Dostoevsky
and
The Problem of Evil

Introduced to the English-speaking world as “the Shakespeare of the Madhouse,” Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) was the first writer to discover and plumb the depths of the individual.
In Dostoevsky's world, this individual not only coped with age-old evils of pain, death, oppression and injustice, but with those peculiar to the urban milieu in a swiftly modernizing Russia: atheism, nihilism, suicidal ennui, and alienation. Dostoevsky’s insights into the darkest recesses and basest impulses of the individual are unsurpassed. But his works are also characterized by the sharpest satire, the most exquisite paradox, raucous humor, and possibilities for uplift, transcendence, and redemption. In this course, we will situate Dostoevsky within the Russia of his times and its extraordinary literary culture.

**REQUIRED READINGS**

You should bring our novels to class every day, since it's much easier to be on the same page (literally) in a group discussion. Please do your best to get the following editions/translations.

*The Double and the Gambler* (Vintage Classics) Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky

- **ISBN-10**: 0375719016
- **ISBN-13**: 978-0375719011

[https://www.amazon.com/Double-Gambler-Vintage- Classics/dp/0375719016/ref=sr_1_1?crid=HSFD9KONAQLK&keywords=the+double+and+the+gambler&qid=1658756741&s=books&sprefix=The+Double+and+the+Gam%2Cstripbooks%2C84&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/Double-Gambler-Vintage-Classics/dp/0375719016/ref=sr_1_1?crid=HSFD9KONAQLK&keywords=the+double+and+the+gambler&qid=1658756741&s=books&sprefix=The+Double+and+the+Gam%2Cstripbooks%2C84&sr=1-1)

*Notes from the Underground* (Vintage Classics) Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky


[https://www.amazon.com/Crime-Punishment-Volokhonsky-Translation- Classics/dp/0679734503/ref=sr_1_1_sspa?crid=3QNO5UZU8I75&keywords=Crime+and+Punishment&qid=1658756913&s=books&sprefix=crime+and+punishment%2Cstripbooks%2C89&sr=1-1-spons&psc=1&spLa=ZW5jcnlwdGVkUXVhGlmaWVyPUEvVUdYNUNy82QidGRVY1JmVuY3J5cHRIZElkPUEwNzl2MTY4MzJNUKlKVjA4OUFSNiZlbnY5eXB0ZWRBZElkPUEwMjcyQTY2MkJFNF0NPVFhGNE1STCZ3aWRnZXROYW1IPXowX2F0ZiZhY3Rpb249Y2xpY2tSZWRpcmVjdCZkb05vdExvZ0NsaWNrPXrydWU=](https://www.amazon.com/Crime-Punishment-Volokhonsky-Translation-Classics/dp/0679734503/ref=sr_1_1_sspa?crid=3QNO5UZU8I75&keywords=Crime+and+Punishment&qid=1658756913&s=books&sprefix=crime+and+punishment%2Cstripbooks%2C89&sr=1-1-spons&psc=1&spLa=ZW5jcnlwdGVkUXVhGlmaWVyPUEvVUdYNUNy82QidGRVY1JmVuY3J5cHRIZElkPUEwNzl2MTY4MzJNUKlKVjA4OUFSNiZlbnY5eXB0ZWRBZElkPUEwMjcyQTY2MkJFNF0NPVFhGNE1STCZ3aWRnZXROYW1IPXowX2F0ZiZhY3Rpb249Y2xpY2tSZWRpcmVjdCZkb05vdExvZ0NsaWNrPXrydWU=)

Course Requirements:

Attendance and participation (15%) You should contribute heartily and thoughtfully. Consistent engagement and regular contribution to our discussion is imperative. Outstanding contribution (frequent, insightful, showing a thorough familiarity with the reading) will receive an A. Regular, thoughtful contribution to class discussion will receive an A-. Occasional meaningful contribution will receive a B+. Perfect attendance without contribution merits a B. Please talk to me if you don’t feel comfortable contributing in class so that we can devise another form of participation. I will update you on your classroom participation at mid-term and the end of the quarter.

Missing more than 2 classes without making up participation will negatively impact your participation grade. Please contact me for make-up opportunities in a timely manner.

Pro and Contra (15%)

Dostoevsky’s characters love to argue and often have diametrically opposed views on life’s most profound questions. You will sign up for one class discussions, where you will present and argue the “pro” and the “contra” of the assigned discussion question. Try to develop both sides with the strongest support from the text that you can muster. Your classmates will be assigned as interlocutors to probe and challenge the two positions.

Key terms from Dostoevsky’s context: (10%)

Choose one of the historical, political, or philosophical terms from the “Key Terms List” (terms range from “Napoleon” to “Nihilism” to “Utilitarianism”). Sign up for a term on the Google Doc and prepare a 5-7 minute presentation of your term in which you define it (what is it, when, importance) and its connection to Dostoevsky’s work.

Conceptual Assessment (15%)

An in-class assessment (midterm) of your understanding of the literary and historical key terms discussed in class and in our secondary readings. == 15%

Midterm Paper: Moral themes in Crime and Punishment and/or Notes from Underground due May 2 at 11:59pm (20%) 6-7 pages
Final Paper (25%) 8-10 pages Topics will be posted on Nov. 1.

Due Mon. Nov. 21 5pm on Canvas

READING SCHEDULE

Tues. Sept. 13 Welcome to the Underground!

In Class: Jonathan Haidt, “The Moral Roots of Liberals and Conservatives”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SOQduoLgRw

Discussion: What is evil? Where does morality come from? What constitutes morality? Is there a universal morality? What are the different moral bases of liberalism and conservatism?


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Thurs. Sept. 15 Dostoevsky's Russia

Read: Dostoevsky The Double Chaps 1-5

Recommended Reading: Nikolai Gogol, The Nose and The Overcoat

Pro and Contra Is Golyadkin funny? Is The Double tedious?

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Tues. Sept. 20

Read: The Double, Chaps 6-11

View: The Double (dir. Richard Ayoade, 2013, Canvas Media Gallery)

Pro and Contra: Is Ayoade’s version faithful to Dostoevsky’s novel? Does the double exist in reality or only in the consciousness of the hero?

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Thurs. Sept. 22
Read: *Notes from the Underground* Part I

**Pro and Contra:** Does the Underground Man believe in free will or doesn’t he? Is free will a good thing or a bad thing?

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**Tues. Sept. 27**

**Read** *Crime and Punishment* to page 86

**Pro and Contra** What is to blame for Raskolnikov’s crime, “environment/circumstances” or moral choice?

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**Thurs. Sept. 29**

**Read:** Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Hero and the Position of the Author with Regard to the Hero, in Dostoevsky's Art" from *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* pp. 47-57 (Canvas)

**Read:** *Crime and Punishment* to 193

**Pro and Contra:** Raskolnikov has definitely disproved that he is a “great man,” according to his own theory.

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**Tues. Oct. 4**

**Read:** *Crime and Punishment* to p. 278

**Recommended Reading:** Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Hero and the Position of the Author with Regard to the Hero, in Dostoevsky's Art" from *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* pp. 57-78 (Canvas)

**Pro and Contra** TBA

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**Thurs. Oct. 6**

**Read:** *Crime and Punishment* Part IV to p. 436
**Pro and Contra:** Does Raskolnikov regret what he has done?

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**Tues. Oct. 11**

**Finish the novel**

**Pro and Contra:** Who is the greater villain/sinner, Raskolnikov or Svidrigailov? Is the ending of the novel psychologically plausible?

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**Thurs. Oct. 13**

**Read:** *Brothers Karamazov* to p. 76

**Pro and Contra:** Is Fyodor Karamazov a harmless buffoon?

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**Tues. Oct. 18**

**Read: *Brothers Karamazov* to p. 160**

**Pro and Contra:** Is jealousy the source of conflict between Grushenka and Katerina?

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**Thurs. Oct. 20**

**Read: *Brothers K.* p. 246**

**Pro and Contra:** Can there be harmony if there is hell? Is Ivan right?

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**Tues. Oct. 25**

**Read: *Brothers K.* to p. 324**

**Pro and Contra:** Who has the best solution to the question to the problem of social conflict and injustice, the Grand Inquisitor or Zosima?

*Conceptual Assessment In-Class*
Thurs. Oct. 27

Read: *Brothers K.* to p. 416

Pro and Contra: TBA

Tues. Nov. 1

Read: *Brothers K.* to p. 512

Pro and Contra: Is Mitya guilty?

Thurs. Nov. 3

Read: *Brothers K.* to p. 598

Pro and Contra: Do the kids in the novel offer hope for the future?

Tues. Nov. 8

Read: *Brothers K.* to p. 655

Pro and Contra: Who is right, Smerdyakov or Ivan? Is Ivan’s devil a comedian or evil?

Thurs. Nov. 10

Read: *Brothers K.* to p. 748

Pro and Contra: Whose account comes closer to the truth, the prosecutor’s or the defense attorney’s?

Tue. Nov. 15 Dostoevsky's World Touches our Own

Finish the novel (to p. 776)
Course Policies

Our most important course policy is our classroom climate. Our learning and discussion MUST take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance. Everyone’s views are welcome and valued, and everyone must be prepared to subject their own and others’ views to careful and respectful scrutiny. This is the main task of our course.

ABSENCES and ILLNESS

You are expected to attend class, whether we meet in person or online. However, if you are feeling sick, stay home, get tested, and recover. If you have viral symptoms (cough, sneezing, sore throat) be considerate and wear a mask to class until you feel better or test negative. Even a non-Covid virus can make a person feel miserable and put a dent in the quarter, so do your part to keep everyone well.

LATE WORK POLICY

- Late work will not be accepted unless you contact me in advance or in the case of a serious and unforeseen situation. Work that is time-stamped LATE on CANVAS will not be considered late if it falls within 15 minutes of the due time. If illness or other adverse circumstances have affected your ability to manage your workload, please contact me so that we can work something out.
- Otherwise, LATE WORK is penalized one third of a letter grade for every 24-hour period that it is tardy (from A to A-, A- to B+ and so on)

PARTICIPATION

- Participation in our seminar is extremely important. If you miss more than 2 classes, it will impact your participation grade by 5%. Every successive missed class will result in another 5% deduction. Please contact me in order to make up missed participation.

HELP

* It is a sign of strength to reach out for help when you need it. Some help I am qualified to give, especially as it directly involves our course. Otherwise, I can guide you toward the best campus resources. Here are some of them.

- For additional help with writing and research, you will find resources at the Academic Skills Center [Links to an external site.], and the Writing Center [Links to an external site.].
- The academic environment at Dartmouth is challenging, our terms are intensive, and classes are not the only demanding part of your life. There are a number of resources available to you on campus to support your wellness, including your undergraduate
dean (https://students.dartmouth.edu/undergraduate-deans/Links to an external site.), Counseling and Human Development (https://students.dartmouth.edu/health-service/counseling/about/Links to an external site.), and the Student Wellness Center (https://students.dartmouth.edu/wellness-center/Links to an external site.). I encourage you to use these resources to take care of yourself throughout the term, and to come speak to me if you experience any difficulties.

- The Sexual Respect Website (https://sexual-respect.dartmouth.edu/Links to an external site.) at Dartmouth provides a wealth of information on your rights with regard to sexual respect and resources that are available to all in our community.
- Please note that, as a faculty member, I am obligated to share disclosures regarding conduct under Title IX with Dartmouth’s Title IX Coordinator. Confidential resources are also available, and include licensed medical or counseling professionals (e.g., a licensed psychologist), staff members of organizations recognized as rape crisis centers under state law (such as WISE), and ordained clergy (see https://dartgo.org/titleix_resources/Links to an external site.).

THE HONOR PRINCIPLE

- Your work must be your own, and you should take pride in it. You should also respect other’s work and give due credit by citing it. Please review Dartmouth’s Honor Code, and carefully cite your textual sources using MLA or Chicago Manual of Style.

https://students.dartmouth.edu/judicial-affairs/policy/academic-honor-principle/Links to an external site.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Together we will create a learning environment that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives and experiences, and honors your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.) To help accomplish this:

If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your official college records, please let me know.

If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please don’t hesitate to come and talk with me. I want to be a resource for you. Remember that you can also submit anonymous feedback (which will lead to me making a general announcement to the class, if necessary to address your concerns). If you prefer to speak with someone outside of the course, the Associate Dean of the College for Diversity Programs is an excellent resource.

COLLEGE POLICIES
Religious Observances

Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that occur during this academic term. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations.

Student Accessibility and Accommodations

Students requesting disability-related accommodations and services for this course are required to register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS; Getting Started with SAS webpage; student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu; 1-603-646-9900) and to request that an accommodation email be sent to me in advance of the need for an accommodation. Then, students should schedule a follow-up meeting with me to determine relevant details such as what role SAS or its Testing Center may play in accommodation implementation. This process works best for everyone when completed as early in the quarter as possible. If students have questions about whether they are eligible for accommodations or have concerns about the implementation of their accommodations, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential.

EVALUATION

Individual assignment descriptions and criteria for evaluation will be provided for each assignment under the ASSIGNMENT tab on CANVAS. My scale is based on the Dartmouth Scholarship Ratings and describes the quality of the student’s attainment and performance abstractly, without reference to specific qualities or accomplishments (“creativity,” “originality,” “analysis,” “critical expression”) that may or may not pertain to a level (introductory vs. advanced), mode (humanistic, scientific, etc.), or goals of a specific assignment.

A (94-100) Outstanding mastery of course material. Student performance is truly distinctive and demonstrates impressive mastery and accomplishment in all course work.

A-(93-90) Excellent grasp of course material. Student performance demonstrates a high level of understanding and competence in all course work.

B+ (89-86) Very good mastery of course material. Student performance and quality of work are competent and very satisfactory.

B (85-83) Good mastery of course material, with few exceptions.
The student displays a clear understanding of central concepts and fulfills all assignment/course requirements.

B-(82-80) Sufficient mastery of course material.

The student has completed all assignments and fulfilled course requirements, but the quality of work may be improved.

C+ (79-76) Mastery of material marginal.

Student displays gaps in performance and in adequate completion of assignments.

C (75-73) Mastery of material lacking.

Student has completed assignments, but has not met all the learning goals for the course.

C-/D (72-68) Student has not completed all assignments and/or course requirements.

Mastery of material and quality of work is deficient in a significant respect.

E (67 and below) Failed to master course material and fulfill course requirements.