CORE 100-33 First Year Seminar: Dante, Pilgrim of the Mind

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FIRST YEAR SEMINAR:
DANTE, PILGRIM OF THE MIND

CORE 100-33

A PART OF THE XAVIER FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

Fall, 2016
T/TH 1:00-2:15
Alter 204

Prof. Michael Sweeney
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Hinkle 205

Office hours
T/TH 9:30-10:00
T/TH 2:15-4:45
W 9:30-11:30
Also by appointment and by chance

WHY DANTE?

1. Arguably, Dante is one of the two greatest writers of fiction.
   T. S. Eliot: “Dante and Shakespeare divide the world between them; there is no third.”¹
   Jorge Luis Borges: Dante’s Divine Comedy is “the best book literature has achieved.”²

2. College as pilgrimage: Dante will be our guide to college as a journey—a pilgrimage of the mind. Medieval pilgrimage was a physical journey to the Holy Land or to some other holy site that was meant to change and rehearse the journey of a life. In the Divine Comedy, Dante is often called a “pilgrim,” but the Divine Comedy is a different kind of journey, an intellectual journey that is meant to change and rehearse the journey of a life. This course will propose the question whether college is merely job training or whether it is also an intellectual pilgrimage. We will read closely Dante's Divine Comedy with the assistance of selections from Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and Thomas Aquinas' Summa theologiae.

THE GREATER GOOD: All first year seminar courses focus on the question of the greater good. There are three parts to this 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?”

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.

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.

CRITICAL: From the perspective of the Divine Comedy, we will examine whether suffering prevents achievement of a common good and happiness (hell) or whether it is means to a common good and happiness (purgatory). What kind of suffering is compatible with achievement of a common good and which is not? How does vice divide human beings (hell) and virtue unite them (heaven)? Is human nature the source of a law that directs to a common good (purgatory and heaven) or something that unjustly restricts individual liberty (the perspective of hell)? Is communion with God the ultimate source of communion with human beings (purgatory and heaven) or is rejection of God necessary to achieve individual happiness (the perspective of hell)? Is divine punishment arbitrary and unjust? Like Dante, we will allow the voices in hell, purgatory and heaven to explain themselves and their answers to these questions.

INTERDISCIPLINARY: The nature of the Divine Comedy requires that the course incorporate literature, history, philosophy and theology. All three aspects are necessary for a full reading of the Divine Comedy.
**VOCAUTION:** Pilgrimage is inseparable from the notion of vocation. Pilgrimage is a journey to redefine oneself and one’s place in the world. As the opening lines of the *Divine Comedy* express, Dante’s vocation had to change mid-way life. The short paper on vocation will explore what it means to change one’s vocation in the “middle” of one’s life and why and how one might do that.

**MENTORING:** Students must come to office hours to discuss their progress in the course (or schedule an appointment) at least once in the semester before November 17th. There will be a completely optional dinner at my home (date and time to be determined) with my family.

**LIBRARY:** Students will learn to use in their papers credentialed but not peer reviewed sources (Princeton Dante Project and Dartmouth Dante Project) directly through the internet and peer reviewed sources found through the library.

**SEMINAR:** Since the first year seminar is a seminar, students must participate in the class discussion. Since the class discussion will be textually based, students must do the assigned (private) reading of the *Divine Comedy* prior to class.

### I. Requirements

**A. Three exams**

1. *Inferno*: 20%
   
   a. Date: Tentatively Thursday, September 27
   
   b. Questions: answer two of the three questions below.
      
      i. Explain Aristotle’s notion of virtue; how is it related to the function/final cause of a human being, to moral character, to habituation and happiness? Explain the use of Aristotle’s notion of virtue by Dante in the *Inferno*.
      
      ii. Explain Aquinas’ notion of natural law. Explain the use of Aquinas’ notion of natural law by Dante in the *Inferno*.
      
      iii. Explain Aristotle’s account of justice and Aquinas’ understanding of punishment. Explain the use of Aristotle’s account of justice and Aquinas’ notion of punishment by Dante in the *Inferno*.

2. *Purgatorio*: 20%
   
   a. Date: Tentatively Thursday, November 3
   
   b. Question: What, according to Aquinas, is the relationship between mercy and penance? How is that account of mercy and penance exemplified in Dante’s *Purgatorio*?

3. *Paradiso*: 20%
a. Date: Definitely Thursday, December 15, 10:30-12:20
b. Question: What, according to Aquinas, is human happiness, and how is that exemplified in Dante’s Paradiso?

B. Two papers: for more information on papers, see detailed section below
   1. Vocation: 4%
      a. Due: Tuesday, September 6
      b. Length: two pages
   2. One theme from the Divine Comedy in three stages: 20%
      a. Part I: Inferno
         i. Due: Tentatively Tuesday, October 18
         ii. Length: three-page minimum
         iii. Revise based on my comments and incorporate into final paper.
      b. Part II: Purgatorio
         i. Due: Tentatively Tuesday, November 15
         ii. Length: three-page minimum
         iii. Revise based on my comments and incorporate into final paper.
      c. Part III: Paradiso
         i. Due: Tentatively Thursday, December 1
         ii. Length: four-page minimum (three pages on Paradiso plus a conclusion). Total length of final paper (Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso) is ten pages.

C. Class participation: 16%
   1. Daily class discussion: 10%
   2. Quizzes on reading Divine Comedy: 6%
   3. Public vs. private reading: The philosophical-theological background on the Divine Comedy will be read together in class, i.e., publicly. The Divine Comedy itself will be read privately and then discussed in class. Regular, brief quizzes will ensure private reading of the Divine Comedy.

II. General schedule
   Part I: Inferno
      A. Philosophical and theological structure
         1. Aristotle: virtue and happiness (3 classes)
         2. Aquinas: justice and punishment (2 classes)
      B. Dante: Inferno, Cantos 1-33 (5 classes)
      C. Exam: Tentatively Thursday, September 27
   Part II: Purgatorio
      A. Aquinas: forgiveness and penance (3 classes)
      B. Dante: Purgatorio, Cantos 1-33 (5 classes)
      C. Exam: Tentatively Thursday, November 3
Part III: Paradiso
   A. Aquinas: God and happiness (3 classes)
   B. Dante: Paradiso, Cantos 1-33 (5 classes)
   C. Exam: Definitively Thursday, December 15, 10:30-12:20

III. Schedule of assignments
   September 6: Vocation paper
   September 27: Inferno exam
   October 18: Inferno paper
   November 3: Purgatorio exam
   November 18: Purgatorio paper
   December 1: Paradiso paper
   December 15: Paradiso exam

IV. Schedule of Dante readings (private): Our edition of the Divine Comedy has the original Italian on the left page and the English translation on the right page. Although the page numbers will include both the Italian and English, you are, of course, only required to read the English, which means half of the assigned page numbers. Readings average 18 pages of English per class or 36 per week.

A. Inferno
   August 25: Cantos I-IV, pp. 2-39
   August 30: Cantos V-VIII, pp. 40-75
   September 1: Cantos IX-XII, pp. 76-111
   September 6: Cantos XIII-XVI, pp. 112-149
   September 8: Cantos XVII-XX: pp. 150-185
   September 13: Cantos XXI-XXIV: pp. 186-225
   September 15: Cantos XXV-XXVIII: pp. 226-263
   September 20: Cantos XXIX-XXXII: pp. 264-299
   September 22: Canto XXXIII: pp. 300-309

B. Purgatorio
   September 29: Cantos I-IV: pp. 2-37
   October 4: Cantos V-VIII: pp. 38-75
   October 11: Cantos IX-XII: pp. 76-111
   October 13: Cantos XIII-XVI: pp. 112-151
   October 18: Cantos XVII-XX: pp. 152-189
   October 20: Cantos XXI-XXIV: pp. 190-229
   October 25: Cantos XXV-XXVIII: pp. 230-265
   October 27: Cantos XXIX-XXXII: pp. 266-305
November 1: Canto XXXIII: pp. 306-313

C. *Paradiso*

November 3: Cantos I-IV: pp. 2-37
November 8: Cantos V-VIII: pp. 38-73
November 10: Cantos IX-XII: pp. 74-109
November 15: Cantos XIII-XVI: pp. 110-147
November 17: Cantos XVII-XX: pp. 148-183
November 22: Cantos XXI-XXIV: pp. 184-223
November 29: Cantos XXV-XXVIII: pp. 224-259
December 1: Canto XXIX-XXXII: pp. 260-295
December 6: Canto XXXIII: pp. 296-303

V. **Schedule of Philosophy/Theology Readings** (public, i.e., read together in class from handout)

Part I

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

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

Part II

Aquinas: forgiveness and penance (3 classes)

*Summa theologiae* II-II.30
*Summa theologiae* III.85-86

Part III

Aquinas: God and happiness (3 classes)

*Summa theologiae* I-II.1-5

VI. **Texts**

Aristotle: [http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html](http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html)

Aquinas: [https://archive.org/details/summatheologico02thom](https://archive.org/details/summatheologico02thom)
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. Here are the ISBN numbers:

- *Inferno* 978-0-553-21339-3
- *Purgatorio* 0-553-21344-X
- *Paradiso* 978-0-553-21204-4

VII. **Details about papers** (further guidance will be provided in class)

A. Vocation paper: answer either or both sets of questions below.

1. How did events interrupt Dante’s life-plan or vocation? How did Dante alter his plans? How could your life-plans or vocation be interrupted? How could you alter them?
2. Does Dante’s notion of pilgrimage fit your life? Explain why or why not.

B. Paper on *Divine Comedy* in three parts.

1. Topic: pick one of the themes below and trace it through the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*.
   a. Justice
   b. Courage
   c. Temperance
   d. Prudence/wisdom
   e. Law
   f. Punishment
   g. Pilgrimage
   h. Sound/music
   i. Light
   j. Water
   k. Earth
   l. Air
   m. Motion

2. External sources
   a. Use either the Princeton Dante Project (http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/) or the Dartmouth Dante Project (https://dante.dartmouth.edu/) for searches of your topic in the poem and in commentaries. Reference in your paper all use of commentaries.
   b. You must find in the library, read and quote in the paper at least one peer reviewed scholarly work on your topic. We will discuss this further in class.
VIII. Goals and student learning objectives for the first-year seminar

A. Goals. Students will…
   1. Become engaged in intellectually challenging and interesting questions and problems.
   2. Develop strong mentoring relationships with faculty in and out of the classroom.
   3. Join the community of scholars at Xavier University.
   4. Establish a solid foundation on which subsequent Core Curriculum courses will build.
   5. Engage with a common theme across all semesters: The Greater Good.

B. Student Learning Outcomes. Students will…
   1. Core 1b: Apply the approaches of multiple disciplines to a significant issue.
   2. Core 6b: Articulate the evolution of their vocation and aspirations to contribute to the world.
   3. Core 3a: Identify and critically assess multiple dimensions of an ethical issue in an attempt to reach a conclusion. In FYS, this includes:
      a. Interpreting challenging readings.
      b. Employing effective library research and information literacy skills.
      c. Constructing arguments supported with evidence.

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Two poems on pilgrimage for the first class

Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*[^3]

*Fragment I (Group A)*

General Prologue

When April's gentle rains have pierced the drought
Of March right to the root, and bathed each sprout
Through every vein with liquid of such power
It brings forth the engendering of the flower;
When Zephyrus too with his sweet breath has blown
Through every field and forest, urging on
The tender shoots, and there's a youthful sun,
His second half course through the Ram now run,
And little birds are making melody
And sleep all night, eyes open as can be
(So Nature pricks them in each little heart),
On pilgrimage then folks desire to start.
The palmers long to travel foreign strands
To distant shrines renowned in sundry lands;
And specially, from every shire's end
In England, folks to Canterbury wend:
To seek the blissful martyr is their will,
The one who gave such help when they were ill.

Now in that season it befell one day
In Southwark at the Tabard where I lay,
As I was all prepared for setting out
To Canterbury with a heart devout,
That there had come into that hostelry
At night some twenty-nine, a company
Of sundry folk whom chance had brought to fall
In fellowship, for pilgrims were they all
And onward to Canterbury would ride.
The chambers and the stables there were wide,
We had it easy, served with all the best;
And by the time the sun had gone to rest
I'd spoken with each one about the trip

[^3]: [http://english.fsu.edu/canterbury/general.html](http://english.fsu.edu/canterbury/general.html)
And was a member of the fellowship.
We made agreement, early to arise
To take our way, of which I shall advise.
But nonetheless, while I have time and space,
Before proceeding further here's the place
Where I believe it reasonable to state
Something about these pilgrims--to relate
Their circumstances as they seemed to me,
Just who they were and each of what degree
And also what array they all were in.
And with a Knight I therefore will begin.

* * * *

T. S. Eliot, The Journey Of The Magi

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'
And the camels galled, sorefooted, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
and running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,

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4 http://allpoetry.com/The-Journey-Of-The-Magi
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arriving at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you might say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.