

The Brothers Karamazov:

Text and Context

Nancy Kanach and Victor Ripp

Course Information

Thursdays from 10:00 a.m.–noon for eight weeks beginning March 7 through April 25.

In-Person – Discussion – Maximum 20

Course Description

Good and evil, faith versus doubt, the power of family ties, the presence of evil in God's world – these ideas figure prominently in Fyodor Dostoevsky's last major work, *The Brothers Karamazov*. But this is a novel not a treatise; disputes about how to live a proper life and other “accursed questions,” (as Dostoevsky called them) are woven into a plot centered on a murder. *The Brothers Karamazov* is a whodunit that asks the philosophical question: why is the world as it is?

A close reading of *Brothers Karamazov* accompanied by class discussion will help us sort out these and other complexities. Selected passages will be designated in advance of each class meeting, allowing us to focus our attention.

But looking beyond the text is also useful. Dostoevsky's work has influenced thinkers and scholars in philosophy, psychology, and theology. Each week we'll offer some brief remarks on topics that bear on *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Course Schedule

Weeks	Topics
Week One	Critics' views of Dostoevsky
Week Two	Dostoevsky's Life & Works
Week Three	The Political Context
Week Four	Writing <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i>
Week Five	Freud on Dostoevsky
Week Six	Dostoevsky and Religion
Week Seven	Dostoevsky's Anti-Semitism
Week Eight	Summary

For the first class meeting, as an introduction to Dostoevsky's literary style and his intellectual perspective, we will read his novella *Notes from the Underground*.

Readings

To facilitate class discussion, it would help if we all referred to the same editions. You can get these books from either Labyrinth or Amazon.

Notes from the Underground (Vintage Classics), translated by Pevear & Volokhonsky

The Brothers Karamazov (Picador), translated by Pevear & Volokhonsky. This is the Bicentennial Edition.