

# "god's divine justice in dante's 'inferno'"

## assignment

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" Midway through the Journey of our life, I found/myself in a dark wood, for I had strayed/from the straight pathway to this tangled ground. " These famous lines from Dante's *Inferno* signify the themes of religion and personal salvation in the poem. Often when one embarks on a Journey of self-discovery, they travel to places which astound one by their strangeness. Expecting to see what is straightforward and acceptable, one is suddenly presented with exceptions. Just as such self-examiners might encounter their inner demons, so does Dante, both as a character and a writer, as he sets out to walk through his *Inferno*.

The image of being lost in " dark woods" sets up a clear dichotomy between the supposed unenlightened ignorance that one endures due to a lack of faith in God and the clear radiance provided by God's love. Dante uses contrasting symbols to indicate the character's challenge. The " dark woods" embodies Dante's fear, yet the " right road" symbolizes his confidence in God, ultimately revealing that Dante's Journey is to find the presence of God in a sinful world. However, the Journey upon which Dante is embarking is not solely his, but rather that of every human being.

Consistent with the views of his time, Dante lives that this Journey is one that every individual must undertake, so as to understand their sins and find peace with God. This is an element with which modern readers can identify, as present society is conscious of an individual's right to find peace within themselves and the universe. While there are many different religions and divine beings which are worshipped today, the medieval view of personal salvation and spiritual peace is still applicable to any of these variations.

Dent's Journey throughout the Inferno also gives readers a glimpse into his own perception of what constitutes sin. It may be harder, however, for modern readers to agree with the punishment for certain sins, in light of liberal advances in society's views and the constantly changing nature of moral and societal norms. The torments that sinners are subjected to in Dent's Inferno may seem extreme to modern readers, however, throughout the poem it becomes clear that there is balance in God's Justice and each sinner suffers to a degree befitting the gravity of their sins.

Dent's Journey to save his soul reveals a correspondence between a soul's sin on Earth and the punishment received in Hell. A few examples are the Sullen, who choke on mud; the Wrathful, who attack one another; and the Gluttonous, who are forced to eat excrement. This brings into light one of Dent's main themes, the perfection of God's Justice, which is relevant throughout time. " THROUGH ME THE WAY TO SOULS IN ABOMINATION. /JUSTICE MOVED MY GREAT MAKER IN MY DESIGN. " The inscription over the gates of Hell in Canto III explicitly states that God created Hell and its punishments through the motivation of Justice.

Hell exists to punish sin and the specific punishments awarded are suitable, as they testify to the divine refection, which all sin violates. To modern readers, however, the torments that Dante and Virgil behold, on their Journey through the circles of Hell, may seem harsh. For example, homosexuals must endure an eternity of walking on hot sand and those who charge interest on loans must sit beneath a rainy storm of fire. These, like many " God's Divine Justice in Dent's ' Inferno'" By moon\_vixen the present world.

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While many cultures do not accept homosexual relations, intolerance for this style of life has decreased dramatically in the past generation and by many, is no longer viewed as a sin against nature. Likewise, charging interest on loans is common in the commercial business economies of the modern world. A modern reader would not deem the punishments received by these sinners as appropriate. However, it is important to realize that Dante is writing during a period of great religious influence and obedience to theological ideals.

In addition, when the poem is viewed in its entirety, it becomes clear that the guiding principle behind these punishments is one of Justice and balance. The poem progresses from minor sins to major ones, as the duo proceeds deeper into the fires of Hell and closer to Lucifer himself. While some readers may object to the placements of some sins, the damned souls that reside in the deepest part of Hell, the 9th Circle, are neither a medieval nor modern view, but in fact, timeless.

Dante reserves the harshest punishments for those who have committed sins against those whom the sinner has special ties to, like family or friends. Despite the act, modern readers can agree that a traitor of this nature must be deservedly punished. Early on in *Inferno*, Dante presents tension between the objective impersonality of God's Justice and the human humanity that the character of Dante feels for the souls that he sees around him. However, Dante is demonstrating that sinners receive punishment in divine proportion to their sin and to pity their suffering is to demonstrate a lack of understanding.

The reader must be wary of succumbing to the sympathy that Dante first shows towards some of the damned souls, as messengers from heaven show their lack of concern for the damned and eventually, Dante also becomes less inclined to pity the sinners, trusting the infinite wisdom of divine Justice. It is assumed in Christian theology that God is divine and Just and therefore, it is futile to question His judgments. Subsequently, it should be realized that Dante's sympathy towards some of the characters in Hell is incorrect.

Everything about God is Just; it is only in the mortal world of sin and death that one finds injustice, which is the mark of Cain on humanity. Yet Dante's treatment of some characters asks the reader to put aside their sins and admire their human traits. However, if the reader begins to feel sympathy for Francesca, it must be noted that she is a woman with the habit of laming others for her own difficulties; Pier dell Veggie has totally abandoned his loyalty for God in favor of his powerful emperor; Ulysses is a character of great ego; and even Scullion's paternal feelings have a central concern for his own well-being.

These characteristics may, however, elude the reader and thus, two figures from heaven descend into hell to remind Dante of his mission, indicating how the reader should perceive these sinners. Virgil tells Dante of Beatrice's visit to Limbo, where she admits no compassion for the tribulations of the damned, she only wishes to return to Paradise as soon as possible. When an angel arrives to open the gates of Eden, which had been slammed in the face of Virgil, he makes it clear that he has no interest in the damned nor in Dante's situation, he only wants to complete his task quickly and leave Hell.

Despite these reminders, both the character of Dante and the cantos.

Throughout Canto III, Dante displays a great deal of sympathy for the souls

he encounters; his depiction of Hell as a walled city conforms to medieval

Catholic theology and exemplifies the religious awareness of the period.

Upon passing wrought the gates of Hell, Dante hears innumerable cries of torment and suffering. Virgil explains that these cries emanate from the souls of those who lived their lives without making conscious moral choices and thus, did not commit their lives to good or evil.

Subsequently, the indifference of these souls have caused both Heaven and Hell to deny them entry. These souls now reside in the Ante-Inferno, within Hell yet not truly part of it, where they must chase constantly after a blank banner. The empty banner symbolizes their meaningless existence on earth. Flies and wasps continually tit them, and writhing worms consume the blood and tears that flow from them. The souls of the uncommitted are joined in this torment by the neutral angels those who sided with neither God nor Satan in the war in Heaven. " That death had undone so many, I had not dreamed. Like Dante, modern readers will also find it hard to accept the fate of these indecisive souls. It seems unfair that by not succumbing to either good or evil, they must still endure punishment in the afterlife. In this canto