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# PHIL 385-01 Topics in Medieval Philosophy: Dante and Philosophy

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## TOPICS IN MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY: DANTE AND PHILOSOPHY

### HUMAN LIFE SEEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY IN DANTE'S *DIVINE COMEDY*

**PHIL 385-01**

Fall, 2015

T/TH 1:00-2:15

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Hinkle 205

#### **Office hours**

T/TH 9:30-10:00

T/TH 2:15-45

W 9:30-11:30

Also by appointment and by chance

#### **THIS COURSE IS AN E/RS ELECTIVE:**

**Ethical:** There are three parts to the course, which correspond to hell, purgatory, and heaven. The question for the first part is “What is the relationship between justice and punishment?” For the second, the question is “What is the relationship between forgiveness and penance?” For the third, the questions are “What is the relationship between virtue and happiness?” and “What is the relationship between God and happiness?” In brief, the focus of the course is ethics.

**Socially significant:** The *Divine Comedy* is revolutionary in its artistic focus on individuals, both living and historical. Nevertheless, it never treats individuals without relating them to community (or to lack of community). Individuals are seen through their place in hell, purgatory or heaven. Within each of those “communities,” individuals are further identified by their ranked place within that order. The nature of human society is revealed negatively through hell: alienation from God alienates human beings from each other. Only in hell are human beings alone. Nevertheless, even in hell there is order inasmuch as unequal vice merits unequal punishment. The nature of human society is revealed positively through heaven: communion with God creates communion with human beings. Here, too, there is hierarchy, inasmuch as unequal virtue (and grace) merits unequal reward. Purgatory is not simply the middle ground between heaven and hell, it is the revelation that suffering need not be an obstacle to communion with God and human beings; indeed, suffering can be meaningful because it can be the path to human society in a fallen world.

**Religious:** Although Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a thoroughly religious work, philosophy is central to Dante's religious perspective. When Beatrice died, Dante turned to philosophy and he calls Aristotle "the master of those who know (Inferno IV, 131)." Thomas Aquinas appears in Paradiso X-XIII as the spokesman for the twelve doctors of the church and, in spite of occasional deviations, Aquinas' philosophy forms the philosophical structure of the *Divine Comedy*. One could focus on the literary, religious or philosophical dimensions of the work (or attempt to treat all three); this course will focus on the philosophical nature of the *Divine Comedy* and on Aristotle and Aquinas as guides to that aspect.

**Critical discussion:** To both highlight and critique the Aristotelian foundation of the *Divine Comedy*, the introduction will include a reading of selections from Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, which rejects completely Aristotelian ethics. There Hobbes argues that reason cannot govern the passions (so there is no connection between virtue and happiness), nature is the source of liberty rather than law, and only an artificial law created by an artificial, mortal god, which is the state, can truly reward and punish in this world. This debate will be followed throughout the course and will be incorporated into the term paper.

- I. **Course description:** The course will focus on the Aristotelian-Thomistic foundation of Dante's *Commedia* and Dante's imaginative depiction of that philosophy. In particular, the course will focus on the relationships between justice and punishment (hell), forgiveness and penance (purgatory) and God and happiness (heaven). We will examine the order that exists among individuals and the type of society found in hell, purgatory and heaven. Throughout the course, Hobbes' *Leviathan* will provide an alternative and critical perspective.

## II. Requirements

- A. Three quizzes, for a total of 15%, to test one's reading of *Divine Comedy*
  1. September 22<sup>nd</sup>: Inferno (5%)
  2. October 27<sup>th</sup>: Purgatorio (5%)
  3. November 24<sup>th</sup>: Paradiso (5%)
- B. Exams
  1. Midterm (tentatively Tuesday, October 13th): 25%; three essays; study questions provided in advance.
  2. Final (unchangeably \_\_\_\_\_, December \_\_\_\_\_): 25%; four essays; study questions provided in advance.
- C. Paper (last class): 25%: 8 pages minimum. Electronically submitted draft on Inferno and Paradiso portions due on November 17<sup>th</sup>. Final paper submitted by

hard copy and electronically to turnitin.com due on December 10th. The paper must incorporate the following three elements.

1. Hell
  - a) Describe a contemporary example of vice.
  - b) Explain how, according to Dante (and Aquinas), it would be punished.
  - c) In the spirit of Hobbes, argue that there is no inherent connection between the act (“vice”) and punishment.
  - d) Explain how Dante (and Aquinas) would reply to that objection.
  - e) Explain, according to Dante (and Aquinas), the impact of this vice on human community.
2. Purgatory
  - a) Explain how, according to Dante (and Aquinas) one would be purged/purified of that vice.
  - b) That is, show what Dante (and Aquinas) would consider an appropriate penance.
  - c) Explain, according to Dante (and Aquinas), the impact of this penance on human community.
3. Heaven
  - a) Show the connection, according to Dante (and Aquinas), between the corresponding virtue and happiness.
  - b) That is, show how, according to Dante (and Aquinas), the virtue would be rewarded.
  - c) Explain, according to Dante (and Aquinas), the impact of this virtue on human community.

Other guidelines for the paper

- a) Format
  - i) Title page (not included in numbering)
  - ii) Number all pages.
  - iii) One inch margins.
- b) Stylistic rules
  - i) A paragraph should have at least five interrelated sentences.
  - ii) Correct grammar and punctuation are necessary to communicate clearly your thought.
  - iii) Avoid contractions, slang, and use of the slash.
- c) Quotations
  - i) You must use passages from the author’s writing to support your interpretation.

- ii) Put a quoted passage into your own words and explain it: the quote is meant to support your interpretation of the author.
- iii) Never begin or end a paragraph with a quote.

D. Class participation: 10%

- 1. Volunteering to read
- 2. Answering questions
- 3. Asking questions
- 4. Making comments

### III. Schedule

#### Part I

A. Introduction

- 1. Aristotle: virtue and happiness (3 classes)
- 2. Aquinas: justice and punishment (3 classes)
- 3. Hobbes: passions and happiness, law and punishment (2 classes)

B. Dante: Inferno, Cantos 1-33 (5 classes)

Midterm (1 class)

#### Part II

A. Aquinas: forgiveness and penance (3 classes)

B. Dante: Purgatorio, Cantos 1-33 (5 classes)

#### Part III

A. Aquinas: God and happiness (3 classes)

B. Dante: Paradiso, Cantos 1-33 (5 classes)

### IV. Readings

#### Part I

A. Introduction

- 1. Aristotle: virtue and happiness (3 classes)

*Nichomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapters 7-11, 13

*Nichomachean Ethics*, VII.1-10

*Nichomachean Ethics*, II.1-6

*Nichomachean Ethics* III.10-12

*Nichomachean Ethics* X.1-6, 9

*Nichomachean Ethics* V.1-4

2. Aquinas: justice and punishment (3 classes)
    - Summa theologiae* I-II.90.4
    - Summa theologiae* I-II.94.2
    - Summa theologiae* II-II.57-63
    - Summa theologiae* I-II.87
  3. Hobbes: passions and happiness, law and punishment (2 classes)
    - Leviathan*, Chapters 6, 8
    - Leviathan*, 10-15, 17, 20
- B. Dante: Inferno, Cantos 1-34 (5 classes)

Midterm (1 class)

## Part II

- A. Aquinas: forgiveness and penance (3 classes)
  - Summa theologiae* II-II.30
  - Summa theologiae* III.85-86
- B. Dante: Purgatorio, Cantos 1-33 (5 classes)

## Part III

- A. Aquinas: God and happiness (3 classes)
  - Summa theologiae* I-II.1-5
- B. Dante: Paradiso, Cantos 1-33 (5 classes)

## V. Texts

Aristotle: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html>

Aquinas: <https://archive.org/details/summatheologica02thom>

Hobbes: <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/hobbes/leviathan-a.html>

Dante, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, 3 vols [Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso], transl. Allen Mandelbaum (Bantam, 2004). This is a dual-language version; that is, it has the original Italian on the left and the English translation on the right.

## Goals and Student Learning Objectives

The goals below apply to all courses in the university core, and this course addresses them in the following ways:

**GOAL 1:** *Students will be effective communicators in writing and orally*

The midterm and final exams are long essays; a term-paper is required for the course. Class participation is essential to the Socratic method used in philosophy and it will be graded.

**GOAL 2:** *Students will be critical thinkers*

Three different positions on the relationship between philosophy and religion and, correspondingly, on the relationship between religion and political life will be presented in the course. These questions were intensely debated in the Middle Ages among Islamic, Jewish and Christian philosophers; they remain critical questions today.

**GOAL 3:** *Students will be creators of new knowledge and expression*

More than a course in the history of philosophy, this is a course in philosophy. The purpose of the course is to use these philosophers to understand the perennial questions of the relationship between philosophy and religion and between religion and political life. Through class participation and the paper, students will arrive at their own account.

**GOAL 4:** *Students will be able to understand and appreciate the arts, humanities and science disciplines, and reflect on connections among these studies*

The readings, exams, paper and class discussion will lead students to a deeper knowledge of the impact of Islamic philosophy on Judaism and Christianity. In addition to philosophy, the course will lead students to reflect on history, theology, political science and law.

**GOAL 5:** *Students will be integrated individuals who articulate a coherent, ethical perspective on the world and their place in it*

The question of the role of religion in political life cannot be answered coherently without addressing the relationship between philosophy and religion, in particular whether religion or philosophy is superior.

**PHIL 309 as an E/RS elective:** below are the goals and student learning objectives for E/RS and E/RS electives and how this course addresses them.

Overall goal for E/RS: *Consistent with the mission of Xavier University as a Jesuit, Catholic university rooted in the liberal arts tradition, the E/RS sequence of courses*

*provides a basis for you to become intellectually, morally and spiritually educated individuals capable of critical reflection on ethical and religious questions of social significance from the perspective of multiple disciplines with unique methods.*

This course will enable you to reflect critically on the relationship between justice and punishment, forgiveness and penance, virtue and happiness, principally through the discipline of philosophy, but it will also touch on theology, literature and history.

Goal of the E/RS elective: *Through the E/RS elective, you will develop a more proficient and durable ability to reflect critically on ethical and/or religious questions of social significance.*

Dante's *La Divina Commedia* presents an argument that virtue is naturally rewarded with happiness and that vice is naturally punished with unhappiness; in addition, the acceptance of forgiveness naturally requires an act of penance. Likewise, nature is the source of political life; hence, the pursuit of virtue leads to social cohesion and vice leads to social disintegration. Modern moral philosophy, exemplified in this course by Hobbes, typically rejects nature as a law that rewards and punishes; it also rejects that nature is the source of political or social life. The course will explore the philosophical basis of Dante's claim and his imaginative depiction of it. The validity of this claim will be challenged through a Hobbesian critique.

**Below are student learning objectives that will be addressed and assessed for this course:**

*1b: Students apply the approaches of multiple disciplines to a significant issue.*

The principal discipline in this course will be philosophy, but the approaches of history, literature, theology and political science will also be incorporated.

*6a: Students investigate the root causes of injustice with compassion and academic rigor.*

The course will investigate the question whether the achievement of justice is achieved through human law based on nature or whether it must be wholly artificial, i.e., a rejection of nature as a legal ground.

*3a. Students identify and critically assess multiple dimensions of an ethical issue in an attempt to reach a conclusion.*

Four basic positions are represented in the debate: (1) the relationship between justice and punishment, (2) the relationship between forgiveness and penance, (3) the relationship between virtue and happiness, and (4) the relationship between human nature and political life.

*3b. Students examine the nature of beauty, truth, and virtue as means of gaining a sense of the divine.*

Central to the course is the question whether God and the theological virtues are essential to happiness.

*4a. Students describe and examine the multifaceted character of society and how the inclusion of different perspectives can influence one's worldview.*

The question is whether it is possible to learn anything about justice, happiness and society from a medieval poet.

