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determines him as grateful and servile to the will of God, allowing him into the normalized order of Paradise.

Conclusion

Paradise is the final realization of divine justice, a well-ordered society spun into being by the weaving together of power and knowledge. Applying a Foucauldian critique, Dante's vision of Paradise can be seen as the ideal application of the success of normalization, by which divine authority has become so internalized that it subsumes the desires of the self. The souls in Paradise are the ideal Foucauldian "docile bodies," whose exactitude before the divine Truth guarantees them eternal concord.

Dante's philological exploration thus reveals power as an operative force that not only punishes or reforms (a trope explored by Carlyle) but as one which perfects the individual through knowledge, discipline, and love. The harrowing journey the protagonist takes from Hell to Paradise illustrates humanity's capacity to rise above its inherent corruption and achieve divine oneness — and presents deep insights into the intersection of power, justice, and redemption.

Here, light represents divine grace, meted out by merit. This does not form an inequality, but rather loosens the normalcy of divine justice in the cosmos from its numbers to mirror their rightful standing in the structure. Foucault (1975) noted how power "compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes" (p. 184), observations that echo Dante's presentation of Paradise as a stratified but coherent social order. Their action, as a manifestation of their nature, in any of its aspects (thought, words, action) as represented in this Universe is perfect in the sense that what we know as the Soul, i.e. the inner man, achieves perfection in their unique part of the whole.

2.8. Love as the Ultimate Power

In Paradise, love becomes the highest power that brings together the whole creation. This love is neither passive nor personal; it is the dynamic, all-pervading force that rules the universe. In the final canto, Dante has a vision of God as a Trinitarian unity of love:

"But my will and my desire, that already / were as a wheel in perfect balance mov'd, / by the love that move the sun and the other stars" (Paradiso, 33:142-145).

This ending image culminates in the normalization of divine will, where Dante's wishes align seamlessly with God's. The rotating wheel of using metaphysical wonders aptly describes a dynamic of simultaneity between the powers of political action and those of gods. This, for Foucault, would be the greatest form of power, a power so overwhelming that it becomes seemingly "natural," as though it could have happened no other way. In Paradise, the souls no longer perceive divine power as something outside of themselves constraining them, rather they feel it has become internalized to such a degree that they exist in a form of perfect accord.

2.9. The Role of Beatrice as Mediator

Beatrice's position as Dante's guide emphasizes the association between knowledge and salvation. She represents wisdom divine, guiding Dante through the intellectual and spiritual changes needed to attain Paradise. In Canto XXII, she explains: "The Good that spins and fills the universe, / the universe that's not the realm of sight or touch, / draws to Its very self-love of love" (Paradiso, 22:64-66).

Beatrice's lessons exemplify Foucault's idea that knowledge is never neutral but embedded in power. By choosing to 'unveil' divine truths to Dante, she

For example, the Heaven in Dante's Divine Comedy represents the end of his spiritual journey, in which souls are fully harmonized with the divine will. Here its power is not through punishment or discipline but through the normalization of the divine truth. Michel Foucault's work on power and knowledge is key to understanding the operations at play in Paradise. As Foucault (1975) states, "Power produces knowledge… power and knowledge directly imply one another" (p. 27)

The knowledge that is true in Paradise is the manifestation and explanatory core of almighty power, operating upon and generating the dream of reality, becoming world and order.

2.6. Knowledge as Power

Paradise is a state of perfect and complete knowledge of God, where knowledge is the path to eternal bliss for the souls who approach it. Paradise, unlike Hell and even Purgatory, is a utopia of a type, where such distinctions of hierarchy yield to the implicit equality of submission to divine knowledge. And Beatrice, Dante's guide, often stresses the transformative power of understanding divine mysteries. For instance, she makes the nature of divine justice clear in Canto III: "From this you see that the highest Goodness, / which never spurns Itself, is gathered up / by countless love-knots in a single bond" (Paradiso, 3:85-87).

This description frames divine truth as something that brings all existence together, eliminates conflict, and creates a perfect society. Foucault's concept of normalization offers one window into this dynamic. In Paradiso, souls absorb divine law to the extent that desires and actions automatically conform to the cosmic order. "The normalization process" ensures that no compulsion is required; power flows naturally through knowledge, forming perfect governance.

2.7. The Hierarchy of Light and Perfection

Instead, every soul in Paradise will experience the same eternal bliss, albeit in different spheres depending on their worldly merits. Such hierarchy follows a Foucauldian precept of how power works, through differentiation and categorization. In Canto II, Beatrice expounds the order of the heavens: "The distribution of the light eternal / is not unequal, but the living Love / gives grace in varying measures as It wills" (Paradiso, 2.130-32).

Divine justice in Purgatory takes the form of a structured system of penance, where the sacred quicker than light mercies of heaven redeem the sinner accounts into holy credit.

In *Purgatorio*, sinners undergo physical and spiritual hints to atone for their sins. Each terrace of Mount Purgatory represents one of the seven deadly sins, with punishments that also serve as purification. For example, in Canto X, the proud are burdened with carrying heavy stones. "They seemed as if they wanted to be crouching, / and one could see that they were bound in pain; / they weary our eyes, so weighted down were they" (Purgatorio, 10:118-120).

This imagery of bodily discipline echoes Foucault's analysis of disciplinary systems that regulate behavior through repetitive, structured exercises. Just as the prideful are burdened with physical weight to humble their spirits, Foucault observes that disciplinary systems aim to produce "docile bodies" that internalize control through routine practices (Foucault, 1975, p. 138). The stones in Purgatorio symbolize both the weight of pride and the transformative power of repentance, shaping the sinner's soul in alignment with divine law.

2.4. Surveillance and Self-Regulation

In Purgatory, divine justice is both external (surveillance) and internal (self-discipline). The penitents are monitored day and night by angelic overseers, who watch the penitents in their progress and ensure compliance with the rules of penance. This echoes Foucault's notion of the panopticon, a model of surveillance where people internalize the gaze of authority and self-regulate

For instance, in Canto XIII, the envious are punished by having their eyes sewn shut, preventing them from coveting others: "And as they had their eyelids all sewed up / with iron wire, just like a sparrow-hawk's, / it seemed they'd all been treated cruelly" (Purgatorio, 13:70-72).

This punishment serves to redirect outward gazing envious inward, leaving them nothing to take their eyes off them. That image of sewn eyelids resonates with Foucault's argument that power is most effective when it persuades people to control their own thoughts and actions. As the Envious learn how to transcend their sin, they embody the Foucauldian rule of disciplinary power; power here is not expressed through domination but rather through the public shaming and a reworking of the soul.

2.5. Paradise: Normalization and the Ideal Society

eternal, it's also all-consuming, highlighting God's dominion over body and soul.

2.2. Punishment as Eternal Spectacle

From the theology of Foucault describing the rehabilitative slant that modern systems take, we can see that the punishments within Inferno are as static as the hell in which they are placed. Tormented, unrepentant sinners are condemned to suffer ever better choices, contrasted with modernity's instructions on reformatting, where each iteration is a reformed being.

For instance, the gluttonous in Canto VI are punished with never-ending cold rain and filth: "Huge hail and filthy water mixed with snow / pour from the dismal air to putrefy / the putrid slush that waits for them below" (Inferno, 6:10-12).

They literally become their transgression forever, in punishment that is poetic in its mirroring of their human weakness but also serves as an eternal reminder of their transgression against divine law. The spectacle is not intended for the sinners, who cannot be redeemed, but for the audience — for both Dante and the reader.

The effect of public punishment was "carried to the spectators, not the condemned" (Foucault, 1975, p. 58) and "the spectator was the event" (p. 59). Dante's traversal of Hell, then, serves as a didactic experience, whereby morals are taught through the dramatic display of power.

Purgatory: Discipline and Transformation

2.3. The Mechanisms of Discipline

Purgatory operates on the principle of moral reformation, where sinners and if Hell is a vision of punishment as spectacle, Purgatory in *The Divine Comedy* is the space of transformation, where discipline is a means to salvation. While Hell represents an unending life of punishment, Purgatory provides a space for sinners to make amends for their sins through repentance and purification, supporting Michel Foucault's ideas of discipline as a means of correction and adaptation. As Foucault (1975) puts it, "Discipline is a political anatomy of detail, where power operates in small, precise increments to shape bodies and minds" (p. 137).

of power and authority. The agony of each sinner in Hell is at once a reflection of her earthly crimes and a public affirmation of the divine order.

For example, the punishment of the fortune-tellers in Canto XX reflects this spectacle vividly: "For we had been so twisted in our joints, / the head reversed its course to where the back / is fastened at the neck" (Inferno, 20:10-12).

The twisted back heads in the grotesque image are punishment for trying to see ahead, forcing them to behold the trail behind. This act is personal suffering but also a public punishment from God. The body of the sinner is where power is inscribed, as Foucault (1975) describes in the following: "The body is an instrument, a tool, an intermediary: when one intervenes on it in order to imprison, it is in order to bring a man, an individual, a subject, to lose his liberty" (p. 11). In Inferno, the medium through which God establishes His dominion is the body of the sinner.

Dante's Hell also reminds the living of the realities of sin. This is in line with Michel Foucault's view that public executions in pre-modern societies were not only punitive but also pedagogical: "The public execution did not re-establish justice; it reactivated power" (Foucault, 1975, p. 49). By the same token, the painstaking and theatrical scorning in Inferno reestablishes the will of God, law, and politeness — in this case, erasing any ambiguity or dissent that may rustle through the tormented clusters of souls.

2.1. The Spectacle of Authority

The structure of hell in Dante´s text ruefully mirrors a sin-galling hierarchy over the nine rings of hell, each worsened than the next. This inflexible system resembles the penmanship of Foucault's panopticon, a theoretical model of surveillance that seeks to impose discipline. The further one goes down into Hell, the grander then becomes the spectacle of power. As an example, in Canto V, Dante portrays the second edge, where the lustful are trapped in a ceaseless shipwreck

"The infernal storm, eternal in its rage, / sweeps and drives the spirits with its blast: / it whirls them, lashing them with punishment" (Inferno, 5:31-33).

This storm is a visible sign of God's judgment, punishing the sinners and affirming the moral hierarchy. They are caught in this cycle of these never-ending sinus days, this never-ending surveillance that Foucault would describe in his language of disciplinary institutions. Here, divine justice is not just

Doe (2022) analyses Dante's representations of bodies and punishment in Inferno through a sociopolitical lens, attending to matters of gender and ableism. The study offers important insights into the practice without the overarching Foucauldian format of spectacle and normalization. The researcher proposed the idea of exploring the role of Dante's implementation of punishment as a spectacle in Hell and as a counterpoint, the normalization of virtue in Paradise, as he observes both as mechanisms to ensure the enforcement of divine justice in Dante's Paradiso, inferno, and ante-inferno world. This disconnect calls for a holistic analysis connecting Foucault's theories of spectacle and discipline up and down the cosmological hierarchy of Dante's world.

Brown (2015) traces Dante's footsteps in contemporary media, more specifically, the television show Lost, in order to elaborate on themes of redemption and moral order. Though expanding on Dante's contemporary relevance, this study only indirectly engages with Foucauldian theories of power and control9 in The Divine Comedy. One researcher notices that the study does not attempt to examine how Dante's conception of justice mirrors structural control mechanisms, as Foucault theorizes. This offers an occasion to turn, instead, to Dante's text itself and explore the complexity of relationships between power, punishment and salvation in his medieval world view.

Green (2014) explores parallels between *Inferno* and American Psycho with a focus on visibility and surveillance. But the focus his study brings on these elements through a modern literary lens comes at the expense of a deeper engagement with Foucault's theories—indeed, with Michel Foucault—applied to Dante's hierarchical cosmos. The researcher notes a lacuna in previous scholarship that examines these intense expressions of penalty and divine dominion as exercises of fouccaldian modalities of power, especially with respect to the shift from spectacle as punishment to a species of virtue normalization. This disparity highlights the necessity of a more unified Foucauldian interpretation drawn directly from *The Divine Comedy*.

Hell: Power Through Spectacle

Hell serves as the ultimate stage for divine justice in Dante's Inferno; punishment in Dante's Inferno is retributive... and also highly theatrical. Pope Thoughts: The principle of contrapasso, for example, in which the punishment reflects the sin, is in line with Foucault's notion of punishment as public display

a person in Face of Heaven, to orient and reestablish the process of a soul to Heaven. This spray of technology echoes Foucault's descriptions of sites of discipline that attempt to shape individuals to conform their behavior through ritualized practice and absorbed norms of propriety.

Also a lens through which Dante s *Paradiso* can be examined is the Foucauldian filter that reveals how the hierarchical structure of arranged souls according to their virtues and proximity to God. Normalization [Foucault] is a process through which certain standards are established and at those standards individuals are being measured/marked/collected. In *Paradise* the assignment of souls marks a divine scheme of virtue, reinforcing a cosmic order that parallels the social stratification and disciplinary structure Foucault describes.

In short, Michel Foucault enables an analysis of the themes of justice and hierarchy at play in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. His theories about disciplinary systems and the evolution of punishment into the modern age provide a constructive framework by which Dante's message about the relative degree of punishment can be interpreted. In their own ways, both works expose the mechanisms of power exercised and accepted, and the ways in which power manifests (and reinforces) social contracts—or enforcing social norms to hold a community together while preventing dissent (Freccero, 2008).

The researcher notes that Smith (2018) offers an insightful reading of penitence in Purgatorio considering Foucauldian discipline, but that the paper narrowly considers only the metaphor of the dance as a mechanism of discipline. Though rich in its insights, this approach fails to synthesize other important components of Foucault's framework, including the logic of normalization and panoptic surveillance. Thus, the study ignores how Dante's whole cosmology—hell to paradise—spouses these disciplinary architectures. There is a gap to fill on the dynamics of how these Foucauldian mechanisms work in concert across all three realms in *The Divine Comedy*.

Jones (2010) offers a philosophical treatment of the hierarchical ethics of *The Divine Comedy*, in which he underscores how sin and virtue serve to iterate medieval constructs of justice. Nonetheless, it insufficiently investigates the relationship between Dante's contrapasso and Foucauldian disciplinary systems, and the normalization of behavior and hierarchically arranged power. The researcher argues that it is relevant to examine how Dante's vision of justice both reinforces and restores social and cosmic codes via a Foucauldian lens of power, and most importantly, with respect to moral surveillance and correction.

Naturally, *The Divine Comedy* fits neatly into Foucauldian theories — the power to the narrative arc that evolves from spectacle to discipline to normalization. This alignment highlights both Dante's perspective and the reinforcement of hierarchical authority and moral order across the divine cosmos in which justice is both eternal and systematized (Cogan, 2008,p.98).

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Foucault's seminal work, *Discipline and Punish* (1975), offers a profound analysis of the evolution of punitive measures in Western societies. Foucault has argued that punishment shifted from overt physical torture to more subtle mechanisms of social control, seeking to "punish the soul" rather than the body. He argues that "Docile bodies" are a product of, and are what is encouraged by a modern system of discipline based on surveillance and normalization. The researcher will use this framework to inspect various cultural and historical texts, including Dante Alighieri's The Divine Comedy.

The Divine Comedy embodies the medieval idea of divine justice, in which punishments in the afterlife relate closely to the sins committed on earth — or "contrapasso." This concept mirrors Foucault's assertion that punishment serves as a tool to uphold disciplinary norms and power structures within society. Dante's structured and hierarchical conception of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise mirrors these disciplinary mechanisms, wherein a moral and social order is imposed upon individuals and used to regulate their behavior according to the expectations of the society they reside in, which is the very opposite of Foucault's notion of freewill (Becker, 1966).

By contrast, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault analyzes the "spectacle" of punishment; the public execution becomes a tool in the display of sovereign power, used to intimidate and deter transgression. That spectacle is apparent in Dante's graphic descriptions of sinners' tortures in Hell, which he uses as both punishment and as a moral warning for the living. The social structures of sin and punishment in the work of Dante support the Foucauldian idea, in that power is maintained in visible and theatrical ways, to ensure that society is organized accordingly.

Moreover, Foucault's consideration of the transition from corporal punishment in the Middle Ages to modern disciplinary means of regulating human activity offers a parallel to Dante's depiction of Purgatory. Purgatory consists of penance for souls, a discipline that serves to correct and to normalize

First, Dante's *Inferno* presents punishment as spectacle, echoing Foucault's historical exploration of pre-modern punishment rituals. The graphic and miserable tortures of Hell, described in bloody cantos such as those governing the fate of the flatterers or the betrayers, are enacted in public view to instill horror and to enforce social customs of shame (Doe,2022,p.65). These connections can be cognized in line with Foucault, for example, who says that these spectacles are not only acts of retribution, but can work also as deterrent acts operating through fear and collective discipline (Foucault, 1977,p.11). The narrative presents divine justice as infinitely powerful: the tortures of Hell provide the staged force of moral and ethical order being maintained, which, in the manner of public executions, expresses the power of power's presence and its presence everywhere (Freccero, 2008).

It is in *Purgatorio*, however, that Dante shifts to a disciplinary model similar to Foucault's "docile bodies" framework. Penance is neither instant nor retributive; it is reformist, it is reformatory, concerned less with what his society would do to his outer being than with the necessity of an internal commutation of the soul. Souls in Purgatory have a more organized path to purification, for example the arduous ascent of Mount Purgatory that we would liken to the regimented life in Foucauldian institutions like penitentiary or school. These apparatuses do not seek to annihilate persons; rather, they seek to correct them, cultivating a self-monitory conscience in them capable of being in accordance with divine desires (Foucault, 1977,p.87). The shuttles of penance in Purgatorio echo the details of Foucault's hypothesis about the inward turn of disciplinary power, the penitent souls engaging in self-subjugation toward their own moral rehabilitation.

Finally, Dante's vision in Paradiso embodies the Foucauldian principle of normalization, where justice is fully realized in the complete correspondence of the individual with the divine order. Here in the presence of God, souls obtain a mode of perfection which perfectly aligns them with the celestial order, as they are arranged based upon their virtue and adherence to the divine law (Borgese, 1938).

Normalization establishes a "norm" again in Foucault's theory, which is a standard of behavior to which all deviations from it are judged and corrected (Foucault, 1977). Dante's hierarchical cosmos, concerned with the "just measure" of the place of each soul, adopts this principle, rendering Paradise as the ultimate clearing of normalized justice.

understanding of the way in which The Divine Comedy encapsulates Foucauldian systems of power and control, and thereby enhances its significance in terms of discourses on power, hierarchy, and morality. The conclusions add to wider discussions surrounding the intersections between medieval theology, disciplinary mechanisms, and the use of Foucauldian theory in literary studies.

Keywords: Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Michel Foucault, power, punishment, Justice

الخلاصة

يعتمد هذا البحث على نظريات ميشيل فوكو حول السلطة والعقاب، كما وردت في كتابه المراقبة والمعاقبة (١٩٧٥)، لدراسة الكوميديا الإلهية لدانتي أليغييري. إن رؤية دانتي للعدالة – التي تمتد عبر الجحيم والمطهر والفردوس – مرتبطة بالهرميات الكونية في العصور الوسطى، حيث يُحدد مصير الإنسان من خلال نظام العالم والعلاقة بين الأرواح البشرية والسلطة الإلهية. من خلال تحليل "الكونترباسو" – العقوبات التي تعكس طبيعة خطيئة المذنب – يحقق البحث في العلاقة بين رؤية دانتي للعدالة الإلهية وأنماط السلطة الفوكوية، مثل مشهد العقاب والانضباط والتطبيع. يملأ هذا البحث فجوات أساسية في الأدبيات، بما في ذلك القراءة المؤثرة لتحليل فوكوي متكامل عبر البنية الثلاثية لدانتي، والتفاعل الذي يتم تجاهله كثيرًا بين مشهد العقاب والتطبيع في إنتاج وتطبيع العدالة الإلهية. يهدف هذا التحليل إلى تقديم فهم دقيق للطريقة التي تجسد بها الكوميديا الإلهية أنظمة فوكوية للسلطة والسيطرة، وبالتالي تعزز أهميتها في سياق الخطابات المتعلقة بالسلطة والهرمية والأخلاق. وتضيف الاستنتاجات إلى المناقشات الأوسع حول التقاطعات بين اللاهوت في العصور الوسطى وآليات الانضباط واستخدام نظرية فوكو في الدراسات الأدبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: دانتي أليغييري، الكوميديا الإلهية، ميشيل فوكو، السلطة، العقاب، العدالة

1. Introduction

Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* ties its metatotalitarian cosmology to a sophisticated meditation on justice, pairing poetic vision with Cartesian order. Seen through the lens of Michel Foucault's theory of power and punishment, especially regarding *Discipline and Punish* (1975), the series' representation of justice adheres to Foucauldian punishments of control, discipline, and normalization. This alignment unfolds across the three realms—*Inferno, Purgatorio,* and *Paradiso*—reflecting key Foucauldian dynamics.

The Notion of Justice: A Foucauldian Analysis of Power and Punishment in The Divine Comedy

"مفهوم العدالة: تحليل فوكوياني للسلطة والعقاب في الكوميديا الإلهية"

Abbas Fadhil Raheem [1]

عباس فاضل رحيم

Abstract

This paper draws on Michel Foucault's theories of power and punishment, as articulated in Discipline and Punish (1975), to study Dante Alighieri's The Divine Comedy. Dante's vision of justice—one that traverses Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise—is bound up with medieval cosmological hierarchies, in which the order of the world and the relation between human souls and divine authority determine human fate. Through an analysis of the contrapasso—punishments that reflect the nature of the sinner's crime—the study investigates the relationship between Dante's vision of divine justice and Foucauldian modes of power, such as the spectacle of punishment, discipline, and normalization. This study fills key gaps in the literature, including the influential reading of an integrated Foucauldian analysis across Dante's tripartite structure, and the too-often-ignored interplay between spectacle and normalization in producing and normalizing divine justice. This analysis is intended to provide a nuanced

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Those who set out to visit Imam Hussein during the time of Harun or Al-Mutawakkil, fully aware that they might face death on the path of Hussein (peace be upon him)—or at the very least, the amputation of a hand or foot—cannot be accused of hypocrisy. And even if there were some impurities in the hearts of a few, this faithful pilgrimage purifies them and presents them before Hussein (peace be upon him) with radiant spirits and pure hearts.

Whoever visits Hussein (peace be upon him), knowing his rightful position, God will forgive his past and future sins.

Thus, visiting Hussein (peace be upon him) is knowledge and conduct; it is culture and morality; it is thought and practice. It does not differ from any of the rituals that God commanded us to honor.

"And whosoever honors the symbols of Allah—indeed, it is from the piety of hearts."