

The Oregon Extension  
Fall 2017

3 credit hours

### Segment Four: What Does It Mean to Be Human?

**PURPOSE OF THE COURSE:** We devote this segment to reflecting on what it means to be human. We begin this under the guidance of Dostoevsky's masterpiece, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Each of the major characters in *BK* represents a fundamental orientation to life—in response to nature, society, oneself, and God. As the novel unfolds, Dostoevsky allows each main character opportunities to explain his/her view of the human condition, and as the plotlines evolve, he sketches out what kind of life arises from each view. We also spend time thinking about how the writing and reading of fiction can be understood as inherently moral exercises, and the role of fiction source material for assembling our understandings of what it means to be human. In the Independent Research half of the course students dwell on the question (what does it mean to be human?) drawing on additional perspectives—respected thinkers, movements, narratives—to fill out an answer to this question that rings true to their own experience.

### AIMS OF THE COURSE

- Focus our minds for a sustained time on what it means to be human
- Acquire an eye for how fiction aids us in seeing the moral shape of a human life
- Learn to distinguish within the craft of fiction writing the roles of author, narrator, character and plot as bearers of meaning in a story's assertions about what it means to be human
- Spend time with the problems of evil and creaturely suffering, the challenges these pose to efforts to find meaning in life, and various theodicies that have arisen to consider them in full
- Become familiar with religious efforts to understand the material world as symbol and sacrament
- Explore a specific thinker, movement, historical era, artistic style, or storytelling tradition on the question of what it means to be human

### COURSE TEXTS

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- 1) Book notes
- 2) One Idea paper (1)
- 3) Memo (1)
- 4) Attendance of daily lectures
- 5) Full participation in daily small group discussion
- 6) Research Project
  - a. Daily reading routine
  - b. Daily tutorial with advisor
  - c. Outline of Seminar Presentation
  - d. Presentation Handout *best* draft
  - e. Presentation Handout *final* draft
  - f. Seminar Presentation to student group

### EXPLANATION OF REQUIREMENTS

#### 1) Book notes

The *Brothers Karamazov* is a big novel. Notes should aim to achieve three things:

- a) Identify **characters** by name. You will find it hard in the first day's reading to sort out major characters from minor. Play it safe and record them all. As you get more comfortable in this *BK* world on the second day of reading, drop the minor characters from your notes. Use one note page for each major character (let's say there are 8 major characters). Record personality traits that distinguish them, throw in what strike you as quotes that are uniquely revealing about their character, and jot down a sentence and page # when it seems to you that their character is undergoing a pivot or change of course in the storyline. On a separate page or two write the names of minor characters, and secure them in your memory with a line or two about who they are and the part they play in the story (let's say there are 10-15 minor characters).
- b) As you are reading, spot five **themes/ideas** that you determine are important to Dostoevsky. They are important if he revisits them. They should be themes that have some gravitas. Use one note page for each

theme. Track each theme through the entire book. Provide brief quotes or text-based observations when you detect Dostoyevsky is offering development or new insight into the theme. Back these up with page numbers so that you can recover any lost trains of thought.

- c) On a single page (or two) make a running record of major **plot** developments. Don't write in elaborate sentences. Write in newspaper headlines, e.g., "Zosima bows down at Dmitri's feet and asks all to forgive him." "Alyosha leaves the monastery." "Grushenka attempts to seduce Alyosha, then regrets it and tells the story of the onion." Let one brief line like these cover 10-20 pages of the book. Remember: plot developments refer to actions, not ideas or settings.

Bring your notes to discussion every day. Mark up your books, underline, write comments in the margins, start an index of symbols (e.g., stinkiness, seeds, birds) or whatever catches your fancy on the blank page inside the back cover. Make this book yours.

## 2) **One Idea Paper (1)**

Isolate one major idea from the week's assigned readings, then write one page in which you describe and analyze the idea in your own words, but being as faithful as possible to the author's intent. Be prepared to read this to your Friday small group and handle questions and responses from the group.

## 3) **Memo (1)**

As in Segment One, memos are a more personal form of reflection. Write one page in which you share any important thoughts from the week's readings, lectures, or discussions. Be prepared to read this to your Friday small group and handle questions and responses from the group.

## 4) **Attendance at daily lectures.**

Absences must be excused.

## 5) **Full participation in daily small group discussion**

Absences must be excused. Come prepared with all reading completed and book notes in hand. Dive in.

## 6) **Research Project.** Identify a topic that falls within the open question: *What does it mean to be human?* As you did with your Segment Two research project, make it a topic that has been stirring your curiosity, maybe even keeping you up at night. You know a little about it, but not nearly enough. Your Moby Dick, your fuzzy mirage you've got to get a closer look at. With the help of OE professors, figure out how to investigate it in an academically focused way, keeping in mind that if you are seeking credit in a particular Area (e.g., Philosophy), you need to read what philosophers have to say about the topic.

- **Daily reading within focused topic and completion of reading notes.** While expectations will vary given the difficulty of individual texts, students are expected to read approximately 100 pages per day during their week of research. Students should maintain diligent note-taking habits, as this will ease the writing process.
- **Daily meetings with faculty advisor.** Students will work one-on-one with their individual faculty advisor to develop a reading list and then in tutorials to elaborate and clarify what they are learning through conversation. Students meet regularly with their advisor in order to prevent last-minute problems with the scope of the project or the availability of necessary research materials.
- **Outline of Seminar Presentation.** On the date identified on the course schedule, students will be required to turn in an Outline of the presentation they intend to give. Meet with your advisor about it. Be prepared to receive advice.
- **Presentation Handout best draft.** On the date identified on the course schedule, students will be required to turn in a "best draft" of a SINGLE PAGE Handout that will be distributed to all present in your Seminar Presentation. It could be a page of juicy quotes from authors you believe got it just right on the topic you researched. It could be a graphic diagram or a multi-layered cartoon that distills the essence of what you learned and that you can use in the Seminar as a mnemonic aid to teach your topic. Meet with your advisor and give it a trial run. Be receptive to advice for revision. You and your advisor may come to agree that a few powerpoint slides would be a better medium than a Handout. But this must be a mutual decision.
- **Presentation Outline and Handout final drafts.** Faculty will take approximately a day to read your Outline and best draft Handout. Incorporate guidance they will offer.
- **Seminar Presentation to student group.** Each student will have 60 minutes to lead a graduate-school-type seminar on his/her topic. The class will consist of 4-6 peers. Unlike the process in Segment Two, these peers will not have read in advance anything you've written about your topic. Even so, do not be tempted to write your presentation out word for word and read it. Work from the Outline and Handout you have prepared. Pass around your Handout. Teach it. Improvise on the run. Hold their interest. Leave plenty of time for questions and interaction. Try to get everyone present involved in a conversation about the one shiny thing about which you are now the resident expert. Let it go to your head.

## GRADING

### Grades will be assessed based on the following:

- Quality of book notes, One Idea paper, and discussion group participation
- Documented completion of all reading and book notes on time
- Completion of best draft Outline and Handout
- Active participation in one's own presentation and in other students' presentations
- Group evaluations of the final presentation, rating organization, clarity, and presenter confidence
- Self-evaluations, followed by faculty-student conferences, at the end of the segment

### Assessment will be performed according to the following guidelines:

- We reserve the **A** for the combination of consistently high *effort* and *achievement* displayed across the board in your written and spoken work during the segment. This means a well-presented and well-researched research project as well as a confident, coherent, and clear project presentation.
- **B** indicates high effort but less than high achievement; or moderate effort but (nonetheless) relatively high achievement.
- **C** indicates moderate effort at best and significantly less than high achievement.
- **D** indicates low effort and low achievement generally.

## SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

See Segment Four calendar.

## COURSE CREDIT

*Students will choose from among the following course offerings, tailoring the two-week research project to the necessary credit area. Each project will be an individualized course of study, including readings in and discussions with faculty about the relevant discipline.*

### **ART 398 – Artistic Perspectives on the Human Person**

An examination of selected aspects of the human person as interpreted by the work and/or thought of a major artist or artists.

### **BIST 398 – Biblical Perspectives on the Human Person**

An examination of the nature and meaning of the core issues of the human person by means of careful, detailed exegesis of selected, pertinent biblical texts.

### **COMM 398 – Critical Interpretations of the Human Person in the Media**

An examination of the production and reception of the human person in select digital and electronic media.

### **ENVS 398 – The Natural Sciences on the Human Person**

An examination of the historical and philosophical interactions between scientific theory and understandings of the human person.

### **HIST 398 – Historical Perspectives on the Human Person**

An examination of the human person in light of selected significant historical events and/or thinkers.

### **LIT 398 – Literary Perspectives on the Human Person**

An examination of the nature of religious faith and of the human religious phenomenon by reference to the works of selected literary figures or movements.

### **PHIL 398 – Philosophical Perspectives on the Human Person**

An examination of the human person as understood by selected philosophical thinkers or systems of thought.

### **PSYC 398 – Psychological Perspectives on the Human Person**

An examination of the human person as understood by selected psychological theorists or systems of thought.

### **REL 398 – Religious Perspectives on the Human Person**

An examination of the human person from the perspective of selected religious thinkers and traditions.

### **SOC 398 – Sociological Perspectives on the Human Person**

An examination of the human person in light of the study of human social behavior and social theory.

### **INST 398 OE – Directed Study**

An individualized course of study, examining a topic of critical interest to a student in an academic area not included in the What Does It Mean to Be Human? course listings. Topic will be approved by the student's academic advisor and the Oregon Extension faculty.