

Paradiso XVII, XXI-II

9 May 2020

THE JOURNEY

- The end of last week
 - The fourth sphere of the sun (the Wise)
- This week
 - The fifth sphere of Mars (warriors), Cantos 15-17
 - The sixth sphere of Jupiter (just rulers), Cantos 18-20
 - The seventh and final planetary sphere of Saturn (contemplatives), Cantos 21-22

”Dante and Florence”

Canto XVII

(About the Canto and the secondary reading)

1. Who is Cacciaguida? What does Dante-pilgrim call him in reference to this relationship?
2. According to Najemy, what is Dante-author's opinion, expressed through Cacciaguida, of Florence past/present/future?
3. What kind of governing state does Dante-author see as ideal? Why?
4. What happens in Canto 17? What are the main points?
5. What do this Canto and this sphere (Mars) have to do with the secondary reading?
6. Who is Dante referring to in lines 118-120?

Saturn – Canto XXI

- What do you notice, form/content-wise, about this canto?

Saturn – Canto XXII

- What do you notice, form/content-wise, about this canto?
- Saint Benedict of Monte Cassino – founder of western monasticism
- *The Rule of Saint Benedict*
 - Ora et labora
 - Divided humility into 12 degrees that were like steps on a ladder returning to the origin of goodness and being
- The apostrophe
 - What does the apostrophe signal? What is the key moment of this Canto?

Saturn – Canto XXII

- The apostrophe
 - What does the apostrophe signal? What is the key moment of this Canto?
- What does Dante see?
 - What is the tone?

Timaeus REVIEW

- Distinguishes between a physical and eternal world
 - The physical world changes and perishes, it is the realm of fact and opinion
 - The eternal world is unchangeable and everlasting, it is the realm of truth and reason
- Plato proposes that the universe is a product of rational, purposive and beneficent agency.
 - Made by the Intellect, which he anthropomorphizes as the “Demiurge” (dêmiourgos, 28a6), who imposes mathematical order on a preexistent chaos to generate an ordered universe (kosmos).
 - In that universe is the World Soul (visible cosmos), the Earth, and the 4 elements that constitute matter
- The Intellect models the physical world on the eternal world, using ideal ‘forms’ as the templates for real ones.

Neoplatonism

- Dominant philosophical school 3-7th centuries CE
- Plotinus was the preeminent neoplatonist
 - He was Egyptian and Greek-speaking (204-270 CE)
 - He wrote the *Enneads*, and describes in it three principles: the One, the Intellect, and the Soul
 - These terms are called by other neoplatonists by varying names
 - The One, the First, the Good
 - The Intellect, Nous, the Consciousness, the Demiurge
 - The Soul, the World Soul
 - It takes as its foundational source *Timaeus* but nuances and improves it

Neoplatonism – THE ONE

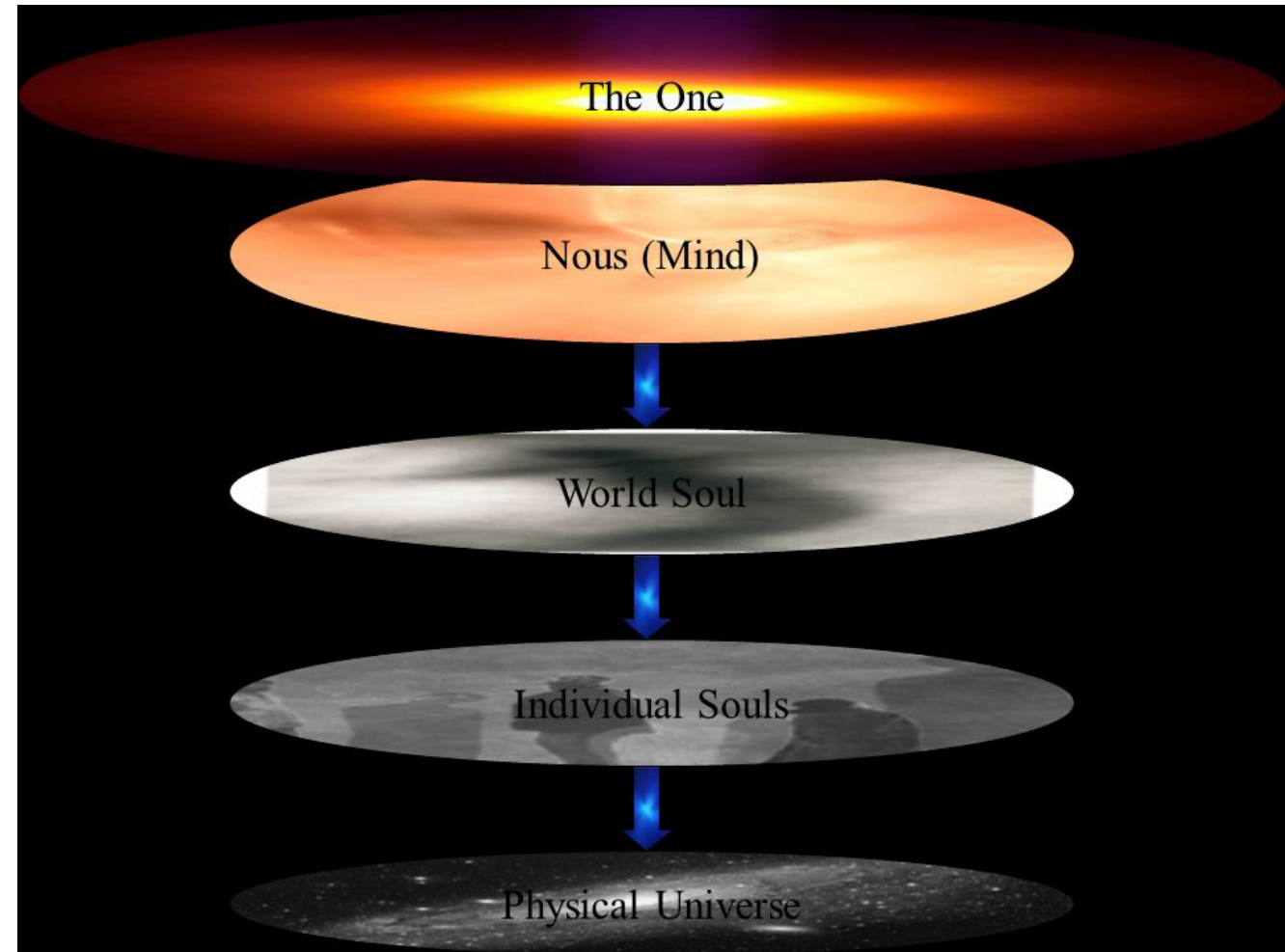
- Is emanationist not creationist
 - In that, all outward appearance emanates from inner activity
 - The outer effect is not the purpose or end of the inner activity, it is simply an effect
 - As such, the One, simply through its inner existence, emanates a manifestation that is, in the end, the phenomenological universe
 - The outward appearance may appear random, but it is not, it is, rather, the outward expression of inner activity
- The One exists and is ineffable, we cannot know much more about it. However, we can understand an aspect of it, as the universe is an expression of it.

Neoplatonism – THE NOUS (INTELLECT)

- The Nous/Intellect is the first effect of the emanation of the One.
 - It is a derivative of the inner activity of the One
 - It can be thought of as Universal Consciousness
- The Nous/Intellect attempts to understand itself and its origin, as that is what defines it (consciousness). In doing so, it looks back to its origin, the One. When the unified Nous/Intellect recognizes a distinct entity in the One, it conceives of all difference at once (size, number, change, etc.) and in doing so it conceives of all possible platonic ideal forms.
- NB: This is not creation. There is no effort, no production, nothing material or spatial changes, no agent exerts influence. In this way it is different from the Platonic and Christian explanations of existence.

Neoplatonism – THE NOUS (INTELLECT)

- Neoplatonists contended, the ideal world of all forms and ideas came to be conceptualized via the Nous/Intellect as it contemplated itself in relationship to the first entity.
- Then, unintentionally and effortlessly, as a simple effect, the outer world was created, in all of its variety. Including the World Soul.



Neoplatonism – THE WORLD SOUL

- How exactly can images of eternal and immutable Forms, prefigured in Consciousness as such, become manifest in and constitute the material world?
- SIDE NOTE:
- This is an example of Idealist philosophy, today materialist philosophy is predominant, though not conclusive.
 - Materialism: Matter precedes the idea
 - Consciousness is a derived/secondary property of the material world and depends on matter
 - Idealism: Idea precedes matter
 - Phenomena are caused by consciousness, the material is a construct of the mind/consciousness

Neoplatonism – THE WORLD SOUL

- How exactly can images of eternal and immutable Forms, prefigured in Consciousness as such, become manifest in, and in fact constitute, the material world?
- The World Soul ‘falls out’ of the Nous/Intellect as the Nous/Intellect ‘falls out’ of the One. It is the outward appearance and effect of the Nous’s inner activity
- The World Soul gazes back at the Nous in the same way that the Nous gazed back at the One, in an attempt to understand itself, and in so doing, manifests the physical forms of the ideal forms ideated by the Nous
 - The outer world is the effect of the activity and life of the Nous (universal consciousness)
- Implication -> we are inherently good / modeled on an ideal

Neoplatonism – ETHICS

- If we are modeled on ideal forms? Why is there evil?
 - Plotinus says evil arises out of ‘misdirection of human attention’, if we look down at the material world instead of up at the ideal source and model
 - That is, **If destitute of form and idea, it is evil**
- So long as idea governs matter, or the soul governs the body, the world is fair and good.
- Unsurprisingly, the route to salvation (a return to the One) turned out to be the philosophic life, a sincere and arduous effort of the mind to return to the One and give up any concerns for the body.

Neoplatonism – AND DANTE

- Since *Vita Nova*, Dante has been trying to assimilate the neoplatonic and dominant Christian cosmological and ethical models
 - Thus, as Plotinus dictates the ontological and ethical goal of humans, so does Dante:
 - the route to salvation (a return to the One) turned out to be the philosophic life, a sincere and arduous effort of the mind to return to the One and give up any concerns for the body.

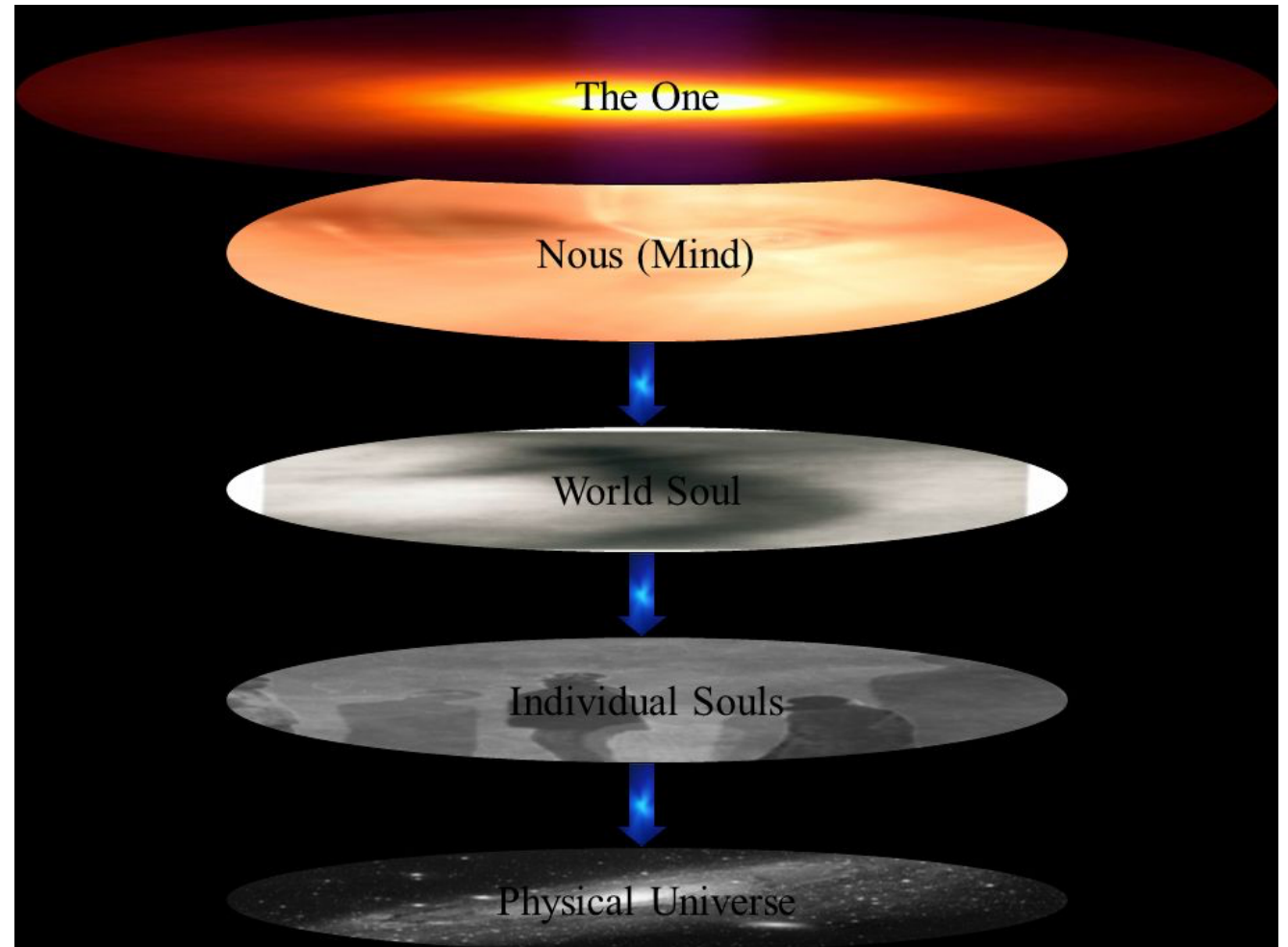
“With my sight I returned through every one of
The seven spheres, and I saw this globe to be
Such that I smiled at its base appearance [...]
The little threshing floor that makes us so
Ferocious.” XXII ll. 133-135, 151-152

Neoplatonism – AND DANTE

- As Dante attempts to assimilate the two models, we see some changes
 - For example, we will see that the World Soul is replaced by the orders of angels who propel the spinning of the spheres in the Empyrean
 - For example, his universe is not a creationist model in the Christian sense. It blends neoplatonic emanationism and creationism
 - The sublunar sphere is not created in 6 days by a personified God, rather, it is shaped by the influence of heavenly bodies governed by the angels (world soul), only the first humans are created directly by the One
- Dante's vision is, according to Durling and Martinez: "an unveiling of a fundamental structure of reality ... the visible world, though it allows the mind to rise to fundamental intellectual/metaphysical truth, but it is itself a mere phenomenon, an appearance governed by invisible entities acting according to metaphysical principles that are by no means obvious."

Intellect as Primary in the Neoplatonic context

- The point is not to understand difficult philosophical principles that still baffle, fundamentally, all humans
- The point is to see what Dante is doing
 - His universe is mainly neoplatonic
 - Which means that his journey to the One has ethical implications:
 - If destitute of form and idea, it is evil
 - The route to salvation is the philosophical life



Humanism?