse 36), Boccaccio surely has in mind the core lesson on ethics taught by Virgil in the center (that is, the most important *locus*) of the *Commedia*. Here are the verses that end that lesson:

> Or perché a *questa* ogn'altra si raccoglia
> *innata* v'è la virtù che consiglia
> e dell'assenso dè tener la soglia.
> Quest'è il principio là onde si piglia
> ragion di meritare in voi, secondo
> che i buoni e ' rei amori accoglie e viglia.
> Color che ragionando andaro al fondo
> s'accorser d'essa *innata* libertate
> però moralità lasciaro al mondo.[36] (*Purg*. 18.61-69)
> (So that to *this* all others may conform, there is *innate* [*innata*] in you

*Center*, "MLN", vol. LXXX, no. 1, 1965, pp. 1-10), the phrase *libero arbitrio* appears 25 *terzine* before the first verse of *Purgatorio* 17 and 25 *terzine* after the last verse of *Purgatorio* 17, thus framing the *Commedia*'s central canto with exact mathematical symmetry. We should add that this careful architecture indicates the centrality of ethics in Dante's thinking.

[36] Quotations of the *Commedia* are from Dante Alighieri, *Commedia. Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*: *Revisione del testo e commento di Giorgio Inglese*, 3 voll., Roma, Carocci 2016. English translations are based on but often modified from the English verse translation in Dante, *Purgatorio*, trans. J. Hollander and R. Hollander, Doubleday, New York 2003.

> the faculty that counsels and ought to guard the threshold of assent. This is the principle from which your merit [i.e., virtuous actions] derives, insofar as [this principle] welcomes and stands watch over good and wicked loves. Those who in their reasoning reached the foundation recognized this *innate* [*innata*] freedom and thus gave moral philosophy/ethics to the world.)

The "this" (*questa*) of line 61 is the specifically human "primal desire" (*prima voglia*; *Purg*. 18.59), our inclination to act in accordance with the first principles of *praxis* (*le prime notizie*; *Purg*. 18.56), to be stimulated toward "first desirables" (*primi appetibili*; *Purg*. 18.57) – toward those good actions that do not contradict the first principles of *praxis*. Our primal desire is the desire to desire in accordance with our first notions of acting well: humans are naturally inclined to be good. Because this primal desire is natural (innate, inborn), it is not ethical: we have no choice but to be born this way (*questa prima voglia/merto di lode o di biasmo non cape* ["this primal will does not garner praise or blame"]; *Purg*. 18.59-60).

The "this" of verse 64's "this is" (*quest'è*) is not the "this" (*questa*) of verse 61, and verse 64's *principio* is something different from the first principles. Dante's phrase for first principles is *prime notizie* ("first notions"), notions which I will discuss further below. Verse 64's "this" is the rational faculty (practical intellect), "the faculty that counsels and ought to guard the threshold of assent." The principle of the ethical is our power to choose between actions that are in harmony with the first principles of praxis and actions that are not. This choice is a judgment concerning an "intention" (*intenzione* [Latin *intentio*]) – that is, an image. Images move us to act well or badly. We act well when we subject the image to the judgment of the rational faculty, which discerns whether the action stimulated by the image is in accordance with the first notions of *praxis* – provided that we adhere to that judgment. The rational animal is the animal that passes judgment on its images of loves, discerning between good loves and bad loves (*i buoni e ' rei amori*; verse 66) Hence, as Cavalcanti insists so brilliantly in *Donna me prega*, love and rationality are inseparable.

This passage is the culmination of Virgil's lecture on loving rationally (i.e., on being human) that extends from the second half of Canto 17 through the first half of Canto 18 and that is preceded by Dante's enthusiastic apostrophe, "*O imaginativa!*" (*Purg*. 17.13)[37]. What Virgil calls *la virtù che consiglia* is the rational faculty, and it is specifically and uniquely human. We can

[37] Here Dante is marveling about the fact that our imaginative faculty can sometimes behold images of things that have not first been perceived by the senses, that it can be illuminated or enlightened from above, from the superlunary metaphysical realm. Dante is thinking of true prophecy as understood by Islamic and Jewish rationalists. See G.B. Stone, *Dante and the 'Falasifa': Religion as Imagination*, cit.

call that faculty practical intellect if we wish, provided that we recognize that it is not really *intellectus*. That faculty is innate (*innata*; *Purg*. 17.62): all humans by nature are endowed with it, and it is the very essence of human nature. We must emphasize that there are no innately desired objects or objectives: what is innate is not the desire for *this* rather than *that*; instead, what is innate is the power to freely choose to pursue *this* rather than *that*. Rationality is the capacity to evaluate images before allowing them to move us to action, and it is the proper exercise of our *libero arbitrio* in choosing to pursue (i.e., to love) good rather than bad actions, the power to decide – when faced with multiple possibilities – to do *these* things rather than *those* things.[38] One should note again that the last *terzina* here in effect lauds Aristotle for giving *De anima* and *Nicomachean Ethics* – for giving reasoned accounts of the rationality of the rational animal – to the world[39].

The operation of our rational faculty has everything to do with our comportment with respect to images. Earlier in his lecture Virgil had said that the human animal is naturally attracted to pleasurable images:

> "L'animo, ch'è creato ad amar presto,
> ad ogni cosa è mobile che piace,
> tosto ch'e' dal piacere in atto è desto.
> Vostra apprensiva da esser verace
> *tragge intenzione,* e dentro a voi la spiega
> sì che l'animo ad essa volger face;
> e, s'e', rivolto, inver' di lei si piega,
> quel piegar è amor, quell'è natura
> che, per piacer, di novo in voi si lega". (*Purg*. 18.19-27)

("The mind, disposed to love at its creation, is readily moved toward anything that pleases as soon as by that pleasure it is roused to act. From real forms your perception draws an image it unfolds within you so that the mind

[38] As T.H. Irwin says regarding Aristotle's notion of rational desire: "To form a rational desire, we must compare the present and future benefits and harms of different actions, and reach a conclusion that will be expressed in a desire [...] We have a rational desire only when we compare the advantages of the two courses of action" (T.H. Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles*, Oxford University Press, New York 1988, p. 336). If we replace Irwin's utilitarian "compare the advantages" with comparing which of two courses of action is most in accordance with the first principles of *praxis*, Irwin's formulation can stand as a precise characterization of rational desire as understood by Aristotle and Averroes. Neither Cavalcanti nor Dante nor Boccaccio's *Amorosa visione* can be properly understood through a simple opposition of reason and desire. This is because there is no such thing as rationality without desire (Irwin, p. 336: "Aristotle denies that a rational animal is moved by something other than desire"). Reason does not differ from desire; rather, it differs from non-rational desire – from what Boccaccio calls, as we will see below, *fragile disio* ("weak desire"; *Amorosa visione* 41.81).

[39] See G. Inglese's gloss to lines 67-69 in his edition of *Purgatorio*, cit.

considers it, and if the mind, so turned, inclines to it, that inclination is a natural love, which beauty binds in you immediately".)

Prior to and up through the end of this passage, Virgil's treatment of human desire is not distinguished from animal desire in general: he is speaking about love in the sense of *appetite*, not in the sense of rational (i.e. human) freely chosen desire**.** Virgil has not yet distinguished between *amor* as animal appetite and *amor* as rational desire. Such desire, which moves the lover instantly ("binds in you immediately"; verse 27) – without the temporal deferral that is an essential element of rational desire[40] – is natural (*quell'è natura*; verse 26), not ethical.

Here Virgil teaches that when a human animal is moved by a pleasing image (*intenzione*; verse 23[41]) abstracted (*tragge*; verse 23) from that animal's sense perception (*apprensiva*; verse 22) of a real external perceptible (*esser verace*; verse 22), the animal mentally inclines desirously (*quel piegar è amor*; verse 26) toward that image. Then, as fire by its natural essence moves upward (*Purg*. 18.28-29), the human animal "enters into desire" (*entra in disire*; *Purg*. 18.31), "which is an imaginal motor" (*ch'è moto spiritale*[42]; *Purg*. 18.32), and its mind never rests until it enjoys the "loved thing" (*cosa amata*; *Purg*. 18.32-33).

Dante understands all this perfectly, but he is still unsatisfied, since Virgil has not yet answered Dante's request that Virgil "demonstrate [i.e., give a rational account of] love, to which every good action and its contrary [i.e., every bad action] is attributed" (*Purg*. 18.14-15). Virgil has not

[40] As Aristotle argues, rational desire "only happens in agents that have perception of time": such agents are able "to resist because of what will happen." Non-rational desire (i.e., appetite, that desire which *Amorosa visione* terms *fragile* ["weak"]), "urges us on because of what is present" (Aristotle, *De anima* 433b6-9; quoted in T.H. Irwin, *op cit*., p. 336. On temporality and imagination as essential elements of rationality for Aristotle and Averroes, see *RA*, p. 193-196.

[41] "In the terminology of Avicenna and Averroes, the 'form as it is known' […] on the level of sensation […] is constantly referred to [by Latin scholastics] as […] *intentio imaginata*", F. Bottin*, Filosofia medievale della mente*, Il Poligrafo, Padova 2005, p. 212. See also G. Inglese's gloss to lines 22-24.

[42] The term *spiritale* here must not be confused with the pneumatic "spirits" which Cavalcanti frequently mentions in his poetry – the breathlike ethereal physical infusions, "vital spirits", which quicken the body and circulate as necessary energy for its various operations. (A Latin translation of the most important Arabic treatise on the pneumatic spirits, Qusta ibn Luqa's *De Differentia spiritus et animae*, was required reading in the natural philosophy curriculum at the Paris Faculty of Arts in the thirteenth century.) Of much more importance for Cavalcanti are what Ibn Bajja, in his *Governance of the Solitary*, calls the "high particular spiritual qualities" – i.e., spiritual forms that are to some degree imaginative and thus not pure intelligibles. Cavalcanti is convinced that human science can never rise higher than the level of high particular spirit, and hence there can be no Conjunction with the Active Intellect.

yet treated ethics and human loving; rather, he has treated animal desire in general, appetitive desire[43]. Dante is dissatisfied because Virgil's explanation of appetitive desire leaves no room for our *libero arbitrio*: when an animal sees something pleasing, it naturally and necessarily is moved to obtain it. If humans were not rational, they would always pursue what they presently perceive as pleasing. Rationality depends upon our cognition of temporality, our ability to recollect images of the past and to imagine pleasant and painful futures[44].

Virgil's reply to Dante's request unfolds between the two passages from *Purgatorio* 18 that we have just discussed. Virgil first explains that humans innately know the first principles of *praxis*. First principles, for Aristotle and for medieval neo-Aristotelians, are that set of fundamental premises that we always already know with certainty, by intuition, as if by nature, but concerning which we do not know how we came to know them. First principles of *theoria* (science) are things that all non-defective humans know, such as "two plus two equals four" and "the whole is greater than the part". First principles of *praxis* (which, as matters of consensus opinion, are less certain than scientific first principles) are virtually always exemplified for Dante by the following decidedly political maxim (politics being the highest branch of ethics): "the good of the whole is better than the good of the part". In *Purgatorio* 18, Virgil's term for first principles is *prima notizie* ("first notions"; *Purg*. 18.56). Humans do not know (*omo non sape*; *Purg*. 18.56) why or how we know them. Intuitively knowing these primordial wishes, desires, and inclinations (*prima voglia*; *Purg*. 18.59) does not admit of praise or blame (*Purg*. 18.59-60) and does not count as an ethical act. Our actions are only ethical when our "innate (*innata*) faculty that advises" (*virtù che consiglia*; *Purg*. 18.62), in evaluating images and discerning which images are in accordance with and which violate the first principles of *praxis*, assents to loving and thus to being moved by those images ratified by the first principles of *praxis*. This free election to love this image and to hate that one – our *libero arbitrio* – is the act of our rational faculty; it is desiderative thinking and thinking desire, i.e., loving[45]. The rational animal is the loving animal.

The following passage from *Amorosa visione* is the narrator's expression of his appetitive desire for the beautiful ladies of his beloved lady's

[43] On the distinction between appetitive desire and rational/loving desire, see *RA*, pp. 177-178.
[44] On the necessity of perception of temporality and recollection for ethical action, see *RA*, pp. 193-196.
[45] On *ratio* as "thinking, loving, and hating" in Averroes, see *RA*, pp. 171-172 and pp. 190-191.

retinue and of his ability to cast aside that desire by choosing to love rationally:

> Sempre con l'occhio quelle seguitando
> lento io n'andava, e dentro *l'intelletto*
> lor gran belleza giva *immaginando*;
> e di quelle prendea tanto diletto
> in me, ch'alcuna volta dottai ch'io
> a tal piacer non facessi subbietto,
> a mal mio grado, il vacillante mio
> *libero arbitrio*: ma pur si ritenne
> con *ragion* vinto il *fragile disio*. (*Amorosa visione* 41.73-81)

(Always following them with my eyes, I moved on slowly; within my mind [*intelletto*] their great beauty imaged itself [*giva immaginando*]. Within me, I took such delight in them that, at times, I feared that I might subject my vacillating free will [*libero arbitrio*] to such pleasure; but this fragile desire [*fragile disio*] was defeated by reason [*ragione*].)

This key moment of *Amorosa visione* gathers together all of the elements of Cavalcanti's and Dante's neo-Aristotelian ethics: intellect (*intelletto*; verse 74); imagination (*immaginando*; verse 75); *libero arbitrio* (verse 80; recall that the very center of the *Commedia*, where Virgil commences his lecture on ethics, is symmetrically framed by this phrase); rationality (*ragion*, verse 81); desire (*disio*; verse 81). The intellect of line 74 can only be practical intellect, not *intellectus* in the proper sense. The latter never sees anything imaged in any way whatsoever; it only sees pure, fully abstracted intelligibles. The intellect here is imagining (verse 75) and thus is not intellect. Recall as well that Averroes is willing to speak of practical intellect, but only with the recognition that this is only so-called "intellect". For Averroes, practical intellect is a faculty of the imaginative power of soul (the *imaginativa* of Dante's "*O imaginativa!*" (*Purg*. 17.13). Practical intellect is a faculty of the animal soul – that is, the sensitive-imaginative soul. (This, like every soul, is mortal.) The difference between humans and the other animals is that humans have a higher mode of imagination, one which is capable of freely chosen rational loving.

What Boccaccio celebrates here is rationality's capacity to triumph over "weak desire" (*fragile disio*; verse 81). Fragile desire is appetite, not love. Fragile desire has not been ratified by the faculty that measures desirable images by the standard of the first principles of *praxis*, and thus it does not qualify as rational loving. There is a reason why Boccaccio does not call his poem *Appetitiva visione*. Moreover, "amorous vision" is the perfect name for practical intellect (i.e., *phronesis*, prudence): unlike ethical actions, *phronesis* (prudence) involves *theoria* ("viewing", "look-

ing at"); it is the only aspect of ethics that in some sense straddles the divide between *praxis* and *theoria*.

Humans who desire appetitively but do not love are merely ordinary non-rational animals, as we learned from the passage that we read near the beginning of this article ("A life that is without *love* is worth nothing, no different than if it were deprived of sense or than the life of a brute animal"; 42.73-75). In that passage, "love" can only mean rational desire, since love is the factor that distinguishes the rational animal from non-rational animals. The narrator is able to resist pursuing the images of what is immediately present to him because he is able to imagine a future when his beloved lady will be present. He can compare multiple images and freely choose to pursue the one that causes pain in the present but promises pleasure in the future. This choice is *libero arbitrio*, rational loving, the essential form of the rational animal. In short, this passage describes the operation of amorous vision (*amorosa visione*), an imaginal vision of the future: the triumph of amorous vision over appetitive seeing. Appetitive desire is image-produced desire to move toward that which is immediately present, without recollection of past images or anticipation of future images; loving desire compares images, remembers past ones, imagines future ones, and, provided that the future images are in accord with the first principles of *praxis*, loves and moves toward and loves what is not yet there. The *Commedia*, driven by the chief first principle of *praxis* – that the good of the whole of humanity is better than the good of a part of humanity – is Dante's loving pursuit of a most desirable future that is a not-yet present.

Now, what is perhaps most interesting – indeed remarkable – about the narrator's development from the early to the later cantos of *Amorosa visione* is his evolution from being unable to grasp discourse about the lady, even if that discourse were only imaginal (16.40-43), to, late in the poem (47.70-75), praising the lady for raising his mind such that he hopes one day to understand "lofty ideas" (*alte idee*; 47.75). In the earlier passage, where the narrator recounts his pre-philosophical state, he can already tell us, with hindsight, that later in his itinerary he will come to know the lady through discursive reasoning (i.e., *ratio*): "as I shall tell further on,/elsewhere I would later see her,/so that I would come to know it [i.e., discourse about the lady] clearly" (*com'i' dicerò appresso,/ in altra parte poi la vidi stare,/donde chiaro 'l seppi io*; 16.44-46). *Amorosa visione* tells the story of a human who, initially, cannot understand philosophy at all, not even when presented in its imaged representation as poetry or myth, yet who by the end understands the ethical teachings of Aristotle's *De anima* and *Nicomachean Ethics.* For the final lesson of ethics is that we ought to strive for a happiness/perfection that is impossible to attain: the intellection of metaphysical intelligible forms

(*alte idee*). The narrator's beloved is Aristotle's ethics personified: "because of her, I raise my mind to lofty concepts" (*alte idee*). Virtue is not in the sky (although the annoying guide whom the narrator of *Amorosa visione* sometimes follows thinks it is). Rather, the end of virtue is to point us skyward, so that we might enjoy the pain of "straining every nerve" (as Aristotle puts it[46]) to understand pure imageless forms. Such arduous straining is, for both Cavalcanti and Dante, the highest ethical achievement of the human animal, although both know that this effort can never reach its goal.

## Bibliography

Alighieri, D., *Commedia. Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*: *Revisione del testo e commento di Giorgio Inglese*, 3 voll., Carocci, Roma 2016.

Alighieri, D., *Convivio: A Dual-Language Critical Edition*; A. Frisardi (a cura di), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2018.

Arnaldez, R, *Averroes, un rationaliste en Islam*, Editions Balland, Paris 1998.

Averroes, *Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois Commentariis*, 11 vols., Venice 1562-74; repr. Minerva, Frankfurt am Main 1962.

Averroes., *Averroes' Tahafut Al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence) Volumes I and II*, trans. S. Van Den Bergh, The E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, Cambridge 1954 (reprinted in paperback, 2008).

Bianchi, L. M., *Filosofi, uomini e bruti: Note per la storia di un'antropologia 'averroista'*, in "Rinascimento", XXXII, 1992, pp. 185-201.

Boccaccio, G., *Amorosa Visione*, trans. R. Hollander, T. Hampton, and M. Frankel, University Press of New England, Hanover and London 1986.

Bottin, F., *Filosofia medievale della mente*, Il Poligrafo, Padova 2005.

Branca, V., *L'Amorosa visione: tradizione, significati, fortuna*, in "Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa: Lettere, Storia e Filosofia", XI, no. 1, 1942, pp. 20-47.

Branca, V., *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, Mondadori, Milan 1965.

Collussi, F., *Sullla seconda redazione dell'Amorosa visione*, in "Studi sul Boccaccio", vol. XXVI, 1998, pp. 187-263.

Flasch, K., *Attributionsatheismus in Boccaccios 'Decameron' VI, 9: Guido Cavalcanti*, in F. Niewöhner and O. Pluta (a cura di), *Atheismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1999.

Gagliardi, A., *Giovanni Boccaccio: Poeta, filosofo, averroísta*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 1999.

Huot S., *Poetic Ambiguity and Reader Response in Boccacio's 'Amorosa Visione'*, in "Modern Philology", LXXXIII, no. 2, 1985, pp. 109-122.

Inglese, G., *L'intelletto e l'amore: Studi sulla letteratura italiana del Due e Trecento*, La Nuova Italia, Milano 2000.

[46] *Nichomachean Ethics* 1177b34.

Irwin, T.H., *Aristotle's First Principles*, Oxford University Press, New York 1988
Kreisel, J.C., *Boccaccio's Corpus: Allegory, Ethics, and Vernacularity*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 2019, pp. 300-306.
McKinley, K., *Chaucer's* House of Fame *and Its Boccaccian Intertexts*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto 2016.
Nardi, B., *Studi di filosofia medieval*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome 1979.
Oleksowicz., M., *Aristotle on the Heart and Brain*, in "European Journal of Science and Theology", XIV, 2018, pp. 77-94.
Padoan, G., (a cura di), *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*, vol. 6 of V. Branca (a cura di), *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, Mondadori, Milan 1965.
Rea, R., *La 'Vita nuova' e le 'Rime'. 'Unus philosophus alter poeta': Un'ipotesi per Cavalcanti e Dante*, in E. Malato and A. Mazzucchi (a cura di)*, Dante fra il settecentocinquantenario della nascita (2015) e il settecentenario della morte (2021)*, Salerno, Rome 2016, pp. 351-381.
Singleton. C., *The Poet's Number at the Center*, "MLN", vol. LXXX, no. 1, 1965, pp. 1-10.
Stone, G.B., *The Ethics of Nature in the Middle Ages: On Boccaccio's Poetaphysics*. St. Martin's Press, New York 1998.
Stone, G.B., *Dante's Pluralism and the Islamic Philosophy of Religion*, Palgrave, New York 2006.
Stone, G.B., *Dante's 'Commedia', Islamic Rationalism, and the Enumeration of the Sciences*, in "Doctor Virtualis", XII, 2013, pp. 135-67.
Stone, G.B., *Dante and the Falasifa: Religion as Imagination*, in J.M. Ziolkowski, ed., *Dante and Islam*, Fordham University Press, New York 2014, pp. 114-132.
Stone, G.B., *Guido Cavalcanti: Poet of the Rational Animal*, Routledge, New York 2020.
Usher, J. *Mural Morality in Tableaux Vivants: Amorosa visione*, in *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, ed. V. Kirkham, M. Sherberg, and J.L. Smarr, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2013, pp. 119-129.