

Nihilism and the Death of God Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Freud

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Nietzsche held Dostoevsky in the highest regard, stating that he was “the only psychologist from whom I have anything to learn.” Freud, too, was a great admirer of Dostoevsky, calling *The Brothers Karamazov* “the greatest novel ever written.” This high praise is no surprise. Dostoevsky, just like Freud and Nietzsche, was singly obsessed with what he himself called life’s “accursed questions”: the existence of God, the question of immortality, and the issue of whether human existence has any ultimate meaning or purpose. Our first topic of inquiry, thus, will be Dostoevsky’s own portrayal and understanding of human psychology, the question of God, and life’s purpose. Having done so, we shall then in turn examine Nietzsche’s and Freud’s respective takes on the matter. In short, our goal is not only to understand each of these thinkers on his own terms, but to reconstruct his thought in a way that lets us put these three giants in productive dialogue with one another.

Further Details

- All the materials needed for this course are provided online.
- The course consists of 8 tutorial weeks, followed by 3 weeks dedicated to an examination essay (3,000 words).
- Weekly progress requires completing the reading assignments, submitting an essay, and meeting with the tutor.
- Final grades are awarded according to standard Woolf marking conventions (consult the Woolf Academic Handbook).

Programme Details:

Students on this course are provided with all the materials required to complete the course successfully. The course consists of four units, normally completed over four weeks, by arrangement with the tutor. Progress for each unit requires the student to complete the reading assignments, submit an essay, and meet with their tutor to discuss it.

This course is examined by long essay (3,000 words). Final grades are awarded according to standard Woolf marking conventions (consult the Woolf Academic Handbook).

Week One Readings:

1. Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*
2. Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time*
3. Jones, *Dostoevsky's Journey of Religious Discovery: A Biographical Introduction*

Week Two Readings:

1. Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*
2. DeLay, *Before God: Exercises in Subjectivity*

Week Three Readings:

1. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*
2. Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time*
3. St Mark the Ascetic, *The Philokalia*

Week Four Readings:

1. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*
2. Johae, *Towards an iconography of Crime and Punishment*
3. Russell, *Beyond the will: Humiliation as Christian necessity in Crime and Punishment*

Week Five Readings:

1. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*
2. Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion*

Week Six Readings

1. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*
2. Gemes, *Nietzsche's Critique of Truth*

Week Seven Readings:

1. Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*
2. Lear, *Freud*

Week Eight Readings:

1. Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*
2. DeLay, *Before God: Exercises in Subjectivity*