

Dostoevsky, God, and The Devil
English 710/Fall 2009
Nursing Ed 221/Wednesdays: 6:00-9:00

Dr. Duke Pesta
210 Radford Hall
Office Hours: MW: 11:30-1:00; W: 5:00-6:00

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Course Objectives

English 710 is a graduate seminar offering students an intensive intellectual experience in reading, writing, and research. Our subject—Dostoevsky, God, and The Devil—considers the writings of Fyodor Dostoevsky, Russian novelist and philosopher of the human soul, against the backdrop of Western European Intellectualism in the nineteenth century. Specifically, Dostoevsky opposed the Europeanization of Russia, and stood athwart the philosophical imperatives of Rational Liberalism and Marxism, two dominant ideologies of his time that sought to subsume Russian thought and history to the secular humanist aims of European liberal philosophy. Championing a broader Christian and historical understanding of human nature based on the soul, Dostoevsky rejected the thinking of intellectuals like Marx and Nietzsche as hopelessly out of touch with the essential verities of the human condition. Shaped by his own terrifying childhood experiences and a horrific jail term in Siberia, Dostoevsky came to understand that suffering and doubt constitute the necessary precursors to any meaningful faith in God. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky's greatest work, he provides the most compelling reasons ever assembled why God cannot exist, and then demolishes them one by one, offering instead a profound affirmation of God and the human spirit.

Required Texts

Crime and Punishment, Vintage Classics (Pevear and Volokhonsky, translators)
The Brothers Karamazov, FSG Publishing (Pevear and Volokhonsky, translators)
Liberty and Tyranny, by Mark Levin (Simon & Schuster/Threshold Editions)

Note: We will be reading these works in translation. Due to the subjective nature of translation, it is essential that you have the specific editions listed above.

Grading

10% Reading Evaluation
20% Take Home Essay Exam
20% Comparative Essay

15% Draft of Research Paper
35% Final Research Paper

Grading Scale

100-93 A; 92-90 A-; 89-88 B+; 87-83 B; 82-80 B-; 79-78 C+; 77-73 C; 72-70 C-; 69-68 D+; 67-63 D; 62-60 D-; 59-0 F

Term Research Paper

Each student will write one critical essay approximately 5000 words long (about 20 typed, double-spaced pages) on some dimension, problem, or theory found in one or several of the works studied during the semester. While the topic will be of the student's choosing, the instructor will be happy to discuss possible topics or facilitate in any way. A thorough knowledge of the secondary material should be evident in the background of the paper, but secondary material should not take the place of the student's own original critical thinking. The goal is to produce a paper of publishable quality, and those papers that best fulfill this objective will receive the best grades.

This paper will be completed in two phases. A preliminary draft of the paper will be submitted on Wednesday, 2 December. This version will be given a grade based on the originality and cogency of its ideas, its careful reading of the work or works under consideration, the clarity and precision of its expression, and its correct use of secondary sources. It is advisable to consult with the instructor before submitting this draft. This version will be graded and returned the following week. The purpose of this process is to encourage students to write a paper that does more than simply fulfill a class requirement. If done well, this paper could be suitable for submission to a journal, a conference, or for one of our departmental prizes. The finished essay will be due on Wednesday, 16 December.

Disability Policy

If you have a disability or need special accommodation of any nature whatsoever, I will work with you—in conjunction with the proper university office—to provide reasonable assistance in order to ensure you a fair opportunity to perform in this class. Once you have registered your disability with the proper university office, advise me of the disability and the desired accommodation as soon as possible after the commencement of the semester.

Readings

September

W/9 Introduction

W/16 Read Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* pages 3-117. Read also *Liberty and Tyranny* Chapters 1 and 2.

W/23 Read *Crime and Punishment* pages 117-235. Read also *Liberty and Tyranny* Chapters 3 and 4.

W/30 Read *Crime and Punishment* pages 236-350. Read also *Liberty and Tyranny* Chapters 5 and 6.

October

W/7 Read *Crime and Punishment* pages 350-462. Read also *Liberty and Tyranny* Chapters 7 and 8.

W/14 Read *Crime and Punishment* pages 462-551. Read also *Liberty and Tyranny* Chapter 9, 10, and Epilogue. Take Home Exam Assigned.

W/21 Read *The Brothers Karamazov* pages 3-100.

W/28 Read *The Brothers Karamazov* pages 100-203.

November

W/4 Read *The Brothers Karamazov* pages 203-282.
Comparative Essay Due

W/11 Read *The Brothers Karamazov* pages 283-390.

W/18 Read *The Brothers Karamazov* pages 390-499.

W/25 Thanksgiving Break

December

W/2 Read *The Brothers Karamazov* pages 500-603.
Research Paper Draft Due

W/9 Read *The Brothers Karamazov* pages 603-706.

W/16 Read *The Brothers Karamazov* pages 706-776.
Final Research Paper Due