

Course Syllabus, "PL 27501, Philosophy in Literature: *The Lord of the Rings* & *The Brothers Karamazov*
Dr. Peter Kreeft, Boston College, Woods College of Advancing Studies
Fall 2012, Tue. 6:30-9 P.M.

The last time I taught this course, my course outline was very long and elaborate. It read:

I. *The Lord of the Rings*

II. *The Brothers Karamazov*

That's really almost all you need to know.

Four readers' polls picked *The Lord of the Rings* as "the greatest book of the (20th) century," and *The Brothers Karamazov* was the only novel on every "top 10" list in a poll of 30 great living authors.

Written in very different styles (epic vs. psychological novel, fantasy vs. realism, external vs. internal stage, symbolic vs. literal, "high" (heroic) vs. "low" (quotidian), archetypal vs. psychoanalytic), they share common themes: good & evil, death & immortality, individual & community, fate & freedom, head & heart, nature & supernature, loyalty & betrayal, love & hate, hope & despair, faith & doubt, truth & lies. These are some of the most fundamental themes of philosophy, when philosophy dares to be profound.

We will simply read these 2 books together in triad (better than dialog), i.e. with all 3 voices speaking in class: (1) the authors (in their characters), (2) the student-readers, and (3) the teacher-tourguide. Therefore the teaching method will combine (1) explication of the text, (2) discussion, and (3) lecture.

Do not take this course if you plan to skip the classes and just write an exam and papers on these two books, even if you know them well. What we will find and focus on in class in these two books (they are more like two *worlds*) will surprise us all. This is more like a dangerous expedition than a pre-set online course; personal presence and participation is essential. And be sure to read the assigned pages *before* we discuss them in class, otherwise class will pass you by and confuse you because I will assume you did.

The Philosophy of Tolkien (Kreeft) will be a referenced resource for LR (*The Lord of the Rings*), and it will say what I would have said in class if this had been a lecture course. Putting the class lectures in a book frees up class time for more discussion and exploration.

Writing requirements: (I.) There will be a comprehensive final exam, part objective and part essay. (II.) You also must write at least 10 pages of original essays interacting with the books. This can be ten 1-page essays, two 5-page essays, one 10-page essay, three 3 1/3 page essays, etc. Due date: 12/11.

Books: Be sure you get the I-volume Houghton-Mifflin edition of LR so we can all follow the same page numbers, and the Constance Garnett translation of BK, both of which are in the Bookstore.

Probable schedule (we may flex it a little as we move; it is our servant, not our master):

1 (9/4) Introduction	9 (10/30) BK
2 (9/11) LR Bk. 1 (it's really 6 books, not 3)	10 (11/6) BK
3 (9/18) LR Bk. 2	11 (11/13) BK
4 (9/25) LR Bk. 3	12 (11/20) BK
5 (10/2) LR Bk. 4	13 (11/27) BK
6 (10/9) LR Bk. 5	14 (12/4) conclusions
7 (10/16) LR Bk. 6	15 (12/11) final exam
8 (10/23) BK	