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Dante Beyond Dante

The Good Place (2016-2020) as an aesthetic echo of Dante's *Divine Comedy*

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Abstract: This comparative study examines the television series *The Good Place* (2016-2020) as an echo of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. Adopting the concept of intertextuality developed by Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, I investigate how both stories are linked by a narrative thread, the recounting of the pilgrimages of their narrators through the realms of afterlife in pursuit of Infinite Goodness, to serve as guides for its receivers. Hell is not what it appears to be in *The Good Place*. As the show unfolds, the characters find themselves in an uncanny version of hell disguised as heaven, a torture plan developed by a demon. The spectator embarks on a journey through hell, purgatory, and paradise, similar to Dante's path in *The Divine Comedy*. There are many elements that can be correlated between them, symbolisms and aesthetic references that suggest similarities and reveal the lingering presence of Dante's legacy in the 21st Century.

Introduction

“Anyone can easily discover more Dante bibliography than anyone can use”.¹ In just a few words, the twentieth-century poet and critic T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) captured the enduring legacy of Dante Alighieri and of the scholars who have studied him, in the preface to his 1929 book *Dante*. A hundred years later, as new media are developed, new adaptations and derivative works contribute to the continual reminiscence of the *Commedia*. Dante's *Divine Comedy* remains unwavering at the pinnacle of Western literature.

The Good Place (2016-2020) is a modern situational comedy about the afterlife created by Michael Schur. Despite not being categorized as an intentional adaptation of the *Commedia*, the absorption and the reproduction of themes and structures from Dante's work is worthy of scholarly connection, indicating an intertextual thread that conjoins the cultural tissue of both artworks. It appears to represent all stages of the epic poem in

¹ Eliot, T. S. *Dante*, The Poets on the Poets—NO. 2, Faber & Faber, 1929, p. 12.

innovative fashion, through a different medium and under the lens of significant cultural differences. In *The Good Place*, there are no mere allusions to the *Inferno*, nor cartoonish quotations of Dante's exquisite verses. The spectator accompanies the protagonist Eleanor Shellstrop, interpreted by the American actress Kristen Bell, through every part of the afterlife just as the reader experiences Dante's journey. The similarity of narratological structures is only surpassed by the substantial echoes of the core values and reflections posited by the *Commedia*.

Dante, the character and narrator of the *Commedia*, took upon himself a divine enterprise to share his journey across the realms of afterlife with humanity. In service of truth, hope, and love, Dante aims at a rigorous description of his experience in the afterlife, meant to serve as a guiding compass for other human beings lost in their own dark woods, facing the contrapasso of their sins. *The Good Place* shares a similar account of Eleanor's journey, later revealed in the show as a duty in service of mankind, to guide those who are lost to the path of salvation. Eleanor and Dante share the same fate, as both end in their respective versions of the Emyrean, ending both epics in a heaven beyond time and space, that shows the universe as bound together by love.

This reminiscence can be approached and understood through the post-structuralist lens of intertextuality. Roland Barthes (1915-1980) studied how cultural products can be inspired or influenced by other works even without explicit authorial intent due to the use of language which possesses a dialogic nature,² sharing this aspect with Mikhail Bakhtin's theoretical framework of intertextuality.³ Barthes' theory of intertextuality would be further elaborated by one of his students, Julia Kristeva, who understood the concept as a cultural logic through which every text is composed of absorptions and transformations of other texts.⁴ For post-structuralists such as Barthes and Kristeva, text is a concept beyond

² Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author.", in *Image — Music — Text*, Hill and Wang 1977, pp. 142-148.

³ As summarized in the glossary from the Holquist edition, "Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole—there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. Which will affect the other, how it will do so and in what degree is what is actually settled at the moment of utterance. This dialogic imperative, mandated by the pre-existence of the language world relative to any of its current inhabitants, insures that there can be no actual monologue." In: Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. *The Dialogic Imagination*, University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 426.

⁴ Kristeva, Julia. *Recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Éditions du Seuil, 1969, p. 146.

the written page, encompassing meaningful cultural practices.⁵ It exists in language as a meaningful production, “productions signifiantes”.⁶ This understanding of cultural products as texts, and therefore as permutations of texts, aids the identification and comparative analysis of commonplaces between Dante and Schur’s work.

Engaging with the *Commedia* through textual literary theory and with the sitcom through post-structuralist and adaptation studies’ frameworks focused on intertextuality, we aim to explore the television series *The Good Place* (2016-2020) as a modern echo of *The Divine Comedy*, caused by the intertextual reflection of Dante’s aesthetic of being that repeats the allegories of his work, albeit with a different topography of the afterlife. Texts, in Kristeva’s framework, always possess a dual nature: they are anchored in the present through their linguistic disposition, and projected into a “future perfect” by the movements of “signifiante”, appearing as “écho et précurseur”,⁷ a consolidation of before and after. For the contemporary audience, it is Eleanor the character that travels once more to the underworld to witness, inform and safeguard the hope of salvation from the archetypal allegory of Dante, available to all who, astray from the right path, decide to live impelled by love, the binding of justice and truth in one of the moral trinities shown in his work.

Situating this research in comparative studies, the analysis will focus on comparisons between different aspects of those stories such as plot, set, and characters, to interpret the objects of our study and investigate our hypothesis. Afterwards, the findings will be systematically organized. The conduction of this research aims to bring new interdisciplinary insights into Dante Studies and Comparative Studies regarding *The Good Place* as an echo of Dante’s journey through the afterlife.

⁵ Text and intertextuality are both summarized in the beginning of Kristeva’s *Le texte clos*: “(...) nous définissons le texte comme un appareil translinguistique qui redistribue l’ordre de la langue, en mettant en relation une parole communicative visant l’information directe, avec différents types d’énoncés antérieurs ou synchroniques. Le texte est donc une productivité, ce qui veut dire: 1. son rapport à la langue dans laquelle il se situe est redistributif (destructivo-constructif), par conséquent il est abordable à travers des catégories logiques plutôt que purement linguistiques; 2. Il est une permutation de textes, une intertextualité: dans l’espace d’un texte plusieurs énoncés, pris à d’autres textes, se croisent et se neutralisent.” Ibid., p. 113.

⁶ Ibid., p. 278.

⁷ Kristeva, Julia. *La Révolution du langage poétique*, Éditions du Seuil, 1974, p. 364.

Regarding Dante bibliography, T.S. Eliot's *Dante* (1929), *Dante's Divine Comedy* from Jules Gelernt (1966) and Warren Ginsberg's *Dante's Aesthetics of Being* (1999) were chosen as main guides for the *Commedia*, though other studies might be discussed whenever appropriate or adequate to illustrate or corroborate the proposed exchanges and departures between Dante's work and the television show *The Good Place*. The goal of this paper is not to provide a literature review of Dante bibliography, nor is it to provide an exposure of random patterns identified in Schur's work that could resemble *The Divine Comedy*. Our point of contention is the possibility of a cultural thread permeating the fabric of this modern sitcom traceable all the way back to the *Commedia*. By forfeiting the old notion of influence in lieu of the novel concept of intertextuality from Barthes and Kristeva, one might be able to identify how cultural works retain such historicity, which is not to say a constitutive part of our past, but of our present.

Dante and Schur's allegories

The significance of Dante's journey through the afterlife in *The Divine Comedy* can be associated with its archetypal use of allegory, positing a clear symbolism of spiritual transformation in the context of artistic narratives. T.S. Eliot was convinced of Dante's "universal mastery in the use of images" and that *The Divine Comedy* constituted a good allegory because "it is not necessary to understand the meaning first to enjoy the poetry, but that our enjoyment of the poetry makes us want to understand the meaning."⁸

An understanding of catholic theology, medieval philosophies, politics, and references to classics present in *The Divine Comedy* is not required for the reader to be able to grasp the maps of meaning interlined, as Dante is pedagogical in the depiction of his spiritual journey as an allegory of a universal human experience. The imaginary aspect of this story about the afterlife highlights the unavoidable human quest for awareness.

Afterlife isn't presented as an inevitable fate in the context of a spiritual journey. Dante himself is saved from the beasts of Inferno by Virgil, a guide commanded by Virgin Mary, Saint Lucy and Beatrice.⁹ In *The Divine Comedy*, afterlife works as a forecast for the

⁸ T.S. Eliot, op. cit., p. 56.

⁹ As summarized by Annarita Placella in her work on Beatrice's pity, "la Misericordia che Dante cerca in Virgilio si collegherà poi alla Beatrice pietosa di Inf. II, 133, la cui pietà è a sua volta sollecitata, tramite Santa Lucia, da Maria, la quale è l'origine di questa catena di salvezza." in «*Se questa donna sapesse la*

construction of meaning during human experience. As summarized by Jules Gelernt, Dante's epic is "not a flight into fantasy; it is an imaginative work which, coming to grips with the problems of life, seeks to interpret the meaning of human existence".¹⁰

Meaning is a function of eternity as an inevitable constituent of human experience. Death can only be grasped and understood through the fabrication of a self in which awareness of existence is embodied and justified by the exercise of free will. Hence, Virgil's explanation of fear after Dante begins to question being chosen for such an enterprise:

Ma io, perché venirvi? o chi 'l concede?
Io non Enëa, io non Paulo sono;
me degno a ciò né io né altri 'l crede.

Per che, se del venire io m'abbandono,
temo che la venuta non sia folle.
Se' savio; intendi me' ch' i' non ragiono».

E qual è quei che disvuol ciò che volle
e per novi pensier cangia proposta,
sì che dal cominciar tutto si tolle,

tal mi fec' io 'n quella oscura costa,
perché, pensando, consumai la 'mpresa
che fu nel cominciar cotanto tosta.

«S' i' ho ben la parola tua intesa»,
rispuose del magnanimo quell' ombra,
«l'anima tua è da viltade offesa;

la qual molte fiata l'omo ingombra
sì che d'onrata impresa lo rivolve,
come falso veder bestia quand' ombra. (*Inf.* II 31-48)

Though of disputed authorship, the *Epistle to Cangrande* supposedly written by Dante would also share this explanation of the allegory of his *Commedia*: "Si vero accipiatur opus

mia condizione, [...] molta pietade le ne verrebbe». Beatrice impietosa/pietosa tra Vita Nova e Commedia, in «Theory and Criticism of Literature and Arts», Vol. 9, No. 2, 2025, p. 92.

¹⁰ Gelernt, Jules. *Dante's Divine Comedy*, Monarch Press, 1966, p. 5.

allegorice, subiectum est homo prout merendo et demerendo per arbitrii libertatem iustitiae praemiandi et puniendi obnoxius est.”¹¹

Regardless of the controversy over the epistle authenticity, this interpretation also applies to the underworldly journeys of Paul and Aeneas,¹² working as a common standpoint warranted by the references to those stories in Canto II of the *Inferno*, further vindicated by the commonplace of the hero’s return, which transforms the literal significance of these three journeys through the afterlife into allegories of the human experience. Therefore, the character Dante is experiencing the afterlife and actively engaging in the moral duty derivable from man’s relation to God, revealing the universal spiritual order to enlighten men driven by sin about the exercise of free will.

Dante, the poet, responds to the mission of writing his journey to the afterlife in order to guide the readers that find themselves lost in the dark woods of human suffering, made clear by the encounter with his great-great-grandfather, Cacciaguida: *tutta tua vision fa manifesta / e lascia pur grattar dov’ è la rognna. (Par., XVII, 128-129)*. His journey and his poetry have the purpose of changing the world.¹³

The Good Place (2016-2020), a television show created by Michael Schur, is centered around Eleanor Shellstrop, a selfish person that died and appears to arrive by mistake in *The Good Place*, their concept of paradise. By the end of season one, in the final episode “Michael’s Gambit”, the spectator discovers that there was no mistake, and that version of paradise was actually a mechanism of torture developed by a demon from the bad place, the show’s equivalent to hell. The story revolves around Eleanor’s efforts to face her contrapasso and escape her misfortune.

Michael Schur provides a clear summary of the idea behind *The Good Place* in his book on how to live an ethical life, published two years after the end of the show:

¹¹ *Dantis Alagherii Epistolae: Le Lettere di Dante*, edited by Arnaldo Monti, Hoepli, 1921, p. 338.

¹² Paul’s journey is described in The Bible, 2 Corinthians 12, and Aeneas’ journey is presented in Virgil’s *Aeneid*. The characters find themselves in different conceptions of the afterlife, but through both stories, the reader is invited to grasp death as a source of meaning in light of our awareness. Death is experienced during life as a call to direct free will towards faith (St. Paul) or fate (Aeneas). Dante’s journey is a call for both.

¹³ Shaw, Prue. *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*, Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2014, p. 141.

The initial idea behind *The Good Place* was that a “bad” woman, who had lived a selfish and somewhat callous life, is admitted to an afterlife paradise due to a clerical error and finds herself ticketed for an idyllic eternity alongside the very best people who ever lived—people who'd spent their time removing landmines and eradicating poverty, whereas she'd spent her life littering, lying to everyone, and remorselessly selling fake medicine to frightened seniors. Scared she's going to be discovered, she decides to try to become a “good” person in order to earn her spot.¹⁴

Those commentaries by Eliot, Gelernt and Shaw would find a convenient approximation to the *Commedia* in this television series, for it shows an afterlife similar to Dante's, while also working as an imaginative work that seeks to interpret the meaning of human existence. The entire sitcom develops around the fundamental moral question of “what we owe to each other”, though it would only be formally introduced as derived from Scanlon's book further down the road. The idea of a *contrapasso* is as fundamental for *The Good Place* as it is in *The Divine Comedy*, and the necessity of a guide is explored from the pilot episode all the way through the final episode, since Eleanor is always being aided by Michael, Chidi and Janet.¹⁵

The show remains adamant about simplifying the exposition of complex moral philosophies developed over the centuries to allow the viewer to understand through the characters that morality is not a complex feature of life as much as a point of resistance that strays one away from the right path. It also posits a clear symbolism of spiritual transformation in the context of artistic narratives. Just as *The Divine Comedy*, the show consists of a descent into hell, a spiritual preparation and finally an ascend to the stars. Both artworks share structures and themes through a similar model of narrative, implying an intertextual thread that connects those stories and shapes *The Good Place* to exercise a similar significance for the viewers as *The Divine Comedy* did for its readers, adapting the verbal representation of the spiritual nature of human experience to a graphic representation with identical purpose. The afterlife is not meant to be exposed as an inevitable place beyond comprehension, irrelevant to the living. On the contrary, just as in

¹⁴ Schur, Michael. *How to be perfect: the correct answer to every moral question*, Simon & Schuster, 2022, p. 18.

¹⁵ As it will be further explained, Michael is a character that occupy many roles throughout the narrative, but starts out as a demon, and is interpreted by the actor Ted Danson. Chidi Anagonye is a character introduced as Eleanor's soulmate, interpreted by the actor William Jackson Harper, and Janet is identified as an informational assistant of the afterlife, a walking database created by “The Makers of Light, Darkness, and Everything in Between”, portrayed by the actress D'Arcy Carden.

The Divine Comedy, meaning in *The Good Place* is a function of death and eternity as inevitable constituents of human experience, which explains the show's decision to end in a circular structure with the transformation of spiritual souls from the Empyrean into a mysterious and unique loving light that joins the very fabric of the universe, guiding living beings toward meaningful transformation of their lives according to moral principles, like a voice in one's head, or an ancient poem impelled by Love.

Eleanor, a guide for the viewer; Michael and Chidi, guides for the characters

Eleanor's journey mirrors Dante's journey in terms of development. Both find themselves in hell, searching for a way out of its dire landscape. Both have to endure an adventure across hell and purgatory before ascending to heaven and are moved by a higher concept of love. In *The Good Place*, after the initial discovery of Michael's Gambit, the characters are impelled to improve their lives based on a fundamental reflection of what they owe to each other, drawn from a philosophy book by T. M. Scanlon entitled "What we owe to each other".

Dante was not a contractualist in the modern sense. Nevertheless, treachery, the sin of those sent to the ninth and final circle of Hell, involves fundamentally the betrayal of that moral principle. It is the sin of fraudulent behavior breaking special bonds of love and trust. There is a significant lesson about love in *Purgatorio*:

«Né creator né creatura mai»,
cominciò el, «figliuol, fu senza amore,
o naturale o d'animo; e tu 'l sai.
(*Purg.* XVII, 91-93)

Love is considered innate to creator and creature. Fraud is identified with the violation of bonds of love and trust in *Inferno* and so is treachery, a qualified form of fraud against a special trust built on added love (*Inf.* XI, 52-63). The worst sin in his hierarchy is deliberately acting opposite to what we owe to each other based on that foundational love. Eleanor improves her life based on such reflection, and she also serves the role of Dante, the pilgrim, representing the sins of other human souls she finds during her journey of purification, serving as a conduit for the moral allegory in relation to the spectator of the sitcom.

It is through her pilgrimage that the show teaches the spectator about its moral philosophy, exemplified by the episode “The Answer” of the fourth season when the character Chidi Anagonye makes a necessary sacrifice of erasing his memory after writing “the answer”. When he regains his memory, he tells Eleanor that the journey is the destination and asks Janet for his note back. It says: “there is no 'answer'. But Eleanor is the answer.”¹⁶

Eleanor is not the answer merely because of their romantic relationship. Eleanor is the one that guided all characters to the good place, showing Chidi that he was also in a gloomy wood. She experiences every *contrapasso* in the bad place, learning from them, and teaching others so they are given equal chances to improve their lives. She is the answer by serving in her pilgrimage as their guide through the afterlife. The stories of Paul, Aeneas and Dante share the archetype of the moral guide as necessary for the development of the plot. Like Dante, Eleanor is a guide for the recipient of the tale, though she also learns from her journey to the underworld, confessing her sins and cleansing herself in order to move forward.

She also begins the show strayed off the straight path (*Inf.* I 1-3), and declares herself unworthy, thinking that she was sent off to such a journey by mistake, just as Dante thinks of himself unworthy in light of other heroes who experienced the same adventure (*Inf.* II 31-35). Eleanor, as Dante, functions as a guide for the viewer (*Inf.* IX 61-63; *Par.* II 1-21), but is also guided by other beings in her journey through the afterlife: just as Dante is guided mainly by Virgil and Beatrice, so is Eleanor guided by Michael and Chidi. Chidi, who teaches Eleanor about moral philosophy and guides her to become a better person, also becomes her love interest, and at first is presented to her as her soulmate, though this was also a way for Michael to torture both by pairing a moral professor that embodies a rigid and perfectionist quest for moral and ethical choices with the one person that knows she doesn't belong in the good place due to her selfishness and lack of moral or ethical considerations in her choices.¹⁷ Eleanor is trying to become a better person in order to

¹⁶ Schofield, Dan (Writer) & Collins, Valeria Migliassi (Director). (2019, November 21). “Chapter 48: The Answer” (Season 4, Episode 9) [TV series episode]. *The Good Place*. NBC, 00:21:11-00:21:20.

¹⁷ Chidi, though one of the humans being tortured, performs a similar role to Virgil and Beatrice in *The Divine Comedy* that could be further explored, being the source of knowledge used by Eleanor to improve her life while also being her soulmate and the love that guides her through her ethical dilemmas. Mirco Cittadini, in one of his studies of Virgil in *The Divine Comedy*, explains lust as a literary sin, and how knowledge becomes the object of amorous desire, exemplified by the cases of Virgil, Dante's love of the classical world, and Beatrice, Dante's love of Wisdom, analogous to the situation of Chidi in regard to

justify her belonging in the good place. Dante, in *The Divine Comedy*, also starts his voyage as someone that didn't belong in *Paradiso*. The poem consists of a rescue mission initially conducted by Virgil, later on by Beatrice, since Virgil couldn't enter *Paradiso*. Michael is equally unable to enter the Emyrean due to his nature.¹⁸ Dante doesn't see himself as worthy, and his adventure is a transformation of his character in order to be able to enter the Emyrean. He needs to witness hell and purify himself before rising to *Paradiso*.

In *The Good Place*, Michael is a demon that designs the neighborhood 12358W to experiment a new form of torture using Eleanor, Chidi, Tahani and Jason¹⁹ as his initial subjects. According to Schur, they named him after the Archangel Michael,²⁰ which reinforces the connections with Christian tradition and also with *The Divine Comedy*. In the *Bible*, there are only five passages that explicitly refer to the archangel Michael: Daniel 10:13, 10:21, 12:1, Judas 1:9 and Revelation 12:7-8. In *The Divine Comedy*, the archangel is mentioned either explicitly or implicitly in *Inferno*, Canto VII (lines 11–12), *Paradiso*,

Eleanor: “L'amore è conoscenza e la conoscenza è amore. Medesima è la fiamma che li alimenta. [...] L'oggetto del sapere diventa oggetto del desiderio amoroso. Dante apprende complesse questioni teologiche attraverso un coinvolgimento emotivo senza precedenti. Il trasporto amoroso verso Beatrice è trasporto sensuale verso la Sapienza. La trasformazione del sapere in corpo erotico viene portato agli estremi in Dante se pensiamo che persino nelle sue opere concettuali, come il Convivio, Filosofia diventa donna da amare, antagonista alla gloriosissima. E come Dante ama Virgilio, così ama intensamente tutto il mondo classico.” *La dolce sapienza di Virgilio: un modello di pedagogia immaginale*, in «Theory and Criticism of Literature and Arts», Vol. 9, No. 2, 2025, pp. 24-25. Michael is also imbued of some characteristics of Virgil studied by Cittadini, notably his familiarity with the abyss given his condition, and Michael being a demon while guiding the characters toward salvation matches Cittadini's clarification of Virgil as a conjured figure, a “damned, infernal and passive Virgil” after citing De castellano, of Bonvesin (Ibid., 2025, p. 26). But it is Chidi, in the end, who works as an imperfect guide perfect for Eleanor, an imperfect pilgrim, just as Cittadini explains the relationship of Dante and Virgil: “Virgilio guida Dante offrendo costantemente sé stesso come modello. E non necessariamente perfetto. Anzi, una guida imperfetta perfetta per un viaggiatore imperfetto.” (Ibid., 2025, p. 32) And it is Chidi who participates in the three thematic axes of the *Commedia*, wisdom, love, and virtue, similarly to Virgil in the ways studied by Cittadini (op. cit., pp. 38-39).

¹⁸ Schur, Michael (Writer & Director). (2020, January 30). “The Final Chapter: Whenever You're Ready” (Season 4, Episode 13) [TV series episode]. *The Good Place*. NBC.

¹⁹ Jason and Tahani are also two human beings sent to The Bad Place. Jason Mendoza is interpreted by Manny Jacinto and Tahani Al-Jamil is interpreted by Jameela Alia Jamil.

²⁰ Egner, Jeremy. *'The Good Place' Finale Finds the Meaning of Life: 'Yep, Nailed It'*, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/28/arts/television/the-good-place-michael-schur.html>.

Canto IV (lines 47–48), *Purgatorio*, Canto XII (lines 25–27), *Purgatorio*, Canto XIII (line 51), *Paradiso*, Canto XXVIII.

Michael's human body is a "skin suit" to hide his true form,²¹ while the archangel Michael in *The Divine Comedy* also appears in human form as a way of showing humans spiritual beings. Canto VII of the *Inferno*, referencing the book of Revelation, posits that Michael was also the enforcer of divine justice, who took vengeance for the rebellion against God. In *The Good Place*, Michael explains that he tortures humans because it is his job, as it was the archangel's job to enforce divine order over chaos and evil.

It is the rejection of selfishness that allows a human soul to escape hell, and in *The Good Place* the transition between hell and purgatory begins with Michael who, in an act of self-sacrifice, ends the characters' journey through hell and allows them to meet Judge Gen, the judge of the afterlife,²² by sacrificing himself to save Eleanor.²³ The name of this archangel is the antithesis of pride, the exact sin that for *The Divine Comedy* constitutes the root of all evil, treated at the first terrace of *Purgatory*, for being the sin of Lucifer. The humility necessary to conquer this evil is precisely the fundamental act of self-sacrifice, that is, sacrifice of one's own ego.

The point system, an adaptation of Dante's *contrapasso*

Perch' io parti' così giunte persone,
partito porto il mio cerebro, lasso!,
dal suo principio ch'è in questo troncone.

Così s'osserva in me lo contrapasso».
(*Inf.* XXVIII 139-142)

²¹ Jefferson, Cord (Writer) & Sackett, Morgan (Director). (2019, October 17). "Chapter 43: Tinker, Tailor, Demon, Spy" (Season 4, Episode 4) [TV series episode]. *The Good Place*. NBC.

²² Judge Gen, interpreted by Maya Rudolph, is the almighty judge of the afterlife, appearing for the first time in Amram, Megan; Mande, Joe (Writers) & Holland, Dean (Director). (2018, January 25). "Chapter 25: The Burrito" (Season 2, Episode 11) [TV series episode]. *The Good Place*. NBC.

²³ Statsky, Jen; Schofield, Dan (Writers) & Yang, Alan (Director). (2018, January 18). "Chapter 24: Rhonda, Diana, Jake, and Trent" (Season 2, Episode 10) [TV series episode]. *The Good Place*. NBC.

Contrapasso is the name of the law of punishment in the afterlife, by which the punishment is proportionate and fitting to the sin. According to Pietro Alighieri,²⁴ Dante's son, an idea related to the book of Deuteronomy 25.2; for Niccoli and Diurni, a tool for his *Commedia* to serve as "a sublime vendetta against his numerous adversaries".²⁵ According to Pertile:

There are a number of cases in which the contrapasso appears to function as the tragic fulfillment and realization of a metaphorical discourse, that is to say, as the transposition into everlasting "reality" of a common metaphor, habitually used to describe an inner, spiritual condition.²⁶

Punishment is portrayed in *The Good Place* pilot episode by the same principle and also as a transposition into reality of a common metaphor. The episode ends with Eleanor Shellstrop waking up a day after Tahani's party by a severe disruption of the good place. There is a heavy storm, with wild giant creatures out of control, random missiles, and other issues, such as plants fighting each other, the entire neighborhood falling into chaos.

Eleanor commits many sins in the premiere episode. Gluttony, as she eats shrimp without control in Tahani's party, filling her bra with more shrimp to take home, though she is already in paradise, with infinite food available anytime at request. The day after, nine giant flying shrimps are seen in the neighborhood, also a possible hint at the true nature of that place based on Dante's nine circles of Hell. There is a giant frog that eats one of the shrimps, and since Eleanor shows gluttony for shrimps and is hiding from the architect of heaven, a possible connection with the description of damned souls in Dante's hell (*Inf. IX*, 76-81). She also presents envy against people that got into the good place, specially Tahani, and mocks her by saying in her British accent: "I am just a big, beautiful, utterly perfect cartoon giraffe."²⁷ Another disruption is a bunch of giraffes occupying the streets of the neighborhood, the transposition of her metaphorical manifestation of envy against Tahani's appearance.

²⁴ Alighieri, Pietro. *Super Dantis Ipsius Genitoris Comoediam Commentarium*. G. J. Bar. Vernn, 1845, p. 243.

²⁵ Niccoli, Alessandro; Diurni, Giovanni. "Vendetta." *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani, 1970.

Accessed at [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vendetta_\(Enciclopedia-Dantesca\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vendetta_(Enciclopedia-Dantesca)/).

²⁶ Pertile, Lino. "Introduction to Inferno", *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, edited by Rachel Jacoff, 2nd ed., Cambridge UP, 2007, p. 78.

²⁷ Schur, Michael (Writer) & Goddard, Drew (Director). (2016, September 19). "Chapter 1: Everything is Fine" (Season 1, Episode 1) [TV series episode]. *The Good Place*. NBC, 00:16:42-00:16:50.

Furthermore, Eleanor shows anger, reflected in plants and animals fighting and eating each other during the chaotic morning. Eleanor reveals that while she was alive, she would “lie to old people and scare them into buying fake medicine”,²⁸ and giant bottles of fake medicine trample people on the streets, a transposition of her fraud. She is also choosing to lie in order to stay in what she thinks is paradise undeserving, another manifestation of fraud, and its transposition in the disruptive morning is that everyone wakes up with the same outfits, except for her.

In the beginning, Michael explains that every neighborhood is unique, adjusted for its residents. “Every ladybug, every detail has been precisely designed and calibrated for its residents.”²⁹ The disruption includes a hectic giant ladybug in front of Eleanor’s house, a transposition into reality of her fraudulent condition. It would allow the interpretation that the ladybug is also part of the design, a precise detail calibrated for Eleanor, which would hint at her torture and it being the bad place.

Giant forks also drop from the sky, following Eleanor’s repeated counts of swearing, since every swear word is replaced in the good place by a similar word, and she was always trying to use a foul word that sounded similar to fork. This is flattery, also a sin covered in *The Divine Comedy*.

These mechanisms of contrapasso and fulfillment of metaphorical discourses are present in every torture suffered by the human protagonists, also including the tortures developed for Chidi, Jason and Tahani. Chidi’s rigidity and indecisiveness hurt everyone in his life,³⁰ so his punishment is endlessly being forced to deal with difficult moral decisions and its consequences. His first private interaction with Eleanor involves her confiding her secret and putting him in the moral dilemma of what choice to make in light of knowing in secrecy her fraudulent presence in the good place. And Chidi’s indecisiveness keeps making someone’s life worse throughout their journey in hell and purgatory. Jason is easily recognized for his incontinence, which leads him to being punished by also thinking he is mistakenly in the good place, while being forced to take the place of a monk with a vow of silence. His impulses are snared and neutralized, and he is unable to be his incontinent self. Tahani, on the other hand, faces the punishment of her pride and envy of her sister. The

²⁸ Ibid., 00:10:31-00:10:35.

²⁹ Ibid., 00:03:47-00:03:54.

³⁰ Schur, Michael (Writer & Director). (2017, January 19). “Chapter 13: Michael’s Gambit” (Season 1, Episode 13) [TV series episode]. *The Good Place*. NBC.

four characters were also put in the same neighborhood because they were perfect to torture each other and were doing so involuntarily.

Aesthetical correlations from Hell to the Empyrean in the 21st Century

Aesthetics is a broad signifier, and its use warrants some clarification. It is often used in artistic studies as a formal replacement for beauty, appearance or style. In this regard, the TV show set design is very suggestive of Dante's presence and importance in the cultural web behind *The Good Place*. Although it is not revealed to the spectator until the end of the first season, the characters find themselves in a version of the bad place, the show's version of hell that is disguised as the good place, equivalent to paradise.

Eleanor's house in the afterlife, meant to perfectly match her true essence, is composed of three circular windows, five shrubs designed as circles and its main red fence with a centered circle in a total of nine circles. Right above her bed lies a decorative piece also composed of nine circles. The other decoration consists of nine paintings of clowns divided in groups of three, another element hated by Eleanor and meant to be part of her torture.

The floor of Tahani and Jason's house is designed with groups of circles, often three, and the house of Tahani's parents is decorated with nine antique plates. One of the frozen yogurt stores, which are also included in the neighborhood as torture devices, is decorated with nine circles right at its entrance. Michael is a demon and claims to Eleanor that he is able to see in nine dimensions. While there is no identical topography of the afterlife, there are continual references to the nine circles of Dante's Hell foreshadowing the actual nature of this initial good place, a fake paradise designed as the ideal torture for four human beings.

There are also other conceptualizations of aesthetics. For the purposes of this comparative study, we will be referring to Warren Ginsberg's work on "Dante's Aesthetics of Being" (1999). Dante is conceived as a theorist of the aesthetic,³¹ and analogy in Dante works as a "mark of the aesthetics coordination of the sensible and the metaphysical."³²

³¹ Ginsberg, Warren. *Dante's Aesthetics of Being*. The University of Michigan Press, 1999, p. 7.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Differentiating how aesthetic works in Dante's *Vita nuova* and in the *Commedia*, the author also posits that:

In the *Vita nuova*, the aesthetic offered a form of knowledge between sensation and intellection that made Dante and the poetry he copies from the book of his memory similar to Beatrice. In the *Purgatorio*, however, the aesthetic becomes a form of existence. In place of the ratios that made the various stages by which Dante knew Beatrice like her, Dante now asserts that his life is intelligible as an analogy: he is man and poet insofar as he moves signifying through the world in embodied proportion to the inner articulations of Love's promptings. The aesthetic has been transformed into the style of God's writing in heaven and on earth; it has become nothing less than a discourse of being.³³

In that regard, *The Good Place* is an aesthetic echo of *The Divine Comedy*, operating as an adaptation of Dante's discourse of being. The transformation of the characters is intelligible in the afterlife as a movement in regard to the Love innate to Creator and creature mentioned in *Purgatorio*. Life is an analogy in the sitcom, as we see the characters being defined in terms of their movement toward that "First Good" (*Purg.* XVII, 97) or evil (*Purg.* XVII, 100). When the characters are deep in sins, they experience hell. When they strive to move toward the First Good, they experience hope as an articulation of their innate Love toward apotheosis, for hell is defined just as in the *Commedia* as a place where all hope is lost (*Inf.* III, 9; S4E6).

In the pilot episode, it is clarified that every religion got something right and something wrong. Schur's aesthetic style doesn't cease to be theological in essence. It is filled with allegories akin to Abrahamic religions. Nevertheless, it transcends the constraints of traditional theological styles objected by post-modern audiences, as well as the traditional styles of Hollywood television shows, constituting a particular style that allows him to partake in meaningful spiritual practices with a contemporary audience that resists all metaphysics. It is an outlier of contemporary Hollywood sitcoms, and one could make the case that, as Dante, its style follows the dictation of Love (*Purg.* XXIV, 55-63). Another important takeaway from Ginsberg in this sense is that "Knowing and being have become reflexes of Love; they are constituted and structured by it, joined as one through it, as body is to soul, in a way that only a theologized poetry can represent."³⁴ The show is not

³³ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 89.

theologized by coincidence, but rather by the necessity of its relationship with the foundational allegories of religious narratives. Ginsberg clarifies that:

If Love and Dante are conjunct as a cause is to its effect, however, the action that has joined them is the notice he takes of Love's inspiration. With its recall to Augustine's "notitia," which with "mens" and "amor" make the mind like the Trinity, "noto" refers directly to the act of discursive intellection, with its production of the word that expresses the universal, corresponds to the first procession in the divinity, which is "by the way of the intellect, and... is the procession of the word."³⁵

Apart from these similarities regarding the discursive intellection of divinity, the spectator learns by season three that time works differently in *The Good Place*. "While time on Earth moves in a straight line... time in the afterlife moves in a 'Jeremy Bearimy'". The timeline of the afterlife looks like the name Jeremy Bearimy in cursive English, hence the name. It consists of loops, swirls, cycles, plus a peculiar dot representing the "time-moment when nothing never occurs."³⁶

Time also works differently in Dante's afterlife, and the lack of temporal change, or stasis, presents itself as a structural necessity of the *Inferno*'s aesthetic. The four main characters of *The Good Place*, during their passage through hell, lack this defining characteristic of Dante's *Inferno*, a difference that does not set these works apart, but approximates them, since this is what allows Eleanor to occupy the same narratological position of Dante.

In *The Good Place*, the difference is subtly revealed in the pilot episode as Janet, the informational assistant of their neighborhood, claims after Chidi asks about the bad place that she is not allowed to tell them about it. She can only play a brief clip of what is happening there at that moment, consisting of unchanging agony. Despite the suffering of the four characters throughout this initial part of their journey, they are not merely in pain, facing the horrors of an everlasting torture proportionate to their sins: they are trying to reconcile their sinful experiences with the idea of belonging in paradise. This leads to the journey of improvement that posits a possible growth of the human soul, same as Dante, the character.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 90.

³⁶ Amram, Megan (Writer) & O'Donnell, Trent (Director). (2018, October 18). "Chapter 31: Jeremy Bearimy" (Season 3, Episode 4) [TV series episode]. *The Good Place*. NBC.

This differs from the passage of time during life on Earth, which showcases the divine intervention of Fortune, described in Canto VII of the *Inferno*:

Colui lo cui saver tutto trascende,
fece li cieli e diè lor chi conduce
sì, ch'ogne parte ad ogne parte splende,

distribuendo igualmente la luce.
Similmente a li splendor mondani
ordinò general ministra e duce

che permutasse a tempo li ben vani
di gente in gente e d'uno in altro sangue,
oltre la difension d'i senni umani;

per ch'una gente impera e l'altra langue,
seguendo lo giudicio di costei,
che è occulto come in erba l'angue.

Vostro saver non ha contasto a lei:
questa provvede, giudica, e persegue
suo regno come il loro li altri dèi.

Le sue permutazion non hanno triegue:
necessità la fa esser veloce;
sì spesso vien chi vicenda consegue.
(*Inf.*, VII, 73-90)

In *The Good Place*, Fortune works just as described in *Inferno*. Even after divine intervention and a new chance given to the characters, they associate their improvement to improvement in their material fortune, which swiftly exchanges hands through a necessity of time dictated by God. Afterall, Fortune is divinely commissioned to both enrich and deplete man.³⁷

³⁷ Bogna, Aimee. The question of time: artistic, intellectual and social responses to time in medieval Europe. *Pacific Journal* 7, 2012, p. 68.

Moreso, time in Dante's afterlife works differently in *Inferno* and *Paradiso* compared to *Purgatorio* because in the first two there is no temporal change, only spatial movement.³⁸ In *The Good Place*, the experience of hell shares this lack of temporal change. The demons that inhabit the bad place are able to reboot their version of hell to restart the torture of the four main human characters infinitely, erasing their memories if they ever approach the development of hope, the nurturing of love and attempt to escape their contrapasso. The erasure of progress mirrors time (or lack thereof) in Dante's *Inferno*, as there can only be spatial movement inside the characters' own circle of punishment, rather than temporal change, since time is conceived as part of the discourse of being in light of Love's prompting. Their equivalent of the Empyrean also possesses the same atemporality as in Dante. It involves the passage from human form to divine form, and from time to eternity (*Par.* XXXI, 37-39). Most of the journey in *The Good Place* involves for the main characters a pilgrimage through the afterlife that also works as their purgatory, for there is temporal change only as they move forward on the purification of their lives.

There is an uncanny problem with the project of eternal damnation developed for the characters: though the four humans are meant to torture each other in a complex and subtle psychological framework of torture, never realizing they are being punished, by allowing human beings to interact with each other, this turns out to work as a fatal system in which the protagonist Eleanor always finds out that they were put in the bad place disguised as a good place neighborhood. The primary reason for her unchanging realization, after thinking she received this unearned reward, lies in her relentless effort to become a better person to be deserving of heaven. No matter how many versions of hell she faces, Eleanor seeks the other humans being tortured in the same place, and they always try to improve together and make sense of the afterlife, despite having their memories constantly reset. In season 2, it is revealed with fast forward exposition that they endured 802 different models of punishment.³⁹

This explains the identity of plot progression in comparison to Dante's pilgrimage. The spectator of *The Good Place*, as the reader of the *Commedia*, grasps the imagery of damned souls in hell through the narration of a pilgrimage that transcends the stasis inherent to that

³⁸ Costa, Daniel Lula. A confluência das temporalidades: a *Commedia* (1321) de Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) e o Velho de Creta. *Mirabilia Journal* 41, 2025/2, pp. 239; 251.

³⁹ Schofield, Dan (Writer) & Sackett, Morgan (Director). (2017, October 5). "Chapter 17: Team Cockroach" (Season 2, Episode 3) [TV series episode]. *The Good Place*. NBC, 00:05:03-00:05:15.

place, a storytelling that embodies the significance of discourse and the procession of the word.

Michael, the demon responsible for their torture, eventually asks to team up with the humans. His desperation follows a betrayal in light of pressure from his boss. Michael is blackmailed by Vicky, interpreted by Tiya Sircar, a demon aware that the reboots were not approved by their supervisor, and that Michael only had two attempts to make it work. Interestingly, as noted by Joseph Gallagher, “Dante deems it just that traitors be betrayed”.⁴⁰ Michael’s initial project is centered on the betrayal of human trust, and the show reveals that he is betrayed by Vicky.

They agree to reset the neighborhood so Vicky can try to manage their tortures, but Michael preserves their memories, agrees to join them in Chidi’s moral philosophy classes to become a better person and offers to get them into the real good place. Spatial movement is replaced by temporal change and yet, the plan crumbles after a surprise visit from Michael’s supervisor, not aware of his plan, to announce that both of them are being promoted, considering the apparent success of his enterprise. The promotion implies that his neighborhood will be shut down, and the four human protagonists will be sent to the actual bad place for traditional torture.

Michael looks for a way to save the humans. Vicky’s aforementioned betrayal is complete in episode 8 of season 2.⁴¹ She betrays Michael and reports his failures to Shawn, their supervisor, portrayed by Marc Evan Jackson, but is framed as responsible, and the circle of treachery envisioned by Dante is complete, for the pilgrim responded to betrayal in similar fashion. The show hints at the system of *contrapasso* designed by Dante, but more than that, reveals that the storytelling of Schur ends the account of hell in the same way as Dante, by showing the hierarchy of sins and its culmination. Dante makes a deal with Fra Alberigo for his story, but doesn’t fulfill his end of the deal, marking the *contrapasso* of traitors:

Per ch’io a lui: «Se vuo’ ch’i’ ti sovvegna,
dimmi chi se’, e s’io non ti disbrigo,
al fondo de la ghiaccia ir mi convegna».

⁴⁰ Gallagher, Joseph. *To hell and back with Dante: a modern reader’s guide to The Divine Comedy*. Triumph Books, 1996, p. 62.

⁴¹ Encell, Christopher (Writer) & Mendoza, Linda (Director). (2018, January 4). “Chapter 22: Leap to Faith” (Season 2, Episode 8) [TV series episode]. *The Good Place*. NBC, 00:13:56-00:15:31.

(...)

Ma distendi oggimai in qua la mano;
aprimi li occhi». E io non gliel' apersi;
e cortesia fu lui esser villano.

(*Inf.*, Canto XXXIII, 115-117 & 148-150)

They eventually have to take a leap into faith, and by the end of season 2 travel to the “actual” bad place, the show’s version of traditional hell, after finding out that Michael didn’t actually know how to take them to the good place. He tried one billion and twelve different plans⁴² before realizing that “the only way into the Good Place is by being a good person on Earth”. However, the idea of a “good person” relies at this initial moment in a point system that rewards good conducts with points proportionate to their good results. This is the idea of consequentialism, by which “the basis for judgment about whether something is right or wrong stems from the consequences of that action.”⁴³

Just as Dante was heavily opposed to this system, in *The Good Place*, the pilgrimage involves overcoming this initial theory. The characters manage to meet the judge of the afterlife, who agrees to try Michael’s new plan: they send the four human protagonists back to their lives on Earth, creating a new timeline. Their deaths become near-death experiences, as they are all saved from their fates by Michael’s intervention. Eventually, Eleanor, Chidi, Tahani and Jason are forever doomed to hell because they discover how the afterlife judgement works, so they cannot gain any points to go to the good place. Every action would become motivated exclusively by the concept of moral desert. The show dives into the virtue ethics developed by Aristotle. One should try to develop oneself according to those virtues. If the actions are not based on those virtues, they would not be ethical, just as actions motivated exclusively by “moral desert” do not count to the point system.

During season 3, the humans die on Earth after demons attack them and Janet takes them into her void, and Michael further investigates the point system with the accountants of the afterlife. Upon the discovery that no human being managed to get into the good place in 521 years, Michael becomes suspicious that demons infiltrated the accounting department

⁴² Straessle, Tyler (Writer) & Robinson, Julie Anne (Director). (2018, January 11). “Chapter 23: Best Self” (Season 2, Episode 9) [TV series episode]. *The Good Place*. NBC.

⁴³ Amram, Megan (Writer) & O'Donnell, Trent (Director). (2018, October 18). “Chapter 31: Jeremy Bearimy” (Season 3, Episode 4) [TV series episode]. *The Good Place*. NBC.

and are tampering with the point system, so no human beings are sent to the good place. Michael, Shawn (representing the bad place) and Judge Gen meet, agreeing to repeat the original experiment of the four human protagonists with four new people to see if they improve, which would prove that the point system is unfair. The experiment is successful. However, Judge Gen claims that the human race needs to be erased and start over from scratch to fairly apply the new system, as a universal reboot of everything. The protagonists come up with an entirely new afterlife system that both the good place and the bad place agree on, before the judge manages to execute her restart plan.

They develop a new system so that everyone gets a fair shot. The time on Earth would not be a test you either pass or fail, but a class humans take, and the test would come in the afterlife. When a human dies, he or she will still have a points total, but that would be used as a baseline to determine the difficulty of the afterlife test. The tests would be designed by one architect from heaven and one from hell. By the end of the test, you are given an evaluation, and explanations of what you did right or wrong, and then one gets rebooted until one is able to ace the test. In the new system, the reboot won't be total: one would retain a vague memory of what was learned during the evaluation sessions, "like a little voice in your head, helping you become a better version of yourself".⁴⁴ With enough chances, some would qualify for the good place. Maybe some never would. The point is that everyone would have the same chances. The system is approved by heaven, hell, and the judge.

It could be argued that the new system retains some sort of deontology, defined by the character Chidi as "the school of thought that there are strict rules and duties that everyone must adhere to in a functioning society. Being ethical is simply identifying and obeying those duties and following those rules".⁴⁵ The points obtained through the traditional point system are still used as a baseline for the difficulty of the test people face during the afterlife, and the traditional system is a blend of deontology, consequentialism and virtue ethics. But

⁴⁴ Murray, Matt (Writer) & Asher, Rebecca (Director). (2020, January 9). "Chapter 49: You've Changed, Man" (Season 4, Episode 10) [TV series episode]. *The Good Place*. NBC, 00:16:31-00:16:36.

⁴⁵ Amram, Megan (Writer) & O'Donnell, Trent (Director). (2018, October 18). "Chapter 31: Jeremy Bearimy" (Season 3, Episode 4) [TV series episode]. *The Good Place*. NBC.

the new system can also be viewed as Aristotelian.⁴⁶ We consider that it also works as their version of an aesthetic of being, in which existence is an analogy of moving in proportion to the inner articulations of Love's promptings.⁴⁷ The strict rules that lead the characters to heaven are not set by men or human formulations of Ethics. They are rather the same epistemology revealed by Dante as "a form of being rooted in the correspondence between the inner word that Love inspires and the mind's word for the universal concept."⁴⁸ The ethics of *The Divine Comedy* rely on the correspondence between these formulations and Love's promptings. In *The Good Place*, the same formulation of ethics is presented. The consequences of one's actions, the strict obedience of rules regardless of virtues or consequences, or the pursuit of virtues give space to an aesthetic of being defined in light of the inner articulations of Love's promptings. Schur summarized the ethical morass of the show into four simple questions that are implicit in the articulations of Dante: 1. What are we doing? 2. Why are we doing it? 3. Is there something we could do that's better? 4. Why is it better?⁴⁹

Regressing to the sitcom, by season 4 the main group finally gets into the good place, located in the stars.⁵⁰ The problems, however, are not entirely over. They find out that people become zombies in the afterlife due to the experience of infinity, and Michael is tricked to become the good place committee, responsible for heaven. They find out that the old committee tried all sorts of measures to help the good place, but since they were not humans, they could not understand why humans were falling apart in infinity. This is a continuance of the previous appointments regarding the importance of time and eternity, mortality and the afterlife. Eleanor proposes a solution: the knowledge of death is what gives life meaning.⁵¹ The way to restore meaning in the good place is to let them leave. They set a new kind of door in heaven, so that when someone feels happy and satisfied and

⁴⁶ Phillipson, Traci. "The Ethics of Indecision: Why Chidi Anagonye Belongs in The Bad Place". *The Good Place and Philosophy: Everything is Forking Fine!* edited by Kimberly S. Engels, Wiley Blackwell, 2021, p. 64.

⁴⁷ Ginsberg, op. cit., p. 81.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 90.

⁴⁹ Schur, Michael. *How to be perfect: the correct answer to every moral question*. Simon & Schuster, 2022, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Amram, Megan (Writer) & Sackett, Morgan (Director). (2020, January 23). "Chapter 51: Patty" (Season 4, Episode 12) [TV series episode]. *The Good Place*. NBC, 00:00:04-00:00:48.

⁵¹ Ibid., 00:16:08-00:16:19.

complete, and wants to leave the good place for good, they can go through the door and their time in the universe will end.

What happens after, they don't know, not even Janet, the omniscient database of the afterlife. They only know that it would be a peaceful end of the human journey, similar to Dante's Empyrean. The last door to be at peace. It works, and eventually all the human protagonists choose to go through the door, except for Tahani, who becomes an afterlife architect. Michael chooses to become a human. The show ends with a hint that Eleanor becomes a mysterious part of the universe, contributing as a guide for the spectator on how to live an ethical life, which is no different than the dilemma of the significance of human experience. Eleanor is the last one to go through the door and as she ceases to be in human form, so the narration and the show come to an end, as she was the pilgrim echoing Dante's lines for a better understanding of Infinite Goodness.

Conclusion

If one of the main aspects for the defense of Dante's greatness can be considered how easy it is to read the *Commedia*, *The Good Place* in similar fashion facilitates the grasp of moral philosophy and theological practices for its viewers, not withholding the complexity of ethical dilemmas that are presented and discussed in the show.

One can set aside the idea of an unequivocal meaning of *The Divine Comedy* or *The Good Place* and turn to the total existence of writing as intertextual exchange, a jolt of culture and tradition that joins culture as much as repeats, denies and rebuilds it in its own fashion. Dividing the systems of *The Divine Comedy* and *The Good Place* into smaller functional units that are combined to shape these narratives allows the comparative method to identify commonalities that posit the latter as a modern echo of the former, revealing the enduring influence of Dante's work in Western culture and the significance of the spiritual transformation narrated in *The Divine Comedy*.

The profound spiritual transformation of Dante in his epic poem is one of the grand motives for *The Divine Comedy* being recognized as one of the classics and perhaps one of the best poems ever written. As Chidi points out in season 4 of *The Good Place*, the journey is the destination, which means that we shouldn't think of the afterlife as a physical place at the end of our path, but rather an opportunity to contemplate our own lives as spiritual

journeys, whether through life, before, or after. If we were to guess what we owe to each other in general terms, perhaps it is accepting each its own journey of spiritual transformation in a grand aesthetic scheme of being consolidated in Western tradition by Dante. Dante and Schur were both arguing for trying, and both stories allow the readers and viewers, as characters of their own narratives, to experience a spiritual and artistic guide to behold the stars.

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