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RUSS 2425, Spring 2019  
*Class meets:* Mondays: 2:30-5:25 pm  
*Classroom:* 237 Cathedral of Learning

\*Office Hours: Wed: 1:30-3:30 pm or by appointment, 1229B CL

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### **Philosophy and Literature: Western Thought and the Russian Dialogic Imagination**

This course is a study of the relationship between Western philosophy and Russian literature, specifically the many ways in which abstract philosophical ideas get ‘translated’ into literary works. Russia does not have world famous philosophers. We have Solovyev, Rozanov, and Berdyaev, but very few of our colleagues at philosophy departments in the United States would recognize them and fewer still would have anything to say about them. Yet, most Russian writers were avid readers of philosophy and are often considered philosophers in their own right. On what grounds can, for example, Dostoevsky, such a notorious opponent of “reason,” be considered a philosopher? “I am weak in philosophy,” Dostoevsky has written, “ but not weak in love for it; in loving it I am strong.” Dostoevsky weeps when he reads Hegel in Siberia. Can we find traces or consequences of this encounter in his texts? Or what happens when Tolstoy meticulously studies Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* or falls in love with Schopenhauer, while claiming that Hegel’s philosophy is both incomprehensible and ‘incredibly stupid’? How are these engagements reflected in his fiction? We will not be talking about intertextuality, but rather about philosophical dialogues in fictional texts that might not be immediately noticeable but are nonetheless crucial for the texts. From these dialogues we can derive and infer the author’s robust philosophical arguments, arguments that are both a part of the aesthetic structure and a partial reason for it.

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#### *Format:*

General background, themes, bulk of the week’s reading; presentations and discussion. Average 150-200 pages of reading per week, but can be more. Keeping up is all.

#### *Requirements:*

**The very small discussion prompt:** At least 5 times during the semester, each student submits via e-mail to juharyan@ a discussion prompt (no more than one paragraph) on some aspect of the reading. These are not to be lengthy “response papers” that develop arguments in detail, but questions that identify troublesome nodes, appealing or appalling ideas, an insight arrived at in your own processing of the material. Taken collectively and assessed together with oral contributions and class presentations, they comprise the midterm grade.

**No midterm exam**, but attendance and participation are everywhere noted and credited.

**Final paper**, 20-25 pages, on any aspect of the course, topic chosen by student, consultation with the instructor. Due electronically by May 15.

*Required texts:* Available at **the University Bookstore** under RUSS 2425 or on-line.

Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*

Ivan Goncharov, *Oblomov*

Leo Tolstoy, *On Life*

Vladimir Solovyov, *The Meaning of Love*

Edith W. Clowes, *The Revolution of Moral Consciousness: Nietzsche and Russian Literature*

George Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*

Mikhail Bakhtin, *Towards Philosophy of an Act*

Alyssa DeBlasio, *The End of Russian Philosophy*

*Sequence of readings and target dates for discussion:*

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## **I. The Period of Philosophical Remarks, the Philosophical Dark Age and the Emergence of Professional Philosophy**

Wk #1. Mon. Jan. 7: Introductions. **Philosophy and Literature.** Can we speak of ‘Russian’ philosophy?  
Gregory Skovoroda, “**Socrates in Russia**”  
“Leibniz and Peter the Great, and the Modernization of Russia or Adventures of a Philosopher-King in the East” by George Gale

Wk #2. Mon. Jan. 14: **Gregory Skovoroda**, “A Conversation Among Five Travelers Concerning Life’s True Happiness”  
**Alexander Radischev** [1749-1802], *A Journey from Saint Petersburg to Moscow*. “On Man, His Mortality and Immortality.”  
**Peter Chaadaev**, First Philosophical Letter; Philosophical Letters Addressed to a Lady [1829].

Wk #3. Mon. Jan. 28: **Schelling** and the Slavophiles  
**Hegel** and the Westernizers

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## **II. Literature as Philosophy? Russian Literature in Dialogue with Western Philosophy**

Wk #4. Mon. Feb. 4: **The Russian Plato:** Ivan Goncharov’s *Oblomov* [1859]. Part 1. ‘Determinate Negation’

Wk #5. Mon. Feb. 18: Ivan Goncharov’s *Oblomov*. Parts 2 and 3. Philosophy, Literature and Music. Hegelian Dialectical Structure.

Wk #6. Mon. Feb. 25: Ivan Goncharov’s *Oblomov*. Parts 4. Conclusions. Philosophy of Art and History. Vladimir Solovyov, *The Meaning of Love*

Wk #7. Mon. Mar. 4: Ivan Turgenev: **from Philosophy to Literature.** *Faust* [1856].

Spring Break: Mar. 10 —> Mar. 17

Wk #8. Mon. Mar. 18: **Tolstoy and Philosophy.** *On Life* [1887].  
**Dostoevsky and Philosophy.** “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man” [1877].  
“Lyrical Philosophy or How to Sing with a Mind” by Mikhail Epstein [2014].

Wk #9. Mon. Mar. 25: **Nietzsche in Russian Literature.** *The Revolution of Moral Consciousness: Nietzsche and Russian Literature* by Edith W. Clowes [1988].

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## **III. Theory, Practice, and the Politics of Russian Philosophy**

Wk #10. Mon. Apr. 1: **Lukács and Hegelian Aesthetics.**  
*The Theory of the Novel* by George Lukács [1914-15].

Wk #11. Mon. Apr. 8: **Bakhtin and German Idealism.** “Unity of Answerability” [1919].  
Bakhtin “Towards Philosophy of an Act” [1920s]. “Author and Hero” [1920s].

Wk #12. Mon. Apr. 15: **Russian Literature: Giving back to Philosophy.**  
Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* [1886].  
Heidegger’s Tolstoy. Selections from *Being and Time* [1926].

Wk #13. Mon. Apr. 22: **The End?** *The End of Russian Philosophy* by Alyssa DeBlasio [2014].  
“The Phoenix of Philosophy” by Mikhail Epstein [1996].