



Yeshiva University

THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

Dante's Moral Philosophy: Syllabus

Semester: Spring 2021

Course Number: PHI 4930 [Topics: Dante's Moral Philosophy]

Sessions Meet: Tuesdays/Thursdays @ 3-4.15pm

Instructor: Rabbi Dov Lerner (dov.lerner@yu.edu)

Course Description:

The aim of this course is to examine the philosophical arguments presented through the medium of Dante's poetry. After an introduction to Dante's biography and his historical, political, religious, and literary context, we will explore in depth—Canto by Canto—his celebrated work *The Comedy*, focusing primarily on the first section, *The Inferno*.

Toward the end of our study, we shall also explore the work of Dante's Jewish contemporary, Immanuel of Rome. Focusing on his *HaTofet VaHaEden* ("Hell and Heaven")—a Hebrew work, modeled in many ways on Dante's *Comedy*—we shall examine how he channels Maimonidean rationalism through his poetic construction.

Required Texts:

- Dante Alighieri, Robert M. Durling, and Ronald L. Martinez. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. [ISBN: 9780195087444].
 - Approximate cost: \$20.00
- All other readings will be made available on *Canvas*.

Course Requirements:

Attendance, Preparation, & Participation – 10%

Midterm – 30%

Class Presentation – 20%

Final Paper/Project – 40%

Please be aware of the University's *Academic Integrity Statement* as all students are expected to abide by it, and note the following two announcements:

Accommodations

Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should contact the Office of Disability Services, akelsen@yu.edu during the first weeks of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter and discuss any specifics with me to ensure the successful implementation of your accommodations.

Academic Support

Academic support is available to you if you are having any difficulties that could include the following but are not limited to these: understanding assignments, navigating research papers, issues with time management of your schedule and your life or general college adjustment, please make an appointment with daphne.herskowitz@yu.edu.

Week 1: Introduction

Readings: n/a

January 19th: Introduction & Overview

Readings: *Letter to Can Grande*

January 21st: Dante's Introduction to the Inferno

Week 2: The Journeys Begin

Readings: Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Life of Dante*

January 26th: Dante's Context

Readings: Durling and Martinez. *The Divine Comedy of Dante*, "Introduction"

January 28th: Textual Influences—Athens and Jerusalem

Week 3: Hell's Moral Landscape

Readings: Marc Cogan, *The Design in the Wax* (p. 1 -12)

February 2nd: Hell's Moral Landscape

Readings: Marc Cogan, *The Design in the Wax* (p. 13-36)

February 4th: Hell's Moral Landscape II

Week 4: At Hell's Gates

Readings: Cantos 1-2; Gaimari & Keen, *An Ethical and Political Bestiary*

February 9th: *Inf.* 1-2

Readings: Cantos 3-7

February 11th: *Inf.* 3-7

Week 5: Across the Styx

Readings: Cantos 8-9

February 16th: *Inf.* 8-9

Readings: Cantos 10-11; Erich Auerbach, "Farinata and Cavalcante"

February 18th: *Inf.* 10-11

Week 6: Vice of Violence

Readings: Cantos 12-13

February 23rd: *Inf.* 12-13

Readings:

February 25th: Fast of Esther

Week 7: Over the Cliff

Readings: Cantos 14-15

March 2nd: *Inf.* 14-15

Readings: Cantos 16-17

March 4th: *Inf.* 16-17

Week 8: Fraud

Readings: Midterm Preparation

March 9th: *****In-class midterm*****

Readings: Cantos 18-20

March 11th: *Inf.* 18-20

Week 9: More Fraud

Readings: Cantos 20-23

March 16th: *Inf.* 20-23

Readings: Canto 24-26

March 18th: *Inf.* 24-26

Week 10: Public Justice

Readings: Canto 27-29; Justin Steinberg, "More than an Eye for an Eye: Dante's Sovereign Justice"

March 23rd: *Inf.* 27-29

Readings: n/a

March 25th: n/a.

Weeks 11: Pesach

Week 12: Treachery

Readings: Cantos 30-31

April 6th: *Inf.* 30-31

Readings: Cantos 32-33

April 8th: *Inf.* 32-33

Week 13: At the Core

Readings: Canto 34

April 13th: *Inf.* 34

Readings: n/a

April 15th: n/a.

Week 15: Immanuel's Maimonidean Comedy

Readings: Selections of *Ha-Tofet ve-ba-Eden* (= "Hell and Paradise").

April 20th: *HaTophet*

Readings: Presentation and Paper Preparation

April 22nd: *Presentations*

Week 16: Class Presentations

Readings: Presentation and Paper Preparation

April 27th: *Presentations*

Readings: Presentation and Paper Preparation

April 29th: *Presentations*

Weeks 17: Dante's Afterlife

Readings: TBD

May 4th: Dante Today

Readings: ****Reading Day****

May 6th: Reading Day