



Kierkegaard: The Individual in Global Society

University of Copenhagen Department of Theology

Summer 2021

Classes: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 11:00-14:00
Room: 6B.0.22, Karen Blixens Plads 16, 2300 Copenhagen S.
Language: English

15 ECTS credits

Course Instructor: K. Brian Soderquist, Ph.D. in philosophical theology, University of Copenhagen, 2005; M.A.R. in philosophy of religion, Yale University, 1994; B.A. in philosophy and natural sciences, Utah State University, 1990.

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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 culture-specific ethnic and religious that have traditionally defined the self, he explores the culturally destructive power of Socrates' irony, 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's thought is critical of inherited ethnic and cultural definitions of self, and why he nonetheless considers human relationships to be absolutely essential to understanding oneself and one's obligations to other human beings.

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 any Scandinavian language).

Masters 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).

Computer policy: No surfing or texting during class.

Primary Literature:

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

The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air, trans. Bruce Kirmmse, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

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

Pdf material (linked to Absalon):

Selections from *On the Concept of Irony*.

Selections from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

Selections from *Works of Love*.

Selections from *The Moment*.

“Irony” in *Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, ed. by John Lippitt and George Pattison, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

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).

Course Outline

1. *Wed. July 7*

Historical Introduction: Kierkegaard's biography and authorship.

Reading:

- Nietzsche: *The Gay Science*, §125.
- "Kierkegaard in Ten Minutes."

2. *Fri. July 9*

On the Concept of Irony: The Truth and Untruth of Irony.

Reading:

- *On the Concept of Irony*: "The Conception Made Necessary" and "Irony after Fichte," pp. 222-240, 293-302 (Danish: *SKS* 1, 244-262, 308-321).
- *Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, chap. 18, "Irony."

Sat. July 10

Walking tour of Kierkegaard's North Sjælland (rain or shine)

3. *Mon. July 12*

Either/Or I: Aesthetics and Actuality

Reading:

- "Preface" to *Either/Or* by Victor Eremita, pp. 27-37 (Danish: *SKS* 2, 11-22).
- "The Unhappiest One" in *Either/Or*, pp. 209-221 (Danish: *SKS* 2, 211-223).

4. *Wed. July 14*

Either/Or I: Boredom and Nothingness.

Reading:

- "Diapsalmata" by "A," in *Either/Or*, pp. 39-57 (Danish: *SKS* 2, 25-52).
- "Crop Rotation" in *Either/Or*, pp. 223-241 (Danish: *SKS* 2, 271-289).

5. *Fri. July 16*

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).

Sat. July 17

Bike tour of Kierkegaard's North Sjælland (rain or shine)

6. *Mon. July 19*

Either/Or II: Taking Ownership of Oneself.

Reading:

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

7. *Wed. July 21*

(On site at Frb. 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).

8. Fri. July 23

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”]).

9. Mon. July 26

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”])

10. Wed. July 28

Sickness Unto Death: Despair is Sin

Reading:

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

11. Thursday, July 30

The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air and *The Moment*: Joy—in Nature

Reading:

- *The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air*, pp. 71-90 (Danish: *SKS* 11, 40-48 [read the last section, “III. Joy”]).
- “My Task” in *The Moment 10* (Danish: *SKS* 13, 404-411).

Final Paper due Sunday, Aug. 15