

# Dante's and khayyam's opinions of sin



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Dante's *Inferno* and Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* define their essential beliefs and attitudes regarding sin and the meaning of life. Their contrasting opinions of sin outline the extent to which their values differ and the way they live their lives. Dante's belief that hell was both a place and a condition where condign punishments were dealt out showed his strong belief that sins were meant to be punished according to their severity. On the other hand, Khayyam was an epicurean and a hedonist who lived solely for pleasure and disregarded the consequences of sin, thereby showing a strong contrast in their beliefs. In fact, many of Khayyam's actions would have ensured him an afterlife in hell had he been Christian and the world was Dante believed it to be. Thus, while Dante advocated for a life lived righteously, Khayyam's disposition completely juxtaposed Dante's.

Dante believed that there were multiple levels to hell, where both the severity of the punishment and crime increased as one went further down in hell. In a dream that he had, he met a leopard, lion, and she-wolf in a dark wood forest, which he interprets as the three sets of sins, those being incontinence, violence, and malice and fraud. The first levels of hell consisted of those who were incontinent, or those who could not control their natural impulses. The first level was "The Carnal", where those unable to control their sexual desire were swept off their feet by a hurricane. This represents how Dante believed that people should be able to restrain their natural sexual impulses in order to be pure and free of sin in the afterlife. Khayyam, however, was a hedonist who lived solely for pleasure, and was even an alcoholic despite drinking being against his religion. His disregard was especially apparent in his story about the girl from Samarqand being

sick due to her separation from her lover. Although the king represents God and her desire for her lover is nafs, or human selfishness, that prevents her from being able to reach God, her sickness shows that Khayyam believed that people should make the most of what they have in life before they die. This went hand in hand with Khayyam's policy of carpe diem, which means to seize the day, essentially outlining his attitude that life should be lived to the fullest before one dies. Therefore, while Dante's attitude towards life was one of purity, Khayyam believed one could act upon all their desires in life as long as they were able to let go of those desires before reaching God.

In addition, Dante was very adamant against the idea of epicureanism, which was a main heresy that landed one in the fifth level of hell. He believed that those who lived life solely for pleasure and avoided any hardships deserved to be burned in hell. The practice of epicureanism was especially rampant in Dante's time, as it spread due to middlemen getting rich in Italy. This shows how Dante thought that one should not be very materialistic in life, and should instead focus on religion instead of riches. Those who enjoyed life too much and prioritized money would eventually burn in hell. Khayyam, on the other hand, was the very definition of an epicurean, and even when he knew his life was soon going to fade away, he stuck to his ideals. He believed that one should have no ambitions in life, and instead seek only enjoyment. He asked the girl he loved to bury him in the garden, which represented pleasure, and let flowers grow out of him, so that even when he was dead he would be able to spread pleasure and epicureanism. In fact, even his greatest pleasure, wine, was considered to go against his religion, and made him a heretic, but because ultimate pleasure was his goal in life, he

disregarded all else. Thus, he lived and died a life filled with personal happiness, wrapped in the joys of wine. He was a nihilist who believed in nothing, and the idea that death was merely death prompted him to live his life to the fullest while he could. All in all, Dante believed that living a life based solely upon personal satisfaction was heretic, while Khayyam acted upon all his personal desires.

Furthermore, Dante reserved the 6th level of hell for the violent, including those who were blasphemous, essentially violence against God. This level of hell included those who were violent against neighbors, self, or God. Those who cursed God were pinned down in the desert and had hot flames falling on them. The symbolism of the desert is significant in that it represents a barren place, and those who were cursed there were empty of love for God and deserved to be punished. The extent to which blasphemy was punished shows how much Dante respected religion and God, and the extreme influence it had not only on him, but on all of Europe. Thus, his essential ideas revolved around the existence of a higher being and the ultimate respect and piety in life to God. In the case of Khayyam, however, he was an atheist agnostic and materialist who believed that the only reality is what we can perceive. This led him to live a life unrestrained by the rules imposed by religion. In fact, in the *Kuza Nama*, or “Book of Pots”, he brings forth the notion of the theodicy problem, which asks why there is still evil on earth despite a good God. He also ponders the question of why there are twisted “pots”. Although there are several explanations, such as evil being the result of the devil or individual people, or evil being a test for us to overcome, Khayyam also presents the idea that God is also evil to an extent. This in

itself is already extremely blasphemous, and shows that Khayyam lived a life without regard for the concept of God or religion. As a matter of fact, he believed in the notion of predestination, which meant that one's fate was already decided, and nothing one did in life would change that course. Furthermore, Khayyam also wrote blasphemy quatrains in the Rubaiyat that directly attacked God and blamed God for tempting people with all these desires in life. This further proves that Khayyam had little to no regard as to how God and religion controlled his life, in direct contrast to how Dante advocated for people to live religiously. In addition, the way Khayyam ends the Rubaiyat by saying "Tamam Shud", which was said by Christ to mean "it is finished", in a non-religious way despite the quote being very religious goes further to show how sacrilegious he is. Overall, Dante's essential belief was to live a life of extreme piety, while Khayyam lived a life of self-determination.

In conclusion, Dante's opinion of sin and that of Omar Khayyam are on opposite sides of the spectrum, which extends to their essential beliefs and attitudes about life as well. Dante's strong opposition to many sins showed that he believed that almost any kind of wrongdoing in life would land one in hell, and thus one should try to live as righteous a life as possible. On the other hand, Khayyam was a nihilist who believed in nothing, and preached epicureanism in life and even in death. His policy towards life was to simply enjoy oneself as much as possible, without any regard for God or religion. In fact, Khayyam being an epicurean who simply pursued his life's pleasures and being blasphemous conflicted directly with Dante's belief that one should not be incontinent, an epicurean, or blasphemous in life. All in all,

Dante's fundamental views of life differ in every way from Khayyam's opinions on the meaning of life.