

## Inconsistent Incorporeality

Statius provides a seventy-five-line explanation of the formation and nature of the physical forms possessed by both infernal and purgatorial souls. Furthermore, the *Commedia* includes several important scenes, one in all three cantiche, where the physical act of embrace is either primary, or at least important and highlighted<sup>1</sup>. Given this, it may be surprising to discover the apparent inconsistency in Dante's treatment of the corporeality of the beings in his work; notably that Dante fails to embrace Casella, but physically interacts with infernal beings to no issue, and that Virgil physically interacts with both infernal and purgatorial beings but believes he cannot do so with Statius. This inconsistency is striking enough for some commentators to conclude Dante does not care to have any particular physics governing the beings he encounters, but rather that he feels free to play with their solidity for poetic purposes<sup>2</sup>. To respond in this manner is to ignore the poetic intentions of Dante, and to do away with a valid question: "why do different bodies behave differently." This then shuts off any channel of reasoning to the interesting question: "what does this difference imply about the nature of posthumous existence as it appears in other events of the comedy." An answer to this first question is primarily the result of induction, an answer that will itself be more an analytic object than an insightful product, but hopefully this object will prove to be a tool for the achievement of such a product that will be the answer to the second question. Being an act of induction and analysis, a framework with rules, guidelines, and a few slight terminological agreements will here be useful.

1. I here have in mind Dante and Virgil's coupled slide away from the Malebranche (*Inf* 23), the program of Purgatorial embraces involving Casella (*Purg* 2), Sordello (*Purg* 6-7), and Statius (*Purg* 21), and the aethereal 'embrace' between Dante and Saint Peter (*Par* 24).
2. "the physical laws of the afterworld are immutable – except when the writer chooses to break them in order to make the details of his poem work better" – Hollander  
"the solidity of such bodies is everywhere made to suit the convenience and dramatic purposes of the poet." – Singleton

There are four areas of data that may be relevant to this question, and anything outside of these four areas I deem irrelevant. The physical nature of a particular being may be revealed either by (1) the term(s) by which Dante categorizes the being, and (2) the being's history of physical interactions with other beings of known physical nature. Furthermore, knowledge of the physical nature of beings more generally may be gained either from (3) locations of beings with known physical interaction histories and interaction histories between beings with unknown physical nature, and (4) textual elucidation on the bodies themselves.

To keep future sentences from reading as clunkily as some of the above, I will hereon use *nature* only to refer to the *physical* nature of bodies and *interact* only to refer to interactions involving *physical* contact as in an embrace, a being carrying another being, and other such physical interactions. Furthermore, due to the possible importance of *soul*, *shade*, and *spirit* as classificatory terms, I will refer to all such things (and to Dante himself) merely as beings, a term whose vagueness is hopefully made up for by its neutrality.

A working assumption made here is that all beings are either corporeal or incorporeal. Beings that are corporeal can interact both with themselves and other corporeal beings. They cannot interact with incorporeal beings. What is unclear though is whether incorporeal beings would be able to interact with other incorporeal beings, or themselves. Intuition indicates that they would not be able to, and upcoming analysis supports this intuition, but this will not be included as an assumption, for intra-incorporeal interaction does not immediately lead to contradiction since the nature of the incorporeal body is not known. Furthermore, as a principle of extension, it will be assumed beings from the location bear the same physical nature, unless evidence to the contrary reveals itself.

The possibility of additional groups (for example, two disjoint collections of differently incorporeal beings) will be *prima facie* discounted, and the existence of these groups will only be acknowledged if textual evidence strongly implies their possibility, for they are quite unintuitive, and it thus seems silly to assume that Dante would expect readers to infer their existence without clear indication. I will also *prima facie* discount the possibility of a grouping lying halfway in both corporeal and incorporeal; beings that can partially interact with others, but due to their limited corporeality fail to do so ‘completely.’ This view, taken by Carroll<sup>3</sup> and possibly Singleton<sup>4</sup>, is both confusing and loosely-founded. How a body could lie in such a grouping seems in no way obvious, and certainly not advocated by Dante. Nowhere in the text do we see beings interact, but only just for a moment, or only apparently as they slowly slide through each other.

### Investigation 1: Terms

There are four potential terms used by Dante to identify the being he encounters. In these four terms I do not include words such as *gente* or *lume*, for terms such as the former are clearly quite neutral in the same manner as *being*, and terms such as the latter are reserved only for the beings of Heaven, whose bodies are both incapable of any interaction and not composed of matter. The potential terms of interest here are *ombra* (*ombre*), *spirti* (*spirito*, *spirti*, and *spirto*), *anima* (*anime*), and *alma* (*alme*)<sup>5</sup>. Analysis of the frequency and predication of these words does not here reveal trends distinct enough to warrant their use as terms for division of beings into interaction

3. “When the power of sin is broken by penitence, the new and higher spiritual condition of the soul shows itself in the refining and etherealizing of the ‘body’ which is its reflected image. And finally, in Paradise where the process of purification is completed, the perfect holiness enhaloes itself in a sphere of Divine light, which serves as a temporary ‘body of glory,’ and carried according to the special quality of holiness attained.” - Carroll

4. “This verse can serve as an index of the relative “substantiality” of the souls in the various levels of Hell. Here in upper Hell, the souls of the gluttons are “empty” and insubstantial; they have only “the appearance of bodies.” Farther down, the wayfarer will encounter souls that are much more substantial and corporeal.” – Singleton

5. I take the words in parenthesis to be equivalent to the non-parenthesized words, and thus selected the one version to serve as representative. Any time I speak of one, I mean to speak of some from the equivalent grouping. So, when I say that *ombra* appears twenty-four times in the *Inferno*, that is in no way contradicted by the fact that “*ombra*” and “*ombre*” appear twelve times each. It is similarly not refuted by the fact that of those twelve times, two are written as “un’ombra” and seven as “l’ombra.”

classes<sup>6</sup>. This section may be overlooked with conclusions of future sections remaining completely understandable and agreeable, given of course one accepts the classificatory empty nature of these words. But for my own sake, I keep the analysis here. Furthermore, I include an index of these words along with their speaker, or if used in exposition a notation indicating this, and the being predicated by the word, should I ever doubt my conclusions and wish to rerun the analysis.

The first potential term for analysis is *ombra*. In the *Inferno*, *ombra* is used twenty-four times. *Ombra* appears in seventeen of the thirty-four cantos, eleven of those times appearing only once in the canto, five of those times appearing twice, and once appearing three times in canto IV. Trends of note are the complete lack on the word in any canto from XVII to XXVII. In these twenty-four occurrences the following people(s) are predicated as *ombras*, noted by group of membership when the being is not meaningfully identified: Virgil, “him who from cowardice made the great refusal”, Adam at time of the harrowing, poets of circle one, lustful, gluttons, Fillipo Argenti, Cavalcante, those in Phlegethon, Vani Fucci on self after last judgement, group of three Florentines, schismatics, Capocchio, falsifiers, and the treacherous. The eleven-canto segment lacking any use of the word corresponds to the lack of its use throughout the first eight rings of circle eight. The only circle completely lacking in use of *ombra* to describe an inhabitant is circle four.

In the *Purgatorio*, *ombra* is used thirty-three times. It appears in fifteen of the thirty-three cantos. There are five cantos in which it appears once, six cantos where it appears twice, two cantos in which it appears three times, and it appears four times in canto XIII, and six times in canto XXI. Of note is its lack of use after canto XXVI. In its thirty-three uses, the following people(s) are

6. There are uses of most of these words that go beyond the use as predicates for beings. I will make note of these other cases only in footnotes at the end of each section for they do not seem to contribute any numerical or terminological significance to this analysis.

predicated as ombra: Casella, the late repentant, Sordello, the princes, prideful, envious, Virgil, slothful, avaricious, Statius, Dante, gluttons, Forese, and the lustful. Members of every group aside from the excommunicated and the wrathful are referred to as ombra, and the *Commedia*'s only occurrence of calling Dante an ombra occurs here in canto XXI.

In the *Paradiso*, ombra is used merely four times, and appears in only three cantos. It appears once in canto V, once in canto IX, and twice in canto III. It is used for: elect appearing in the Moon, elect appearing in Mercury, and the beings of the Inferno. Its use completely ceases after Dante moves beyond Mercury.

Ombra is most commonly translated as *shade*, and seems to refer only to the physical form of the beings encountered. The term is used to refer to nearly all posthumous beings encountered up until the heaven of Venus. Failure to refer to the prodigal/avaricious of the Inferno by ombra seems to merely be an artifact of the lack of focus paid to any individual member of that group, and similarly members of bolgia one through eight are simply not paid very much attention. Bolgia one through four are moved through quite quickly, bolgia five is dominated by the Malebranche whose ontology Hollander rightly notes is left unaddressed<sup>7</sup>, bolgia six's inhabitants are barely visible under their lead cloaks, and the counselors of bolgia seven have bodies unlike the traditional shade-form. For similar reasons the suicides are not called shades. Failure to refer to the wrathful as shades, much like the Hypocrites, results from the inability of Dante to have seen their bodies, thus reinforcing the reading of ombra merely as a descriptor of physical form, and not as a descriptor of nature. This is the root of why Dante is mistakenly referred to as an ombra by Statius, for from his perspective Dante was merely a shade.

7. "it perhaps also forces us to wonder whether the demons of hell have a fleshy or only spiritual presence, for if Dante can move things with his body, apparently Chiron can also – his own beard with the nock of an arrow. This question is never confronted by Dante, who leaves the ontological status of the demons of hell unresolved" - Hollander

Ombra does seem to be a proper term, as it quite particularly picks out the humanoid body of the deceased beings. However, this term does not help divide those beings into interaction classes, for it is merely the superclass of beings of interest: the set of ombra is the conjunction of the set of corporeal and incorporeal beings, insofar as those groups were meaningfully described above.<sup>8</sup>

The second term for this analysis is *spiriti*. Spiriti appears twenty-five times in the *Inferno*. It appears in fifteen of the thirty-four cantos. There are nine cantos in which it appears once, three in which it appears twice, it appears thrice in cantos IX and VI, and four times in canto V. It has a similar lapse in use to ombra, being used only once from canto XIV to XXIV. The following beings are predicated as spiriti: general beings of Hell, those in Limbo, lustful, Francesca, gluttons, Fillipo Argenti, Dante, Farinata, Pierre della Vigna, sodomites, false counselors, thieves, Geri del Bello, falsifiers, and the treacherous. Some being from every circle aside from circle four is predicated as a spiriti. Dante is also predicated as such, twice in fact and both times by Virgil, indicating that this is not a mistake as it was with ombra.

In the *Purgatorio*, spiriti appears twenty-five times. It appears in fifteen of the thirty-three cantos. There are eight cantos in which it appears once, four in which it appears twice, and three in which it appears thrice. There are no particularly long stretches of its appearance or lack. The following beings are predicated as spiriti: general beings of Purgatory, the new-arrivals, the excommunicated, the late repentant, the envious, the wrathful, the slothful, Statius, Virgil, the lustful, Dante, and Beatrice. Every grouping aside from the prideful and the greedy are explicitly called spiriti, but these too are generally included at many times.

8. There are an additional twenty-nine uses of ombra in the *Commedia*. One in the *Inferno*, sixteen in the *Purgatorio*, and twelve in the *Paradiso*. Twenty-six of these instances refer to shadows and the other three refer to an image or figure. This brings the total number of occurrences for the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* to twenty-five, forty-nine, and sixteen respectively (ninety in total).

In the *Paradiso*, *spiriti* appears fifteen times. *Spiriti* appears in thirteen of the thirty-three cantos. It appears once in eleven cantos, and twice in two cantos. Again, there are no notable lacks, or extreme frequency, of *spiriti* in this cantiche. The following beings are predicated as *spiriti*: Piccardi, beings of the Moon, beings of Mercury, Charles Martel, Folco de Marseilles, Thomas Aquinas, beings of the Sun, Saint Dominic, Cacciaguida, beings of Mars, beings of Jupiter, Saint Peter, and elect infants in the celestial rose. Again, nearly all groupings are called *spiriti*. Only Saturn lacks any representative *spiriti*.

*Spiriti* quite obviously tends to be translated as *spirit*. Even more encompassing than *ombra*, *spiriti* is used to refer to at least one member of every group aside from the prodigal/avaricious in both the *Inferno* and Purgatory, the prideful of Purgatory, and the beings presented to Dante in the heaven of Saturn. Furthermore, all aside from the beings of Saturn are indirectly referred to as *spiriti*. Though that is perhaps misleading, for the angels of Purgatory and the demons of Hell are never referred to as such. This word does seem to be a term, but one too broad to be helpful. For it refers to all humans, dead and alive, insofar as they are children of God.<sup>9</sup>

The third, and most frequent, word for analysis is *anima*. It occurs thirty-nine times in the *Inferno*, and appears in twenty-one of the thirty-four cantos. It appears once in ten cantos, twice in seven cantos, thrice in canto V and canto VI, four times in canto XXXIII, and five times in canto XIII. The word appears quite frequently, failing to appear in more than two consecutive cantos only once, from canto XX to canto XXIII. The following beings are predicated as *anima*: Dante, Virgil, general beings of Hell, Francesca, the gluttons, Florentines, avaricious, wrathful, Vani Fucci, elect beings that bathe in Lethe, sodomites, Buoso Donati, Myrrha, Guido de Montefeltro, Guido da

9. There are an additional twelve occurrences of *spiriti* in the *Commedia*. One in the *Purgatorio*, and eleven in the *Paradiso*. One of these refers to Statius's vocal spirit, one to a prophetic inspiration, one seemingly referring to breath as a sort of essence, two refer to visual spirits or essences, and the remaining seven refer to the Holy Ghost. This brings the total number of occurrences for the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* to twenty-five, twenty-six, and twenty-six respectively (seventy-seven in total).

Romena, Nimrod, Fra Alberigo, and Judas. The only group lacking any direct predication as anima is the heretics, and most of the bolgia of circle eight, though all are referred to generally called anima. Of note, this is the first time any term has referred to more than just humans, for the giant Nimrod is called an anima.

In the *Purgatorio*, anima appears forty-six times. It is in twenty-five of the thirty-three cantos. It appears once in fourteen cantos, twice in five cantos, thrice in three cantos, four times in canto VI and canto XIX, and five times in canto IV. Anima appears quite frequently in the *Purgatorio*, appearing for ten cantos in a row from canto XVIII till canto XXVII. The following peoples are predicated as anima: the new arrivals, Dante, the excommunicated, the purgatorial souls in general, the late repentant, Sordello, the princes, Oderesi, the envious, the avaricious, the gluttons, poets, Lucca, the active virtue of a human, lustful, Statius, and Adam. Here the word predicates all of Purgatory indirectly, and all groups but the wrathful directly. Again, we see the wide reach of this term, as Sordello uses it to refer to the formative essence of a fetal human.

In the *Paradiso*, anima appears twenty-four times. It is in seventeen of the thirty-three cantos. It appears once in twelve cantos, twice in three cantos, and thrice in cantos XVII and XXVI. The following beings are predicated as anima: general beings of Heaven, Justinian, general beings of the Inferno, St. Francis, those of Purgatory, Cacciaguida, those in the celestial eagle, Trajan, Dante, St. Peter, St. James, St. John, and Adam. Again, nearly every group of beings (all aside from any being in the Moon, Venus, Saturn, and the Crystalline) are explicitly called anima. Of possible interest, Dante is the last to be called an anima (Para 31:89) and was the first in the *Inferno* to be called an anima also (Inf 2:45).



Anima tends to be translated as *soul*, and is used in the sense of intellectual virtue of one's self. We here have the broadest term, encompassing all the *ombras* and *spiriti*, but also including the giants, and possible other non-humans. There are certainly interesting facts in the data of this words use, but none that appear helpful for us here.<sup>10</sup>

The final potential term is *alma*. Alma appears only fourteen times in the Commedia. It appears once in the *Inferno* (where it predicates Filippo Argenti), four times in the *Purgatorio* (where it predicates one of the princes, those purging generally, and is used twice in Statius' discourse on formation of bodies), and nine times in the *Paradiso* (where it predicates beings in general, Dante, beings of the moon, harrowed beings, Cacciaguida, Mary, Henry, and all the beings of the celestial rose). Alma tends to be translated as *soul*, but more particularly seems to mean *being* as it is used here. Its uses are far too infrequent and incoherent for usefulness here.<sup>11</sup>

This then concludes the investigation into terms. Interesting numerological trends suggest themselves through the data present, but none pressing for our goal here. Most importantly, none seem to be terms that divide beings based on how they interact. These terms may be used without confusion now, though I will stick to using *being* for the majority of this paper.

## Investigation 2: Interaction History

Most characters we encounter are locked into their circle, terrace, or sphere, so we have almost no data on interactions between characters from different locations. The only data we do have that transcends location is the interaction histories of Dante and Virgil. If anyone in this

10. There are no non-being uses of anima in the Commedia

11. Alma does appear an additional time (bringing the total to fifteen) where it refers to the 'soul' of Rome (*Inf* 2:20).

story is corporeal, it is certainly Dante, at least up until his ascension in the *Paradiso*. Furthermore, Dante has no trouble interacting with Virgil in either Hell or Purgatory<sup>12</sup>, so Virgil too belongs to the set of corporeal beings. We may then trace every being with whom either interacted, and class them among the corporeal, and similarly those with whom they failed to interact and class them among the incorporeal.

We will begin with Dante. In the *Inferno* he is said to interact with the gluttons<sup>13</sup> (Inf 6:36), Pierre della Vigna (13:31), Brunetto Latini (Inf 15:24), and Bocca delgi Abati (Inf 32:78). In the *Purgatorio* he fails to interact with Casella (Purg 2:82). He does there interact with Lucia (Purg 9:62) and Matelda (Purg 31:93), but the latter interaction does not seem relevant. Virgil interacts with Fillipo Argenti (Inf 9:44) and Sordello (Purg 6:75). He makes comment about inability to interact with Statius (Purg 21:132), but the validity of this is not to be taken for granted.

This may not seem like much, but even these few occurrences have shown, in conjunction with our principle of extension, that the inhabitants of circle one, circle three, circle five, circle seven-two (suicides), circle seven-three, circle nine, the late-repentant, and Lucia all number among the corporeal. Also, that the incorporeal group is not empty (though this paper would certainly not be constructed otherwise) for it now formally contains Casella.

12. Inf 8:46, Inf 9:62, Inf 10:37, Inf 17:96, Inf 19:36, Inf 19:126, Inf 21:24, Inf 23:50, Inf 24:27, Inf 26:16, Inf 31:28, Inf 31:132, Inf 34:71, Purg 1:126, Purg 16:10

13. Many commentators seem to take this line to mean that Dante and Virgil are not truly walking upon the souls, but rather through their 'emptiness'. It seems a more neutral reading would be to read this as the two standing *on*, and thus interacting with, the glutton's bodies while also maintaining that their bodies are not truly substantial as is Dante's. The reading of this as a sort of marker for level of substantiality of the shades (as Singleton does) seems to beg the question.

### Investigation 3: Interaction within Groups

Having now done away with any attention to Dante's terms, and concluded the investigation into Dante and Virgil's history of interactions, we may now move onto the shakier grounds of general reasonings. So far, we have looked at quite specific instances of predication and interaction with corporeal agents. This investigation will list off each circle of Hell, each ring and bolgia within them, and each terrace of Purgatory that was left untouched by investigation two. None of the many beings classed as corporeal through that investigation demonstrate, or even indicate, any difficulty interacting with other members in their location, so redressing them here would only serve to lengthen an already lengthy analysis.

Of circle two we are given no explicit indication as to whether the beings can interact with each other. Though, if the beings of this circle were corporeal, it is strange not to have any mention of lovers grasping each other, nor some moving in pairs held together, nor any physical sign of affection between Francesca and Paolo.

Of circle four we again have no explicit interactions. However, the inhabitants are said to be "rolling weights, which they pushed with their chests" (Inf 7:26). This makes it likely that these beings are corporeal, and classing groups such as these among the corporeal seems the only move available.

Of circle six we do have explicit interactions between the beings there. We are told that "like with like is buried here" (Inf 9:130), where heretics are stacked atop each other in tombs, sorted by

their sect. But their bodies do not fall through the other bodies and collect at the bottom, instead the bodies mutually repel other bodies allowing for stacking: the bodies interact.

Of circle seven-one, we have no direct information at all to determine the corporeality of the beings there. The spendthrifts of circle seven-two are corporeal, as one “made one knot of himself and of a bush” (Inf 13:123). The Florentines of circle seven-three are said to “tread the sand” (Inf 16:39), further supporting their corporeality. However, this seems to conflict with the posthumous incorporeality of Virgil and other infernal beings, for when Dante and Virgil enter circle seven they are met by Chiron who says: “have you observed that the one behind moves what he touches?” (Inf 12:81). He here refers to the fact that Dante touches and moves the ground, while Virgil and other beings move through the air. This fact is immediately supported by Virgil’s statement of the fact that Dante “is not a spirit that can go through the air” (Inf 12:96). If the division into corporeal and incorporeal as interaction classes can hold, that answer must then explain why some corporeal beings float through the air and other stay planted on the ground.

Of circle eight-one and circle eight-five, we are told the inhabitants are smote by demon’s prongs<sup>14</sup>, indicating that they are both corporeal, especially since that Dante was threatened by those same weapons. The simoners of circle eight-three, much like the epicureans of circle six, are stacked atop each other. The many hypocrites of circle eight-six that slowly walk with their leaden burden each walk atop the counselors that convinced the Pharisees to crucify Jesus, demonstrating that all these people are able to interact with each other. Circle eight-seven is a particularly interaction-centric location, with beings transforming and biting each other, and in doing so

14. “with large scourges, who smote them fiercely from behind” – Inf 18:36, “they struck him with more than a thousand prongs” – Inf 21:52

demonstrating their mutual interactability. Circle eight-nine's schismatics suggest at being corporeal, with their bodies healing and being recurrently sliced by a demon, but this need not be conclusive. The falsifiers of circle eight-ten get quite physical, the bolgia concluding with physical fighting between Master Adam and Sinon. This bolgia also contains beings that can interact with each other. The beings of circle eight-two, eight-four, and eight-eight are quite completely indeterminate through this investigation.

The new arrivals, that boatful of beings that arrives to Mount Purgatory during canto II of the *Purgatorio*, are a difficult grouping to classify. The principle of extension does not nicely apply, and we only have data on Casella, who we have already classes as incorporeal.

The excommunicated provide us neither explicit interactions, nor indications as to their corporeality.

The prideful do not engage in any interactions, however they do stand "more or less contracted according as they had more and less upon their backs," (Inf 10:138) which suggests towards their corporeality as they are physically influenced by the boulders they carry.

The envious give us clear indication that they can interact with each other, for they lay propped up against their neighbors.

The wrathful go unseen, moving chaotically through the thick fog. We have no explicit interactions here, but, similarly to and more strongly than the second circle of Hell, we here have people where ability to co-interact would seem incorrect. The wrathful are confused and ever-

moving in their blindness, surely Dante would either hear signs of feuds or talk of blind-leading-the-blind movement in the dark of the fog if they could interact with each other.

Of the slothful, avaricious and prodigal, and gluttons we have no accounts, explicit or otherwise.

The lustful are able to co-interact, as evidenced by the exchange of kisses between homosexuals and heterosexuals.

Finally, the first two spheres of Heaven, the only two where beings have extended bodies, do not include any indications towards interaction-status.

With this, the investigation into interaction within groups has been exhausted. We have classed among undetermined locations where inhabitants can mutually interact: circle six, circle seven-two (spendthrifts), circle eight-three, circle eight-six, circle eight-seven, circle eight-ten, the envious, and the lustful. The undetermined but likely incorporeal are: circle two and the wrathful. The undetermined but likely corporeal: circle four, circle eight-nine, and the prideful. The completely undetermined: circle seven-one, circle eight-four, circle eight-two, circle eight-eight, the new arrivals, the excommunicated, the slothful, the avaricious and the prodigal, the gluttons, sphere one, and sphere two.

#### **Investigation 4: Explicit Elucidation**

We now come to the final investigation before the proposition of an account, though hints of the account will surely come through here, as this is the least analytic of the four investigations. First will come the account given by Statius, then a remark given by Beatrice, then an interesting

comment by Virgil, and the final general elucidation given to the nature of the posthumous body comes both from Chiron and through a series of remarks in the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*.

I here include, in full, Statius' comment on the nature of the body possessed by posthumous beings:

“As soon as space encompasses it there, the formative virtue radiates around, in form and quantity as in the living members. And as the air, when it is full of moisture, becomes adorned with various colors by another's rays which are reflected in it, so here the neighboring air shapes itself in that form which is virtually imprinted on it by the soul that stopped there; and then, like the flame which follows the fire wheresoever it moves, the spirit is followed by its new form. Inasmuch as therefrom it has its semblance, it is called a shade, and therefrom it forms the organs of every sense, even to sight.” – (Purg 25:88-102)

This account is deeply unsatisfying for our purpose, though if Statius did here satisfy this question our investigation would certainly have been unnecessary. We learn from Statius' account that the shade-form is composed of air, that reflections from water vapor give the body semblance of a true body, and that the body is formed in amazing resemblance to the body the being had in life. This answers why light passes through everyone aside from Dante, but not why some beings can embrace and other cannot. That the body's air follows it's being is potentially useful. The fire analogy leaves an open question: does the shade-form continually form as the being moves, does air move but slowly replace itself with the air from wherever the being moves, or does the air collected at original time of formation stick relentlessly with the being?

At the end of the first canto of the *Paradiso*, Beatrice says the following:

“it would be a marvel if you, being freed from hindrance, had settled down below, even as stillness would be in living fire on earth” – (Par 1:140)

We then learn that it is the natural inclination of humans to float upwards towards God, towards the Crystalline, and that this tendency is only frustrated by the presence of sin within them<sup>15</sup>. Dante, having now drank of the Lethe and left his sins behind, is finally able to actualize this God-given potential and begin his ascent. It seems the gravitational tendency is not a hard and fast rule linked to the sort of being one is, but variable based on the weight of one’s sin.

Twenty-eight cantos earlier, Virgil made a somewhat similar sort of comment:

“To suffer torments, heat, and frost, bodies such as these that Power ordains, which wills not that the way of Its working be revealed to us.” – (Purg 3:33)

Here we see Virgil commenting on the nature of the shade-form, and as is often the case he is lacking knowledge that will later be supplied by Beatrice. Not much can be newly extrapolated from this. We already knew the posthumous body could feel heat, frost, and pain. What is novel is that this is a piece of knowledge that Virgil lacks and that he does not predict Beatrice knows. He does not see this as an important piece of revelation that Dante may receive, but as a bit of trivia. Possibly as unimportant for Dante to learn as why rocks fall or fire rises: certainly not completely trivial as they are all embodiments of God’s will, but not a fact relevant to Dante’s salvation. Here, as shown by Beatrice’s quote above, Virgil is quite wrong.

15. “The order of the universe is appointed by God, so that every part of it has its proper function, and is impelled towards the discharge of this function by an instinct implanted in it... The instinct of the [rational beings] impels them upward towards the presence of God, but this influence may be interfered with by man’s possession of free will, which allows of his beings drawn in another direction by lower attractions (ll. 121-35). But when, as in Dante’s case, the counterinfluence of sin has been removed, the higher instinct reasserts itself, and impels him upward towards Heaven.” – Tozer



Finally, as noted in the third investigation, there is a problem regarding which beings float and which walk. As said in that part of the third investigation, most of the deceased beings float. However, the sodomites of ring seven-three walk on land. In the *Infèrno*, we are also given a hint to the weightiness of Master Adam who, while striking Sinon, says: “Though I am kept from moving, by the weight of my limbs, which are heavy...” (Inf 30:105). Far more frequently we hear about weight in the *Purgatorio*, for four times throughout Dante makes note of his increasing lightness<sup>16</sup>. This happens in tandem with the removal of P’s from his forehead, signifying purgation of sins, and is thus in accord with Beatrice’s comments that come at the beginning of the *Paradiso*. We have no comments signifying, or even hinting at, a lightening of any other character in the *Commedia*.

In addition to these comments on weight, it would be in bad faith not to mention Beatrice’s controversial “tenth step on the ground” (Purg 33:17). Here not important for its possible significance as an allegory for passing of Pope Clement V<sup>17</sup>, but for its wording as a step on the ground itself. Importance is not paid to Beatrice’s weightlessness, and perhaps Dante did not mean a literal step on the ground but merely a step above the ground, but this reading would seem at least a tad forced.

16. “both of us were now showing how light of foot we were” (Purg 12:12), “I was far lighter than before” (Purg 12:117), “before death has given him flight” (Purg 14:2), “lighter than at the other passages” (Purg 22:8)

17. “This passage has become encrusted with as much controversy as that of the famous *Veltro* in *Inf.* i. 100-111, and once cannot hope for any final, indisputable solution of the mystery.” – Carroll

“Those that allegorize the nine steps taken by Beatrice argue that they represent the years between the accession of Pope Clement V in 1305, who agreed to King Phillip’s desire to move the papacy to France (which he did in 1309), and the deaths of Clement and Philip in 1314, this possibly allowing the tenth step to point to the advent of the new leader in 1315. About such things there can be little of no certainty, but the hypothesis is attractive.” - Hollander

## Conclusions from above Investigations

The conclusions of investigations two and three are, as far as I am aware, the full enumeration of what can be directly known from the text about with whom each being can interact. The first three points of investigation four are the only explications as to the nature of the posthumous body's corporeality, and the fourth point is the full summary of what is said about the weight of beings. The issue of weight, while not directly necessary to answer questions concerning corporeality, is the only other variable that comes up (along with corporeality itself) relevant to the guiding question: "why do different bodies behave differently?" What remains is to propose a model explaining why most beings are corporeal while a few, Casella and likely the lustful of Hell and the wrathful of Purgatory, are incorporeal; why some beings float, others walk on land, and why Dante lightens as he ascends Mount Purgatory; and ideally to have this model fit with Virgil's failure to understand the importance of shade physics, and Beatrice's possible stepping on the ground itself.

Additionally, having come across no evidence to the contrary, I now find it safe to assume that only corporeal and incorporeal beings exist, and that the incorporeal beings cannot mutually interact. I accept this since a nice model forms given this assumption, but should a better model be suggested I would happily rescind this assumption.

I propose that the corporeality of a being is linked not to its sinfulness, as some suggest<sup>18</sup>, but to the air of which it is composed, and the distinction here is only difference in causal method and not one of causal intention. As Virgil rightly notes, the bodies are ordained by God to be tools for punishing or purging the beings, though certainly all things are ordained by God so this insight is quite trivial. All the bodies encountered up through the *Purgatorio* exist for one of these two ends, and thus should manifest solidity and unsolidity according to the usefulness of that for God's purpose. For most ends of punishment and purgation, a corporeal body is most well suited.

Corporeality allows for physical pain and burdens, fighting, discomfort, and is needful for many of the sorts of punishments ordained by God. There are merely three occasions where the punishment is accentuated, rather than harmed, by incorporeality of the bodies, and those are the punishments found in circle two of Hell, the base of Mount Purgatory, and the second terrace of Mount Purgatory. In the first and last case I have already argued for the benefit, and in fact seeming occurrence, of incorporeality. These are the only locations where the souls are not physically ailed, and where corporeality could be used by the beings to lessen the pain of their punishment, aside from the base of Ante-Purgatory. The lovers could use corporeality to embrace their beloveds, at

18. I quote and respond to Carroll, who has given this position, along with his thoughts that it arises from Dante's understanding of Aquinas.

"It has been often remarked that the souls of their lost have bodies quite different from those of penitents – not etherealized shades which cannot be embraced, but bodies so gross and palpable that Dante falls on one and tears out handfuls of hair. The reason is obvious: the gross material 'body' is the spiritual image of the gross material soul which has made evil its good (again Dante is following Aquinas: 'Inasmuch as their soul will have its will turned away from God and deprived of its proper end, their bodies will not be *spiritual* [1 Cor. xv. 44], in the sense of beings wholly subject to the spirit, but rather their soul will be in effect carnal.' Their bodies will not be '*agile*' but 'ponderous and heavy and insupportable to the soul.' They will be liable to suffering *from sensible things*. They will also be 'opaque and darksome,' to correspond with their souls which are void of the Divine light. 'This is the meaning of what the Apostle says, that *we shall all rise again, but we shall not all be changed* [1 Cor. xv. 51]: for the good alone shall be changed to glory, and the bodies of the wicked shall rise without glory' [*Contra Gentiles*, iv. 89]. Aquinas, it is true, is speaking of the Resurrection body, but Dante applies the *principle* to 'separate souls' in the intermediate state). When the power of sin is broken by penitence, the new and higher spiritual condition of the soul shows itself in the refining and etherealizing of the 'body' which is its reflected image. And finally, in Paradise, where the process of purification is completed, the perfect holiness enhaloes itself in a sphere of Divine light, which serves as a temporary 'body of glory,' and varies according to the special quality of holiness attained."

I take no issue with his application of Aquinas, in fact I find this conception of souls quite in line with my model. Insofar as the soul turns from God (partakes in sin) the body will be heavier, and less supportable by the soul. This does not mean they will not be corporeal, but that their shades cannot float as well as more pious shades. The affection by sensible things does not refer to corporeality, but to susceptibility to desires. For surely the incorporeal souls are equally susceptible to suffering brought on by sight and sound and heat (sensible things), they merely lack an outlet to interact with them. The coloring of the shades also seems in line with Dante, and is perhaps a better explanation for his comment on the glutton's bodies than the unfounded notion that they are incorporeal.

least those who find themselves in situations like Francesca and Paulo, and the wrathful could use corporeality to help orient themselves in the chaos. It is also interesting to note that these are the only two locations where the air itself is remarkably different from everywhere else. The lovers are wrapped up in “The infernal hurricane” (Inf 5:30), while the wrathful are emerged in thick, clinging smoke (Purg 16). Perhaps the beings are made of hurricane and smoke themselves.

The base of Mount Purgatory, home to the excommunicated, is a place of waiting, yearning, and boredom. It seems fitting to further deny these beings the comfort of contact with each other, as this serves to be another object of yearning. It does seem odd that this same incorporeality does not extend to the late repentant, for Sordello and Virgil were able to embrace. I see this as a symbolic token of excommunication: an act of removal from community. As the excommunicated lost the right to engage in the church, they too lose the privilege to interact with fellow beings for as long as they serve penitence for their excommunication. This then is why incorporeality does not extend to the late-repentant.

Now it is not clear that Casella was excommunicated, and that he will need spend time on that beach where he finds himself in canto II. This is why I ascribe the cause for corporeality to be the air of composition. By filling each distinct location with a certain air, God can control which beings are made corporeal, and which are made incorporeal. Upon arriving at the beach, all beings on the boat of new arrivals are exposed to the air of the beach and have the air of their bodies replaced by the air of the beach, which is an incorporeal air. Casella, one headed for punishment unknown, finds himself temporarily incorporeal as he stands on the beach with Dante.

The weightiness of souls is a result of their sin, and seemingly their sin alone. I have argued for the reasonableness of this reading in footnote eighteen, and it appeared as an immediate result in investigation four. The only remaining justification is the checking against instances of floating and non-floating beings to check that everything coheres nicely.

We are not told of many souls explicitly floating or not floating in the *Inferno*. Virgil, and presumably the other inhabitants of Limbo, are said to float. Even the lustful of circle II are a difficult case to analyze, as they could very well be more weighted souls kept aloft only by the infernal hurricane. Significant weight may not even be present in circle VI, as the heretics may lay atop each other in an indirect sense. As noted above, we are told explicitly that the sodomites of circle VII do walk on the ground, and distinct several cases of weightiness occur after this point. This data agrees with the thesis above, but is not very powerful as support.

The best data at hand for analyzing this question is the weight changes of Dante. Through the *Inferno* we never hear of his steps or body feeling heavier. This would suggest that weight is not a gravitational concept; one is not heavier in proportion to their closeness to the center of the earth<sup>19</sup>. Dante does not purge his sins in the *Inferno*, so his sinfulness would not change either. In the *Purgatorio* however Dante does go through a purgation. As he enters Mount Purgatory proper he is marked with 7 Ps, symbols of the seven primary *peccata*, that are removed as he moves out of each terrace. At the removal of many of such Ps, Dante notes a feeling of being lighter. In fact, Virgil even explains to Dante that the removal of such Ps will lead to a lightness of foot and desire to progress upwards<sup>20</sup>. Dante's experience on Mount Purgatory terminates with his ascension into the

19. I emphatically am not asserting the converse of that implication. In fact, I take it that a soul's final location is intimately proportional to the heaviness of their being. A heavier being is one more encumbered by sin, and thus one that is tormented closer to Satan (the center of the earth). The holiest of souls will be the lightest, and thus ascend furthest from Satan, not only reaching the Empyrean but also floating to the widest ring of the Celestial Rose.

20. "When the P's that are still left on your brow all but effaced shall be, as one is, quite erased, your feet shall be conquered by good will that not only will they not feel fatigue, but it will be a delight to them to be urged upwards" (Purg 12:125)

Heavens, and such an ascent is only possible after bathing in the Lethe and Eunoe, fully removing him of sin and bringing his virtue to the forefront. This once again confirms the direct link between weight and sinfulness.

One would expect that Statius could ascend through Mount Purgatory faster than Virgil and Dante, Virgil and Dante both being not fully purged. This is addressed by Dante when speaking to Forese: “he goes up perchance for another’s sake more slowly than he would do” (Purg 24:9). This of course brings up the interesting issue of Statius’ delayed salvation for the purpose of discourse with Virgil, but I have stretched this topic as far as I deem reasonable, and feel comfortable setting this aside for another time.

In final answer to this essay’s guiding question, different bodies behave differently because they are composed of different air and/or they are differently sinful. The corporeality of a body, which falls into one of two distinct types, is determined completely by the air of the bodies composition, and the air is chosen for the purpose of the punishment/purgation of the soul. The weight of a body is completely determined by it’s sinfulness, more sinful bodies being more weightier. This result, as a lens for viewing the nature of the posthumous body, may provide interesting insights into the nature of existence for the shades of Dante’s world. I have already suggested such an analysis for the incorporeal groups (lustful, excommunicated, and wrathful), though one could certainly go deeper than I have hinted at here.