

# [The humanity of god in the inferno](https://assignbuster.com/the-humanity-of-god-in-the-inferno/)

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God’s apparent flaws diminish theSupremedivinity for which he is worshipped, degrading him to imperfect humanity. In Dante’s Inferno, an epic poem following Dante’s journey through Hell in attempt to gain enlightenment, Dante unintentionally challenges God’s omnipotence. Dante’s description of Hell contradicts God’s own morals as written in the bible. The God portrayed by Dante is guilty of many human flaws—egotism, injustice and hypocrisy—proving that Dante’s ignorance of irrational contradictions led him to depict a God more human than divine. By arranging Hell to flatter himself, God commits the most common human sin: egotism. This fault is illustrated in Limbo and on the Gate of Hell.

For example, God sends those who never had the chance to worship him to Hell. These virtuous pagans in the circle of Limbo were born before Christianity began. By sending them to Limbo, God projects the idea that a life without God is equivalent to a life of sin. Because of God’s hubris, souls never given the chance to worship him are sentenced to a hopeless afterlife. This unfair punishment represents God as a person, rather than an all-mighty power. God not only erroneously punished those who did no wrong, but punished those who greatly contributed to society.

Many great souls reside in Limbo: Virgil, Socrates, Plato, Democritus, Diogenes, and Seneca, the moralist. Dante is awe-struck that so many of whom he admires are in Hell. Dante, and the people of his time, have accepted that their intellectual and social role models were subjected to a life in Hell—but why? Why does Dante not challenge God’s authority to place them in such an awful fate? Dante’s unconditional worship of God has brought him to a mindless and unquestioning state. His ignorance is clear when he proclaims he “ cannot count so much nobility” in Limbo, and then inaptly moves on (Canto 4, line 148). If these souls are not excused from Hell for a lifetime of accomplishments, God must be so confident of his great effect on people’s lives that all who have not felt it are unworthy of a positive afterlife. A second instance of God’s vanity is the text on the gate of Hell: “ Sacred justice moved my architect,/ I was raised here by divine omnipotence,/ primordial love and ultimate intellect” (Canto 3, lines 4-6).

God praises his own work by speaking as if he were the gate. On it, God claims he is holy, just, divine, powerful, loving and intelligent. This is, perhaps, is the most obvious form of God’s egotism. By speaking as if he were the gate, God attempts to hide that he is complimenting himself. If God is capable of such narcissism, then he must not be the truly enlightened being he claims.

Dante does not think to second guess this adulation, clearly unaware of the conceit he has written for God. God’s arrogance reveals that he is faulted, causing readers to conclude that God is more similar to humans than generally assumed. God’s lack of justice is yet another flaw of his, further removing him from his godly image. God’s unfair treatment of his people is reflected in the punishments of the opportunists and the sodomites. The opportunists, who did neither good nor bad during their lives, are subject to an afterlife of chasing a banner, followed by stinging insects and maggots.

In a Hell, where all punishments supposedly parallel the sins committed in the souls’ lives, a neutral life should be granted a neutral afterlife. However, by forcing the harmless into an excruciating existence, Dante reveals that God is unfair, another human weakness. In addition to treating the opportunists unreasonably, God also punished the sodomites unfairly as well. The circle of Hell, entitled “ The Violent Against Nature” is represented by a dear role model of Dante: Brunetto Latini. As Harold Bloom, a literary critic, noted, “ Dante’s ambivalence is particularly underscored in the canto of Brunetto Latini, who he knew to be both immensely admirable as a leader of men—and guilty of sodomy, a sin before God” (Bloom).

In other words, Dante is somewhat disbelieving when he sees Brunetto Latini in Hell, for he knows Latini to be a respectable leader, despite committing sodomy. When Brunetto committed what was, at the time, considered unnatural sex, both Dante and God judged Brunetto as attempting to rebel against nature. Dante and God are equally guilty of injustice based on their ignorance of homosexuality. Brunetto’s sexual orientation is irrelevant to his character; believing the contrary proves God’s lack of insight and tendency to unfairly pass judgments. By granting unfair punishments to good souls, God gives reason to believe that he is as fallible as humans. For committing the aforementioned sins and contradicting his words in the bible, God has committed the sin of hypocrisy as well, further diminishing his godliness.

For example, God has condemned the sin of egotism, yet he has committed it repeatedly. The bible states that “ Arrogance will bring your downfall, but if you are humble, you will be respected.” (Proverbs 29: 23). In addition to condemning egotism, God has also punished unfairness. The bible claims that “ An unjust man is an abomination to the just” (Proverbs 29: 27).

Additionally, the very act of being hypocritical is also hypocritical, for God speaks out against hypocrisy in the bible, as well: “ For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practice hypocrisy, and to utter error against the Lord,” (Isaiah 32: 6). In other words, God believes that only the evil will speak of sin, feel sin and practice hypocrisy. According to Slattery, a literary critic, “ Dante prepares to die in his human self in all its weaknesses, doubts, and limitations, so that he may be reborn through the light of God” (Rountree 2). By condemning Dante’s human state (one who is weak, doubtful and limited), Slattery proves God’s hypocrisy, for God is human as well. Although Dante may lack characteristics that God possesses, God utilizes his authority to make mistakes.

This ability to make mistakes is by far the most human characteristic of all, for both Dante and God are fully capable of it. Their other traits are mere aspects of their personalities, making it apparent that Dante and God are closely related: both are far from being divine. God’s actions in hell are inconsistent with his words in the bible, proving his flaws and humanity. His condescending nature in reference to the human state therefore leads to the greatest hypocrisy and humanity of all. Dante’s portrayal of God’s fallacies brings God closer to being human rather than divine.

In attempt to write about God’s omniscience and holiness, Dante failed, resulting in a poem challenging the religious devotion prevalent in the 13th century. Whether or not it was intentional, Dante proved that God has all the faults of a human: egotism, poor judgment and hypocrisy. The Inferno reveals the misconstrued notion of God to future generations. God, according to Dante, suffers from the same failings all humans do; each example rips him off his lofty pedestal of divinity, reducing him to mere humanity. ? Works Cited Aligheri, Dante.

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