PhD and MA seminar 19:00- 22:00 Wednesdays, room E 4 3056

William Franke

Philosophy and Religious Studies, and English

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**Self-Reflection: Dante as Philosopher**

This course is centered on the reading of Dante’s philosophical works as revelatory of the modern age in some of its most decisive traits. The problematic of self-reflection in thought and language emerges with Dante. He is traditionally characterized as the first modern European individual incarnating the urgent demand for human autonomy. However, in Dante this demand is still bound up with a theological vision of transcendence. This provokes critical questions about modernity since the Enlightenment. We will consider also later philosophers such as Spinoza, Hegel, Derrida, and Deleuze in order to gain perspective on the far-reaching consequences of the modes and premises of self-reflection found in Dante. The ambiguities of self-reflection will be probed and discovered as a driving issue aimed at the future of particularly intercultural philosophy today. Comparative perspectives (for example, with Zhu Xi or Xun Zi?) will also be evoked. We will work through literary expressions of philosophical ideas in Dante and will consider his English successors in prophetic poetry, particularly Milton and Blake.

Week

1. Introduction + Dante, *The New Life* (*Vita Nuova* )

2. Dante, *The New Life* (*Vita Nuova* )

3. Dante, *The Banquet* 1 (*Convivio*)

4. Dante, *On the Vulgar Tongue* (*De vulgari eloquentia*), Book I

5. Dante, *The Banquet* 2 (*Convivio*)

6. Dante, *The Banquet* 3 (*Convivio*)

7. Dante, *The Banquet* 4 (*Convivio*)

8. Dante, *On World Government* 1 (*De Monarchia*)

9. Dante, *On World Government* 2 (*De Monarchia*)

10. Dante, *On World Government* 3 (*De Monarchia*)

11. Hegel, *Selbst-Reflexion* in the *Logic*

12. Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*

13. Deleuze on Spinoza

14. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1-2

15. Blake, *Milton*

Further perspectives on course:

This course will concentrate on Dante's theoretical works, not only as the indispensable background for the *Divine Comedy*, but also as keys to understanding major intellectual traditions of the Middle Ages. These texts will be presented as perhaps the best way for the non-specialist to approach the whole mind-set of the High Middle Ages and its laying the ground for modern Europe. We will concentrate principally on the *Vita nuova* (*The New Life*), *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (*On the Vulgar Tongue*), *Monarchia* (*Monarchy*), and *Convivio* (*The Banquet*). Each of these texts is monumental in its own right and inaugurates a new secular outlook that nevertheless is still firmly ensconced in ancient and medieval processes of theological revelation. Revelation itself , as Dante conceives it, is becoming thoroughly historicized and individualized, and it is possible to discern here exactly how Christian, incarnate revelation renders possible the emergence of the new outlook of the modern world in its autonomy and concrete reality as we know it.

Dante's invention of the concept of an Italian national vernacular language and his vulgarization of philosophical and theological wisdom for a new middle class or bourgeoisie, furthermore, constitute major intellectual revolutions. His championing of the Holy Roman Empire seems to represent a reactionary reaffirmation of a civilization that was rapidly becoming obsolete with the impending rise of the nation-state. Yet the idea of a temporal authority, universal in scope and completely independent of the spiritual authority of the papacy, has a powerful secularizing thrust that puts Dante in the vanguard of the civilization that was to develop in Europe from the Renaissance forward. We will inquire into the extent to which Dante’s ideal of world government might take on renewed relevance today in a world facing the twin challenges of globalization, on the one hand, and ethnic fragmentation and religious sectarianism, on the other.