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## Core Curriculum Seminars Signature III

Center for Catholic Studies, Seton Hall University

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# *Core Curriculum Seminars*



## *Signature III Seminar*

*June 27—28, 2007*

## Signature III Seminar

K.C. Choi

*Department of Religious Studies*

The two-day seminar offered a good window into the research interests of my Seton Hall University colleagues in departments other than my own. Such a forum to listen, converse, and exchange ideas with a broad spectrum of fellow faculty members are few, so I was appreciative of the opportunity to do so under the framework of Signature III. A recurring question for me has been the issue of how the various research programs (or course proposals) might reflect or fit into what can be called the Catholic intellectual tradition (CIT). To be sure, CIT is itself something more amorphous than rigidly defined, so in this respect, the many course proposals that were presented can be seen as part of or contributing to CIT in some way. But is there a conceptual framework that can help us (maybe, just help me) to better understand how the work of colleagues in various fields represents CIT?

To some extent, course proposals from religious studies/theology and philosophy are the easier cases. The harder cases are those from the social sciences, business, nursing, and so on. Our moderator John Haughey's reflection that CIT might be better understood as the Catholic anthropological tradition is one that continues to resonate with me. I would modify it slightly—a linguistic reformulation—and posit the Catholic *humanistic* tradition, and propose this as a conceptual framework that might help us to better see how the various course proposals reflect the intentions of the Signature III core.

The very idea of Christian humanism, to be sure, is today a contested notion, at least within the academic fields of religious studies and theology. Much of the controversy centers around issues of identity, traditionalism, ecclesial particularity, challenges of modernity (and post-modernity, if there is such a thing), the prospects for mutual understanding, and so on. But despite the “politics” of Christian humanism, Christian humanism as a conceptual framework for Signature III can illumine in a constructive manner how the work of all the disciplines contributes to the catholicity of Seton Hall and, correlatively, represents the spirit of the Catholic intellectual tradition. The great twentieth-century, Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner is insightful in this regard. Again, like the idea of Christian humanism, Rahner too is now a contested figure (after all, he was one of the leading intellectual catalysts for the contemporary “revival” of Christian humanism). But the level of disagreement he now engenders within Catholic and broader Christian communities are good indications that his work is serious enough to wrangle over and thus certainly worthy for us at Seton Hall to consider more seriously.

While space does not allow for a full treatment of what Rahner has to say about Christian humanism, it suffices for our purposes to note that he begins with a theological account of why the sphere of human affairs ought to be a critical focus for both believers and non-believers. To make it short, the drama of salvation leads to what Rahner calls the unity of love of God and love of neighbor. This means that all persons are called to love God, a love that is manifested concretely when we love the neighbor (in this respect, we can say that all persons are called to love neighbor in their call to love God). The upshot of all this is that the salvation of the individual person is not achieved in some sort of esoteric spirituality or in splendid isolation outside from human history. Rather, it is fully achieved in the human sphere, in all its dimensions (personal, public, economic,

political, cultural), when, to be more specific, she serves her fellow-persons in self-less responsibility and freedom. This is why Rahner thinks that Christian theology must always be “political theology,” since theology—as intellectual reflection and examination of God’s activity in the world *and*, correlatively, humanity’s response to such activity in the world—must always remind us of what it means to be human: to love God, which is to love the neighbor as she exists in all spheres of worldly life.<sup>1</sup> Thus theology as political theology is also describable as “practical theology,” which is to say a theology that informs humanity of what it means to love, how to love, or the manner in which one ought to practice her call to love neighbor in response to God’s love for her.<sup>2</sup> This love is not an ahistorical, spiritualized love, but a love that manifests itself in the world; after all, the human person is a social being who exists in political communities, participates in civic societies and economic systems, is a member of a family, seeks friendships.

In referring to political or practical theology, Rahner is trying to suggest that Christianity cannot above all be neglectful of what he refers to as the “humane future.”<sup>3</sup> It is in this sense that Rahner thinks that Christian theology is a humanistic endeavor, that is, an endeavor that seeks to further understanding of human nature and to pursue the fullness of human personhood in the world. And insofar as theology’s task is humanistic in the manner described, Rahner thinks that Christian theology should exist in solidarity with other humanisms or the non-theological disciplines. This is a striking statement in its recognition of other academic, scholarly disciplines as partners to theology in their concern for furthering understanding of the human person and the pursuit of a humane future. In fact, Rahner at times can be read as suggesting that the other disciplines *or humanisms* may be better positioned and equipped to deepen such knowledge of human personhood.

For Rahner, one can call “Christianity Humanism” insofar as “it can enter into dialogue with other humanisms.”<sup>4</sup> But it must be made clear that while Christianity enters such dialogue with the aim of learning more deeply about what is necessary for a humane future, such learning in turn entails the recognition by the other humanisms that their claims about the human person are not absolute, but must be seen as contributing to the fullness of what it means to be human in the world. For Rahner, the task of dialogue is to gain “clearer awareness of those hoped-for aspects of the future which have *as yet been anticipated only dimly*—justice, freedom, dignity, unity and diversity in society.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, theology must learn from the other humanisms if it is to better contribute to a humane future, *but* in doing so the other humanisms must take it upon themselves to affirm that their findings about the human person are not the singular answer to the question of a humane future, that is, to the promotion of “justice, freedom, dignity, unity and diversity in society.” Such matters cannot be resolved by the work of only one discipline (as if one discipline can have the “future tucked away in his pocket like a complete five-year plan”<sup>6</sup>, but requires mutual collaboration of all. As Rahner opines, “Must Christian and non-Christian humanists be enemies? I do not think so, provided that both sides realize that their obligations are to the future....”<sup>7</sup> The task of theology and the non-theological disciplines is to work together as humanists, which is to say, to contribute in mutually sustaining ways to the humane future, a future of “justice, freedom, dignity, unity and diversity in society.” This task is frustrated when one discipline claims that it knows once and for all what that future is. What that future is, theology cannot determine on its own, but only by collaborating with its humanist partners. The fullness of the future—the humane future—belongs to God, as Rahner suggests, and not to any one humanism, whether theology or the non-theological disciplines.

I have left out many of the more technical, nuanced details of Rahner’s account of Christian humanism (what I have described above may be too technical already). But what I have registered

thus far illumines enough why Rahner thought that dialogue between non-Christians and Christians is necessary, or why he thought that pluralistic discourse (discourse between all the humanisms) is necessary. Such discourse, I think, was reflected in some measure at our Signature III seminar. And I want to propose that a stronger sensibility to the kind of Christian humanism Rahner articulates can make all of our various courses cohere in such a way as to reflect the fullness of the Catholic intellectual tradition at Seton Hall. If there is anything to be taken away from Rahner's vision of Christian humanism is that the task of a Catholic university—as a society of various humanisms—is mutual collaboration toward the *fullness* of human personhood, i.e., toward a humane future, “justice, freedom, dignity, unity and diversity in society.” The mere expansion of knowledge, therefore, is hardly adequate for a Catholic university; instead, the task is the expansion of knowledge in the service of this fullness. In more theological terms, whatever our discipline, our task as scholars/educators is self-realization in selfless love to others; it is to engender a capacious love; or, it is to ready ourselves and our students to love neighbor, whether in the political or non-political, in the public or private spheres, in the religious realm or the secular. And such readiness to love is, ultimately, an anticipation and openness to the Kingdom of God.

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The Signature III course I wish to propose and develop is a course that considers the question of cultural diversity. As I articulated during the seminar, the question, more specifically, is what it might mean to recognize the cultural identity of a person or persons. In short, this course is about the meaning and significance (or perhaps the possibilities) of cultural pluralism—or multiculturalism, call it what you like. Many of us take cultural pluralism for granted nowadays (just look at our tri-state region), but it exists in strong tension with what has been a more typical political philosophy in the modern U.S.: participation in the “public” requires neutrality, which means cultural—whether ethnic, racial, or religious—identity is confined to the “private” sphere. But to what extent does such a political philosophy diminish human personhood? Alternatively, to what extent should plural, cultural expression be allowed in the public? At the heart of such questions is whether cultural pluralism is a good. Accordingly, the aim of the course is to explore in what normative sense cultural pluralism can be considered a public good—what is the limit and extent of this good?

In the spirit of the Christian humanism described above, I would like to entertain the foregoing questions from a theological framework (primarily Catholic but one that also includes the wider Christian tradition) that is in dialogue with a number of non-theological perspectives (philosophy, sociology, and law in particular). As a way of framing the question of cultural pluralism and indicating the contemporary salience of the question, the course will begin with a number of recent U.S. Supreme Court cases on affirmative action, school busing, and desegregation, as well as explore current political debates on immigration reform and citizenship. The course will then turn to a theological exploration of cultural pluralism through the themes of freedom, the nature of truth, the relationship between church and state, and the role of religion in society, just to name a few. Readings will draw from Vatican II documents, John Courtney Murray, S.J. (a contributor to Vatican II's *Declaration on Religious Freedom*), Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, the Mennonite John Howard Yoder (a long-time theologian at Notre Dame), Pope John Paul II's *Veritatis Splendor*, and others within the Catholic-Christian intellectual tradition. This theological exploration of cultural pluralism will then dialogue with other non-theological reflections (political theory and sociology, political and moral philosophy). For instance, this section of the course will draw on the works of Alasdair MacIntyre, John Dewey, and Amy Gutmann, and the more recent treatments of cosmopolitanism by K.

Anthony Appiah and Martha Nussbaum. With all of this, my hope is that students taking the course will be able to better articulate how Christianity can constructively contribute to the larger public discussion on the contemporary challenges of cultural pluralism in law, politics, and religion.

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## References

<sup>1</sup> *Theological Investigations* [or *TI*], Vol. IX, p. 195).

<sup>2</sup> *TI*, IX, p. 195

<sup>3</sup> *TI*, IX, p. 201

<sup>4</sup> *TI*, IX, p. 194).

<sup>5</sup> *TI*, IX, p. 203, emphasis added

<sup>6</sup> *TI*, IX, p. 203

<sup>7</sup> *TI*, IX, pp. 202-203

## Signature III and the Hermeneutical Circle

Anthony L. Haynor

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In attempting to make sense of the charge to us to develop Signature III courses within our disciplines, Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of the "hermeneutical circle" (drawing on his teacher, Heidegger) is both instructive and illuminating. Gadamer developed this influential notion most clearly in his landmark work, *Truth and Method* (originally published as *Wahrheit and Methode* in 1965).

For starters, both Catholic thought, on the one hand, and the various disciplines, on the other, are "horizons" or "traditions." As the philosopher, Thomas Nagel expressed it, there is no such thing as a "view from nowhere." Yet it is precisely such "decentering" and "decontextualizing" that many argue was the hallmark of classicist and, later, Enlightenment thought (to which the Counter-Enlightenment responded). For Gadamer, human beings can "interpret" objects (e.g. other people, the so-called natural world, God, or most relevant to the present discussion, texts of one kind or another) *only* through the horizons that they bring to their engagement with them. But, what is a "horizon?" Simply put, it refers to a perspective or vantage point on the world that is rooted in presuppositions ("prejudices" according to Gadamer) that guide, structure, and make possible our meaningful connectedness to it. Gadamer tends to use "horizon" and "tradition" interchangeably, which presents a bit of a problem. For a "tradition" requires that there be an "authority" of some kind (a "guardian" group according to Anthony Giddens) in whom one trusts to interpret the "teaching" by virtue of the "legitimacy" that is invested in the authority. A tradition is also characterized by a clear sense of peoplehood that is rooted in a shared ancestry, a shared present, and a shared future. One of the challenges that we face in contemporary education is that many of our students (even or perhaps especially those from a nominally Catholic background) do not subscribe to a Catholic tradition as defined above. If we now live increasingly (certainly not exclusively) in a "post-traditional" society (to use Giddens' phrase), does that mean that we live in a society devoid of "horizons?" This is the problem with equating "horizon" and "tradition." While it is most definitely the case that many of our students are impoverished when it comes to their "traditional" moorings (which have become increasingly contentless and vacuous), this does not mean that they do not have "horizons," however incoherent and fragmented we might think they are. One of our challenges as a faculty is to get our students to understand what their horizons are (whether "traditional" or not) and how they intersect with the texts in which we ask them to be engaged.

Hermeneutics as the study of interpretation involves by definition an interpreter and something (e.g. a text) to be interpreted. Within the context of Signature III courses, the interpreter can fall into a number of categories. First and foremost, there is the "student" as interpreter. One thing that should be fostered in Signature III courses is the students' self-understanding of their horizons in relation to their effort to make both disciplinary and Catholic texts intelligible and meaningful. One possibility is that they embrace a horizon outside of their discipline and Catholicism that either prevents both disciplinary and Catholic traditions from resonating or that frame their understanding of both their discipline and Catholicism. Another possibility is that they embrace a disciplinary horizon that can be "applied" to Catholic thought. Another possibility is that they embrace a decidedly Catholic horizon that can be "applied" to their discipline. Finally, their horizon can take a hybrid form, in which their double commitment to a discipline and to Catholicism continually inform each other. Overlaying this is the professor as interpreter. It is the responsibility (one could reasonably



argue the “moral” responsibility) of the professor to make transparent the “horizons” (that is the prejudices) that are guiding his or her perspective on the text. This is course assumes that the professor is fully aware of what those prejudices are. So, what should also be fostered in Signature III courses is an enhanced self-understanding on the part of professors as to their horizons (and corresponding prejudices). This could run the gamut from an uncritical acceptance of secular disciplinary norms to a blind allegiance to Church authority, to a dogmatic skepticism of all attempts to uncover or discover the truth, or even to Catholic bashing. The third category of interpreter would be texts that attempt to make sense of the texts under consideration in the course. Of course, their relevance in understanding the text as object depends on the horizons adopted by those (namely students and the professor) who are drawing on them.

The “hermeneutical circle” commences with the process in which a text can derive its meaning *only* in terms of how the interpreter’s horizon is “applied” to it. This having been said, according to Gadamer, the very process of engaging the text as object implicates the horizon itself. The horizon that makes possible the “conversation” with the text is forever changed by the conversation. It is in this sense that the interpretive act comes full circle. This does not mean that the horizon is necessarily changed; it may in fact be reinforced. Even this scenario would not negate the fact that it is in some significant sense changed by the encounter with the text. (The spiral metaphor is useful in this context. One’s stance toward the world is in a sense unchanged, but one’s vantage point is at a “higher” (that is richer) level of consciousness. However, a modification of the horizon in light of the conversation is always possible. One’s prejudices are modified, deepened, or jettisoned. According to Gadamer, the “new” horizon is not any less prejudicial than the old one. (On this point, Gadamer would differ from Lonergan who argued that human beings are capable of becoming progressively less biased, and from the American pragmatists and Habermas, who argue that the existence of a dialogical community fosters the pursuit of the truth through rational argument.) The hermeneutical circle, thus, for Gadamer, begins and ends with our “finitude” for we are ultimately incapable of transcending the limitations of our “historical consciousness.” However, it is through our encounter with the other (including texts) that the shape and texture of our historical consciousness take form. Our finitude, which makes possible our encounter with texts, bears the imprint of those encounters. This is what Gadamer refers to as the “fusion of horizons.”

According to Gadamer, the hermeneutical circle requires an “openness” to what the text has to offer, as well as an openness to having one’s horizon transformed by it. Within the context of the Signature III courses to be developed, this would involve an openness on the part of both students and faculty to the hermeneutical circle, in particular to modifying their disciplinary, Catholic, and other horizons in light of a serious conversation with the “other.” One does not need to subscribe *in toto* to Gadamer’s position to recognize the potential usefulness of the notion of the hermeneutical circle in Signature III courses. Some would object to having all horizons on a level playing field, at a Catholic sponsored University no less. I am not positing any such metaphysical equivalence. I am arguing on behalf of an approach that can best foster the “conversations” that need to take place in the academy in general, one that I would argue would advance the mission of Catholic universities like Seton Hall.

## Signature Three Course: Catholicism and Art

Richard M. Liddy  
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I enjoyed very much the seminar on the Signature Three courses facilitated by John Haughey June 27-28. In particular I enjoyed the chance to get to know – or to know better – fellow faculty members and their work. I found the diversity of personalities as well as disciplines particularly engaging. At a seminar like this one senses new possibilities of community than one had ever sensed before. I am grateful to my fellow participants for sharing themselves during these days, and I hope we can do it again. Though I entered into the conversation during the two days we were together, I did not mention the course I am thinking about for Signature Three and that is an “upgrading” of the course I presently teach on “Catholicism and Art.” It is a course I teach every other year and it is part of the Catholic Studies program - though other students regularly take it as a free elective. Currently it is a 2000 level course, but I am contemplating offering it as a Signature Three 3000 level course.

My own doctoral dissertation, “Art and Feeling: The Philosophy of Art of Susanne K. Langer,” was on one of the foremost American philosophers of art. Though Langer wrote from the 1940s through the 80s, her works are still featured by Harvard University Press. My own philosophy teacher, Bernard Lonergan, leaned heavily on Langer in his work on the philosophy of art and in this course I regularly weave in perspectives from Langer and Lonergan.

The course studies the role of art in Christian history as well as contemporary Catholic attitudes towards artistic creation and appreciation. It considers various examples of early Christian, Byzantine, medieval, Renaissance and Baroque art; it also treats the relationship between Catholicism and modern/postmodern art and what recent cultural studies have called “the Catholic imagination.” Visiting speakers address the class on various aspects of Catholicism and art through the centuries. Regularly class trips are arranged to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Cloisters.

The objectives of the course are:

- \* to examine the relationships between the aesthetic/artistic patterns of consciousness, (“zones”) and other patterns of consciousness: ordinary, common-sense consciousness, theoretical consciousness, religious consciousness with the help of Bernard Lonergan and Susanne Langer to develop a language for understanding art and aesthetic consciousness;
- \* to become familiar with the history of the relationship between Catholicism and art
- \* to become familiar with the Christian theological principles that have guided the relationship between Christianity and the arts: e.g. the incarnation of Christ, redemption, ecclesiology, sacramentality, liturgy, the historicity of culture, etc.;

\* to become more sensitive to the role of art in Christian life and worship today

Recently I have come across two excellent texts for the course. One, *The Clash of Gods* by Thomas F. Mathews, professor of the history of art at New York University, surveys the various artistic images of Christ between the third and the sixth century and challenges other scholars who have used the “emperor mystique” to interpret early Christian iconography. Mathews’ contention is that the context for early Christian images of Christ are the rival images of the ancient gods, so that Christ is presented as a magician, a philosopher, and an androgynous figure. The book is an excellent example of art historical scholarship.

The second work is more a survey of the topic of Catholicism and art and is by R. Kevin Seasoltz, *A Sense of the Sacred: Theological Foundations of Christian Architecture and Art*. This is more a “all you ever wanted to know” type of book on the whole history of the relationship between Catholicism and Art.

Of course, in a course like this, what is involved is more than reading. I encourage the students to seek out in person, in the museums and churches of New York and New Jersey, examples of the relation between Catholicism and art. Also, today the internet makes available countless classic examples of Christian art. In the first part of the course I will focus on ancient and medieval art and in the second part I will focus on modern/postmodern works.

Of course, all along I will be asking the methodological question: what are we doing when we are doing it? Are we having an aesthetic experience? Or are we reflecting on it in a theoretical way? Are we allowing ourselves to have the experience or are we engaged in distracting considerations? Is the art becoming “didactic” or is there an experiential and expressive component here?

Another question comes in for consideration: how did art, so wrapped up with religion in its origins, become so alienated from the Church in the Enlightenment? What is the story here? What about so-called “secular” art? Is there a “spiritual,” indeed a “religious” element here? Is there a “catholic” element to all genuine art? And can some art conceived under the rubric of religion be less than what might be hoped?

## Developing the Third Signature Course

Vicente Medina  
*Department of Philosophy*

I found our conversations about the development of third signature courses stimulating. Despite our differences, it appears that most of us feel comfortable with the recommendation that these courses will be developed within specific departments. This recommendation seems pedagogically sound. Representatives of each discipline can engage in fruitful dialogues with the Catholic intellectual tradition from their own areas of expertise. In that way, we shall be able to do what we can do best, namely teach our strength.

The Catholic intellectual tradition is sufficiently rich and diverse to allow faculty members from different disciplines to come up with interesting and challenging ideas in developing their 3000 level signature three courses. I found all of the proposals or suggestions discussed in the seminar for new courses interesting and promising. Some seemed broader in scope than others, but their depth is what really matters. I was impressed by the openness and receptiveness of those colleagues who shared their views with us during the seminar. A real spirit of collegiality permeated our conversations.

I envision that some members of the department of philosophy will create several signature three courses focusing, for example, on social and political issues, epistemological issues, or metaphysical issues that are prominent in the Catholic intellectual tradition. When I think of this tradition, the idea of social justice comes to mind; however, that is not the only representative issue of the tradition, even though it is unquestionably an important one. There are also fundamental issues such as the possibility of a virtuous life, the possibility of empirical knowledge or transcendental knowledge, and the idea of faith, to mention only a few. Since the spirit of human inquiry is to be critical so we can be liberated from prejudices and false beliefs, those who choose to develop and/or teach these courses should be responsible for promoting in our students a passion for critical inquiry rather than a passive acceptance of controversial and dogmatic beliefs.

My perspective differs from the one that some of my colleagues take, including the one assumed by the moderator John Haughey. According to some participants, signature three courses ought to be informed by faith seeking understanding. On the contrary, I assume that the spirit of these courses should be doubt seeking understanding. Such Augustinian skepticism is congruent with the Catholic intellectual tradition. Nonetheless, one could argue that those teaching these courses should have some kind of faith in the possibility of acquiring human knowledge. If that were not to be the case, then our pedagogy would be futile. It is precisely a belief in the possibility of human knowledge that characterizes the Catholic intellectual tradition. Whether such a belief can be justified remains a fundamental challenge of human inquiry. Hence, signature three courses that explore epistemological issues in different disciplines from critical perspectives could offer our students a worthwhile experience.

The Catholic intellectual tradition is grounded not only on a belief that human knowledge is possible, but also on a belief that such knowledge is practical. In this tradition, knowledge for its own sake is insufficient. Propositional knowledge or knowledge of that

which is true is important to the extent that it informs our practical knowledge of how to act in the world. If that is so, then one could argue that signature three courses should aim at explaining the relationship between theoretical and practical knowledge. Yet our beliefs regarding that relationship are not necessarily impregnable. They can be challenged. Intellectual honesty demands a commitment to revise our beliefs when faced with countervailing evidence. To act otherwise would be to embrace obscurantism and dogmatism. These are vices that ought to be overcome by representatives of any worthwhile tradition.

It is from the assumption that human knowledge is practical and hence good that the Catholic intellectual tradition represents a truly ecumenical approach. Such an approach embraces a distinctive conception of toleration. Catholic or Christian toleration is not based on skepticism, but rather on a recognition that human knowledge is possible and yet limited in scope. Our dialogical approach and respect for one another's opinion during the seminar was a good example of this kind of toleration. And yet if one accepts that there is such a thing as truth and that it is possible to apprehend it, then there seems to be a real tension between a Catholic or Christian commitment to that which is true and tolerating other set of beliefs which are considered to be false. This tension is not unique to Catholic or Christian toleration because other traditions face similar challenges. For example, despite its commitment to toleration, liberalism needs to wrestle with the presence and advocacy of militant intolerant groups who challenge liberal toleration. Hence, there seems to be no liberal way to deal effectively with them.

Apparently, those of us who choose to develop and/or teach signature three courses have the responsibility of explaining to our students how to reconcile truth and tolerance from the perspectives of our own disciplines. But, if an instructor realizes that at times such reconciliation is practically or conceptually impossible, then he or she must have the courage and intellectual integrity to say so. The success or failure of signature three courses would depend to a large extent on whether we are able to convey to our students a passion for critical knowledge and for intellectual integrity. In the Catholic or Christian intellectual tradition this passion is based on an impeccable respect for our human dignity as actual or potential reasonable persons with a capacity for being free. But there is no such a thing as a flawless tradition. So, to engage our students in an honest and fruitful dialogue with the Catholic intellectual tradition we need to focus on both its virtues and its flaws. A condescending paternalistic attitude would be anathema to the intellectual and personal growth of our students. Thus, it is important to avoid a temptation to offer sanitized versions of such a rich and diverse tradition.

**There's More to Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony than duh-duh-duh dah!**  
**My Take on the Third Signature Course**

Athar Murtuza  
*School of Business*

The seminar was a wonderful feast for intellect—thanks for making it possible!

If they are seen as discrete courses, like many if not most courses in today's college environment, the three Signature courses no matter how well designed can easily turn into stones to step over for students, instead of being stepping stones to an educated conscious and informed conscience. What business majors pick up in their general studies courses stays there and does not become, for most of them, a part of their skills; business students for the most part, in my opinion, treat Arts and Science courses as stones to step over with no residual aftermath. The third signature course could be something different if it were to focus on what are assumed to be business topics, but teaching them in the contexts usually associated with Arts and Humanities.

Beethoven's Fifth symphony is a musical miracle but its catchy opening phrase made up of three short notes and a long one happens to be a very small part of the total symphonic transcendence. What makes the Fifth a musical miracle is how those notes are echoed, repeated, and reverberated throughout the symphonic transcendence made possible by Ludwig's genius. Those musical notes are not stones to step over but stepping stones, a veritable staircase leading listeners to transcendence. The signature courses are important and are likely to be important stepping stones provided the lessons of those courses are linked and integrated with the rest of students' university experience.

The SHU's curriculums, arts and science as well as professional ones designed for nurses, teachers, journalists, lawyers, diplomats, priests, professors, or even accountants will be better served if they are to the signature courses what the Beethoven's 5th symphony is to its starting notes. But that is not easily done—most acolytes of Mammon know of greed and gluttony but St. Augustine's confession let alone the meaning of Jesus' gospel is not easily or usually incorporated with the long and short of hedging. The High Priests, familiarly known as AACSB accreditation imperatives, seemingly could care less for all that Jazz! The curriculums of business disciplines, accounting for instance, march to its own drumbeat and given its presumed sanctity—akin to Playboy bunnies' look but don't reach mystique—are unlikely to make social justice, let alone the Deity, a part of their quotidian. Still the 3<sup>rd</sup> signature course in the context of the framework that has been designed for it, can serve or perhaps even subvert, by inoculating at least some accountants against a rabid propensity for being made into minions for greed and gluttony.

My prescription for the section of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Signature course I hope to design and teach is aiming to ask students (presumably accounting and finance majors but not exclusively) to answer with the help of a semester's worth of learning, a question: to what extent accounting and accountants help, (as they are indeed capable of doing) or hinder (which they often do) the attainment of social justice as prescribed in the Catholic social tradition as well as the teaching of other faiths.

To make the question being asked in an accounting-grounded section of the 3<sup>rd</sup> signature course more real, it could be related to the kind of capitalistic dogma that does not blink even as 26,000 human beings die everyday from preventable causes. The course would start by inculcating among students the realization that accounting not only implies counting, it can also represent accounting for, as in accountability. Reaching through history, in Old Testament, in Babylon and back when the Valley of Kings in Egypt was kingly with Pharaohs and Joseph's functions included managerial stewardship, accounting for accountability was extant, while accounting for financial statements to facilitate speculation, euphemistically called arbitrage, was not. Accounting students need to be made aware of the genealogy of their profession. After the Industrial Revolution while corporations were turning into behemoths, it was hoped accounting and auditing would keep them leashed for the sake of public interest. Ironically, 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw corporations co-opting the accounting profession and the accounting pedagogy dutifully followed the wake of such financial titanics.

Such a historical survey of the origins of accounting within a course (reading, writing, and critical-thought intensive) that seeks to place accounting in its evolutionary context before analyzing what accountants do and the extent to which they contribute to social justice would be a very rare (rarity being the mother-lode of profitable brand differentiation as marketing strategists tell us) course indeed, if 'twere to be! *Inshaa Allah!*

## Reflections on Signature 3 and the disciplines

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Revisiting the notes I took of the two day seminar reinforced my initial insight that the best part of the experience was listening to the passion present in everyone's teaching. The next best thing for me, both as a teacher and scholar, was to listen to how others fleshed out, in practice, ways of engaging the "Catholic intellectual tradition, broadly defined." It almost seemed like Signature 3 became the site for many hopes, not only for our respective academic programs and for Seton Hall itself as an educational institution, but also for our own disciplines' potential contribution to our students' personal and professional lives.

Although I have participated in our university's curricular initiatives in some other ways, such as in the core "proficiencies", I have not really been involved in the Signature 1 and 2 courses. It is a matter of relevance, really, since there are many other colleagues who are in a better position, both in terms of training as well as in experience, to contribute to the design and teaching of these particular courses. It is also a matter of practicality especially in small departments like mine with few faculty members to spare. When the invitation for Signature 3 came up, however, the disciplinary aspect was particularly intriguing and challenging. My academic and intellectual perspectives from university onwards were forged in large state (and proudly secular) tertiary institutions where excellence and service to others is a core value but not framed within specific religious traditions. Teaching from within my discipline with the words Catholic or Christian in the course description is an interesting project not only because it was not something I had not done before (since I am not an anthropologist of religion and my past positions were all in state universities) but also because my discipline itself has quite a tradition of stubborn eccentricity, even a methodological skepticism, where we study all human groups, the way they organize themselves & live their lives, and where verbal claims or narratives are always considered alongside actual behavior, and where "special" phenomena are always considered alongside the "everyday" ones that we often take for granted. So even if I was raised Catholic and educated until high school by Franciscan nuns who framed issues of poverty and social justice in very consistent, almost self-consciously "consciousness-raising" ways, my own religious background and practices have not *explicitly* informed my teaching nor my scholarship.

Perhaps this is why alarm bells kind of rang in my head when our discussion leader, John Haughey, framed the Signature 3 enterprise in terms of an explicit reference to God as our "Co-laborer." When John Ranieri also mentioned that model for Signature 3 shouldn't be about an existing syllabus with the Catholic aspect "helicoptered in," I really began to squirm, wondering if that applied to the course I was thinking about. Surely any qualified individual, whether believer or non-believer should be able to teach, or take, the anthropology course I have in mind but would that disqualify it for Signature 3? It is not because I think it impossible (to teach with the starting premise of God as co-laborer in the classroom) but the question in my mind is, should I? I keep thinking of the current US President and how he makes the same revelatory arguments about his own decisions, and



what would appear as humility in some circles rankles as arrogance in others. Knowing what I have come to know of the surprising diversity of our students' spiritual beliefs and practices also makes me disinclined to do so. In my four years teaching at Seton Hall, so many of my students have opened up about their own personal beliefs and practices, writing very frank essays and reflections about faith, organized religion, ritual cycles, their roles in these events, their family contexts, the points of view of their peers. I am surprised by the predictability of cultural and religious backgrounds on one hand (i.e. a high proportion of self-identified Catholics and Christians from mainline/denominational churches) that contrast with a greater diversity of actual faith-based practices (i.e. a significant proportion of lapsed and/or hybrid religious activity). Perhaps it is because of the nature of anthropology that explicitly advocates for the often misunderstood perspective of cultural relativism, where one does not deny one's own moral or ethical values but actively seek to understand the underlying ideas of *any* value system, and to do so with a careful and analytic eye, perhaps it is because of this intellectual climate in an anthropology classroom that makes students feel safe or find the space to share aspects of their lives without fear, shame or embarrassment, or to find themselves surprised to see connections with other lives lived in faraway places. As we read and discuss and write about what we have to in the course of the semester, they end up reflecting on their own spiritual journeys wherever that may lead, but in the end, they need the intellectual space to figure out what they want to pack for the trip.

When John H. commented on the second day that we enter this world "traditioned" (which sounds like a good opening lecture for Introduction to Cultural Anthropology), and John R. pointed out that a Catholic education teaches ways of "beholding the world," the course I had in mind no longer seemed like a lost cause. Hearing from other participants think out loud about their own possible Signature 3 courses also helped me consider other possibilities in my own. Especially striking to me were the frank discussions about how the proposed course should address professional ethical issues head on, whether in nursing or accounting; how a philosophy course can be applied to the healing of the self or the sorting out of actual life issues; or, how the course can help students navigate competing truth claims whether in the context of inter-religious dialog, contemporary literature or in rituals of citizenship & civic life.

When my turn came, it was very helpful to be forced to address a widely interdisciplinary group. The course I have in mind is very specific, one that seeks to answer a general question: What does it mean to be Catholic or Christian in cultural & geographical regions of the world that fall outside "the West"? What kinds of cultural formations arise many centuries after religious conversion especially when facilitated by larger social & historical forces such as colonialism or conquest? If I had to draft a working title, I would call it "Catholicism, Conversion & Post-Colonial Social Movements" and it can run initially as a 3000 level ANTH topics course.

Standard teaching practice in anthropology combines reading actual field-based ethnographies of contemporary communities in many parts of the world, alongside theoretical consideration of models that help explain or analyze collective representations, key symbols of identity/ethnicity and ensuing social formations. I hope to apply this classic approach, along with a great deal of writing/journaling, preparation of their own mini-ethnographic projects that require field work, and conventional quizzes & exams. I have specific book-length ethnographies and journal articles in mind that study how the

phenomena of Catholic conversion under Spanish and Portuguese colonial rule in Asia, Africa & the Americas links to post-colonial social movements, especially those that frame their endeavors in religious terms: *pasyon* (for Christ's passion) and *rebolusyon* (revolution) in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Philippines as well as the 20<sup>th</sup> century; missionary translations of Christian doctrine into indigenous languages in Meso-America in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries and the impact of the printing press in both proselytization as well as nationalist movements; the phenomenon of the Christianized "plantation Indian" in New England as well as the Hispanized Pueblo Indians of the American Southwest and the lives of their descendants, among others. I will need help in finding other good field-based ethnographies that touch upon Catholicism & conversion especially from sub-Saharan Africa (where my bibliographic coverage can be better) as well as in not-so-obvious places such as South Korea, Goa in India, the US territories in the South Pacific, or even the Christian communities in the Middle East.

In subsequent discussion of my proposed course, I am particularly grateful for the many helpful references and citations that were shared by those present, such as the one on "operative theologies" as well as the recommended surveys/anthologies on "theologies of religions." I have begun to read up on some of these and appreciate that they are part of others' favorite teaching tool kits. Whether or not this skeletal framework holds promise as a Signature 3 course (which I am curious to find out), I must say that I really welcome this seminar. It came at a very good time, mid-summer, when there is a little bit of a pause in teaching cycles and there is a bit more peace and languidness to stop and think about issues that affect our professional and personal selves.

## This Stuff

John Ranieri

*Department of Philosophy*

About a year ago I received a call from the college age daughter of a couple I am friendly with in the parish where I am a weekend assistant. She had informed her parents that she no longer wanted to go to church. They told her that before she followed through on this decision she must speak to me first. If after meeting with me she still did not want to attend Sunday Mass, they would accept her decision. Nancy (not her real name) dutifully met with me and stopped going to church. During the course of our conversation she said, “You’re an intellectual. How can you believe this stuff?” I am not sure what she meant by “intellectual” so it was difficult for me to determine whether I would even want to be one. By “this stuff” she seemed to mean Catholic Christianity. In any case, whatever an intellectual was, Nancy firmly believed it excluded belief in Christianity as mediated through the Roman Catholic tradition. She appeared exasperated with me when I told her that I not only believed this stuff, but that it was the lens through which I viewed the world. From the look on her face I could tell that I had now been banished from the garden of the intellectuals.

I have no doubt that, to a significant degree, the Catholic Church is responsible for creating the Nancys of our time. But I am also convinced that when it does so, it is being unfaithful to itself. The problem, however, is not that students have been indoctrinated with Catholic teaching and need to be liberated from the narrowness of their religious vision. In fact our Catholic students come to us knowing little or nothing about the Catholic intellectual tradition. Even the zealots among them, ever eager to guard orthodoxy against what they perceive as a hostile modernity, simply wind up reducing the message of Christianity to a position to be defended. I remember having a conversation with a student after the class had read scripture scholar Jerome Murphy-O’Connor’s book, *Becoming Human Together*. To my mind it is the best thing I have ever read on Paul’s understanding of community. At the time I was using it in class as part of a three way comparison with liberalism and Aristotle. The student stopped after class to say she had up until then no idea this was what Christianity was about. In her case, what she had come to understand was very appealing to her, but it is certainly conceivable in our culture that a student would come to understand the gospel message and decide it was not for her/him. Whether the Nancys of this world believe or not, whether they go to church or not, it would seem that a Catholic university, at the very least, has a responsibility to help them make such a decision based on knowledge rather than ignorance. I would add that this goal applies equally to the wisdom traditions of all of our students. John Haughey, during previous visits, said something to the effect that Seton Hall come to understand itself as a home to the faiths. Recent conversations with friends and acquaintances belonging to other religions have helped me realize how Catholics are not the only ones living with an impoverished notion of their religious tradition. The vast majority of people I have encountered in pastoral ministry have been people of sincere good will who wish to translate their faith into action. But there is an enormous gap between the sophistication and depth of knowledge with which they operate in their professional lives, and their understanding of the religious tradition from which they

wish to take their bearings. Why even have Catholic universities if they are unable or unwilling to help bridge this gap?

There is a sense in which the three signature courses take their fundamental orientation from this dilemma. Despite their superficial openness, in my experience, our students inhabit incredibly narrow horizons –and not because of their religion. If they were to seriously engage their own traditions and those of others they might actually be deepened and become capable of genuine openness and adult faith. My reservations with regard to the current approach to the signature courses is that we are overloading them with so many additional tasks that we are leaving little or no space for the reflective engagement with the texts. I fear we will wind up ruining what might have been an opportunity for deepening in our students. Done well, these courses could help students and faculty realize that in believing “this stuff” they are being neither doctrinaire nor silly And they still might be able to go on to become intellectuals.

## The “Inter” in Inter-disciplinary as the Space of Possibility

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After an enjoyable three day conversation, facilitated by John Haughey, on a fascinating array of Signature Three course possibilities, the inter-disciplinary character of the Seton Hall Signature courses became more obvious than ever. Cultural anthropology, sociology, political science, political theory, philosophical ideas of health, philosophy of religion, and psychology were represented along with their particular avenues of questioning. Everyone who is designing a syllabus for Signature Three is attempting to bring their expertise into conversation with the Catholic intellectual tradition. Thus the course is by definition inter-disciplinary.

What I want to reflect on here is not so much the methods of the different disciplines, but rather on a possible justification for inter-disciplinary discourse and what that “inter” might suggest to us and about us. Such reflection is not new. Bernard Lonergan’s *Insight*, Paul Ricoeur’s *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, and Hans Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* stand as contemporary monuments to the importance of this endeavor. Indeed, apart from such arguments and justifications, calls for inter-disciplinary study and a more unified curriculum sound strained and shrill, perhaps fostered by various cultural and even territorial fears rather than reflection and a genuine desire for inquiry.<sup>1</sup>

The first thing that strikes me is that there is no reason to suppose that different disciplines can hold a conversation, much less support one another in an ongoing tradition of inquiry. Why should sociology, for instance, want to converse with psychology; why should economics feel a need to speak with a religious studies person? External justifications for this conversation, i.e., because economics affects religious practice, will not do for at least two reasons: first, this approach to the problem, while it holds some truth, generally relegates one discipline to the status of second-class citizen. If we are truly interested in inter-disciplinary study, then both disciplines need to be respected in their integrity. Religion must be encountered qua religion, and not merely as an interesting place of economic activity (and, of course, the other way ‘round). Second, we need to face the fact that historically these various disciplines often emerge in conflict with one another.<sup>2</sup> Various disciplines emerge from an agonistic context where they contest the validity and viability of the others. I seriously doubt that all remnants of this contest have been exorcised from our own assumptions about how a topic should be studied or what counts as rigorous analysis.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, contemporary palliatives such as appeals to cultural and epistemological pluralism or “difference” as justifications are often pleas to be left alone rather than a genuine approach to the underlying issues.

Yet it may be startling for the benevolent to think of academic disciplines locked in such a contest. I suspect we do not look across the table at our colleagues and say to ourselves, “Geez, they sure have nothing to contribute to the intellectual enterprise.” What tells against this historical *agon* are the actual collaborations that take place among professors

with different areas of expertise and the inter-disciplinary work of scholars in our fields. Teilhard de Chardin and John Polkinghorne, for instance, joined science and theology in highly suggestive ways, while Clifford Geertz brought the findings of philosophy of mind and hermeneutics to bear on cultural anthropology. Indeed, examples abound. So our experience gestures toward a need to transcend one's own discipline when the questions human beings ask move us beyond those boundaries. We then find ourselves moving between disciplines, translating our questions into another idiom and back again, and trying to be sure that each discipline receives its due. So it does happen; but why and how is it possible that it happens? As I said earlier, what I want to explore here is the "between" dynamic, what William Desmond might call the "metaxu" or metaxological space of thought such that the plurality of intellectual discourses finds its justification as a legitimate plurality.

The first point of this justification is that no one discipline can provide the condition for the possibility of all the others. For example, sociology cannot provide for the possibility of a conversation between history and psychology, since this would only beg the question of what makes the intercourse between sociology and history possible. In addition, if one discipline could provide the possibility for the others, all other disciplines would need to recognize that they find their justification in that discipline. Here we run a serious danger of reductionism.

Two analogies should help move our discussion along. We can begin with a chess game. If we ask, "what makes a chess game possible once we have all the pieces of the two sides," we cannot say, "another side." Now we would have three sets of pieces and still no game. Rather, something qualitatively different from the two sides is necessary: a board and game rules. And the game rules have everything to do with how the two sides negotiate the space (board) that allows them to play: a pawn can move one square forward at a time, save for its first move and when it captures an opponent's piece; a bishop can only move diagonally, and it cannot move as a rook does, etc. Thus the board makes the game possible, just as a court does for basketball teams, a field for baseball, etc. So the condition for the possibility of game intercourse, so to speak, is something qualitatively different from the two sides in the game itself, namely, a field of play.

More illuminating yet is the form of intercourse that is human sexual relations. What makes sexual intercourse possible is certainly not a third person—for that would simply beg the question as when we added another discipline—nor only one of the partners, but rather an underlying field of play, in this case, their common species-being or humanity and the particular erotic drive built into it. We can push this line of inquiry a bit further. Human being, or human nature, is not a third being in our series, but the field of play that makes possible properly human sexual relations (we can thus restrict our metaphysical bed to a Queen size). In addition, human nature is neither one nor the other partner. Nor do both together add up to human being or exhaust it. One partner is not half of human nature, but rather participates in the unity that is human nature without ever exhausting its possibilities. No one human being, or even one million, exhaust the possibilities for being human.

Now a second point becomes equally important. While human sexual relations point to a shared nature, that nature shows up nowhere but in actual human beings. One does not have erotic intentions toward human nature as such, but with Sally, Padma, or Sean. So, human nature depends upon particular human beings for its realization or existence, and

particular human beings are finite events or occurrences of the infinite possibilities inherent to human nature. Moreover, both sexual and intellectual intercourse becomes possible through a common ground in nature that both unifies and distinguishes the dialogue partners. It unifies in that both are human beings, and differentiates in that each are different realizations of human being where neither can be reduced to the other.

I have limited the discussion here to the human species, but only because we are working our way back to a discussion of inter-disciplinary study, which, so far as I know, is not of concern to hamsters or cats. The argument, then, is that the field that makes these different types of intercourse possible is indeed the field called metaphysics. Now, this is where care needs to be taken. By metaphysics, I do not mean this or that view of essences or natures or even will, though all of these will require discussion. This kind of metaphysics would not so much be the space on which other disciplines play as another disciplines itself. For reasons stated above, this would not solve our dilemma.

At a more primal level, I would argue, metaphysics springs from two forms of love: *eros* and *agape*, love that desires and love that serves. It is this that forms the playing field for our different discursive endeavors now to be understood as different ways of inquiring into the meaning of Being. We can speak of both forms of love in subjective and in objective terms.

*Eros* (subjectively speaking): As children, we explore our world, its corners, crevices, and colors in a desire to map it, understand it, and negotiate it. We desire to know and to be known by others in our truest intentions and in our goodness. Oddly enough, apart from being known (by parents, siblings, friends), our existence narrows to near nothingness. So we desire communication, and we desire that those with whom we communicate grasp our meaning, purpose, and concerns.<sup>4</sup> We can see the intensity of this desire for communication by way of the contrasts provided by experts in alienation: Edward Hopper paintings and Michelangelo Antonioni films display the inability to reach out to others and communicate. The characters move us by their immobility. So this desire is evident to the extent that it finds fulfillment, but also to the extent to which we are misunderstood or discursively paralyzed, Babel-like, in various and painful ways. Subjectively speaking, then, *Eros* signifies a self-transcending desire for communication, recognition, and communion (as in, *koinonia*, participation). Nor do we restrict ourselves to the bare necessities of social intercourse; rather, we stretch out and communicate about the world that presents itself to us, about things trivial and profound, and we seek not merely to exist, but joy itself—true communion.

*Agape* (or Love as service--subjectively speaking): In trying to know and communicate our world, we serve two masters (but ultimately only one!). The first master is the world around us. To know something is to give oneself over to it before doing anything else—to allow it space within oneself to open up and breathe and come into the light of the intellect. To believe that one can know something, that the world is knowable, is, of course, a fundamental trust that the world is both intelligible and worth knowing. It is to pronounce the wonder with which most of us begin our intellectual endeavors a genuine good. Thus we serve the world by opening a space within our intellect to it, bringing it into the light of knowledge, language, and image, and thus not only reflecting it, but in some sense creating it. The effort to know is fundamentally an effort to serve what presents itself to be known and to give that subject of knowledge over to language. This knowing, it should be said, is a

knowing from somewhere, a knowing that shapes the known and is also shaped by it as reality resists efforts to completely manipulate it. A conversation is a good example here. Nothing is more frustrating than speaking with someone and having them completely, and perhaps willfully, misconstrue one's meaning. Reading and writing form other examples. We all say to students, "I think you've misread that" or "I don't think that's what you mean to say."<sup>5</sup>

Eros (objectively): If it is true that like Christina in the famous Wyeth painting we all stretch towards a horizon, then perhaps it is also true that the world has always already reached out to us (indeed, in us). The world comes to us primarily in images, sounds, and smells that disclose underlying and infinite possibilities. A more formal way of saying this is that Being is given to us in particular forms of being and particular realizations of those forms. Being is given as the species dog and as this particular dog, Sophie. Only through meeting Sophie, and others like her, does the human being encounter the dog species/nature and hence one of the gifts of Being. But by no means do we say that this dog is the only possibility inherent to dog-nature. Rather, Sophie points us to other dogs and other possibilities that reflect the abundance and surprising nature of Being. The number of possibilities increases as a species is capable of greater individualization and self-consciousness. Moreover, Being seems to have a drive—a "desire"—to express itself and be known somewhat like human beings do. This may sound odd, but if we think that we are not entirely different from the animal kingdom and the world around us, then it should not be so difficult to imagine that the human desire for communion is not absent in an analogical sense from the rest of Being. Indeed, in being known, Being comes to the fulfillment at its heart. Yet being known is never a static reality; knowing a particular thing is to know how the abundance of Being gives itself and that Being is gift. Knowing the abundance of Being as gift is to always point to the inexhaustible riches that can surprise and overwhelm the knower—Being is mystery in its very giving of itself for knowledge. Being is mystery as surplus.

Agape (objectively): If human beings serve the world through knowledge and will, it is also the case that the world makes possible genuine human being as service. In other words, without a world that gives itself to and for human knowledge, the human *eros* towards communication and communion would be left without a partner. *Agape*, here, also speaks to the indifference of Being in its giving. Being in its variety, color, majesty, and in its smallest, most seemingly prosaic details gives itself to the poor and rich, the just and unjust, the petty and the magnanimous. Being gives itself universally and without deference to the character or status of the beholder (whether it is beheld is a different story). The attempt to be indifferent to one's self or one's self-interest is likewise the call of the intellectual in her act of knowing. One first tries to bring to light whatever presents itself in all its dimensions, just as one tries to do justice to the position of an interlocutor. Everything else is ideology and ego.

#### *Disciplinary Intercourse:*

What does all this have to do with inter-disciplinary study and its possibility? Inter-disciplinary study involves the presupposition that the disciplines should not be reduced to one über-discipline, and that no one discipline, alike to the others, can provide the conditions for inter-disciplinary study. Rather, I am suggesting, it is the nature of Being and



the nature of being human wrapped up in the forms of love as desire and service that makes inter-disciplinary study both possible and desirable. In this sense, all the disciplines should view themselves as naturally opening onto a broader and more expansive web of Being than all the disciplines, let alone any one, can ever account for. Moreover, if the human being is a form of *erotic* openness and *agapaic* service in its very core, then it will be inclined to ask questions—provided something does not block this—that transcend the ability of their particular discipline and sends them screaming into the opening that they share with all the other disciplines, the opening into the depths. The sociologist, after all, is not merely a sociologist, but also a human person concerned with issues of psychological health and economic viability. The theologian might ask why there is evil in the world in a general sense, but this question will always also direct him to particular forms of economic, geo-political, and social evil occurring in history. It is the excess of Being and the nature of human being, then, that justifies forays outside our chosen disciplines and justifies a plurality of disciplines, which is to say, conversely, that a reduction to one discipline would be to betray the various ways in which Being can and should be known.<sup>6</sup>

We can finish with two observations: first, in our discussion at least, knowing is inherently tied to love and service. Outside of this, knowledge itself can turn demonic. Second, this relation of knowledge and love only makes sense insofar as Being itself is viewed as a gift, as an intelligible and valuable reality that is worth loving. This means, then, that at root intellectual intercourse properly rests upon an approach more fundamental than any blank curiosity: it rests on gratitude.

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<sup>1</sup> In this atmosphere, proponents of a more unified curriculum decry the fragmentation of knowledge, the demise of a pedagogical *telos* or purpose for education, the severing of any but the most superficial of links—be sure to take that ethics course!—between college education and a well-lived life, and the painful lack of basic knowledge or cultural literacy students can claim after spending an absurd amount of money on their education. All of this lends credence to the not necessarily Marxist feeling that education merely serves to marry up and off members of various classes and prepare young people for their rightful place in the world of cubicles, sports radio, manicured lawns, and piles of bills—in short, a life of quiet misery. Arguments against inter-disciplinary classes often focus on the lack of expertise this implies, coupled again to issues of educational larceny. After all, it seems unreasonable or worse to present a student who pays \$25,000 per year with a course taught by a non-expert. An argument for inter-disciplinary courses can hardly be an argument for ignorance or theft. Other “arguments against” involve more practical matters such as tenure requirements and time to publish in one’s field—say, linguistics—while trying to learn Dante for Signature Course 1. A longer piece would need to address these issues.

<sup>2</sup> Philosophy emerges as a spiritual corrective or purification of myth, and myth will rebel and try to swallow philosophy; sociology, at least in its Comtean and Marxist forms, has little truck with theology or psychology. Philosophy and poetry knock heads again in the modern Enlightenment versus Romanticism

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flare ups. Each discipline or discourse either contests its opponents ability to say something cogent about reality or relegates them to a superstructure or epiphenomenal role in some larger system.

<sup>3</sup> Claims, for instance, that evolutionary biology fully explains human behavior (E.O. Wilson), that sociology “really” explains human beings as opposed to psychology, that all human endeavors stand on a base of economic structures and everything else is superstructure (Marx, and the recent book, Freakonomics) each marginalize other disciplines or types of discourse in some form or another.

<sup>4</sup> I would also argue that this desire for communion emerges from a communion that is given prior or with the original desire. Thus communion is present in some early stage prior to individuation.

<sup>5</sup> I recall a student, writing on sex in marriage alone, in an exasperated tone, asking, “And what if it’s monogamous?” She of course meant “monotonous.” I didn’t feel a need to answer either question. Here we can observe a difference between *eros* and *agape*, and perhaps link the two as well. Eros springs from a need, whereas *agape* responds to a need. *Eros* moves a person beyond themselves so that they can acquire a world; *agape* then seeks to serve the world by giving itself (in intellect and will) over to it. Both are good; both are necessary.

<sup>6</sup> A more rigorous and lengthy treatment would need to discuss the different methods and their ways of approaching Being (i.e., history studies Being as it is known in terms of time).

## Signature Course Three Seminars- Response Paper

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Attending the signature course three seminars was a satisfying and highly instructive experience for me. I was able to meet and enjoy dialogue with faculty members from many other disciplines within the University. Hearing others' points of view and perspectives on the aims of Catholic education as well as how this can be accomplished within the various disciplines allowed me to observe the breadth of intellectual and practical creativity exemplified by the diverse body of faculty members who attended. As a Jewish woman (albeit one who is rather familiar with the basic teachings of the Catholic church,) I learned more deeply about the Catholic intellectual point of view and how this can be best translated into the basic education of all Seton Hall University undergraduate students. I came away with the view that our aim in developing the third signature course is to teach students how Catholic intellectual tradition can inform their learning within any particular academic discipline along with the mandate to help students discover how their own particular area of specialization can be experienced as engaged in reaching out to human wholeness. We would also strive toward helping students access a personal (and, in my view, transformational) sense of G-d as collaborator in their intellectual development.

However, I must say that my strongest impression of the entire experience was witnessing and being a part of a faculty group that conveyed a deep dedication to the intellectual growth of our students within the Catholic tradition. The group process itself felt somewhat like a religious experience. I could feel the University's mission and philosophy come alive in the values and thinking expressed by seminar participants (something one often doesn't feel so closely in our day-to-day activities!) I felt deeply moved by the degree of commitment and spirituality expressed within the group and by our facilitator, John.

In nursing we are educating students for practice where they will necessarily come in daily contact with important questions about human existence. Nursing practice touches the full range of human thought, belief and experience. Our students will be called upon to deal directly with life, health and illness, dying and death. Students need to be able to confront and share the deeply personal and emotional issues people face as they deal with difficult medical diagnoses, pain, suffering and care choices that are often hard for patients to process. Nurses are directly involved with issues of sexuality and reproduction, suicide, euthanasia and genetic engineering as well as the full range of emotional struggles people go through as they cope with health issues, including anger, shame, self-loathing, guilt over sin, concerns about forgiveness and redemption, anger at G-d and loss of faith.

It is clear that Catholic intellectual and religious teachings, directly focused as they are on all of these elements of our work, have much to offer nurses as they develop their identity as caretakers and learn appropriate responses to patient need. All student nurses

need to clarify and develop a clear sense of personal belief and values in relation to their practice. Additionally, nurses need to learn the ways in which a strong religious perspective can be developed and maintained as a consistent patient-centered identity and a firm humanistic approach to our work in the face of today's health care climate, which is too often impersonal and income-driven.

In my experience in nursing education, I find that students often fail to make the connection between how content learned in various support courses may be integrated into learning the nursing process. Also, although most students may have had a basic religious education (Catholic or otherwise), I often find it surprising that so many of them start out not thinking too deeply about how religious teachings do and should inform our work. I believe that it is critical that students learn and fully understand that religious teachings can and do inform the very heart of nursing practice.

Therefore, students need to integrate the intellectual skills that will enable them to critically examine health care issues in the light of religious thought for application throughout their career. In a Catholic institution such as Seton Hall University, it is appropriate and expectable that all nursing students leave with a firm ability to understand how Catholic religious teachings inform health care. Obviously, in nursing it is also important that students learn and respect other religious and cultural traditions as well. While educated in a foundation of Catholic religious belief, they need to be able to compare and critique a range of other belief systems. The third signature course in nursing will provide the opportunity for students to gain this important knowledge and skills. It will help them translate the information they learned about the Catholic intellectual and religious tradition in the first two signature courses into outcomes consisting of a) nursing identity development, b) informed, appropriate responses to patient need c) developing a coherent value system, informed by Catholic intellectual tradition, regarding major health care issues of our time.

Listening to other seminar participants' discussion about how they might develop courses within their particular disciplines, I was able to mentally sketch out how our course might look. I envision various sections of the course, each covering an important health care topic that requires application of religious dialogue and understanding, emphasizing the Catholic intellectual perspective. For example, the course might include such topics as a) death and dying, b) pain and suffering, c) health care controversies such as suicide, euthanasia, family and reproductive planning, d) spirituality in health and illness, e) culture in health and illness, f) abuse (domestic, elder, child, etc). Teaching methods could include some lecture, much discussion over case studies and clinical vignettes illustrating various issues within the topics, role-playing to help students learn interactive skills with patients to help them "live" the situations under discussion, use of journaling to help students process their own feelings and value-development in relation to the topics and religious teachings as well as aid in their own spiritual development and readings and other assignments that will help clarify and aid discussion about the relation of Catholic and other religious traditions to the issue of health care. Class discussion that will help students examine and clarify their own spiritual beliefs and values will be emphasized, especially as they relate (or possibly don't relate) to Catholic teachings.

We will submit an outline by summer's end and will work in committee to fully develop our third signature course. Attending the seminars was exceedingly helpful in directing our efforts and I am pleased to have had the opportunity to do so.

## **Core Curriculum Seminar on the Third Signature Course**

Judith Chelius Stark, Ph.D.

*Department of Philosophy*

The core curriculum seminar on the third Signature Course provided us faculty with a wonderful and fruitful opportunity to discuss and debate many of the fundamental questions that, undoubtedly, will come to be included in a variety of ways in these courses themselves. Like any good seminar leader, John Haughey S.J. proposed many provocative questions for us to consider without finessing or forcing any preconceived results. In these ways, he provided us with the opportunity to engage and challenge each other as we worked out some preliminary ideas about how we might begin to construct proposals for the third Signature Course for the new university core curriculum. Since we had the opportunity to discuss these ideas outside the ordinary contexts of meetings for the usual business of departments and the college, we were able to engage in frank and open discussions about the intersections of religious faith and the methodologies of our own disciplines. This process is both fraught and fruitful in my discipline of philosophy.

The fact that this seminar included colleagues from a number of disciplines, including some outside the humanities and social sciences, made the exchanges that much more valuable and enriching. Without minimizing our differences or reaching for superficial and inadequate commonalities, I believe that we were able to listen, appreciate and disagree in ways that often are neither sought out or valued sufficiently among us faculty. In fact, I think the seminar mirrored and expressed some of the best qualities of informed, critical, and appreciative academic discourse that stands at the heart of university life. While engaging in this conversation among ourselves on these topics of the Catholic intellectual tradition, broadly understood, we set ourselves the task of continuing this conversation and of inviting our students to join us in the courses we may develop for the core curriculum.

As a result of participating in the seminar, I began to think more deeply about three areas in particular: first, the qualities of mind and heart that enhance the academic conversation; second, the relationship between my discipline of philosophy and the Catholic intellectual tradition; and third, the course that I plan to develop on philosophy and social justice for the third Signature course.

### **The Academic Conversation**

Since our academic project is cooperative and communal, as well as individual and solitary, I pondered the qualities that would enhance effective communication in the academic conversation. Although these may seem very obvious, I wondered how much explicit notice we gave them in the teaching-learning process by calling attention to them in the classroom--openness, attentive listening, self-criticism, and mindful speech. We expect our students to be open to new knowledge, information, and ways of organizing and examining knowledge in methodical ways, but how open are we faculty to having our habits of mind and pre-suppositions challenged? Are we open to being persuaded to abandon some of our cherished notions and to change our minds? How well do we actively listen and encourage our students to do likewise, and not just rush into the gap of the conversation

with the next point we want to make? With the airwaves and cyberspace abuzz with blogs, chatter, and “chat rooms”, how well equipped are we to distinguish among those claims and conversations that are worth listening to? Self-criticism involves both inner-directed awareness and outer-directed gathering of information and knowledge. How do we create coherent and consistent views that are rigorous, well-examined, and also open to revision when necessary? Finally, in our responses to others in the conversation, are we mindful and careful in our speech, choosing and using our words to advance the communal search for greater understanding and truth, and not simply for display or scoring debating points?

### **Catholic Intellectual Tradition**

Within the first few centuries of Christianity, the early church fathers began using philosophical concepts and principles in the task of “faith seeking understanding.” Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.) was one of the major architects of the grand synthesis of Christianity and Neoplatonism that held sway for almost a millennium in the western tradition. In fact, the Catholic intellectual tradition **is intellectual** precisely to the extent to which these early authors used philosophical methods as ways to understand and explore the meanings and implications of their religious faith. The creation of this synthesis was not without its critics and detractors, for example witness Tertullian’s reposte: “What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?” Nevertheless, the works of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas (among many others) attest to the conjunction of philosophy and theology that has come to inform the Christian tradition to this day. With the rise of modern science and modernity itself, philosophy and many other disciplines no longer serve as “handmaidens to theology,” but the questions posed within the Catholic intellectual tradition continue to rely on the clarity and cogency of philosophical methods. Tracing and exploring this on-going relationship between contemporary philosophy and the Catholic intellectual tradition, especially in the light of the crises of modernity and the loss of “easy faith” (Bonhoeffer) would itself constitute a fruitful enterprise for the third Signature course. However, it is not the one that I would develop at this point (I think one of my colleagues in the department may be interested to propose this topic). The one that I am interested to propose is briefly described below.

### **Philosophy and Social Justice**

From its inception, a strong component of the Catholic intellectual tradition, broadly understood, has been its concern for social justice and the on-going tensions between the imperatives of the Gospel and the claims of the dominant culture. Ever since Jesus first uttered his famous line “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s,” Christian followers have been working out how to live “in the world, but not of the world.” This is not the kind of issue that can be solved once and for all, as Augustine himself realized when he wrote his masterpiece *The City of God* in which he rendered the claims of ultimacy of both imperial Rome and triumphalist Constantinian Christianity equally suspect. The course I will work on would look at the roots of Augustine’s critique of these claims and his development of a Christian philosophy of history as the foundation for exploring the principles and concerns of social justice in the contemporary world, including, for example, papal documents, documents of the Second Vatican Council, American Catholic bishops’ pastoral letters, writings of authors like Karl Rahner, Thomas Merton, and Dorothy Day.

By developing this course, I hope to invite students into the excitement and vitality of the academic conversation by engaging their minds and hearts in studying the contributions of the best of the Catholic intellectual tradition, especially as it has been put to the test in the contemporary world.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to discuss the many issues that were raised during the seminar and especially thankful for the thoughtful and wise words of our seminar leader, Rev. John Haughey. I look forward to continuing these conversations as we move into the full implementation of the core curriculum in the next few years.



## Reflections on “Developing the Third Signature Course”

Yvonne Unna  
*Department of Philosophy*

The question that struck me most during our conversation was John Haughey’s simple question “What are we going to do about the mess we are in?” which he raised in the context of our brief excursion to the topic of salvation. It seems to me that this question can be understood as entailing, in a nutshell, all those questions that could serve as a blueprint for the design of a third signature course. Let me explain this.

One line of interpretation of the question could run as follows: The mess “we are in” is not a fictional mess. It is a real mess, otherwise we would not “be in it” (I am excluding Anthony’s “certifiably insane” aunt). Since the “we” refers to all those who grapple with this question in one way or another, in other words to those who regard themselves as being addressed by the question, the mess is a problem common to “us”. Furthermore, since “we” are in a mess, we are not alone in it but face it together. And finally, since we are together in a real mess, facing a problem common to us, we have to decide what it is we want to do about it.

Though we were asked to write the response to the work shop from the perspective of our “own discipline,” I have chosen to provide a personal response as a student and teacher of philosophy not as a representative of the discipline which is simply too vast a field.

As a Kantian, I am very much influenced by Kant’s call to practice and authenticity. In his lecture on “*Philosophische Enzyklopädie*” Kant recounts Plato’s admonishment of an old man who told him that he had listened to his lectures on virtue. According to Kant, Plato asked the man: “When will you begin to live a virtuous life?” Commenting on Plato’s response, Kant stresses that “one should not always speculate” but always put the results of this speculation into practice. However, most philosophical prescriptions of how one ought to live are unbearable to listen to laments Kant, because “they do not show us any means” of how to fulfill them. (AA 29.1,1: 12, 8).

I am mentioning this passage because I see the third signature course as an opportunity to discuss the means employed by philosophers and Catholic thinkers alike to help us live a good life. The tentative title of this course is “Philosophy and Therapy.” For the purpose of this particular course, the key questions outlined above, would provide the following road map: Given our imperfections as human beings and their often horrific consequences (“the mess we are in”) how can we (meaning all those who are concerned about this question) go about improving ourselves.

One major focus of the course would be the literature on spiritual exercises (Ignatius of Loyola, Stoics, Epicureans). Spiritual exercises can be understood as therapeutic devices aimed at the improvement of the self for the purpose of living a moral life. Pierre Hadot, for

example, in his book *Philosophy as a Way of Life* stresses that the rich tradition of spiritual exercises of Greco-Roman antiquity can be put to use in the twenty first century. Hadot claims that Ignatius of Loyola's *Exercitia Spiritualia* simply constitute a Christian version of this Greco –Roman tradition, a claim that has to be scrutinized.

Even though the guidelines for creating a Signature III course ask that the course should focus on the dialogue between the Catholic intellectual tradition and the respective discipline, other religious traditions may also be covered. It would be contrary to the spirit of the guiding question, if in answering the question of this particular human problem we would not enter into a dialogue with all those, who because they ask and attempt to answer the same question are included in the “we.” I certainly would like to engage other religions such as Judaism (here come to mind, for example, the *Therapeutae* a group of Jewish ascetics described by Philo in *De vita contemplativa*) and would appreciate it very much, if you would let me know of any relevant texts from other religious traditions.

This course, as I envision it, develops themes from Signature Courses I and II as required by the guidelines. The idea of self-knowledge for the purpose of self-improvement is the focal point of Plato's *Apology* read in Signature I. The connection between faith (religion) and reason (philosophy) that provides the horizon for the course I propose to teach is considered in Signature II.

Let me end these brief reflections by thanking all of you for two enjoyable and enlightening mornings. It was a great opportunity to meet those of you I never had a chance of meeting before and I sincerely hope that we will be able to continue our interdisciplinary exchange of ideas in the future.

## “Give us ‘understanding’ of our understanding”

Gisela Webb

*Department of Religious Studies*

I have never experienced a faculty retreat facilitated by John Haughey that was not an opportunity for great camaraderie as well as intellectual and spiritual growth. I am forever grateful for these opportunities.

I came to the CORE III workshop with an idea for a course that would reflect an aspect of the Catholic intellectual tradition that has been critically important to me, and that is “Interreligious Dialogue,” an enterprise that had its modern academic roots in the era of a post- Vatican II, post-Holocaust commitment to seek understanding of “self and other” in a commitment to human knowing and justice in the face of historical ignorance, chauvinisms and violence toward the projected “other.” I was fortunate to have been a graduate student in Temple University’s Religion Department during the 1980’s when the likes of Gerard Sloyan, Leonard Swidler, (Catholics), Zalman Schachter (Jewish), and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Muslim), Bibhuti Yadav (Hinduism/Buddhism), John Raines and Thomas Dean (students of Niebuhr and Tillich), were teaching courses in their own disciplines while organizing public seminars with History of Religion/Comparative religion scholars such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Hans Kung, and others. That era of “Interreligious Dialogue” did not bring the political progress its participants may have hoped for, and, in fact, the project has waned. Indeed there are many reasons that might have led to this stagnancy: perhaps the inability of academic ‘dialogue’ on Israel/Palestine to effect sufficient on-ground progress in the long Israeli/Palestinian crisis; perhaps the glaring omission of women’s voice in early institutionally based ‘dialogue’ for a needed to be addressed. Sadly, the last two decades have seen a rise of Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Hindu fundamentalisms of various sorts.

My sense is that it is time to revamp what a course in Interreligious Dialogue could and should be in this era, particularly *here* in a Catholic institution in the middle of the global hub of cultural, racial, and religious diversity of the Newark-New York area. I have experimented with an Interreligious Dialogue course in two different venues, one with undergraduates at Seton Hall (junior level honors students, mostly Catholic), the other with graduate students in Indonesia’s Gadjah Mada University (mostly Muslim, but also Protestants, Catholics, and Hindus). What seemed to work , and what I would propose for this third core course in Religious Studies at Seton Hall-- is one that begins with Comparative Religions/Phenomenology readings (a comparative theologies model) so that students can see philosophers’, theologians’, and social scientists’ perspectives on the common structures that religion—the human quest for meaning—seems to take. We would look at primary sources in religions to see the narratives that inform constructions (theological, philosophical, ethical, social) –and their development of interpretations over time. (I know I would want to do a serious comparative mysticism section, especially Christian and Muslim developments). Finally, a contemporary interreligious dialogue would need to look at on-ground social, economic, and environmental ills, and utilize comparative ethics and social justice commitment to see how the our global community can find ways to work together across religious lines.

Moreover, I think there is an obvious service learning component to this course in terms of investigation of /creation of /participation in on-ground dialogues, interfaith/inter-ideological/ discussions on a range of issues, as they arise, and community programs related to political, racial, social, economic, environmental justice. (David Burrell from Tantur Ecumenical Center ‘just outside Jerusalem on the way to Bethlehem’ has spoken to us of the Jewish/Christian/Muslim work done—both theoretical and on-ground—toward resolving terrible long-standing and new problems in Israel/Palestine. There are several interfaith service organizations wanting to link not only at a theological level, but at the level of praxis. My course in Indonesia, the questions of religious truth/orthodoxies/praxis led to requests for “special topics dialogues” to discuss *intra*-religious issues, for example ethical questions involved in ‘conversion’ goals and tactics of Christians, and issues of gender and sexual orientation within their traditions, proper (ethical, humane) ministry to poor. Catholics and Muslims (from Java to Papua) together formed sex education groups for the poor, especially geared toward the causes of prostitution. The development of such a course has a legacy in the Religious Studies Department, with Father Jack Radano being asked to go to Rome in the 1980’s to set up actual interreligious dialogues among and within traditions (Christian-Jewish, Christian-Muslim) at the Vatican. We can continue that legacy of our department, serving students across disciplines.

*INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: Theories/Practices*  
 “BEYOND HEAVEN OR HELL, IN OR OUT, TRUE OR FALSE”  
 CORE III Course 2008    Instructor: Dr. Gisela Webb

Considering theologian Hans Kung’s claim that there can be ‘no global peace without peace among religions’, in this course we will look at---and participate in-- the phenomenon of inter-religious dialogue, seeking answers to such questions as: *What is the nature of religious language, experience, and truth claims? Are there common structures or core beliefs that all religions share? Do all religions share a ‘mystical’ core that could bridge the divide among religions? How is inter-religious dialogue used today in service of common social justice mandates across religions, such as economic justice, ecological care, women’s rights, and peace?*

Readings include selected texts representing comparative religionists, theologians, and human rights activists on inter-religious dialogue. ( E.g., William James, Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade, Wilfred Cantwell Smith John Paul II, Hans Kung, DuWei-Ming, , Bernard Lonergan, Paul Knitter, Farid Esack, Zalman Schachter, Paul Tillich, Hisamatsu, Maseo Abe, Seyyed Hossein Nasr,) as well as primary texts several religious traditions.