



Kierkegaard: The Individual in Modern Society

University of Copenhagen Department of Theology
Summer 2023 - August 7 to August 25

Classes: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 11:00-14:00 (except 11:00-15:00 for session 1)
Room: 8B.0.16, Karen Blixens Plads 16, 2300 Copenhagen S.
Language: English

15 ECTS credits

Course Instructor: Cæcilie Varslev-Pedersen, Ph.D. in Philosophy, New School for Social Research, 2021; M.A. in Philosophy, New School for Social Research, 2013; B.A. in Philosophy, University of Copenhagen, 2010.

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Course Content: A study of the works of Copenhagen's most radical author, the "father of existentialism," Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). Kierkegaard's entire authorship is centered around the existential project that every human being is confronted with: to become oneself and none other than oneself. And as he sees it, becoming oneself does not happen passively and is never achieved once and for all, but requires constant effort. He thus often describes this project as one of taking responsibility for "choosing," "gaining," or "becoming oneself."

This course examines his witty, humorous, but also deeply earnest exploration of the psychology of self-identity. Kierkegaard's thoughts about the struggle for personhood take us through perhaps unexpected territories: beginning with the breakdown of pre-modern culture and society that have traditionally defined the self, he explores the destructive power of nihilism, the art of seduction, theories of beauty and boredom, a scathing critique of religious culture and politics, religious demands that conflict with ethical duty, the joy of being embodied here and now, and finally, love.

We will remain especially attentive to the ways in which Kierkegaard considers human relationships to be absolutely essential to understanding oneself and one's obligations to other human beings.

Computer policy: No surfing or texting during class.

Primary Literature:

Either/Or, trans. Alastair Hannay, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992.

Fear and Trembling, Alastair Hannay, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986.

Sickness unto Death, trans. Alastair Hannay, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1989.

Pdf material (linked to Absalon - UCPH electronically course room):

Selections from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

For students who read Danish:

Kierkegaards samlede værker, *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* (SKS) is on the net: www.sks.dk. I have provided references to SKS for every reading (e.g., Danish: SKS 4, 148-181) in this reading plan. (Note: To see page breaks, place a checkmark in the middle box, next to SKS, on the top left-hand side of the screen).

Optional Secondary Literature:

Karsten Harries, *Between Nihilism and Faith*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010 (177 pages).

George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, Chesham: Acumen Press, 2006 (205 pages).

Exam requirements:

Undergraduate requirements:

- a) Active class attendance (75% attendance as documented in the attendance record).
- b) Familiarity with a reading list (primary and secondary literature) of 1,200-1,500 pages.
- c) A written paper of 10-12 pages with 1.5 line spacing, based on 400-500 pages of primary literature. The paper will receive a letter grade, evaluated by an internal grader. (Paper can be written in English or Danish).

Graduate requirements:

- a) Active class attendance (75% attendance as documented in the attendance record).
- b) Familiarity with a reading list (primary and secondary literature) of 1,200–1,500 pages.
- c) A written paper of 15-20 pages with 1.5 line spacing, based on 800–1,000 pages of literature. The paper will receive a letter grade, evaluated by an internal examiner. (Paper can be written in English or any Scandinavian language).

Final Paper due at 12 noon on Friday September 15 in Digital Exam

<https://eksamen.ku.dk/>

Course Outline

Classes: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 11:00-14:00 (except 11:00-15:00 for session 1)
Room: 8B.0.16, Karen Blixens Plads 16, 2300 Copenhagen S.

1. *Mon. August 7*

Historical Introduction: Kierkegaard's biography and authorship
Either/Or I: Aesthetics and Actuality

Reading:

- "Preface" to *Either/Or* by Victor Eremita, pp. 27-37 (Danish: SKS 2, 11-22).
- "Diapsalmata" by "A," in *Either/Or*, pp. 39-57 (Danish: SKS 2, 25-52).

2. *Wed. August 9*

Either/Or I: Boredom and Nothingness.

Reading:

- "Crop Rotation" in *Either/Or*, pp. 223-241 (Danish: SKS 2, 271-289).

3. *Fri. August 11*

Either/Or II: Taking Ownership of Choice.

Reading:

- "The Equilibrium Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical" by Wilhelm, in *Either/Or*, pp. 475-487 (Danish: SKS 3, 155-166), and pp. 542-556, (Danish: SKS 3, 239-253).

4. *Mon. August 14*

Fear and Trembling: Tuning in on the Religious

Reading:

- "Preface," "Attunement," "Ode to Abraham," and "Preamble from the Heart"

5. *Wed. August 16*

Fear and Trembling: the Teleological Suspension of the Ethical

Reading:

- "Problemata" 1-3

6. *Fri. August 18*

(On site at Frederiksberg Gardens and Assistens Cemetery, weather permitting)

Concluding Unscientific Postscript: The What and the How

Reading:

- *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, pp. 155-158; 167-172; 197-204 (Danish: SKS 7, 169-173; 182-187; 213-221).

7. *Mon. August 21*

Sickness unto Death: The Self as a Synthesis.

Reading:

Sickness unto Death, pp. 43-72, (Danish: SKS 11, 129-157 [Start at the beginning of "Part One. The Sickness unto Death is Despair" and stop before reading section "B. Despair Viewed under the Aspect of Consciousness"]).

8. Wed. August 23

Sickness unto Death: Not to Want to be a Self and to Want to be a Self.

Reading:

- *Sickness unto Death*, pp. 72-105, (Danish: SKS 11, 157-187 [B. “Despair Viewed Under the Aspect of Consciousness,” which brings you to the end of “Part One”])

9. Fri. August 25

Sickness unto Death: Despair is Sin

Reading:

- *Sickness unto Death*, pp. 109-165 (Danish: SKS 11, 189-242 [all of “Part Two”]).

Final Paper due at 12 noon on Friday September 15 in Digital Exam

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