

Dante as Political Theorist:

Reading Monarchia

Edited and with an Introduction by

Maria Luisa Ardizzone

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-1651-2

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1651-9

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CHAPTER SIX

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

¹ *Purg.* 27.79-81; text and translations of the *Commedia* (Mandelbaum) and *Convivio* (Lansing) are adapted from *Columbia Digital Dante* (New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2015) <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/>. Text and translations of *Monarchia* are adapted from the edition of Prue Shaw, *Dante, Monarchia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Translations of Aristotle’s *Politics* appear in the new standard edition of Benjamin Jowett in *Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation. Volume 2*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

² *Inf.* 15.78; *Inf.* 15.68

³ *Inf.* 16.73-74; on the Aristotelian valence of the term *misura* and its place within the larger courtly, sociological, and ethical framework of the *Commedia* and Dante’s lyric poetry, see Teodolinda Barolini, “Sociology of the Brigata: Gendered Groups in Dante, Forese, Folgore, Boccaccio—From ‘Guido, i’ vorrei’ to Griselda”, *Italian Studies* 67, no. 1 (2012): 4-22 and Teodolinda Barolini, “Aristotle’s *Mezzo*,

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

Courtly *Misura*, and Dante’s *Canzone Le Dolci Rime: Humanism, Ethics, and Social Anxiety*,” in *Dante and the Greeks*, ed. Jan M. Ziolkowski (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2014). For a comprehensive catalogue of greed and monetary corruption in the *Commedia*, see Leonid M. Batkin, *Dante e la società italiana del ‘300* (Bari: De Donato, 1970).

⁴ *Purg.* 6.127-151; *Purg.* 6.76-77

⁵ *Purg.* 14.37; *Conv.* 4.6.16

⁶ *Par.* 27.121-123

⁷ *Par.* 30.139-141; Dante, of course, views greed, whether as *cupidigia* or *avarizia* (Lat. *cupiditas* and *avaritia*), as one with a “Ulyssian” desire for knowledge, mastery, and all forms of *folle volere*. On the latter point, see Teodolinda Barolini, “Guittone’s *Ora Parrà*, Dante’s *Doglia Mi Reca*, and the *Commedia*’s Anatomy of Desire,” in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006). But Dante’s linkage of greed with the insatiable desire for money, political power, and domination—within the theological and moral condemnation of deadly sins and vices generally—is not merely an abstract reflection on the perennial *pondus amoris* and Dante’s moral investigation of multivalent *incontinentia*, but also a recognition, as I will show, of actual *monetary* greed stratified within and enabled by political power and corporate-private interests.

Just as the *Commedia* explores the strong interconnection between greed and political corruption, so too in *Convivio* and *Monarchia*, Dante posits that political dysfunction, wars, and social maladies are the consequences of capital accumulation and the intertwining of politics and economics. The latter economic facts, as I will argue in this essay, are what undergird the superstructure of medieval church-imperial contests in which smaller political party interests and municipal sovereignties engaged and to which they bent. In *Monarchia*, Dante argues that the end of his proposed universal polity is justice, which by replacing the ravenous domain of greed, not only brings about peace but fosters the intellectual development and eudemonistic fulfillment of all human beings. As I will show, however, chrematistic polities or wealth-getting states—which in Dante's time were early Italian capitalistic states that wielded international capitalist power—thwart the achievement of that goal and make Dante's new theory of the state and empire a necessary political project.⁸ Thus, Dante is perhaps one of the first critics of political economy in the Latin west because he accurately grasped Aristotle's critique of chrematistics and political economy in the *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* and incorporated them into his own analysis.⁹ Dante's early critique of

⁸ For a philosophically rich and accurate picture of Dante's theory of empire and state, see the preeminently coherent work of Bruno Nardi, "Il concetto dell'impero nello svolgimento del pensiero dantesco," in *Saggi di filosofia Dantesca* (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1967).

⁹ "Political economy" is a term most often associated with the field of study that emerged with the French physiocrats and took form in its eighteenth and nineteenth century "classical" exemplars, such as Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, and Mill. The phrase "critique of political economy", whence I model the title of this essay, is inspired by the titles of several of Karl Marx's major works, including *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin in association with New Left Review, 1976); *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International Publishers, 1981); and *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* (London: Penguin Books, 1993). In this paper, however, I use the phrase "political economy" in its purely classical-antique, and by extension, medieval formulation (see note 10, below). In my use, its meaning ultimately derives from Aristotle's arguments regarding the difference between politics (*politike*) and household management (*oikonomia* or *oikonomike*); natural and unnatural wealth-getting (*chrematistike*); exchange (*kapelike*); and the relationships of each to justice (*dikaiousune*), which are examined especially, but not exclusively, in his *Politics* (Book 1) and *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book 5). Below, I briefly review Aristotle's understanding of political economy and how it relates to Dante's political thought. By "critique," I mean a moral-philosophical claim against a union of state power, monetary interests, and the pursuit of the bad sort of wealth-getting/accumulation as defined by Aristotle. For political economy in the

capitalism places him far ahead of his scholastic contemporaries in the history of economic thought; in contrast to Dante, they increasingly appropriated Aristotle to legitimize usury and chrematistic business practices.¹⁰ Furthermore, I will demonstrate the existence of "political economy" in Dante's Florence and Italy. Not only will this new perspective on the economic and political history of his time allow us to understand Dante's use of Aristotle in *Monarchia*, it will also show that his normative political theory depends in part upon a critique of political economy.¹¹ Understanding Dante's political theory as such a critique not

Aristotelian vein see Spencer J. Pack, *Aristotle, Adam Smith and Karl Marx on Some Fundamental Issues in 21st Century Political Economy* (Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2010); Ricardo F. Crespo, *A Re-assessment of Aristotle's Economic Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Odd Langholm, *Wealth and Money in the Aristotelian Tradition: A Study in Scholastic Economic Sources* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1983); Scott Meikle, *Aristotle's Economic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Nicolas J. Theocarakis, "Nicomachean Ethics in Political Economy: The Trajectory of the Problem of Value," *History of Economic Ideas* 14, no. 1 (2006): 9; and M. I. Finley, "Aristotle and Economic Analysis," *Past & Present*, no. 47 (1970): doi:10.2307/650446. On the relationship between the Aristotle and modern theories of economy and political economy, see Spencer J. Pack, "Aristotle's Difficult Relationship with Modern Economic Theory," *Foundations of Science* 13, no. 3-4 (2008); Ricardo F. Crespo, *Philosophy of the Economy: An Aristotelian Approach* (New York: Springer, 2013); Cornelius Castoriadis, "Value, Equality, Justice, Politics: From Marx to Aristotle and From Aristotle to Ourselves," in *Crossroads in the Labyrinth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984); Joseph A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954); and Karl Polanyi, "Aristotle Discovers the Economy," in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press 1957).

¹⁰ While there is a vast literature on medieval economics, for the centrality of Aristotle along with Roman Law and the Patristic Fathers in its early medieval and scholastic development—especially concerning permitted profit, interest, and chrematistic market activities in an emerging "market" context—see Odd Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools: Wealth, Exchange, Value, Money, and Usury According to the Paris Theological Tradition, 1200-1350* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992); Odd Langholm, *The Legacy of Scholasticism in Economic Thought: Antecedents of Choice and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Joel Kaye, *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange and the Emergence of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Henri Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937).

¹¹ In paving the way for this analysis on political economy, I am indebted to Joan M. Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 41, for demonstrating the centrality of "commerce,"

only re-contextualizes his stringent denunciations of greed and political dysfunction throughout the *Commedia*, but it is crucial to historicizing Dante as a unique, consistent political theorist in all his works, especially in the *Monarchia*.¹²

As Marx observed in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, in a chapter on the primitive accumulation of wealth, “capitalist production developed earliest” in medieval Italy.¹³ Considering the grounds upon which Dante can be said to “critique” political economy, it is clear that in late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth century Italy, despite the nuances of particular academic debates regarding the origins of capitalism, we are talking about early or “proto” capitalism.¹⁴ As Gaetano Salvemini notes,

within the nexus of “the independent city-state, the claims of empire, and the church,” as the dominant preoccupation of Dante’s political thought. Moreover, Justin Steinberg’s work, *Accounting for Dante: Urban Readers and Writers in Late Medieval Italy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), which establishes the wide circulation of Dante’s lyric within the merchant and bourgeois classes, inspired me to further investigate the historicizing of other socio-economic questions in Dante’s political work.

¹² On the need for historicism, see Teodolinda Barolini, ““Only Historicize”: History, Material Culture (Food, Clothes, Books), and the Future of Dante Studies”, *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 127 (2009): 37-54. In arguing for Dante as a consistent theorist, I disagree with Albert Ascoli’s assertions in *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 229), that Dante’s *Monarchia* “had been notoriously difficult to locate, both chronologically and conceptually within Dante’s career,” but also with his claim that Dante’s political argument is riddled with illogical “internal contradictions” (59). According to Ascoli’s thesis about Dante, sharing much with Minnis’ theories about authorship and authority, the *Monarchia* is predominantly a rhetorical exercise (229) in “auctoritas” appropriation that is unable to “absorb and interpret the materials of history” and might better be interpreted in a “transhistorical” figural mode (292). To the contrary, I hold that a strongly historicist method ought to lead one to opposite conclusions. First, the *Monarchia* is a strongly coherent moral and political response to concrete contemporary social and historical conditions (and not merely fanciful epideictic “auctoritas” appropriation). Second, as Bruno Nardi has stated in “Le rime filosofiche e il «Convivio»,” in *Dal “Convivio” alla “Commedia.”* (*Sei Saggi Danteschi*) (Roma: Nella sede dell’Istituto Palazzo Borromini, 1992), 35, far from being difficult to locate in his career, “la dottrina di Dante sulla *Monarchia* era ormai saldamente costituita in tutti i suoi elementi essenziali” from his early lyrics, like *Doglia mi reca* and *Le dolci rime* to the *Convivio* and *Commedia*.

¹³ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 876.

¹⁴ Fernand Braudel and Siân Reynolds, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century. Volume III: The Perspective of the World* (New York: Harper & Row,

“it was Dante’s fate to be living just at a time when society had come under the control of moneyed merchants.”¹⁵ Historian John Larner concurs

1984), 57; Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 8-40; Philip J. Jones, *The Italian City-state: From Commune to Signoria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 186. Whereas Marx mostly elaborated on “Kapital,” Sombart, who was a colleague of Weber, extensively uses the term “Kapitalismus” in his *Der moderne Kapitalismus, 2 vols.* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1902) and identifies medieval Northern Italy as prototypically capitalistic. Also, see Sombart’s extensive treatment of Florence in *The Quintessence of Capitalism: A Study of the History and Psychology of the Modern Business Man* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1915). It should also be noted that contemporaneously with Sombart, it was the judgment of Robert Davidsohn, in the *Storia di Firenze Vol. II, Pt. 2* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1972), 538 (in the tenth chapter on the “Ordinamenti di Giustizia e la caduta di Giano della Bella,” in the subchapter “La Genesi del Capitalismo” (Die Entstehung des Kapitalismus [The origin of Capitalism])), that “nel secolo decimoterzo in tutte le grandi città dell’Alta e Media Italia la società assunse un nuovo assetto economico, come a Firenze, dove però le conseguenze politiche del mutato regime economico furono più manifeste che altrove. Lo sviluppo del capitalismo, di cui nei tempi moderni la scienza si è affaticata a scoprire le origini, fu quello che dette la sua impronta a quell’epoca.” While it has since been vociferously debated whether or not it is appropriate to refer to “capitalism” in the thirteenth century, many intelligent critics identify enough features of mercantile, financial, commercial, world-economy, and political development in the period’s history, which permit me to insist, in a qualified sense, that in Dante’s Florence and northern Italy of the mid-thirteenth through early fourteenth centuries, we are witnessing an early form of capitalism, so to speak, with a lower-case ‘c’—if we can invent this historiographical category—even if many wish to restrict the origins of “C”apitalism to post-sixteenth century Europe. A valid warrant for denying its existence in earlier forms remains wanting. On the vast discussions and debates regarding the origins of capitalism in medieval Italy—and its status as “capitalism”—see, among so many innumerable others: Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*; Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974); Fernand Braudel and Siân Reynolds, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century. Volume I: The Structures of Everyday Life, the Limits of the Possible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London: Verso, 2002); Martha C. Howell, *Commerce Before Capitalism in Europe, 1300-1600* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); and William Caferro, “Economy: Hard Times or Prosperity?”, in *Contesting the Renaissance* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

¹⁵ Gaetano Salvemini, “Florence in the Time of Dante”, *Speculum* 11, no. 03 (1936): 317-326.

because, by around 1300, Italy had inherited a "revolution" which, from its beginnings in the eleventh century, had "given to the whole of Europe a new prosperity, and to Italy the supremacy of the medieval world."¹⁶ In short, Italy brought forth an unprecedented "commercial" revolution.¹⁷ Consequently the locus of power shifted from Rome—whose days as the ecclesiastical capital of Europe were numbered—to Florence. Florence was "a city with no civilized past but an apparently infinite capacity for expansion fed by its industrial workshops and its mastery of international finance."¹⁸ The rule of "gente nuova" (*nouveaux riches*) that took shape in the mid-thirteenth century and whose *primo popolo* first minted the gold florin—which quickly became an international currency—turned Florence into Europe's economic powerhouse and dominated the republic's communal life for the next two centuries to come.¹⁹

Florentine banks like the Mozzi, Spini, Bardi, and Peruzzi, to name just a few, had branches and dealings not just in Italy but throughout Europe and the Middle East.²⁰ Much of this activity was what we would easily identify as financial, not merely industrial-productive, capitalism in collusion with multiple layers of state and ecclesiastical powers. Florentine bankers lent huge sums of money to the kings, feudal nobles, convents, bishops, popes, municipalities and, of course, private enterprises of Europe, at rates of interest between 36% and 262%.²¹ This lending produced massive profits. According to Salvemini, for example, at the end of the thirteenth century the firm of the Florentine Cerchi was regarded as among the most powerful in the world and was believed to possess capital of 900,000 florins.²² Vieri de' Cerchi's personal wealth was estimated at over 600,000 florins. Other powerful firms, like the Bardi and the Peruzzi, also had massive capital valuations. For instance, in 1319 the annual turnover in the public books of the Bardi firm was 873,638 florins, and the

¹⁶ John Larner, *Culture and Society in Italy, 1290-1420* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 22.

¹⁷ Robert S. Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

¹⁸ George Holmes, *Florence, Rome, and the Origins of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 3.

¹⁹ John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 6.

²⁰ Edwin S. Hunt, *The Medieval Super-companies: A Study of the Peruzzi Company of Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 38-75; Jones, *The Italian City-state: From Commune to Signoria*, 187.

²¹ Salvemini, "Florence in the Time of Dante," 319.

²² *Ibid.*, 320.

combined war debts—owed mostly to the Bardi and Peruzzi banks by Edward III of England—had, by 1339, risen to 1,365,000 florins.²³ How much is 900,000 to 1.5 million florins of capital worth in contemporary estimations? To put those monies into rough perspective, here are a few examples: in the year 1300, eight thousand florins was considered a large fortune; in 1268 Florence purchased the town of Poggibonsi for 20,000 florins; and in 1348 the entire city of Avignon was sold to the pope for 80,000 florins.²⁴ When talking about Florentine firms from 1260 until the financial crisis of the 1340s (the period that overlaps Dante's lifetime), we are talking about capital assets that rival today's multinational industrial corporations and investment banking complexes such as Haliburton, Citibank, GE, Goldman Sachs, Koch Industries, and so forth. The capital of some individual Florentine firms was greater than the sovereign wealth of entire kingdoms and the total of amount of debts—"tra di capitale e provisioni e riguardi" (including capital, fees, and interest)—owed by England, as Villani puts it, "valeano un reame" (were worth an entire kingdom).²⁵ From their first appearance in the 1230s, the chief *campsores papae* were Tuscan *mercatores* and most were conspicuously Florentines; both monopolized the management and swelled the coffers of papal finances at great profit to themselves.²⁶

We simply cannot, therefore, interpret the split between the Church and Empire, Guelf and Ghibelline, and the later White Guelf and Black Guelf rift without already seeing beneath this superstructure a vast functioning system of international capital, determining not only the broader ideological contests but also the actual internal structure of politics within Florence itself.²⁷ In this political economy not only did state

²³ On the accounting and organizational structure of the Peruzzi corporation, see the magisterial study of Hunt, *Op. cit.*

²⁴ Jones, *The Italian City-state: From Commune to Signoria*, 197.

²⁵ Giovanni Villani, *Giovanni Villani: Nuova Cronica* (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2002), 856; Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 133; Carlo M. Cipolla, *Before the Industrial Revolution: European Society and Economy, 1000-1700* (New York: Norton, 1976), 200.

²⁶ Jones, *The Italian City-state: From Commune to Signoria*; Gino Arias, "I banchieri italiani e la S. Sede nel XIII secolo: linee della storia esterna," in *Studi e documenti di storia del diritto* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1902).

²⁷ For essential works on the topic, see Sergio Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del dugento*, ed. Sergio Raveggi (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1978); Gino Masi, "La struttura sociale delle fazioni politiche fiorentine ai tempi di Dante," *Giornale Dantesco* 31 (1930): 3-28; Gino Masi, "I banchieri fiorentini nella vita politica della città", *Archivio Giuridico*

interests bend to financial interests, the powers of the state also acted in unison with oligarchies and formations of power centered around networks of allied and competing interests, which increasingly became one. The history of Florentine political changes and "popular revolutions," which culminates in the anti-magnate "ordinamenti di giustizia" legislation of 1292, were, nonetheless, all revolutions involving capitalist interests (*popolani, popolo grasso, grandi*). It is also important to remember that while these revolutions may have been anti-magnate, they were neither anti-capitalist nor anti-oligarchical.²⁸ Starting with the *primo popolo* (1250–1260), its rule was "not a social revolution" but rather emerged from a disagreement within the elite between those dedicated to "factions and those who saw such alliances as damaging to the economic interests of their class and city."²⁹ In fact, throughout Florentine history, we see the unification of capitalist interests with its most powerful guilds (*arti maggiori*) such as the *Calimata, Lana, and Cambio*. The consolidation of the most powerful banking and industrial-trade firms resulted in restricted access to state power and culminated in Florence's "guild republicanism."³⁰ The most overt and open institutional example of the latter, of course, is seen in Florence's 1308 *mercanzia* or *universitas mercatorum*: a wedding of the most powerful guilds of *Calimata, Cambio, Lana, Por Santa Maria, and Medici, Speciali, Merciai*, into a governing state power.³¹ Authority and power in this period were often directly related to the possession or demands of capital accumulation, including access to markets.³² As Jones points out, the consolidation of

"Filippo Serafini" 9 (1931): 57-89; and Gino Arias, "Il fondamento economico delle fazioni fiorentine dei Guelfi Bianchi e de Guelfi Neri e le origini dell'ufficio della Mercanzia in Firenze," in *Studi e documenti di storia del diritto* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1902). For the interpretive insight of base and superstructure in Marx's historical materialism, which should be employed heuristically rather than be understood as an over-determined methodological criterion, see its seminal formulation in the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

²⁸ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 68-69; Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze. Vol. II, Pt. 2*, 537ff.

²⁹ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 68.

³⁰ John M. Najemy, "Guild Republicanism in Trecento Florence: The Successes and Ultimate Failure of Corporate Politics," *The American Historical Review* (1979): 53-71.

³¹ On the *mercanzia*, see Antonella Astorri, *La Mercanzia a Firenze nella prima metà del Trecento: Il potere dei grandi mercanti* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1998).

³² The still definitive work regarding the history of the Florentine guilds is Alfred Doren, *Le arti fiorentine*, 2 Vols. (Florence: Le Monnier, 1940). See also, Antony

power in the Italian city-states was directly linked to "wealth and migrated with movements of wealth, and through all revolutions of political and economic regime, oligarchy, in fact or law, was the predominant form of government."³³ Of course, the bonding of economic interests with state power is a cause of a state becoming unjust, the reasons for which we will explore with Dante and Aristotle. A significant historical example of such an unjust state, as related to Dante's challenge regarding the dueling authorities of church and state grafted onto the political economic situation in Florence, is Urban IV's quest to overthrow Manfred Hohenstaufen's Ghibelline rule of Florence following Montaperti in 1261.

When the Ghibellines returned to rule in Florence for six years, with Guido Novello of the Counts Guidi (a cousin of Guelf Guido Guerra) governing in the name of Manfred Hohenstaufen, we see the full extent of capital driving politics. While old Ghibelline elites did return to political life, the participation of non-elite guildsmen in government as in the period of the *primo popolo* was negligible. In this play of moneyed interests, Najemy points out that the "fatal weakness" of the Ghibelline restoration was, in fact, its "inability to control the influence of Florentine merchant capital in and outside the city."³⁴ The major figures of the commercial and banking companies who were exiled in 1260, among whom were the Bardi, Mozzi, Rossi and Scali, suffered only temporary loss of their Florentine properties, "but not [the loss of] their far-flung investments and assets, which were beyond the reach of the Ghibellines. Even companies that continued to direct operations from Florence were difficult to control."³⁵ The mobility and power of capital, in this case operating at a level above multiple individual state powers, highlights the embryonic world-economy nature of capitalism that would later be articulated by modern investigators of the logic of capitalism.³⁶ In this historical situation, the power of capital was a key determinant of political events, not just within the internal class relations of Florence itself and its

Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought From the Twelfth Century to the Present* (London: Methuen, 1984).

³³ Phillip J. Jones, "Communes and Despots: The City State in Late-Medieval Italy," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (Fifth Series)* 15 (1965): 71-96.

³⁴ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 72.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

³⁶ In particular, see Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Nature and Logic of Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 1985); Wallerstein, *Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-economy in the Sixteenth Century*; Karl Marx, *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998).

wealthy *popolo*, but also at the “world” level of relations with other Italian cities and power-plays among monarchic, church, and seigniorial elements.³⁷

Pope Urban IV and, later, Pope Clement IV saw the weakness of the Ghibelline state on account of its disaffected capitalist interests as well as its potential, through financial leverage, to seize upon international opportunities. Urban found a challenger to Manfred in Charles of Anjou, the brother of King Louis XI of France. Charles, however, required significant funds to fulfill his role in displacing Manfred. Urban pressured the Florentine bankers to rally against the Hohenstaufen by threatening to release their debtors from obligations, to interrupt the import of Flemish textiles, and even to impound or confiscate their goods. According to Najemy, as the result of secret negotiations with papal officials, many firms agreed to pledge financial support for the Angevin campaign to avoid these punitive measures.³⁸ Davidsohn, characterizing these strategies as the “conquista dei banchieri fiorentini” (victory of the Florentine bankers), reports that the Pope also manipulated the *Arte della Lana* with the textile issue and generally “cercò di piegare ai suoi disegni i membri delle corporazioni, minacciando i loro interessi economici” (tried to force the members of the guilds to accede to his plans, threatening their economic interests). He later intensified this effort with “minacce all’Arte di Calimala, la corporazione dei banchieri” (threats to *Calimala*, the bankers’ guild).³⁹ What is remarkable here is not just the fact that such

³⁷ While the emergence of “world-economy” in the middle ages (as opposed to Wallerstein’s hypothesis of the sixteenth century) has been effectively explored *in nuce* and defended by Abu-Lughod in *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*, Heilbroner’s comment in *The Nature and Logic of Capitalism*, 94, regarding the nature of state capitalism and supranational corporations is especially applicable to the situation described here: “Thus capital, which arises within the state and which exists only at the pleasure of the state, becomes increasingly capable of defying, or of existing ‘above,’ the state. A network of commodity flows cuts through the boundaries of national sovereignty to form a ‘system’ that operates according to the dictates of its own logic, with less regard for those of politics. Such a world system came into existence originally with the rise of integrated market flows of broad dimensions sixteenth-century—what Wallerstein has called a ‘world-economy’—but in recent years its presence has become dramatically apparent in the emergence of supranational corporations and pools of money seemingly capable of eluding all constraints of political boundaries.”

³⁸ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 72-73.

³⁹ Robert Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze. Vol. II, Pt. 1. Guelfi e Ghibellini* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1972), 763-764.

negotiations were on-going despite the Ghibelline state (apparently ignorant of the conspiracy for two years), but that the state, backed by Manfred’s “empire,” was ineffectual in combatting the movement of capital and the greater power of capital-linked interests. In the end, 181 Florentine bankers and merchants from twenty-one major companies pledged loyalty to the Papacy and the Guelf cause and committed to the destruction of Ghibelline rule and Hohenstaufen power.⁴⁰ This alliance signaled a major shift of power in Italy against the Hohenstaufen and which would later turn against the Angevins. The wealth of the Florentine merchant-bankers, allied with the papacy and the house of Anjou, transformed Florence into the “financial core” of Guelf power and linked it to both the kingdom of France and the entire south of Italy, creating access to a new large and protected commercial territory.⁴¹

This example of the strength of capital-linked polities and states reveals why the scholarly discussion about the conflict between “spiritual” or “temporal” realms and the competing claims between them needs to be more precise. The fact is that in reality these two realms are often intermixed. Even a binary distinction between church and empire in an abstractly theological or juridical vein can be misleading as a heuristic category for medieval Italian politics, albeit one suggested in the voluminous works of medieval publicist tracts on politics. On the papal side of the deal that financed Charles’ imperial army, the capitalists provided interest-bearing loans backed by repayment in ecclesiastical or papal taxes that they collected as agents of the papacy throughout Europe, especially in France. Furthermore, since the pope declared Manfred a “Muslim” and “Heretic” the war became a Crusade and hence eligible to be supported by levied crusade taxes; these were also collected by Italian banking firms. On the other side of the ecclesiastical taxation privilege, since many church entities and prelates could not pay their assessments, the same bankers loaned them “ecclesiastical” monies to pay the taxes *they themselves* were collecting with additional loans at interest and fees. Florentine firms thus secured an astonishing double-dip and sometimes even a triple-dip profit from loans to Charles and those ecclesiastical entities taxed on the authority of the pope to repay them. The most lucrative gain of all to the bankers from the imperial side was Charles’ granting expansive commercial, trading, and banking privileges to the same creditors, the Italian capitalist elements, in the southern Italian

⁴⁰ Najemy, *A History of Florence 1200-1575*, 73; Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: i detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del Duecento*, 60.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

territories that he was about to conquer. In 1267, Charles of Anjou was made *podestà*, and thus the eve of the *secondo popolo* in 1268 provides a major example—between municipal, imperial, and church elements—that Italian politics was no longer merely some ideological conflict over investiture or a theological dispute about secular versus temporal power, but also, and perhaps primarily, a contest of power the politics of which reflect the material conditions of a developed capitalistic political economy.

According to Najemy, this period marks the beginning of a shift around the time of Dante's birth and early childhood in which "economic realities worked inexorably to define the ruling class [...] and the merchant and trading giants became the core of a newly configured elite. This was by no means the triumph of a 'bourgeoisie' over an 'aristocracy.' It was rather a process of evolution within the elite itself, a replacement at the center of power of elite families that did not adapt to the age's booming capitalism."⁴² The scope of this essay does not permit the enumeration of further examples. However, the debacle following the *Ordinamenti di Giustizia*, involving Boniface VIII, the Cerchi-Donati Feud, the White and Black Guelfs, Philip IV of France and Charles of Valois, which casts a shadow over Dante's and the White Guelfs' exile is worth a mention in that it has been widely shown to be similar in its political-economic entwinements to the above example from the 1260s.⁴³ As Philip Jones observes about this period: "the warring powers of [the rest] of [old] feudal Europe were bound in common alliance with [new] Italian capitalism."⁴⁴

Dante is deeply critical of this dominant capitalist political economy of his time. He repeatedly argues in *Monarchia* (using the word *cupiditas* sixteen times) that greed destroys justice and that the only defense against the unjust state is a one-world monarch. In fact, stopping the destructive power of greed is one of the central themes of Dante's political thought. According to Dante, the main way one stops greed, and its deleterious effects, depends on not confounding the purpose of a polity writ large and according to proper ends with mere wealth-getting which—in Aristotelian terms—appears sometimes analogous to the purpose of the polity. Dante goes to great trouble to make this point in the fourth book of *Convivio* where, in his commentary on *Le dolci rime* and referring to Aristotle's *Politics* 4.8, he challenges the linking of imperial authority with the

⁴² *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴³ Holmes, *Florence, Rome, and the Origins of the Renaissance*, 163-185; Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze. Vol. II, Pt. 2*, 537-758.

⁴⁴ Jones, *The Italian City-state: From Commune to Signoria*, 198.

possession of "antica ricchezza e belli costumi" (ancestral wealth and fine manners).⁴⁵ Here, he disputes the notion that the wealthy have some implicit or natural nobility, accentuated by time. He argues that "le divizie, sì come si crede [...] non possono causare nobilitade" (riches cannot, as others believe, confer nobility) and, therefore, the authority to rule because of their capital holdings (as reflected in the political realities of Florence).⁴⁶ Drawing on the Aristotelian idea that the principle of proportional reciprocity and distributive justice binds the city together, he argues, moreover, that the first function of the state is to meet actual social needs, and thus the state must prevent greed and the "gloria d'aquistare" (glory of acquiring).⁴⁷ In the later chapters of *Convivio* 4, particularly chapters 11-14, Dante asserts that this sort of governance must stop along with the deleterious and vicious mania for monetary accumulation, which goes beyond any social or individual need, thus generating injustice.

Riches, he says, are "vili" (base) and "imperfette" (imperfect).⁴⁸ Their defect lies "ne lo indiscreto loro avvenimento; secondamente, nel pericoloso loro accrescimento; terziamente, ne la dannosa loro possessione" (in the lack of discretion attending their appropriation; second, in the danger that accompanies their increment; thirdly, in the ruin resulting from their possession).⁴⁹ In this section, Dante argues that gold and pearls as objects in themselves (use values) have no actual, intrinsic value as riches or money, but only socially instantiated value (exchange value): "quanto è per esse in loro considerate, cose perfette sono, ma non sono ricchezze, ma oro e margherite; ma in quanto sono ordinate a la possessione de l'uomo, sono ricchezze" (that insofar as they are considered in themselves, they are perfect things, and are not riches but gold or pearls; but insofar as they are conceived as a possession of man, they are riches).⁵⁰ This insight would much later be central to Marx's notion of commodity fetishism.⁵¹ Dante further asserts that the appropriation of riches lacks discretion. Why? Because through various kinds of business and all the "modi per li quali esse vegnono" (ways in which riches are acquired) of either a legally licit or illicit nature (*immoral* wealth-getting can be *legal*) "nulla distributiva giustiza risplende, ma tutta iniquitate" (no distributive justice is present,

⁴⁵ *Conv.* 4.3

⁴⁶ *Conv.* 4.10.7

⁴⁷ *Pol.* 2.1261a29-31; *Eth.* 5.5.1132b30-1133a15

⁴⁸ *Conv.* 4.11.2

⁴⁹ *Conv.* 4.11.4

⁵⁰ *Conv.* 4.11.5

⁵¹ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 163f.

while injustice [...] almost always is).⁵² Dante holds the radical position that all wealth-getting of riches—"in ciascuno modo quelle ricchezze iniquamente avvenire" (the appropriation of these riches in whatever way results in injustice)—violates Aristotle's definition of the distributive justice that binds political communities in friendship, one in which just distribution of property and resources, and settlements of disputes are done proportionally, according to need of individuals and criteria of virtue.⁵³

The arguments Dante advances concerning the accumulation of wealth in *Convivio* 4.12–13 are indebted to Aristotle's distinction between two kinds of wealth-getting: one that is natural and the other that is one with the habit of greed (chrematistic wealth-getting) and which is *specifically* related to *monetary accumulation*—the accumulation of riches. Speaking of the accumulation of riches and their possession, Dante says that they are "pericolose" (dangerous) because "promettono le false traditrici sempre, in certo numero adunate, rendere lo raunatore pieno d'ogni appagamento; e con questa promissione conducono l'umana voluntade in vizio d'avarizia" (these false traitresses always promise to bring complete satisfaction to the person who gathers them in sufficient quantity, and by this promise they lead the human will into the vice of avarice).⁵⁴ Although they promise satiation in "certa quantità di loro accrescimento [...] in loco di bastanza recando nuovo termine, cioè maggiore quantitate a desiderio, e, conquesta, paura grande e sollicitudine sopra l'acquisto" (fulfillment of this promise when they have increased to a certain amount [...] in place of sufficiency they set up a new goal: that is, a greater quantity to be desired, and once this has been realized, they instill a great fear and concern for what has been acquired).⁵⁵ Citing a canon of authorities that have denounced greed, from Cicero and Boethius, to the Scriptures and Roman poets, Dante links the *acquisition, accumulation, and possession* of capital to destructive political and social consequences, or to use a stronger word, "iniquitate" (injustice).⁵⁶ In short, in the mania of acquiring wealth, all means are taken to get, to accumulate more, and to hold on to riches without limit or ethical consideration. Dante sarcastically challenges his readers to consider the lives and consequences of those who chase after and accumulate riches: "E che altro cotidianamente pericola e uccide le cittadi, le contrade, le singolari persone, tanto quanto lo nuovo raunamento d'aver appo alcuno? Lo quale raunamento nuovi desiderii discuoore, a lo

⁵² *Conv.* 4.11.6-7

⁵³ *Pol.* 2.1261a29-31; *Eth.* 5.5.1132b30-1133a15

⁵⁴ *Conv.* 4.12.3-4

⁵⁵ *Conv.* 4.12.5.5

⁵⁶ *Conv.* 4.11.6

fine de li quali senza ingiuria d'alcuno venire non si può" (And what imperils and destroys cities, territories, and individuals day by day more than the accumulation of wealth by some new person? Such an accumulation uncovers new desires which cannot be satiated without causing injury to someone).⁵⁷

Dante argues for just laws and political order to stop the disastrous effects of greed in *Convivio* as he will repeatedly do in *Monarchia* as well. In Dante's view, the laws were founded to curb the effects of greed: "E che altro intende di meditare l'una e l'altra Ragione, Canonica dico e Civile, tanto quanto a riparare a la cupiditate che, raunando ricchezze, cresce? Certo assai lo manifesta, e l'una e l'altra Ragione, se li loro cominciamente, dico de la loro scrittura, si leggono" (What else were the two categories of Law, namely Canon Law and Civil Law, intended to curb if not the surge of greed brought about by the amassing of wealth? Certainly both categories of Law make this quite evident if we read their beginnings, that is, the beginnings of their written record).⁵⁸ He argues for the necessity of one world authority, one monarch: "lo quale, tutto possedendo e più desiderare non possendo, li regi tegna contenti ne li termini de li regni, sì che pace intra loro sia, ne la quale si posino le cittadi, e in questa posa le vicinanze s'amino, in questo amore le case prendano ogni loro bisogno, lo qual preso, l'uomo viva felicemente (who, possessing all things and being unable to desire anything else, would keep the kings content within the boundaries of their kingdoms and preserve among them the peace in which the cities might rest. Through this peace the communities would come to love one another, and by this love all households would provide for their needs, which when provided would bring man happiness, for this is the end for which he is born).⁵⁹

Significant here is that Dante is speaking of *bisogno*, since *bisogno* (need) connects with the idea of meeting economic needs in a state, rather than a state merely being a platform in which individuals, entities, or groups set about acquiring, amassing, and possessing riches. In this understanding, good economy is *using* and *providing* riches—true riches are wealth understood as something that people "use" justly—while bad economic wealth-getting is merely acquiring, amassing, and possessing money beyond its instrumental use-value.⁶⁰ In the *Aristoteles latinus*, Moerbeke translates the passage from *Politics* 1.7 (1255b14-20) that Dante alludes to in *Convivio* 4.4, as "yconomica quidem monarchia" (the rule of

⁵⁷ *Conv.* 4.12.8-9

⁵⁸ *Conv.* 4.12.9-10

⁵⁹ *Conv.* 4.4.4-6

⁶⁰ *Pol.* 1.7 1256a11-18

a household is a monarchy).⁶¹ It is important to understand right political rule as involving the distribution and regulation of property for self-sufficiency, social need, and the good life, while preventing greed from turning the laws to bad ends. Invoking Aristotle's maxim (*Pol.* 1.2.1253a2–4) that “man is a political animal”, Dante says the root of “la imperial maistade” (imperial majesty) is “la necessità de la umana civiltade, che a uno fine è ordinata, cioè a vita felice; a la quale nullo per sé è sufficiente a venire senza l'aiutorio d'alcuno, con ciò sia cosa che l'uomo abbisogna di molte cose, a le quali uno solo soddisfare non può” (the need for human society, which is established for a single end: namely, a life of happiness, which no one is able to attain by himself without the aid of someone else, since one has need of many things which no single individual is able to provide).⁶² Dante posits the authority of *imperium* to regulate *dominium*: the distribution of property and exchange according to Aristotelian moral ends.⁶³

What does Dante have in mind, then, if the “yconomica” is like a “monarchia”? First, in the beginning of the *Politics*, Aristotle goes to great lengths to clarify that the wealth provisionary functions of the *oikonomia* is not the same thing as the art of politics (*politike episteme*).⁶⁴ This distinction is important in so far as it rejects the equation of politics—the attainment of human social ends—to mere wealth-getting, while also placing economy squarely beneath political authority as a subsidiary function of the latter's regulation. Second, if Dante intends to suggest that a single monarch is necessary to prevent uncontrollable greed in the world, as he does in the above passages of *Convivio* and in *Monarchia* 1.5 and 1.11, then in regards to the political rule over the economy, the polity would have to exert a single authority over wealth-getting, as Dante argues, for the sake of the proper ends and good life of the entire human

⁶¹ William Moerbeka and Aristotle, *Aristoteles Latinus Database*, ed. Traditio Litterarum Centre (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011).

⁶² *Conv.* 4.4.1

⁶³ For an overview of the Dominican and Franciscan disputes regarding property and the complexities of the terms *dominium* and *imperium* in legal (civil and canon) and in medieval publicist texts, see Janet Coleman's *A History of Political Thought: From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) and “Property and Poverty” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought C. 350–c. 1450*, ed. J H Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁶⁴ *Pol.* 1.1.1252a8–24; *Pol.* 1.8.1256aff.

race.⁶⁵ The *Monarch* would be of superior intellect and able to rule in so far as he thinks in proper ethical political categories, that is “secundum philosophica documenta” (in conformity with the teachings of philosophy) as a lawgiver, or “oikonomos” over the state. Furthermore, he does so because “ad hunc portum vel nulli vel pauci [...] pervenire possint, nisi sedatis fluctibus blande cupiditatis genus humanum liberum in pacis tranquillitate possit” (none [...] or few [...] can reach this harbor [...] unless the waves of seductive greed are calmed and the human race rests free in the tranquility of peace).⁶⁶

A serious concern in Aristotle's political thought that develops through the first book of *Politics* is the real danger of confusing the “economic” mode of authority (which also includes despotic and regal rule) with the activity concomitant with acquiring things (*chremata*) or wealth necessary for the good life. For this reason, Aristotle sees the imminent importance of discussing household management (*oikonomia*) and the other aspect of it, “the art of getting wealth” and property, as a prerequisite to understanding the particular forms of state. For Aristotle, the extent to which and mode in which societies seek and distribute wealth plays an immense role not only in the degree to which states are just, but also in the various forms of state and their respective transmutations from one form to another.⁶⁷ Chrematistic activity (from *ta chremata*) for Aristotle is the acquisition of useful things and is a natural part of the household or state management as well. These useful things can be accumulated and provisioned, but as Aristotle writes, “the amount of property which is needed for a good life [...] is not unlimited, although Solon in one of his poems says that *no bound for riches has been fixed for man*.”⁶⁸

Thus, while there is a good, “natural” economic activity, in *Politics* 1.9 we encounter the seminal discussion of another type of acquisitiveness described as *chrematistike*, and designated as bad *chrematistike*, because it is “unnatural”. The latter violates the acquisition of wealth qua “use” values, in other words, the acquisition of things necessary to consume and exchange for human life in society (with correct teleological ends, but not for exchange itself). Aristotle observes that acquisitiveness is “commonly

⁶⁵ Aristotle acknowledges that wealth-getting is a concern of the statesman, even if the economic mode is not to be confused with the political, and discusses the importance of considering economics at the state level in *Pol.* 1.5.1259a35–39.

⁶⁶ *Mon.* 3.16.10; On the legal arguments of the *Monarchia*, as pertaining to economic issues, see Vittorio Russo, *Impero e stato di diritto: studio su “Monarchia” ed “Epistole Politiche” di Dante* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1987).

⁶⁷ *Pol.* 2.1267a–1267b20; *Pol.* 3.1279a19–1280a20

⁶⁸ *Pol.* 1.8.1256b31–38

and rightly called an art of wealth-getting, and has in fact suggested the notion that riches and property have no limit. Being nearly connected with the preceding, it is often identified with it."⁶⁹ Bad chrematistics happens in the context of a developed monetary economy, where money's usefulness as a token of exchange has become a foundation for money to become a "useful" thing in itself qua exchange, thus breeding more money, and starting the infamous the Money-Commodity-Money' chain that Marx identifies in *Capital* on the basis of Aristotle's very discussion here in *Politics* 1.9.⁷⁰ It is on these grounds that the thought of Marx, Aristotle, and Dante coincide and agree.⁷¹ In Dante's time monetary exchange of this second sort was fully developed and, as we have seen above, exhibits many of the major political and economic characteristics of the fully formed capitalism of our time.

For Aristotle, one of the biggest problems for the health of the state is that people come to believe that wealth-getting consists in the procurement of wealth qua coin, qua money (the second bad chrematistics). The consequence of this belief is that people misunderstand the basic economic function, which should be the exchange of goods between diverse and unequally needy individuals, houses, and families in a division of labor or social intercourse, of the sort Dante describes in *Convivio* 4.4, for the meeting of human needs and eudemonism. The right understanding of the basic economic function would be friendship bound by the principle of proportional reciprocity and distributive justice, instead of the mere procurement and accumulation of monetary wealth.⁷² Some people are led, Aristotle says, in a passage that shows Dante's debt to the philosopher's economic thought in *Convivio*, "to believe that getting wealth is the object of household management, and the whole idea of their lives is that they ought either to increase their money without limit, or at any rate not to lose it."⁷³ We have now arrived at the point from which we departed, that of the political economy under critique or, in other words, the confusion over the notion of wealth-getting, as well as misunderstanding the proper mode of political authority in relation to wealth-getting.

As Dante puts it in *Monarchia*, referring directly to the above noted passages in Aristotle on distributive justice and monetary exchange, "ad

⁶⁹ *Pol.* 1.8.1256b40-1257a3

⁷⁰ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 248.

⁷¹ In fact, one of Marx's earliest attempts to articulate a "critique" of political economy, in the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, starts with a discussion of Aristotle's *Politics* 1.9.1257a.

⁷² *Pol.* 2.1261a29-32; *Eth.* 5.5.1132b30-1133a15

⁷³ *Pol.* 1.9.1257b35-40

evidentiam primi notandum quod iustitie maxime contrariatur cupiditas, ut innuit Aristotiles in quinto *ad Nicomacum*" (it must be noted that the thing most contrary to justice is greed, as Aristotle states in the fifth book of the *Ethics*).⁷⁴ As we have seen, Dante goes to great lengths to make clear that the monarchy is necessary, through the exercise of law and state power, to stop greed and install "pax universalis" (universal peace); a corollary of this argument is that the purpose of the state is not wealth-getting, because that enterprise prevents mankind from engaging in the activities most proper to humanity.⁷⁵ At the outset of *Monarchia*, it is clear that Dante desires to bear fruit for public benefit but this intention is at odds with the individual who does not care for the common good, like a "perniciosa vorago semper ingurgitans" (a destructive whirlpool which forever swallows things down).⁷⁶ At the beginning of *Monarchia*, Dante also notes that temporal monarchy has not been investigated "propter se non habere ad lucrum" (on account of its not leading directly to material gain), which immediately opposes his idea of monarchy to a chrematistic state in which the exercise of politics is linked to profit. It was, after all, as Cary Nederman has shown, Dante's Ser Brunetto who advocated in his *Tresor* for a conception of politics based upon a totally perverse reading of Aristotle in which "increasing wealth may serve as a positive blessing to the city" and politics and justice in the city are concomitant with the good desire for personal profit.⁷⁷ As Brunetto writes, adumbrating classical political economists like Adam Smith, commercial exchange and market relationships are real civil friendship, and the act of seeking money and personal advantage is a natural thing to do: "Among them [...citizens...], there is a common thing that is loved, through which they arrange and conform their business, and that is gold and silver."⁷⁸

However, if one opposes Brunetto's inversion of the Aristotelian teleology—that merely *living* as market exchange actors in a political economy in pursuit of sterile monetary accumulation is truly living *well*—Dante argues that we should reject such a situation as "unnatural" and change it. In *Monarchia* 1.2.5–8, he clearly asserts that the political realm

⁷⁴ *Mon.* 1.11.11

⁷⁵ *Mon.* 1.11.11; *Mon.* 1.4; *Mon.* 1.4.5

⁷⁶ *Mon.* 1.3

⁷⁷ Cary J. Nederman, "Brunetto Latini's Commercial Republicanism", in *Lineages of European Political Thought: Explorations Along the Medieval/Modern Divide from John of Salisbury to Hegel* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 143.

⁷⁸ *Tresor* 2.5.2; as quoted in Nederman, "Brunetto Latini's Commercial Republicanism", 148.

is under our deliberative control: "cum ergo materia prasens politica sit, ymo fons atque principium reclarum politiarum, et omne politicum nostre potestati subiaceat, manifestum est quod materia prasens non ad speculationem per prius, sed ad operationem ordinatur" (now since our present subject is political, indeed is the source and starting-point of just forms of government, and everything in the political sphere comes under human control, it is clear that the present subject is not directed primarily towards theoretical understanding but towards action). In this passage, Dante anticipates Marx's aphorism on theory and praxis from the *Theses on Feuerbach* that "the Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world [...] the point is to change it."⁷⁹ Since the political sphere is changeable and under our control, Dante argues in *Monarchia* 1.3–7 that we can change it for the good, but only by understanding humanity's real political and moral ends as distinct from the ceaseless activity of wealth-getting and the damage we inflict upon ourselves in the service of its ends.

For Dante, the true end of humanity is intellectual development and eudemonistic fulfillment. This goal is also ultimately the same end of the human political community and at its core is human freedom. This assertion underlies his argument that only by living under the monarch is the human race "potissime liberum" (supremely free), because it exists "sui met et non alterius gratia [...] ut Pylosopho placet in hiis que *De simpliciter ente*" (for its own sake and not for the sake of something else, as Aristotle states in the *Metaphysics*).⁸⁰ It is fairly clear that for Dante the "something else" is the non-monarchical holder of authority's perverted desire to accumulate wealth and hence his deployment of all the organs of the polis in their diversity as instruments to such ends. Freedom includes freedom from being instrumental to mere wealth-getting. Dante meditating on later books of the *Politics*, where Aristotle discusses the role of money in the form of just and unjust regimes, argues that freedom occurs only under the rule of the monarch, since only in the monarchical form of government is man secure from *bad forms* of government—democracies, oligarchies, and tyrannies—"que in servitatem cogunt genus humanum" (which force mankind into slavery).⁸¹ For Dante, just governments seek freedom so that "homines propter se sint. Non enim cives propter consules nec gens propter regem, sed e converso consules propter cives et rex propter gentem" (men should exist for their own sake. For citizens do not

⁷⁹ Marx, *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, 571.

⁸⁰ *Mon.* 1.12.8

⁸¹ *Mon.* 1.12.9

exist for the sake of consuls, nor the people for the sake of the king).⁸² The laws exist for the sake of the common good, not for the disordered ends of the authorities. Given the Aristotelian conception (*Pol.* 1.1253b1–39) that politics is an activity that takes place among *free* men and that *slaves* are *living-tools* under a purely household (oikonomical-regal) despotism, Dante's is an unmistakably political-economic critique.

According to Dante, only under the monarch are the laws framed for the benefit of the community which must, as we now understand, have its basic economic needs met. Justice in this order is the fulfillment of unequal needs in community not according to the arithmetical demands of money (and the arithmetical definition of justice), but according to the actual need of persons and with a view to the intellectual fulfillment of all men: a view that has often been called Dante's "Averroism." For Dante this fulfillment cannot come about in chrematistic states, namely because people (especially the *popolo minuto*) are treated like living tools for wealth-getting, pure labor commodities exploited/involved in extraordinary "cura familiare e civile" (domestic and civic responsibilities) and subject to other myriad social ills that result from the mania for monetary wealth, which Dante passionately illustrates and condemns, for example, in his poem *Doglia mi reca*.⁸³

At the world level, there is no doubt that the monarch is necessary so that, as Dante puts it in *Mon.* 1.10, there is no regression of conflict between the interests of parties motivated by greed, as was so obviously evidenced by the political and social troubles of his time. He writes "et sic aut erit processus in infinitum, quod esse non potest, aut oportebit devenire ad iudicem primum et summum de cuius iudicio cuncta litigia dirimantur sive mediate sive immediate: et hic erit Monarcha sive Imperator" (either this situation will continue *ad infinitum* [...] or else we must come to a first and supreme judge, whose judgment resolves all disputes either directly or indirectly, and this man will be the monarch or emperor).⁸⁴ Dante undoubtedly has in mind the cessation of disputes such as the one between Boniface and Charles of Valois or the end of conflicting claims to authority as we saw in the example of Charles of Anjou, the Florentine bankers, and Urban IV and Clement IV. Dante also certainly calls into question the Florentine political institutions that throughout his lifetime became solidly oligarchical and factious, with greedy citizens lining up

⁸² *Mon.* 1.12.10-12; *Pol.* 3.6.1179a1-21

⁸³ *Conv.* 1.1; *Doglia mi reca*, 64-147; on the social and economic struggles of the *popolo minuto* in 14th century Italy, see Niccolò Rodolico, *Il popolo minuto* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1968).

⁸⁴ *Mon.* 1.10.5

behind these powers for profit at the cost of the common good. A just state, Dante argues, can only come about with a monarch who understands that chrematistic accumulation is not the end of the polity and who is willing to use the universal authority or *imperium* that trumps *dominium*, in order to stop the fires, regressive conflicts, and the destruction of true human happiness caused by greed. In other words, without having a modern anti-capitalist vocabulary, Dante addressed this very problem in his *Monarchia*.

At this point, we can now understand how Dante's political thought is a "critique of political economy". I have historicized the situation of the capitalist base that undergirded the traditional medieval superstructural claims to authority. Having done so, we can better understand why Dante argues that only under the monarch can we have true justice: Dante's monarch subverts not only traditional city-state, imperial, and church claims to power, but the monarch also rejects the immoral economic capitalist base inherent in all of them. Dante's ideal monarch is arguably a "utopian" conception, but Dante intends his vision to be the foundation for a serious political program: in Dante's normative political theory the monarch is not only a political ruler of great philosophical wisdom, but one who is also a good economist, in the right way. This leads me back to Aristotle's observation that "yconomica quidem monarchia" (the rule of a household is a monarchy). Dante's monarchy is to be a polity ruled like a just household, in which the monarch exercises all *imperium* over wealth-getting at a world-wide level: an idea that would be vigorously taken up again by Trotsky. While Dante, of course, is silent on the rather modern debate between proponents of socialism and capitalism regarding whether the principles of distributive justice ought to require a planned economy or not—perhaps because aspects of just such an idea were not at all radical in the relatively recent memory of feudal economic organization—his position on the regulatory role of the monarch in a political economy is nonetheless in accordance with the traditional Socialist maxim "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need."⁸⁵ In this polity, as outlined in Aristotle's *Ethics* 5, all wealth-getting and exchange is to be in accord with proportional justice or the *contrapassum*, based on need and with the end goal of making good citizens, rather than better claimants to city, church, or empire. In contrast to the economically illegitimate society, the just society is one rightly governed according to the virtues and for the perfection of the "multitudo".

⁸⁵ Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," in *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, Vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 19.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BETWEEN LAW AND THEOLOGY: FROM *CONVIVIO* TO *MONARCHIA*

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A few years ago the book *Political Theology and Early Modernity*, edited by Graham Hammill and Julia Reinhard Lupton, suggested once again that political theology was a distinctly modern problem, showing that its origins stemmed from the early modern period, and were rooted "in medieval iconographies of sacred kingship and the critique of traditional sovereignty mounted by Hobbes and Spinoza."¹ After almost sixty years since the publication of the seminal book by Ernst Kantorowicz, medieval political theology still emerges as a key expression in the history of Western political thought.²

If taken in the sense, prevalent today, that all modern legal and political concepts are nothing more than "secularized theological concepts", the expression "political theology", in spite of everything, still denounces its origin as an ideological deformation, instrumental to the construction of an authoritarian conception of sovereignty. This is, in fact,

¹ Graham Hammill and Julia Reinhard Lupton, eds., *Political Theology and Early Modernity*, with a Postscript by Étienne Balibar (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012). The book has been reviewed by Hollis Phelps, *Reviews in Religion & Theology* 20 (2013): 419–22, and by Russ Leo, *Renaissance Quarterly* 68 (2015): 1444–45.

² Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); see Charles Davis, "Kantorowicz and Dante," in *Ernst Kantorowicz. Erträge der Doppeltagung Institute for Advanced Studies, Princeton/J.W. Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt M.*, eds. Robert L. Benson and Johannes Fried (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997), 240–264. For further discussion see Victoria Kahn, *The Future of Illusion. Political Theology and Early Modern Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), reviewed by Russ Leo, *Renaissance Quarterly* 68 (2015): 276–77.