

G. QUISP
GOD IS EROS

Dante ends his *Divina Commedia* with the following words;

All' alta fantasia qui manco possa;
ma già volgeva il mio disio e 'l velle,
si come rota ch'igualmente è mossa,
l' amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.

Here power failed the lofty phantasy;
but already my desire and my will were revolved,
like a wheel that is evenly moved,
by the Love which moves the sun and the other stars.

(Translation Charles S. Singleton.)

Although the commentaries which I consulted do not mention it, certainly someone will have observed already that the last line is a quotation from Boethius:

That this fair world in settled course
her several forms should vary,
That a perpetual law should lame
the frightening seeds of things,
That Phoebus should the rosy day
in his bright chariot carry,
That Phoebe should govern the nights
which Hesperus forth brings,
That to the floods of greedy seas
are certain bounds assigned,
Which them, lest they usurp too much

upon the earth, debar,
Love ruling heaven, and earth, and seas,
them in this course doth bind.

And if it once let loose their reins,
 their friendship turns to war,
 Tearing the world whose ordered form
 their quiet motions bear.

By it all holy laws are made
and marriage rites are tied,
by it is faithful friendship joined.
 How happy ye mortals are,
if the Eros which governs the heaven
 does also reign in your heart.
 O felix hominum genus,
 si vestros animos *amor*
quo celum regitur regat.

Consolatio Philosophiae 2.8

(Trans. H.F. Stewart).

The love of which Boethius speaks is a cosmogonic Eros, not only ruling heaven and earth and seas, but also working in man as a social sense and public spirit ("by it all holy laws are made") and, moreover, as the instinct of procreation by which "marriage rites are tied" and friendship is instigated among males¹.

Very much the same concept is to be found in the contemporary of Boethius, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, in his *On the Divine Names* (4.11-18). It is possible that both are using a common source. The passage in Dionysius is one of the most daring and delightful in Greek literature². No wonder that translators did all they could to make it incomprehensible, translating Eros by "Yearning" and glossing over the erotic relation between David and Jonathan!

Eros has several aspects according to Dionysius.

1. The technical term "cosmogonic Eros" has been coined by the German philosopher Ludwig KLAGES in his *Vom kosmogonischen Eros* (4th ed.; Jena, 1941).

2. Dionysius is leaning heavily here on Origen; cf. John. M. RIST, *Eros and Psyche*, (Toronto, 1964) 204.