

DIVINE COMEDY, PART III: PARADISO

Coordinator: Richard Zuckerman

With *Paradiso*, the most intellectually and aesthetically challenging canticle, Dante “poeticizes theology.” In *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* the confessions of myriad sinners and penitents were told through riveting narratives. In *Paradiso*, that narrative structure is replaced by disquisitions on science, ethics, and metaphysics. The souls we encounter—apostles, saints, theologians, holy emperors, crusaders and assorted individuals from pagan and Christian times—are all blessed. The pilgrim’s ascent through the Heavens is distinctly intellectual, as well as spiritual, emotional and contemplative. His teacher is Beatrice, whose divine beauty now guides him to a direct vision of God in the Empyrean, an inexpressible Paradise situated beyond space and time. His true state of bliss begins where *Paradiso* as a narrative ends, in the silence that follows the poem’s last lines: “my desire and my will were being turned like a wheel . . . by the love that moves the sun and the other stars.”

Richard is a former labor lawyer. He has coordinated study groups in literature, philosophy and religion.

Type of Study Group Discussion

Readings and other Materials/Online Services:

The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri, translated by C. H. Sisson (Oxford World’s Classics Edition, ISBN: 978-0-19-953564-4, \$10 and up). Readings are approximately 15 pages per week.

Note: This study group is open to all members who have read the first two volumes of the *Commedia*. Prior participation in *Divine Comedy*, Parts I and II is not a prerequisite.

******* SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS *******

WEEK 1

TOPIC: *Paradiso*

READING:

Cantos I and II

QUESTIONS:

What is the intellectual theme of the first tercet in canto I? What is the point of the long and elaborate invocation to Apollo in canto I (13-36)? What is the theme of Beatrice's first speech in canto I (109-117)? As canto II opens, is Dante's address to the reader an admonition *not* to continue reading? Does canto II raise the question of how two bodies can co-exist in the same place and at the same time?

WEEK 2

TOPIC: *Paradiso*,

READING:

Cantos III, IV and V

QUESTIONS:

What are the two memorable creations in the third canto? What is the influence of the stars on the nature and fate of human beings? What is Beatrice's lesson to the pilgrim in canto IV? What is the role of the will in relation to the merit and demerit of human actions? What is the doctrinal core of canto V?

WEEK 3

TOPIC: *Paradiso*

READING:

Cantos VI, VII and VIII

QUESTIONS:

Does the political material in canto VI display at least a glimmer of optimism? Does the Incarnation play an important role in Justinian's monologue in canto VI? What is the meaning of Mercury in canto VII? What is the role of the Empire in the aftermath of the Crucifixion? Does Beatrice's long speech in canto VII imply a form of Dantean existentialism? What is Dante's theory of the role providence plays in reference to heredity, as explained in canto VIII? What is the idea of Venus in canto VIII?

WEEKS 4 to 12: *Paradiso*, cont'd.

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