



PHTH615: Dante’s Divine Comedy: Thomistic Philosophy in Narrative
Dr. Sebastian Mahfood, O.P.

1. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Dante’s Divine Comedy can be read as a narrativization of the works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Written between the years 1308 and 1321, the Divine Comedy is among the last of the great works of medieval Europe, preceding Petrarch’s introduction of the Italian Renaissance by only a handful of years. For this reason alone, it is a meaningful study for graduate theological programs that base themselves in some way on the teachings of St. Thomas as we come to experience a successful merger of theology and philosophy (read faith and reason) in narrative poetry. Beyond that, the Divine Comedy is also a good story. Dante the pilgrim descends to the bottom of Hell, climbs to the top of Purgatory, and soars straight to God in this cosmic thriller. He does it all in under a week; we pilgrims will spend a little over three months in the journey. To successfully complete the course, students will read one canto a day for the entire hundred days of the class with short breaks following the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*.

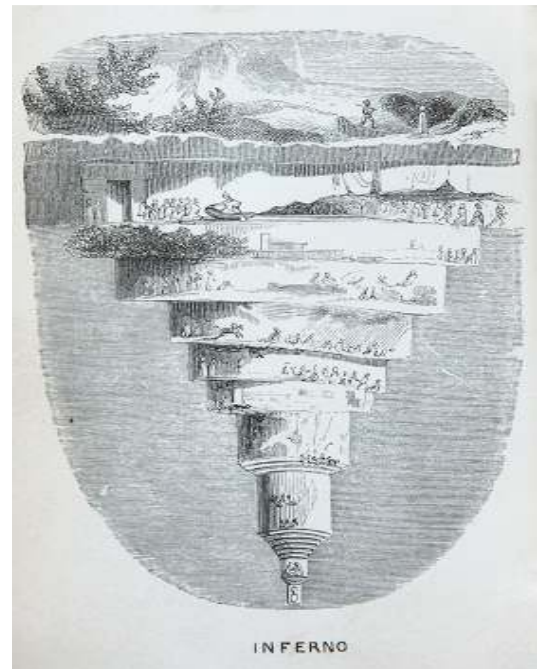
2. ENVISIONED OUTCOME

- Students will demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the cosmological realities of the post-Aquinine Church, of the historical and political realities of the 14th-century Church, and of the literary accomplishment of the last great medieval writer who happened to confront the greatest taxonomy of all time.

3. COURSE SCHEDULE Postings are due on the day of the canto according to the calendar below (e.g., if a student is going to reflect on Canto 10 of the *Inferno*, that reflection can only be posted on September 8).

You will need to listen to the audio lectures assigned for each canto on a schedule as follows:

August - September 2010						
29	30 <i>Inferno</i> , Canto 1	31 Canto 2	1 Canto 3	2 Canto 4	3 Canto 5	4 Canto 6
5 Canto 7	6 Canto 8	7 Canto 9	8 Canto 10	9 Canto 11	10 Canto 12	11 Canto 13
12 Canto 14	13 Canto 15	14 Canto 16	15 Canto 17	16 Canto 18	17 Canto 19	18 Canto 20
19 Canto 21	20 Canto 22	21 Canto 23	22 Canto 24	23 Canto 25	24 Canto 26	25 Canto 27
26 Canto 28	27 Canto 29	28 Canto 30	29 Canto 31	30 Canto 32	1	2

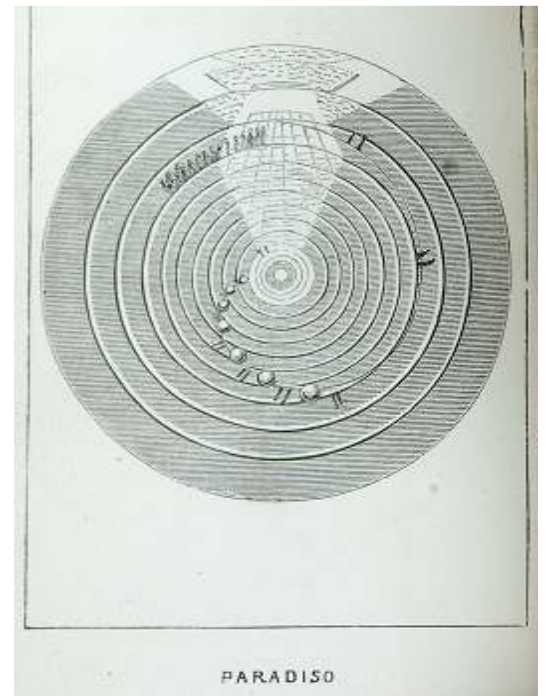


*Images courtesy of Jeffrey Monseau, Digital Collections Intern, Mt. Holyoke College, who scanned them from G. Borghi’s “La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri,” 1844.

October 2010						
26	27	28	29	30	1 Canto 33	2 Canto 34
3 Break	4 <i>Purg.</i> , Canto 1	5 Canto 2	6 Canto 3	7 Canto 4	8 Canto 5	9 Canto 6
10 Canto 7	11 Canto 8	12 Canto 9	13 Canto 10	14 Canto 11	15 Canto 12	16 Canto 13
17 Canto 14	18 Canto 15	19 Canto 16	20 Canto 17	21 Canto 18	22 Canto 19	23 Canto 20
24 Canto 21	25 Canto 22	26 Canto 23	27 Canto 24	28 Canto 25	29 Canto 26	30 Canto 27
31 Canto 28	1	2	3	4	5	6



November 2010						
31	1 Canto 29	2 Canto 30	3 Canto 31	4 Canto 32	5 Canto 33	6 Break
7 Break	8 <i>Para.</i> , Canto 1	9 Canto 2	10 Canto 3	11 Canto 4	12 Canto 5	13 Canto 6
14 Canto 7	15 Canto 8	16 Canto 9	17 Canto 10	18 Canto 11	19 Canto 12	20 Canto 13
21 Canto 14	22 Canto 15	23 Canto 16	24 Canto 17	25 Canto 18	26 Canto 19	27 Canto 20
28 Canto 21	29 Canto 22	30 Canto 23	1	2	3	4



December 2010						
28	29	30	1 Canto 24	2 Canto 25	3 Canto 26	4 Canto 27
5 Canto 28	6 Canto 29	7 Canto 30	8 Canto 31	9 Canto 32	10 Canto 33	<i>End of Course</i>

4. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

No exams or quizzes are scheduled for this course.

Discussion postings – 40%

For the first accountability exercise, pilgrims are encouraged to pose questions, comments, and reactions on each of the 100 cantos, but they are only required to respond meaningfully (in around 300 words or so) to twenty (20) of them. Everyone is required to respond to Canto I and to Canto 100. The other eighteen responses are divided into three groups so that each pilgrim responds at least six times to each canticle (i.e., 6 responses in the *Inferno*, 6 in the *Purgatorio*, and 6 in the *Paradiso* + 2 at the beginning and end = 20). Pilgrims are free to decide where to place their responses, but they should strive to evenly space out their postings so that reflections are not lumped all together in the final cantos of each canticle.

Peer Responses – 20%

For the second accountability exercise, pilgrims will respond (in around 50 words or so) to at least 10 reflections made by any of your colleagues (using the rubric on page 4) on any of the 100 cantos. At least 3 responses are required for each canticle. The tenth can be placed anywhere.

The Semester Project – 40%

For the third accountability exercise, pilgrims will develop a short multimedia project based on some aspect of the *Comedy* and make a class presentation of it during the final week of the course.

This project will be divided into three parts, each of which will be on the dates assigned below.

The first part is to establish a blog at www.wordpress.com and post a short *annotated* bibliography concerning some aspect of the *Commedia*. By the end of the *Inferno*, even if the pilgrim plans to do a project over some part of the *Purgatorio* or *Paradiso*, enough of an understanding of Dante's cosmos should be available to develop a thesis statement and a resource list. The *annotated* bibliography should include 4-6 resources. Due October 3, 2010. This first part is worth 30% of the Semester Project grade.

Here is a sample entry in my Annotated Bibliography -- note the indentation format and that the description is 27 words which is just about right to summarize and defend the applicability of the article to my Thesis Statement:

Harrison, D. J. "Using the Moral Language of Cultures to Dialogue." *Social Justice Review*, 100 (2009):142-146. An examination of the use of Natural Law to enable interfaith dialogue, which is pertinent to my research because it addresses communication between peoples of different backgrounds.

The second part is to build some kind of multimedia presentation concerning the topic with which all pilgrims in the class can interact. Any pilgrim who needs help with the building of his or her presentation should email me before reaching the midway point of the *Purgatorio*. Students are free to determine what exactly it is they will do. Examples of multimedia presentations from previous semesters can be found at http://kenrickparish.com/dante/pilgrims_in_progress.htm Due November 7, 2010. This second part is worth 40% of the Semester Project grade.

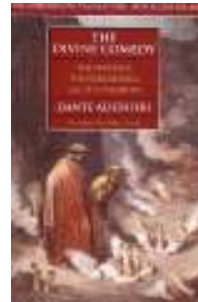
(The rubric for the discussion postings – see below - applies to this multimedia presentation. The student is not graded on aesthetics or functionality of the experience, but attention to these things would demonstrate an awareness of the divine aesthetics and functionality that permeate the Commedia.)

The third part is to write up a 1- to 2-page analysis outlining why the pilgrim chose the project, what the pilgrim learned from it, and where the pilgrim might take it in the future. *(The rubric for the discussion postings applies to this analysis.)* Due December 11, 2010. This third part is worth 30% of the Semester Project grade.

5. RESOURCES:

This class does not have CDs or DVDs, but its video lectures are available online through Blackboard.

The text for the course is Ciardi's translation, which can be found on Amazon.com for \$11. <http://www.amazon.com/Divine-Comedy-Inferno-Purgatorio-Paradiso/dp/0451208633>



While the preferred text to use is the Ciardi translation, a number of suitable translations of each canto are also embedded within the course site.

6. EVALUATION: (basis of evaluation with explanation regarding the nature of the assignment and the percentage of the grade assigned to each item below) – 250 points exist within the class + 10 extra credit points in the form of a Metaphor Exercise that will be made available at Canto 10 of the *Inferno* and will be due by Canto 34 of the *Inferno*.

GRADING SCALE: **A** 93-100% (at least 233 points) **A-** 90-92% (225-232 points) **B+** 87-89% (218-224 points) **B** 83-86% (208-217 points) **B-** 80-82% (200-207 points) **C** 70-79% (175-199 points) **F** 69% and below (fewer than 174 points)

Grading Rubric for the Semester Project (SP), Discussion Board (DB) Postings, and Community Interaction Responses (CI)					
SP – 0 points DB/CI - 0 points	SP – 20 points DB/CI - 1 point	SP – 40 points DB/CI - 2 points	SP – 60 points DB/CI - 3 points	SP – 80 points DB/CI - 4 points	SP – 100 points DB/CI - 5 points
CONTENT OF SP MULTIMEDIA PROJECT (40% OF SP GRADE) AND DB POSTINGS					
Absence of Understanding Analysis shows no awareness of the discipline or its methodologies as the relate to the topic	Lack of Understanding Analysis seems to misunderstand some basic concepts of the discipline or lacks ability to articulate them.	Inadequate understanding Analysis is sometimes unclear in understanding or articulating concepts of the discipline.	Adequate understanding Analysis demonstrates an understanding of basic concepts of the discipline but could express them with greater clarity.	Solid Understanding Analysis demonstrates a clear understanding and articulation of concepts with some sense of their wider implications.	Insightful understanding Analysis clearly demonstrates an understanding and articulation of concepts of the discipline as they relate to the topic; highlights connections to other concepts; integrates concepts into wider contexts.
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY (30% OF SP GRADE)					
Missing Research Paper shows no evidence of research: citation of sources missing.	Inadequate research and/or documentation Over-reliance on few sources; spotty documentation of facts in text; pattern of citation errors; fewer than 4 resources found	Weak research and/or documentation Inadequate number or quality of sources; many facts not referenced; several errors in citation format; fewer than 4 resources found	Adequate research and documentation but needs improvement Good choice of sources but could be improved with some additions or better selection; did not always cite sources; too many citation errors; 4-6 resources found	Solid research and documentation A number of relevant scholarly sources revealing solid research; sources appropriately referenced in paper; only a few minor citation errors; 4-6 resources found	Excellent critical research and documentation Critically selected and relevant scholarly sources demonstrating extensive, in-depth research; sources skillfully incorporated into paper at all necessary points; all citations follow standard bibliographic format; 4-6 resources found

WRITING & EXPRESSION OF FINAL REFLECTION (30% OF SP GRADE) AND DB POSTINGS

<p>Incomplete writing</p> <p>Analysis is only partially written or completely misses the topic</p>	<p>Writing difficult to understand, serious improvement needed</p> <p>Analysis fails to address the topic; confusing organization or development; little elaboration of position; insufficient control of sentence structure and vocabulary; unacceptable number of errors in grammar, mechanics, and usage</p>	<p>Episodic writing, a mix of strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>Analysis noticeably neglects or misinterprets the topic; simplistic or repetitive treatment, only partially-internalized; weak organization and development, some meandering; simple sentences, below-level diction; distracting errors in grammar, mechanics, and usage</p>	<p>Acceptable writing, but could use some sharpening of skill</p> <p>Analysis is an uneven response to parts of the topic; somewhat conventional treatment; satisfactory organization, but more development needed; adequate syntax and diction, but could use more vigor; overall control of grammar, mechanics, and usage, but some errors</p>	<p>solid writing, with something interesting to say.</p> <p>Analysis is an adequate response to the topic; some depth and complexity in treatment; persuasive organization and development, with suitable reasons and examples; level-appropriate syntax and diction; mastery of grammar, mechanics, and usage, with hardly any error</p>	<p>command-level writing, making a clear impression</p> <p>Analysis is a thorough response to the topic; thoughtful and insightful examination of issues; compelling organization and development ; superior syntax and diction; error-free grammar, mechanics, and usage</p>
---	--	--	---	--	--

COMMUNITY INTERACTION (50-word response)

<p>Inadequate response</p> <p>Response merely provides laudatory encouragement for original post, e.g., "Excellent post! You really have thought of something there."</p>	<p>Poor response</p> <p>Response misses the point of the original posting</p>	<p>Weak response</p> <p>Response summarizes original posting to which it responds</p>	<p>Acceptable response</p> <p>Response makes a contribution <i>to the posting</i> to which it responds</p>	<p>Individually-conscious contributory response</p> <p>Response makes a contribution <i>to the posting</i> to which it responds and fosters its development</p>	<p>Community-conscious contributory response</p> <p>Response makes a contribution <i>to the learning community</i> and fosters its development</p>
--	--	--	---	--	---

ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY

Students at Holy Apostles College & Seminary are expected to practice academic honesty.

Avoiding Plagiarism

In its broadest sense, plagiarism is using someone else's work or ideas, presented or claimed as your own. At this stage in your academic career, you should be fully conscious of what it means to plagiarize. This is an inherently unethical activity because it entails the uncredited use of someone else's expression of ideas for another's personal advancement; this is, it entails the use of another person merely as a means to another person's ends.

Students:

- Should identify the title, author, page number/webpage address, and publication date of works when directly quoting small portions of texts, articles, interviews, or websites.
- Students should not copy more than two paragraphs from any source as a major component of papers or projects.
- Should appropriately identify the source of information when paraphrasing (restating) ideas from texts, interviews, articles, or websites.

- Should follow the guidelines of the MLA or Chicago Style Guides (either is fine) when referencing all research sources (A useful MLA guide can be found at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/> and a useful Chicago guide can be found at http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

Consequences of Academic Dishonesty:

Because of the nature of this class, academic dishonesty is taken very seriously. Students participating in academic dishonesty may be removed from the course and from the program.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Even though you are not required to be logged in at any precise time or day, you are expected to login several times during each week. Because this class is being taught entirely in a technology-mediated forum, it is important to actively participate each week in the course. In a traditional classroom setting for a 3-credit course, students would be required to be in class 3 hours a week and prepare for class discussions 4.5 hours a week. Expect to devote at least 7 quality hours a week to this course. A failure on the student's part to actively participate in the life of the course may result in a reduction of the final grade.

NB: An Incomplete may only be awarded to a student who has maintained a passing grade up to the point of the emergency. Incomplete grades will change to a grade of F unless the requirements stipulated on the incomplete form are met by the date listed.

CONTACT

You may reach Dr. Mahfood at smahfood@holypostles.edu.

Dr. Sebastian Mahfood, OP, is a Lay Dominican of the Chapter of the Holy Rosary in the Province of St. Albert.

While working as associate professor of Intercultural Studies and Coordinator of Instructional Technology at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in St. Louis, MO, Dr. Mahfood is also coordinator of the Catholic Distance Learning Network of the National Catholic Educational Association and associate director of the Parresia Project, an organization that pursues greater mutuality among international priests and their American pastors and parishes.

Dr. Mahfood holds a masters in Moral Philosophy from Holy Apostles College & Seminary and a doctorate in postcolonial literature and theory from Saint Louis University. Among his publications include his book *Radical Eschatologies: Embracing the Eschaton in the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Nuruddin Farah, and Ayi Kwei Armah*.

He lives in St. Louis with his wife, Dr. Stephanie Mahfood, and children, Alexander and Eva Ruth.



Dr. Sebastian Mahfood, O.P.