

**From Dostoevsky to Solzhenitsyn:  
Utopias and Anti-Utopias in Russian Intellectual History**

**HIS 304'**

**Instructor:** Martin Beisswenger

**E-mail:** mbeisswe@nd.edu

**Course outline:**

During the last two centuries, Russian thinkers and writers have been preoccupied with utopian visions about human life in modernity and about their country's place in the modern world. At the center of their searchings were questions such as: What is the human person? How can an ideal and just society be organized? What path of development should Russia take? Should it follow the example of Western Europe and the United States or is it a civilization of its own? Should the country be shaped according to the ideologies of liberalism, nationalism, socialism, or the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church? This course examines how famous Russian intellectuals tried to answer these questions. It focuses on key works by such Russian writers and thinkers as Nikolai Chernyshevskii, Fedor Dostoevsky, Aleksandr Bogdanov, Evgenii Zamiatin and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. The course will also explore how Russian intellectual discourses of the past shape and influence controversies about Russian politics and cultural identity in our own time.

**Course goals:**

Students should gain the ability to read complex texts, identify their key theses and problems, and contrast them with each other. They should be able to contextualize the discussed ideas and relate them to important political events, but also to assess their relevance for explaining present-day problems. Students should learn to develop and structure coherent arguments, present and discuss them both orally and in writing.

**Required Texts:**

Alexander Bogdanov. *Red Star: The First Bolshevik Utopia*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Nikolai Chernyshevsky. *What Is to Be Done?* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Fyodor Dostoevsky. *Notes from Underground*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Nicholas Riasanovsky and Mark Steinberg. *A History of Russia since 1855*. Volume 2. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Yevgeny Zamyatin. *We*. New York: Penguin, 1993.

Additional readings are available electronically on Concourse (<http://concourse.nd.edu>).

**Assignments and Exams:**

Students will be asked to make one short presentation in class, write two brief in-class response papers on the readings as well as a mid-term exam, a final exam and a major research paper (10-12 pages). The research paper should be based on the ideas of one thinker discussed in class and relate his ideas to those of another thinker, chosen by the student in consultation with the instructor.

**Attendance:**

This is a lecture and discussion course. You will be expected to have done the reading assignments and participate fully in the class discussions. Attendance is mandatory, and you must be on time and prepared. You can have two unexcused absences throughout the semester. More absences will lower your course grade **one-third letter grade** for each day absent. More than five unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for the course. Unexcused absences are all those absences not related to athletic service to the University or medical emergencies. Arriving more than 15 minutes late in class counts as an unexcused absence as well. It is your responsibility to make up missed work, or to meet with me to go over lectures or assignments that were covered while you were absent.

**Grades:**

Two short response papers:	10% (5% each)
Mid-term exam	20%
Final exam	20%
Participation	20%
Research Paper:	30%

**Academic Integrity:**

As in all university courses, students are bound by the university's Honor Code and should strive to maintain the personal integrity of their work at all times. In this class, any instances of major plagiarism on any assignment may result in a grade of "F" in the course and in referral to the University Honor Council. Plagiarism includes submitting a paper written or significantly revised by someone else, lifting ideas or words from sources without giving credit, quoting without the use of quotation marks, or any other borrowing of materials or writing skills without appropriate acknowledgement. Please come and see me if you are ever unclear about what constitutes plagiarism or how to avoid it. See also: <http://www.nd.edu/~hnr/code/index.htm>

**Disability Services:**

If you are a student with a disability and will need accommodations for this course, please register with Disability Services (<http://www.nd.edu/~osd/>). After you have discussed your accommodation needs with the Coordinator of Disability Services, please speak with me to make whatever arrangements may be necessary.

**Readings and Assignment Schedule:**

[please note that there might be some minor changes in the assigned readings each week, to be announced in advance]

**Week One:**

Jan 18<sup>th</sup> – Introduction to syllabus and course

Jan 20<sup>th</sup> – Introductory lecture: What is Russia? Geography, People and Religion  
Readings: Riasanovsky/Steinberg, Introduction

**Week Two:**

Jan 25<sup>th</sup> – Lecture: Transforming Russia: Chernyshevsky and his times  
Readings: Riasanovsky/Steinberg, chapters 29 and 33

Jan 27<sup>th</sup> – Discussion: Tales about New People  
Readings: Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?* pp. 39-59, 88-97, 114-119, 122-126, 129-131, 154-160, 170-202, 205-207, 213-214, 217-218, 233-249

**Week Three:**

Feb 1<sup>st</sup> – Discussion: Tales about New People (continued)  
Readings: Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?* pp. 259-264, 266-293, 328-330, 345-352, 354-380, 387-389, 408-445.

Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> – Lecture: Sacralizing Russia: F. Dostoevsky, V. Solov'ev and their times  
Readings: Riasanovsky/Steinberg, chapter 30 and Dostoevskii, *Notes from Underground* (part I)

**Week Four:**

Feb 8<sup>th</sup> – Discussion: The Underground Man and his World  
Readings: Dostoevskii, *Notes from Underground* (part II)

Feb 10<sup>th</sup> – Discussion: Russia's Pan-Humanity (Speech on Pushkin)  
Readings: Dostoevskii, *A Writer's Diary* II, pp.1271-1295 [on Concourse]

**Week Five:**

Feb 15<sup>th</sup> – Discussion: A Theocratic Vision  
Readings: Vladimir Solov'ev, "On the Christian State and Society."

Feb 17<sup>th</sup> – Lecture: Revolutionizing Russia: Lenin, Bogdanov and their times  
Readings: Riasanovsky/Steinberg, chapters 31, 32 and 35

**Week Six:**

Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> – Discussion: A Bolshevik Vision  
Readings: Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?* (excerpts) [on Concourse]

Feb 24<sup>th</sup> – Discussion: A Cosmic Vision  
Readings: Bogdanov, *Red Star* (parts I and II)

**Week Seven:**

Mar 1<sup>st</sup> - Discussion: A Cosmic Vision (continued)  
Readings: Bogdanov, *Red Star* (part III)

Mar 3<sup>rd</sup> – Lecture: Russian Revolution, Civil War and NEP  
Readings: Riasanovsky/Steinberg, chapters 34 and 36  
[research paper topic due]

**Week Eight:**

Mar 8<sup>th</sup> – Mid-term exam

Mar 10<sup>th</sup> – Discussion: Bolshevism in Theory and Practice  
Readings: Lenin, *State and Revolution* (excerpts) [on Concourse]

**Week Nine:**

Mar 15<sup>th</sup> and Mar 17<sup>th</sup> – No class (Mid-term break)

**Week Ten:**

Mar 22<sup>nd</sup> - Lecture: Post-Revolutionary Russia: Competing Visions and Soviet Reality  
Readings: Riasanovsky/Steinberg, chapters 37 and 41.

Mar 24<sup>th</sup> - Discussion: A Totalitarian Vision  
Readings: Zamiatin, *We*, pp. 3-103  
[research paper bibliography due]

**Week Eleven:**

Mar 29<sup>th</sup> – Discussion: A Totalitarian Vision (continued)  
Readings: Zamiatin, *We*, pp. 104-225

Mar 31<sup>st</sup> – Discussion: The émigré alternative? Eurasianism  
Readings: *Exodus to the East* (1921) (excerpts) [on Concourse]

**Week Twelve:**

Apr 5<sup>th</sup> – Lecture: Visions of Dissent: A. Sakharov, A. Solzhenitsyn and their time  
Readings: Riasanovsky/Steinberg, chapters 38, 39 and 40.

Apr 7<sup>th</sup> – Discussion: A dissident vision I  
Readings: A. Sakharov, *Progress, Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom* (1968)  
[on Concourse]

**Week Thirteen:**

Apr 12<sup>th</sup> – Discussion: A dissident vision II

Readings: A. Solzhenitsyn, Letter to the Soviet Leaders (1973) [on Concourse]  
[research paper first draft due]

Apr 14<sup>th</sup> – Lecture: Gorbachev's Perestroika and the Emergence of a New Russia

Readings: Riasanovsky/Steinberg, chapters 42 and 43 (pp.641-657)

**Week Fourteen:**

Apr 19<sup>th</sup> – Discussion: Perestroika, the World and the Future of Russia

Readings: Gorbachev, *Perestroika* (excerpts) [on Concourse]

Apr 21<sup>st</sup> – Discussion of movie *Urga (Close to Eden)* by Nikita Mikhalkov (1991)

[Screening TBA]

**Week Fifteen:**

Apr 26<sup>th</sup> – Lecture: Putin's Russia

Readings: Riasanovsky/Steinberg, Chapters 43 (pp.657-680) and 44

Apr 28<sup>th</sup> – Discussion: A New Russia?

Readings: Vladislav Surkov, "Russian Political Culture: The View from Utopia" (2007); Vladimir Sorokin, *The Day of the Oprichnik* (excerpts) [On Concourse]

**Week Sixteen:**

May 3<sup>rd</sup> – Summary: Modern Russian Ideas -- Past and Present

[research paper due]

May 11<sup>th</sup> - **Final Exam**