

PHIL 4027G / 9004B and CLC 4495G
DANTE PHILOSOPHUS
Professor James Miller – Spring 2009

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Part One: Conversion to Philosophy

Jan 8 – Dante and the Pagan Greek Philosophers: Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus in Limbo

Jan 15 – Dante and the Pagan Latin Philosophers: Cicero and Macrobius

Jan 22 – Dante and the Latin Christian Philosophers: Boethius and Bonaventure

Part Two: Erotics and Ethics

Jan 29 – *Vita Nuova*

Feb 5 – *Vita Nuova*

Feb 12 – *Il Convivio*

Feb 19 – Conference Week: no class

Feb 26 – *Il Convivio*

Mar 5 – **Midterm** (first half); Lecture on Dante's political life before and after exile

Part Three: Politics and Poetics

Mar 12 – *Monarchia*

Mar 19 – *Monarchia*

Mar 26 – *De vulgari eloquentia*

Part Four: Conversion of Philosophy

Apr 2 -- *De vulgari eloquentia*: The End(s) of Philosophy: Reason and Imagination in *Paradiso*
ESSAY DUE (if you want written comments)

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Course Description

Dante's fame as a poet has tended to eclipse his extraordinary achievements as a philosopher – not the least of which was his audacious vernacularization of Latin philosophical culture in the interests of a radically political reformation of *nostra vita* (“our life”) in all its spiritual, sexual, and social diversity. In fact, Dante could not have become the boldly original poet whom everyone knows today as the lover of Beatrice if he had not first scaled the Mount of Contemplation mapped out for him by his first love, Lady Philosophy. In order to imagine his own salvation as a lover, he virtually had to reinvent political theory and erotic psychology in lay terms opposing to some degree the discourses of natural law and sexual sin formulated by Catholic scholasticism.

In this course we shall consider not only Dante's intellectual debt but also his dialectical reaction to the great thirteenth-century scholastics – Albert, Bonaventure, Aquinas – whose adventurous readings of Plato and Aristotle shaped the philosophical culture of late medieval Catholicism. No less adventurous were Dante's readings of the great Christian Neoplatonists Augustine, Boethius, and Pseudo-Dionysius in light of the radical Aristotelianism of the Schools which had been officially condemned by the Church in the 1270s. In his first major work, the *Vita Nuova*, completed in the 1290s, he worked out his theory of desire by allegorizing and analyzing his “conversion” from the cult of poetic fame to the *beata vita* (“happy life”) promised by philosophy. Turning to the *Convivio*, his unfinished encyclopedic work on cosmology and natural philosophy, we shall examine his struggle to reconcile philosophy with his ambitions to create a new poetic idiom for anagogic aspiration. His contributions to political theory and philosophy of language will then be assessed through a detailed reading of his treatises on monarchy and vernacularity. Finally, we shall look at the role of philosophically illuminated reason and imagination in the composition of *The Divine Comedy*.

Students who have never read a word of Dante are invited to take this course as (a) an introduction to late medieval philosophical culture or (b) an introduction to the Dantean corpus. Knowledge of the *Comedy* is not a pre-requisite for admission to the course, though a willingness to look beyond philosophical prose – or at least to consider its complex aesthetic relation to poetry – will be expected of each student. Literature students who have never taken a philosophy course before but who have taken at least ONE of the three other courses in the CLC Dante Cycle (*Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, *Paradiso*) are welcome to enrol in this course, which will be regularly offered in the spring term of the second year of the Cycle.

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Course Information

Reading list

ALL WORKS WILL BE READ IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION.

Required Reading:

Dante, *Vita Nuova; Il Convivio; Monarchia; De vulgari eloquentia.*

Cicero, selected moral treatises; Boethius, *Consolation*; Bonaventure, *Itinerarium.*

Recommended Reading:

Inferno 4; *Paradiso* 10 [handouts in class]

Grade Breakdown	Undergraduate	Graduate
a. Midterm.....	20%	30%
b. Essay.....	20%	60%
c. Class Presentation.....	10%	10%
d. Final Examination.....	50%	

Essay Lengths

Undergraduates: 6-8 pages, double-spaced

Graduates: 20 pages. double-spaced

Policy on Essay Submissions

The official deadline for submission is **April 2** for both undergraduates and graduates. If you hand your essay in by that date, you will receive a grade plus my written comments. I will accept essays as late as **April 10 (but no later) from undergraduates**, and **May 1 (but no later) from graduates**. Essays handed in after the official deadline will receive a grade without written comments, but the grade will not be affected by the lateness of submission provided that I receive the essay by the extension deadlines indicated above.

Prerequisite: CLC 1020 and one other CLC course

Antirequisite: none

Please Note: You are responsible for ensuring that you have successfully completed all course prerequisites (or have special permission from your Dean to waive the prerequisite) and that you have not taken an antirequisite course. If you are not eligible for the course, you may be removed from it at any time, and it will be deleted from your record. In addition, you will receive no adjustment to your fees. These decisions cannot be appealed.

Plagiarism: Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see Scholastic Offense Policy in the Western Academic Calendar). The University of Western Ontario uses plagiarism checking software. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.

Contact Information

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