

A Dialogue on the Book

Professor: *Welcome to this book! It's called **Operating Systems in Three Easy Pieces**, and I am here to teach you the things you need to know about operating systems. I am called "Professor"; who are you?*

Student: *Hi Professor! I am called "Student", as you might have guessed. And I am here and ready to learn!*

Professor: *Sounds good. Any questions?*

Student: *Sure! Why is it called "Three Easy Pieces"?*

Professor: *That's an easy one. Well, you see, there are these great lectures on Physics by Richard Feynman...*

Student: *Oh! The guy who wrote "Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman", right? Great book! Is this going to be hilarious like that book was?*

Professor: *Um... well, no. That book was great, and I'm glad you've read it. Hopefully this book is more like his notes on Physics. Some of the basics were summed up in a book called "Six Easy Pieces". He was talking about Physics; we're going to do Three Easy Pieces on the fine topic of Operating Systems. This is appropriate, as Operating Systems are about half as hard as Physics.*

Student: *Well, I liked physics, so that is probably good. What are those pieces?*

Professor: *They are the three key ideas we're going to learn about: virtu-*

alization, concurrency, and persistence. In learning about these ideas, we'll learn all about how an operating system works, including how it decides what program to run next on a CPU, how it handles memory overload in a virtual memory system, how virtual machine monitors work, how to manage information on disks, and even a little about how to build a distributed system that works when parts of them have failed. That sort of stuff.

Student: *I have no idea what you're talking about, really.*

Professor: *Good! That means you are in the right class.*

Student: *I have another question: what's the best way to learn this stuff?*

Professor: *Excellent query! Well, each person needs to figure this out on their own, of course, but here is what I would do: go to class, to hear the professor introduce the material. Then, say at the end of every week, read these notes, to help the ideas sink into your head a bit better. Of course, some time later (hint: before the exam!), read the notes again to firm up your knowledge. Of course, your professor will no doubt assign some homeworks and projects, so you should do those; in particular, doing projects where you write real code to solve real problems is the best way to put the ideas within these notes into action. As Confucius said...*

Student: *Oh, I know! 'I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.' Or something like that.*

Professor: *(surprised) How did you know what I was going to say?!*

Student: *It seemed to follow. Also, I am a big fan of Confucius.*

Professor: *Well, I think we are going to get along just fine! Just fine indeed.*

Student: *Professor – just one more question, if I may. What are these dialogues for? I mean, isn't this just supposed to be a book? Why not present the material directly?*

Professor: *Ah, good question, good question! Well, I think it is sometimes useful to pull yourself outside of a narrative and think a bit; these dialogues are those times. So you and I are going to work together to make sense of all of these pretty complex ideas. Are you up for it?*

Student: *So we have to think? Well, I'm up for that. I mean, what else do*

I have to do anyhow? It's not like I have much of a life outside of this book.

Professor: *Me neither, sadly. So let's get to work!*