

The justification of the inferno



" Through me the way into the suffering city//Through me the way to the eternal pain, //Through me the way that runs among the lost.//Justice urged on my high artificer;//My maker was divine authority,//The highest wisdom, and the primal love.//Before me nothing but eternal things//were made, and I endure eternally.//Abandon every hope, who enter here. " Canto III 1-9

Venturing through the very depths of hell, Dante the pilgrim bears witness to the various consequences of the sins that humans have committed on earth. Sin, as defined in the bible is the deliberate disobedience to the will of God. These deliberate actions serve to disrupt the balance that is the guiding principle in the final judgment and all of hell. Although warped by Dante's personal life experiences, hell in theory is just because it is based on the Bible and the essential teachings of God. Hell is organized according to Dante the writer's perception of God's teaching as well as his philosophical understanding of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics making it both just and logical, but it causes Dante the pilgrim to question the nature of punishment in many of these circles. Hell is organized into three main sections, sins based in incontinence, violence and fraud. Sins of Incontinence make up the first five circles of hell, consisting of those who were unable to control their own desires, which results in them being controlled only by these emotions for the rest of their lives. Next are the sins of violence, consisting of the three levels of the seventh circle of hell, these sins are those of malice towards others, towards oneself, and towards God. Finally are the sins of fraud, based in the final two circles of hell, directly breaking a bond of trust between men. The eighth circle breaking bonds of trust between two acquaintances, while the ninth circle are filled with those that broke special bonds of trust while they were alive, with kin, countrymen and benefactors.

One theme remains constant throughout hell, balance. Sin is a direct interruption of the balance of all things human and the corresponding consequence is instated to insure the right amount of justice as to rectify the sin. The first five circles are the embodiment of the loss of control of the basic human emotions of love, anger, greed, gluttony and depression. These sins come from the lack of thought which is why when, "heaven's vengeance hammers at them, it carries lesser anger"(Canto XI 89-90). The next circle contains the heretics and their sin is a conscious decision to reject the idea of an afterlife, indulging every want in life because they were un-aware of any repercussions after they died. The next circle is filled with those that were consciously violent towards God's creations or God himself. The eighth circle contains those who broke bonds of trust between themselves and acquaintances becoming more serious as they descend. Finally are those treacherous to those that they are closest to. This hits home with Dante being versed in the Bible because Judas Iscariot was the ultimate sinner in the Bible and he is condemned as the worst in hell, being in the ninth circle with those who betrayed benefactors. Dante's Inferno is a just conception of hell based in biblical facts and the philosophy of the age. Justice is to be guided by truth, reason and fairness. The Inferno is the greatest human conceived embodiment of justice in hell due to its base in Biblical facts and personal experiences having little impact on the order or basis of hell. The first five circles of hell have a general theme of incontinence. The balance in man requires self-control, but because of their abuse of self-control in life, they are forced to be guided by their emotions. The heretics reside in tombs for eternity; an exact representation of what they thought would happen at death, so justly they are trapped in their idea

<https://assignbuster.com/the-justification-of-the-inferno/>

of their afterlife. Next is the descent into a lower, more despicable hell: sins of malice. Malice is true sin, because it is a conscious decision to go against God's will, while the first five circles were being guided by your emotions in a single moment, it is similar to the difference in current courts of voluntary manslaughter and pre-meditated murder. In having malice in sin, "injustice is the end; and each such end by force or fraud brings harm to other men"(Canto XI 23-24). Violence is punished by the contrary of the violence they committed: boiling blood to symbolize the blood they spilled, constant mutilation because of the way people killed themselves, and burning sand and rain because they strayed from God's path onto a path of fire. The final two levels of hell are sins of fraud, which is, "man's peculiar vice; God finds it more displeasing and therefore, the fraudulent are lower, suffering more"(Canto XI 25-27) because it is "practiced by a man against another who trusts in him"(Canto XI 52-53). As you descend lower into hell through the circles of the fraudulent, the bonds of trust grow stronger leading the punishments to increase. For example, the first bolgia of the eighth circle of hell are those who misled others in life, the pimps and seducers, are led to march for all eternity. The final section of the ninth circle, however, are those who betrayed benefactors, ones who put blind trust in others assuming they will value the trust in return. The order reflects on the beliefs in the time, however, because now people place a higher priority on family ties than political standing, while back then, it was the opposite as demonstrated by Dante's constant punishments of those against his political party. Their suitable torture is to be encapsulated in ice for all of eternity, being frozen by Satan himself by the flapping of his wings. Even though Dante devised these punishments himself, he has Dante the pilgrim slowly progress in his

understanding of the justice of the punishments. Despite the writer having developed these punishments, the pilgrim transforms from being aghast at the punishments to downright scornful of the sinners being punished. At the beginning of this epic poem, Dante questions the nature of these punishments and whether or not they are actually just. When in Circle 2, Dante remarks, "No sooner had I heard my teacher name the ancient ladies and the knights, than pity seized me"(Canto V 70-71). Not even four circles of hell later, Dante has already lost the pity he had for the sinners scorning Fillipo Argenti, "eager to see that spirit soused within this broth"(Canto VIII 52-53). Finally in the ninth circle of hell, Dante has lost all contempt for the sinners scorning their memory and existence, "you traitor bent on evil, I do not need your talk, for I shall carry true news of you, and that will bring you shame"(Canto XXXII 109-111). This is where we can see Dante the writer's personal experiences come in because Bocca degli Abati was a traitor to the guelphs in battle forcing some anger from his past onto the fictional pilgrim of the afterlife. Unfortunately this is when Dante's Inferno is least just, and more focused on getting revenge on those who have personally wronged him in some way. Although Dante the writer's personal experiences do affect the occasional aspect of the circles of hell and his fictional pilgrim self does not fully understand the reasons for the punishments at first, Dante's inferno is just. Hell is supposed to be God's punishment for all of those who have sinned, deliberate disobedience of God's will, and Dante attempts to recreate just that in his Inferno. The punishments in hell, although severe at first, are understandable in the end and the small modifications to the sinners and punishments that are based on his personal experiences are small and do not affect the overall idea of justice's implementation in hell's

consequences for sin. Dante's interpretation of God's word really captures the core ideas of hell and its layout and any interpretation based in God's basic attributes and ideals is just. Works Cited Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy : Inferno; Purgatorio; Paradiso*. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. New York: Everyman's Library.