

# “Dante’s Journey Towards Fulfillment”

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Every person has the free will to decide the path they choose to lead for their life journey. Ultimately, this path should aim towards the Good. In other words, the truest path is one that is oriented towards an end of fulfillment. Often curiosity is a temptation that turns one on a false path. Once a wrong turn is taken, one must admit the error and reevaluate one's life journey. Such complications of life are embodied in Dante Alighieri's life, as depicted throughout his own writings; namely, *The Divine Comedy*, *La Vita Nuova*, and the *Convivio*. While the majority of Dante's journey is illustrated by *The Divine Comedy*, it is rooted also in accounts of his loves as told in the other two works. In the *La Vita Nuova*, Dante depicts the captivating beauty that he finds in a woman, Beatrice. Throughout this work, Beatrice is a compass towards the Good and she attempts to keep him on his straight and true path. But a swerve from the original path is created by the distraction of "Lady Philosophy", as illustrated in Dante's incomplete philosophical treatise, the *Convivio*. Beatrice views this turn as a betrayal towards her and is upset with Dante's decision. Attempting to recover from the turn he takes away from Beatrice, Dante travels from Hell to Heaven with his guide, Virgil. But, Virgil's strengths lie within the scope of philosophy and his guidance loses relevance as they approach the Good. Although Beatrice feels Dante has used philosophy to betray her, philosophy may not completely be a reason to deter one from their true path. Instead, philosophy may be an integral part in the journey towards God. Comparing Dante's journey with Plato's dialogues will answer: How do philosophy and theology co-exist on Dante's path towards fulfillment? As Dante says in the *Convivio*,

in human life there are different paths, among which only one is the truest way and another the falsest, and some less true and some less false. And just

as we see that the path that leads most directly to the city fulfills the desire and provides the rest when work is finished, while the one that goes in the opposite direction never fulfills it and provides no rest, so it is with our life. (Dante, *Convivio*, IV. 12)

Aware of the possible life paths, Dante recognizes that only the truest and straightest path will end in fulfillment. With the help of his guides, Dante will be rewarded with the greatest fulfillment with his reunion with God.

Beginning in the *Inferno*, Dante finds himself in a difficulty, and examines his life's journey. His recognition is illustrated in the opening lines.

In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost. Ah how hard a thing it is to say that wood was, so savage and harsh and strong that the thought of it renews my fear! (*Inf.*, I. 1-6).

Dante recognizes an error in his path, and is returning to the journey towards the Good. Earlier in Dante's life, as recounted in the *La Vita Nuova*, he had been guided to the Good by Beatrice's beauty. But once God had taken Beatrice to the afterlife, Dante had difficulty staying on his path without her physical presence. The drifting away from Dante's original purpose came about through his curiosity for philosophy. Dante illustrates his captivation for philosophy in the *Convivio*:

I began to go where she [Lady Philosophy] was truly revealed, namely to the schools of the religious orders and to the disputations held by the philosophers, so that in a short period of time, perhaps some thirty months, I began to feel her sweetness so much that the love of her dispelled and destroyed every other thought. (*Convivio*, II.12).

In this newfound love of philosophy, Dante was captivated by a love for something other than Beatrice. This love is so intense that all thoughts are destroyed, including

thoughts of Beatrice.<sup>1</sup> His love for Lady Philosophy overwhelmed his thoughts for both Beatrice and God, which serves as the ultimate betrayal for Beatrice. Unfortunately, the philosophical path does not fully achieve Dante's true path as Beatrice intends to provide for him. In the *Convivio*, Dante admits,

the desire for knowledge cannot properly be said to increase, although, as has been said, it grows in a certain way. For whatever grows, properly speaking, is always one; the desire for knowledge, however, is not always one but many; and when one desire ends, another begins (*Convivio*, IV.13)

The explanation that he gives for desiring knowledge illustrates an endless cycle with a lack of fulfillment. A sense of completion only arises when this knowledge has been attained. Naturally, mankind seeks a boundless amount of knowledge. In the fourth Canto of *Paradiso*, Dante reiterates something similar to his claim in the *Convivio*. He states,

I now see clearly that our intellect cannot be satisfied until that truth enlighten it beyond whose boundary no further extends. In that truth, like a wild beast in its den, it rests once it has made its way there- and it can do that, or else its every wish would be in vain. (*Par.* IV.124-129)

When comparing Canto IV of the *Paradiso*, to the fourth chapter of the *Convivio*, it seems that Dante is conveying nearly identical messages. Whether one is pursuing philosophy or theology, they are within an endless cycle of desiring knowledge. While this seems to be an exhausting path, there is an important aspect that sets theology apart from philosophy: faith in God's grace. In the comparisons made between both philosophical and theological paths, it will be evident that philosophy lacks the grace the theology offers. Dante's journey will prove to possess the most

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<sup>1</sup> Holmes, Olivia. *Dante's Two Beloveds*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2008.

fulfillment when God's grace is reached. Ultimately, the only way to reach the fulfillment of the desire to know is through grace.

To begin this comparison, one may look towards Dante's mentor, Virgil. When traveling through the afterlife, Virgil appears to be a symbol or philosophy and a useful mentor who is adamant in pulling Dante through the toughest parts of Hell and Purgatory. Dante possesses a great deal of admiration for Virgil and is eager to turn to him for advice. Often times along their journey, Virgil's wisdom is essential to Dante. Early in the journey through *Purgatorio*, a song sung by Casella captivates Dante and Virgil. The sweetest of songs, as described by Dante, was the *canzone* that Dante wrote in praise of Lady Philosophy in the *Convivio*. "Love that converses with me in my mind" (*Purg.*II.112). The song was so sweet that all who gathered around were mesmerized and listened intently, untroubled by anything around them. Although the song was beautifully mesmerizing, it offered nothing to Dante's journey and became a deterrent to his progress. A frustrated Cato says to them, "What is this, laggard spirits? What negligence, what standing still is this? Run to the mountain to shed the slough that keeps God from being manifest to you" (*Purg.* II. 120-123). Neglecting to move forward delays their journey to attain the Good. This would leave them stagnate in Purgatory and will not result in fulfillment. Cato's scolding pushed Dante and Virgil to continue their journey. As they continue their journey, Virgil continues to guide Dante through his uncertainties.

Immediately following their abrupt exit from their distraction, Dante witnesses his shadow. Upon this discovery, he realizes that Virgil does not have his

own shadow. His perplexity leads Virgil to criticize his desire for an explanation of this and scolds Dante for not believing that he is with him. Virgil says,

Now if in front of me no shadow falls, do not marvel more than at the heavens, which give no obstacle to each other's rays. Such bodies are disposed to suffer torments, heat and freezings by the Power that does not wish its ways to be unveiled to us. (*Purg.* III.28-33)

This explanation illustrates the inability man has to fully comprehend the Power. In other words, Power (i.e. God) does not uncover this knowledge to man. He compares his lack of shadow to the mystery of the heavens. Just as the heavens are beyond the limits of human knowledge, so is God's power. Despite mankind yearning to understand these phenomena, Virgil explains how each of these desires are denied to man. Although Dante is unable to witness Virgil's shadow does not mean that he is lacking presence. Despite being a man who possesses an abundance of knowledge, Virgil is aware of the difficulties philosophers face when attempting to gain knowledge of the Power. No matter how well educated one may become, they lack the ability to comprehend things beyond the limits of human reason. He explains to Dante,

He is mad who hopes that our reasons can traverse the infinite way taken by one Substance in three persons. Be content, human people, with the *quia*; for if you had been able to see everything, there was no need for Mary to give birth; and you have seen those yearning fruitlessly whose desire would be stilled, which is given them eternally for their grief: I speak of Aristotle and Plato and many others. (*Purg.* III.34-43)

Despite philosophy illustrating the ability to possess all knowledge, Virgil recognizes that this is absurd. Concepts such as the Trinity are beyond human understanding. The fruitless yearning that he describes haunts those who seek to gain knowledge

that it impossible to attain. Virgil is aware of the limitations presented through merely human knowledge and illustrates that through Plato and Aristotle. As two prominent men in philosophy, they illuminate the restrictions knowledge faces. In order to move past this limitation, one must look past this boundary and place their uncertainties within hope (i.e. faith).

In the *Inferno*, Virgil explains his own situation to Dante. He was not a man who committed heinous crimes or viciously betrayed God. Instead, Virgil failed to praise God as needed. Though he was not a wicked man, Virgil was still did not make it to the gateway to Heaven. He admits he did not adore God appropriately and “Because of such defects, not for any other wickedness, we are lost, and only so far harmed that without hope we live in desire” (*Inf.* IV.40-42). Philosophers are bound to knowledge and follow this path devoutly. While religiously following that path, they are unable to give the deserved praise to God. This places philosophers, like Virgil, within limbo full of hopeless desire. The lack of faith within philosophers is the main obstacle in their life journey. Without striving towards God’s grace, they will never attain the Good and they will remain bounded with the limitations of philosophy.

As previously stated, a philosopher himself admits that philosophers are unable to reach God. Although they possess great wisdom and understanding, it is impossible for them to reach the wisdom of God because they lack faith. Attempting to attain this amount of wisdom without faith is an impossibility and leaves philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle to remain in limbo. Thus, the path of philosophy is restricting and does not allow Dante to reach fulfillment. Despite

representing a crucial motivator for Dante, Virgil's own weakness is highlighted when the two reach the end of Purgatory. Unable to go the entire way to the Good, Virgil must leave Dante with Beatrice to continue. This abandonment represents Virgil's limitations as a philosopher. Aware of his inability to continue to be a guide, he says to Dante:

The temporal fire and the eternal have you seen, my son, and you have come to a place where I by myself discern no further. I have drawn you here with wit and with art; your own pleasure now take as leader: you are beyond the steep ways, beyond the narrow... No longer await any word or sign from me... (*Purg.* XXVII.127-139)

Virgil acknowledges his boundaries and does not take Dante any further. Although he is limited by his lack of faith, this does not discredit Virgil's abilities. Instead, it illuminates the unusual power beyond philosophical knowledge: faith. Despite philosophy's potential to leave one unfulfilled, it proves to serve a purpose in Dante's journey. Without Virgil, he would have aimlessly wandered through the afterlife with much difficulty reaching Beatrice in Heaven.

Once Dante has realized Virgil has left him, he turns towards Beatrice. Representing wisdom, faith, and hope, Beatrice appears "in white veil girt with olive" and Dante is overcome with her presence (*Purg.* XXX.31) When Dante and Beatrice are reunited, Beatrice is eager to scold Dante for his betrayal. This disloyalty was especially offensive to Beatrice because Dante had once illustrated Beatrice as an astonishing vehicle for grace. He wrote about the love he had for her in *La Vita Nuova*. In a poem from that book, Dante explained that once he had met Beatrice, "Love ruled over [his] soul" (Dante, *La Vita Nuova*, 2.7). And once Beatrice had passed away, he explained "life has fallen so low... But whatever I am my lady



sees it, and I still hope for mercy from her” (Dante, *La Vita Nuova*, 2.7, *fifth stanza*). Immediately following her death, Dante still seems to desire the path towards the woman he so fondly admires. While this appears to be Dante’s intention, he is enticed astray by philosophy. Beatrice explains her influence while in Purgatory, “For a time I sustained him with my countenance; showing him my youthful eyes, I led him with me, turned in the right direction” (*Purg.* XXX.121-123). But, the impact in her lifetime was not powerful enough to hold Dante on the straight way after she passed away. With great disappointment, Beatrice says

When I was on the threshold of my second age and changed lives, he took himself from me and gave himself to another: when I had risen from flesh to spirit, and beauty and power had increased in me, I was to him less dear and less pleasing, and he turned his steps along a way not true, following false images of good, which keep no promise fully. (*Purg.* XXX. 124-132)

Beatrice is exceptionally disappointed in the actions of Dante that followed her death. Although he was not replacing Beatrice with another flesh and blood woman, he turned to the wonderment of philosophy following her death. In the eyes of Beatrice, this betrayal led Dante towards “false images of good” and made him unable to continue towards the Good. Dante cannot solely follow Lady Philosophy in hopes of reaching the Good. As Virgil has proven, the results of philosophy are bounded. Hence, Dante needs to maintain his path towards Beatrice in order to reach God. Only Beatrice is able pave a path to exceed the limitations present with Lady Philosophy.

While Beatrice believes Dante took a wrong turn, philosophy is more closely related than it seems. This is can be seen in Plato’s work within the *Phaedrus*. Particularly, the allegory of the charioteer as told by Socrates. In this work, Socrates

portrays man's soul as a chariot governed by a charioteer and pulled by two winged horses. Unlike the gods, man has a mixed team of both bad and good horses. Socrates explains that "our driver is in charge of a pair of horses; second, one of his horses is beautiful and good and from stock of the same sort, while the other is the opposite and has the opposite sort of bloodline"(Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246b). The differing quality of the horses results in a difficult time controlling them. In short, the three different elements represent the *logos* (i.e. the charioteer steering the horse, reason), *thumos* (i.e. the white horse, spiritedness), and *epithumia* (i.e. the black horse, appetite) of the soul. When mankind deals with the complexity of love, the impulses must be under control. There must not be an overwhelming power from either horse. When one horse becomes more dominant than the other, the chariot lacks harmony. Within this harmony, there is a sense of control. The responsibility for this control falls to the third part of the soul, the charioteer. Without proper guidance, the soul can be steered in the incorrect way.

It is the responsibility of the charioteer (i.e. the reason) to control the impulses in attempts to do what is right. Socrates gives an example of the charioteer guiding the horses in a relationship between a man and a boy. In this relationship in particular, it is vital for the soul to be governed diligently so as not to harm the boy.

Socrates explains that when

the charioteer looks in the eye of love, his entire soul is suffused with a sense of warmth and starts to fill with tingles and the goading of desire. As for the horses, the one who is obedient to the charioteer is still controlled, then as always, by its sense of shame, and so prevents itself from jumping the boy (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 254b).

Although the white horse appears to be under the charioteer's control, he explains how the second horse (irrational impulse) becomes difficult to manage and unresponsive to his commands. After multiple attempts to control the irrational horse, it

becomes humble enough to follow the charioteer's warnings, and when it sees the beautiful boy it dies of fright, with the result that now at last that lover's soul follows its boy in reverence and awe" (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 254e).

Despite the soul being unruly when first encountering the boy, the charioteer was able to get the impulses back on track. When one maintains harmony of one's soul, one is able to be a lover. In time, the relationship becomes mutually beneficial. A sense of dependency is formed and the two feel a sense of wholeness. The love shared by the man and the boy becomes so dependent upon one another that

when the lover is near, the boy's pain is relieved just as the lover's is, and when they are apart he yearns as much as he is yearned for, because he has a mirror image of love in him (*Phaedrus*, 255e)

A relationship such as the man and the boy's appears to be the ideal relationship for Socrates. They are each benefitting from one another in the relationship; within one another, they gain the wisdom they yearn for. Each of them is pursuing the same goal of beauty within wisdom.

In the *Phaedrus*, both the boy and the man benefit from their relationship. Although the man originally pursues the boy, the boy eventually yearns for the wisdom of the man. This closely parallels the relationship between Dante and Beatrice. For Dante, he desires the wisdom he has found within Beatrice. The wisdom he gains in their relationship brings him closer to the Good. Guiding Dante towards the Good, ultimately brings her closer to God. They are mutually benefiting

from one another. Despite the mirroring between the two, Dante and Beatrice exceed the knowledge the boy and the man share. Instead, they reach towards the Good and become closer to God. In doing this, they are reaching beyond the capacity of philosophy within their faith. Therefore, philosophy's lack of motivation towards faith limits the boy and man's relationship in comparison to Dante and Beatrice.

Plato parallels can also be seen when compared to a sinner Dante encounters in the Inferno, Francesca. Namely, in Aristophanes's account of true love through his myth of an originally androgynous character in the *Symposium*. This original being was powerful and ambitious, and it tested the gods. But the mighty Zeus could never allow this challenge and constructed a plan to destroy it. Zeus explained that he had a plan that

would allow human beings to exist and stop their misbehaving: they [would] give up being wicked when they lose their strength. So I shall cut each of them in two. At one stroke they will lose their strength...(Symposium, 190d).

This illustrates Zeus as a tyrannical God who divided a being out of pure fear. After the recreation of the being, the two halves felt a piece of themselves to be missing. This yearning became an obsession and many of the halves began to perish. Aristophanes states:

Now, since their natural form had been cut in two, each one longed for its own other half, and so they would throw their arms about each other, weaving themselves together, wanting to grow together. In that condition they would die from hunger, and general idleness, because they would not do anything apart from each other. (Symposium, 191b)

The pain is so intense that they are dying without the love they rely on from one another. Despite Zeus being a controlling and powerful god, he felt sympathy for the being he had separated. Although he originally ripped them apart, he had a small

amount of compassion as the halves were dying without one another. “Zeus took pity on them, and came up with another plan; he moved their genitals around to the front!” which ultimately led to intercourse and the ability to reproduce (*Symposium*, 191c). He also explains that this second plan is so “the source of our desire to love each other” which therefore means that “each of us, then, is a ‘matching half’ of a human whole” (*Symposium*, 191c). Although Zeus was initially fearful of the power this androgynous character possessed, he had pity on them and their situation. Zeus’s pity allowed the reuniting of the separate halves and described a “soul mate”. Each half was illustrated as helpless without being with their other half. Once the two were together, they felt a sense of completeness that is described as,

Love is born into every human being; it calls back the halves of our original nature together; it tries to make one out of two and heal the wound of human nature. (*Symposium*, 191d)

Aristophanes illustrates a love so deep that it is innate to man. Each human being is merely half of what they could be without their soul mate.

To follow this parallel, one may explore the affair between Francesca and her lover, and brother in law, Paolo. The affair was solely based upon sexual desires. But, as Francesca describes her love, it appears that she believed her relationship to be rooted much more deeply than in lust. She begins saying, “love, which is swiftly kindled in the noble heart, seized this one for the lovely person that was taken from me; and the manner still injures me. “ (*Inf. V. 100*) The pain describes a love that is deeply rooted within “the noble heart”. In her eyes, the love she and Paolo shared was a true love that captivated each of them. For Francesca, the love born within them that she describes is not one that can be ignored. Instead, what they shared

was inevitable and powerful. Despite being originally married to Giovanni, Paolo's brother, she insisted this affair had more substance than adulterous lust. She continues to explain the heartrending story of her love and she begins to place blame on the power of Love. Instead of taking responsibility for the love affair, she explains how she must love the one who loves her. She says, "Love, which pardons no one loved from loving in return, seized me for this beauty so strongly that, as you see, it still does not abandon me" (*Inf. V. 103*). Francesca explains her innocence in this fate that had taken over her life. Although she deeply loves Paolo, she immediately explains how she was not exempt from loving someone who loved her. It seems to her that this fate remained the responsibility of Love. If one believes this explanation, she would be innocent in this sin of adultery for which she is being punished.

The longing illustrated by Aristophanes parallels Francesca's desperate attempt to justify the intense desire that was born within her. She fails to accept responsibility for the death she had faced in her life. In fact, Francesca claims "Love led [them] on to one death. Caina awaits him who extinguished our life" (*Inf. V. 106*). The reasoning behind Francesca and Paolo's death, according to Francesca, is that they were led to death. It appears to her that the lovers were coaxed into their unfortunate death. Although they both participated in the affair, Francesca remains firm in her belief that they were led to their decline due to the love they could not escape. If Francesca was correct in her defense, it seems as though they were helpless in the decision to pursue the affair. Assuming this is true, their love story truly parallels the inclination to be drawn to one's other half. This overwhelming

attraction was so prevalent within the two ripped halves in *The Symposium* that they could not bare to live life without the other. A yearning this strong attempts to create one being out of two and is explained as,

the two of you would share one life, as long as you lived, because you would be one being, and by the same token, when you died, you would be one and not two in Hades, having died a single death (*Symposium*, 192e)

The desire to be become whole with one's other half is parallel between Francesca's love affair and Aristophanes's account of love. In Francesca's relationship, she was blindly devoted to Paolo; this echoes the desire to wanting to be one with one's other half and to die a single death with them. Considering that Francesca and Paolo were murdered together, they did literally die one death together.

Although Aristophanes's account of love is a captivating fantasy, it does not lead one towards a true path. While Francesca is not mimicking Aristophanes's account, she closely parallels the inability to deny a "soul mate". But, God would not condemn Francesca and Paolo to such a heinous punishment if they were undeserving of it. Giving in to the temptation of a love affair led Francesca to their damnation, not an overwhelming and innate love within her. In fact, further on in the *Symposium*, Socrates explains the error Aristophanes makes when telling this myth. He does not agree with the hypothesis Aristophanes sets forth and refutes it saying

a lover does not seek the half or the whole, unless, my friend, it turns out to be good as well. I say this because people are even willing to cut off their own arms and legs if they think they are diseased. I don't think an individual takes joy in what belongs to him personally unless by 'belonging to me' he means 'good' and by 'belonging to another' he means 'bad.' That's because what everyone loves is really nothing other than the good. (*Symposium*, 205e)

According to Socrates, lovers only seek the good when searching for someone to love. On the contrary, Aristophanes does not contemplate a process of reasoning within the androgynous character. In fact, the two halves will do anything to be with one another. This is also seen with Francesca and Paolo's affair. Within their betrayal, they were not seeking the good. Instead, they were seeking their own selfish satisfactions. Despite her attempts to place the blame of her actions within the love kindled within her, she was incorrect. Though she may disagree, her actions arose from her own free will. Just as God would not condemn Francesca and Paolo to a punishment they did not deserve, he would also not revoke free will. Since there are both true and false paths, God has given man the free will to make all decisions without his interference. This God-given freedom to choose one's path denies the innate love that both Francesca and Aristophanes profess.

As previously explained, Dante's false path with Lady Philosophy did not fulfill Dante. But Beatrice is able to redirect his path in the afterlife towards the Good. Though she directs him on this path, he has trouble looking at her because she exudes a divinity so intense he is blinded. Dante said that her eyes were filled with "the radiance of love and [divinity]" that was so powerful his "power of sight faded and fled" (*Par. IV.140*). Naturally, this worried Dante. But Beatrice expects his inability to see her and says to him,

If I flame at you with a heat of love beyond all measure known on earth so that I overcome your power of sight, do not wonder for this is the result of perfect vision, which, even as it apprehends, moves its foot toward the apprehended good (*Par. V.1-6*)

Easing his worries about his lost sight, Beatrice explains that his blindness is bringing him closer to God. Looking at Beatrice blinds Dante because she is divine



and already possesses perfect vision of God. This path she leads Dante on is bringing him closer to this perfect vision that he is beginning to experience. Following the explanation of Dante's loss of sight, she describes free will. As seen with Dante and Francesca, free will allowed each of them to deviate from their initial path. Despite these mistakes, God still grants man this freedom. Beatrice explains this freedom to Dante as the

The greatest gift that God in His largesse gave to creation, the most attuned to His goodness and that He accounts most dear, was the freedom of the will: all creatures possessed of intellect, all of them and they alone, were and are so endowed. (*Par. V.19-24*)

Man is able to make decisions for themselves on their own accord. Curiosity can lead one to make decisions that turn their path away from God. Despite the possible veering from the true path, God still views free will as the most amazing gift he will ever give to his creations. No matter the decision made through free will, God allows liberty to man. In doing so, God leaves man free will that also allows man to repent of his sins and abandon their false path for a true path.

While Dante is able to admit his wrong doings, Francesca is adamant in her innocence. Unlike Francesca, Dante recognizes his faults and desires to follow his true path. Francesca wallows in self-pity and places the responsibility of her sins within Love. In contrast, Dante eventually faces the betrayal he has committed and pursues a path towards the Good. When Dante fell to his love philosophy, he was unfulfilled; when Dante realizes his wrong turn, he used his free will to return to the Good. As Dante continues to work towards God, he is once again blinded and begins to make sense of it all for himself. Previously, Beatrice described his blindness but in *Paradiso* Canto XXX, Dante illustrates it as

I became aware of having risen above and well beyond my powers, and such was the new vision kindled within me that there exist no light so vivid that my eyes could not have borne its brightness. (*Par. XXX.56-60*)

The closer Dante journeys towards the Good, he is able to witness the greatness before him. Losing his sight prepares Dante for when he is finally face to face with God. Without his sight, Dante is filled with even more desire to understand this Omnipotence. With each step closer, he approaches the ultimate fulfillment.

When one is able to follow the paths to the Good, he/she experiences the greatest reward. Reaching the end of this path, he is overwhelmed with gratitude for the undying support Beatrice had implemented through his journey. After Beatrice leaves Dante to go to her throne, Dante looks up to see her bright light shining upon him. With immense appreciation, Dante says

I know the grace and virtue I've been shown come from your goodness and your power. It is you who, on no matter what the path, have drawn me forth from servitude to freedom by every means that you had in power. Keep your munificence alive in me, so that my soul, which you have healed, may please you when it leaves its mortal flame (*Par.XXXI.83-90*)

At this moment, Dante is recognizing that Beatrice is a supporting cause for his freedom. This realization reflects on her persistent guidance. Without her dedication, Dante potentially could have continued down a false path without fulfillment. Even though Dante had betrayed her, he is aware that Beatrice never left his side. Her grace is so powerful that even from the afterlife, she guided him on his path out of servitude. But, due to free will, Beatrice could not guide Dante away from his temptation towards Lady Philosophy. Despite Dante's disloyalty, Beatrice was persistent in healing his soul. Without Beatrice's support, Dante would have had even more difficulty journeying on his true path.

Upon reaching the pinnacle of his fulfillment, Dante is overwhelmed by the greatness he is experiencing. This event is so powerful that he is at a loss for words and is enraptured by the divinity presented before him. He is beginning to satisfy his relentless desires at the end of *Paradiso*, and he proclaims,

He who beholds that Light is so enthralled that he would never willingly consent to turn away from it for any other sight, because the good that is the object of the will is held and gathered in perfection there that elsewhere would imperfect show

Witnessing the Light is so magnificent that his yearning to satisfy his intellect has been fulfilled. Despite this intellect being satisfied, he has difficulty articulating this greatness. Though his mentors have attempted to prepare him for his encounter with the, nothing could adequately equip Dante with the ability to understand what has come before him. Dante said,

In the deep, transparent essence of the lofty Light there appeared to me three circles having three circles having three colors but the same extent, and each one seemed reflected by the other as rainbow is by rainbow, while the third seemed fire, equally breathed forth by one and by the other. Oh how scant is speech, too weak to frame my thoughts. Compared to what I still recall my words are faint- to call them little is to praise them much. (*Par.* XXXIII.115-123)

For Dante, it is not possible to describe the greatness presented before him. As a poet, Dante is typically able to articulate his thoughts and visions eloquently and effectively. In this situation, he falls short in illustrating something so divine. Though this would appear bothersome to a man such as Dante, he is not bothered. In fact, he is beyond satisfied with this complete captivation. In this captivation he lost the ability to imagine what is before him. He is unable to completely depict what is before him, as he does not have the power to imagine such divinity. He states,

Here my exalted vision lost its power. But now my will and my desire, like wheels revolving with an even motion, were turning with the Love that moves the sun and all the other stars (*Par.* XXXIII. 143-145).

At last fulfilled, Dante has become a part of God's cosmos. The path that Beatrice paved for Dante finally reached completion and Dante experienced the greatness that God provides. Although he has lost power and is unable to articulate the divinity around him, he is aware and elated by the outcome of the true path. If Dante were to follow the philosophical path, he would fail to reach an end. Instead, the end would renew towards a new goal instead of reaching fulfillment. The greatness that he is so astounded by would fail to exist for him through philosophy by lack of faith. As Virgil explained to Dante before they parted, the heavens are beyond human reason. But, now that he has reached the Good, he is fulfilled with the wisdom that mankind yearns for. Unlike philosophy, the path of theology did not completely guide Dante to this wondrous end result.

Pursuing a true and straight path is a difficult task to maintain throughout one's life journey. Though it has been proven to be tempting to veer from the straight path, it is clear that not all paths lead to fulfillment. For Dante, he betrayed the woman he loved for Lady Philosophy. Although Lady Philosophy seemed to offer knowledge, she failed guide Dante to the end of the fulfilling path. Similarly, Virgil was unable to guide Dante for the entire journey. But, as proven, this does not discredit Virgil's significance to Dante's journey. Without Virgil, he could have not reached Beatrice or the Good. Virgil is a prime example of the integral part philosophy played for Dante's path. Although philosophy is viewed as a journey with endless paths, theology can be viewed similarly. What extends philosophy's

boundaries outside of philosophy's, is the ability to gain faith. Without faith when aiming for the Good, one would still be trapped within an endless cycle. In other words, faith allows man to believe in things beyond the physical world. Lacking faith would confine man's thoughts to tangible things within the earthly realm. Placing uncertainties within faith allow man reach beyond philosophy. But, as the parallels between Dante and Plato have illustrated, the two's views closely resemble one another. With this close comparison, the two do not have to oppose one another. Instead, one can recognize when philosophy's limits have been maximized and when faith in theology must be utilized. Without this recognition, he would be chasing an end that does not exist. When reaching the end of *Paradiso*, it is clear the greatness and faith Dante experiences undermine a path of solely philosophy. His reward is so immense that it is beyond comprehension of human reason. The sole reason that Dante is able to experience it, is his faith in God. Therefore, Dante's greatest reward is a result of both philosophy and theology, but fulfilled within faith.

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