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**TH 6/715 SØREN KIERKEGAARD  
SPRING, 2017**

**PURPOSE:** Many of the most influential philosophical and theological movements of the past 100 years have claimed Søren Kierkegaard as one of their own. But Kierkegaard is notoriously difficult to school. The purpose of this class is a close reading of some of Kierkegaard's best-known philosophical and theological works. Top of the agenda will be to get a feeling for his unceasingly dialectical way of thinking. We will encounter his use of pseudonyms, and consider his technique of 'indirect' (as opposed to 'direct') communication. We will pay close attention to his concept of selfhood, concentrating especially on his notions of paradox, striving, inward deepening, faith and offense, and the God-relation. The class is structured as a reading course. In this sense, we can look forward less to a series of lectures and more to an in-class exploration of Kierkegaard's works.

In preparation for this course, it is highly recommended students read Plato's dialogue, "Meno."

**PREREQUISITES:** TH500 or equivalent

**COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:**

- To read and gain an introductory understanding of the specified texts by Søren Kierkegaard. The most important competence to achieve in this class will be to develop close-reading skills of difficult philosophical/theological texts
- To reflect on what Kierkegaard has to teach us as Christians about the meaning of our faith, and what he might have to say to the contemporary Church. (If you read Kierkegaard as a 'disinterested scholar' only, then you are not reading him – at least, not as he wished to be read.)
- To learn to summarize complex arguments, to develop possible implications of those arguments, and to present them both in class and in writing.

**FORMAT AND CONTENT:**

TH 6/715 is a 3 credit course. We will meet once per week for three hours, over the 11 week Spring semester. Each student will be responsible for preparing at least 2 in-class presentations on the week's assigned readings. Presentation notes will be handed in for grading. In addition, students will be expected to keep and submit a 'reading journal.' The purpose of this journal is to carry on a dialogue with the texts – to trace their arguments, to ask questions, to explore one's own thoughts and responses that the text provokes. These thoughts can and ought to be both academic *and* personal in nature. Finally, a larger paper will be assigned. The topic, ideally,

will emerge from the questions each student has wrestled with in his or her reading journal. This paper will not demand an extensive bibliography of secondary sources; the purpose of the paper is primarily for the student to demonstrate his or her ability to understand and engage the primary texts.

### TEXTS:

- Plato's *The Meno*. It is not important which edition or translation. This is a preparatory text which students will be expected to have read before the start of classes.
- Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments/ Johannes Climacus* trans. Howard & Edna Hong (Princeton University Press, 1985)
- ----- *The Sickness Unto Death* trans. Howard & Edna Hong (Princeton University Press, 1980)
- ----- *Fear and Trembling/ Repetition* trans. Howard & Edna Hong (Princeton University Press, 1983)

Please note: The Hong translations are REQUIRED. There are less expensive editions, but for scholarly work these are the standard texts. Since this is a 'reading' course, it is necessary that everyone in the class works from the same editions. The editions are available for purchase at the UBC Bookstore and are readily available online both in new and second hand copies. No e-books will be permitted.

### COURSE POLICIES

1. **Attendance** For a weekly course, VST requires at least 80% attendance.
2. **Reading and assignments** Students are expected to read all required assignments before class and to complete all assignments as outlined in the syllabus within the specified dates of the course and term.
3. **Academic honesty** Students are expected to adhere to VST's requirements for academic honesty as published in the Student Handbook.
4. **Inclusive language** In speaking and writing, inclusive language is expected when making reference to humans and a variety of metaphors are anticipated when making reference to God.
5. **Assignment and Course Evaluation**
  - Course evaluations at VST combine a letter grade system (A+ to B-; course failure is "Not Approved") including narrative comments based on the competencies of the course. No number grades or weights of assignments are calculated, nor are final grades given numerical equivalents.
  - Individual assignments within a course are given narrative evaluations, that is, APP (Approved) or INC (Incomplete) with narrative comments, based on the competencies and expectations set for that assignment. One re-write is allowed on any assignment that is INC. The re-written assignment is due two weeks after the work is returned. The final evaluation for an assignment can be APP or NAPP after a re-write.
  - For a passing grade in the course, all assignments must be Approved.

## 6. Late assignments

Submission of assignments on time is a part of academic, professional and pastoral competence and a part of every course at VST. All assignments in courses are due on the dates specified in the syllabus. Failure to submit an assignment on time will be noted in the narrative evaluation of an assignment. Repeated failure to submit assignments on time may affect the final grade for the course.

Two written assignments (the Reading Journal and final paper) plus two in-class oral presentations (notes to be handed in) are due this term on the dates specified. If two or more assignments for the course are submitted late, the final grade will be reduced by one mark (a B+ becomes a B) with further reductions possible for very late assignments.

7. VST is committed to creating safe space and an inclusive learning environment. If you have a diagnosed or suspected learning disability, chronic condition, mental health concern, or physical requirement which you anticipate may impact your participation in this class, you are encouraged to discuss your needs with the instructor and the Dean within the first week of classes.

## CALENDAR

Jan. 16: Class 1

- Introduction to the life and influence of Søren Kierkegaard
- Plato's Dialogue "Meno."

Jan. 24: Class 2

- *Philosophical Fragments*, 'Preface' & 'I: Thought Project' (p.1-22)

Jan. 31: Class 3

- *Philosophical Fragments*, 'II: God as Teacher and Saviour,' & 'III: 'The Absolute Paradox' (p.23-48)

Feb. 7: Class 4

- *Philosophical Fragments* 'Appendix: Offense at the Paradox,' & 'IV: the Situation of the Contemporary Follower' (p.49-71)

Feb.14: Class 5

- *Philosophical Fragments* 'Interlude: Is the Past More Necessary than the Future?' & "V: The Follower at Second Hand,' & 'The Moral' (p.72-111).

Feb. 21: Class 6

- *The Sickness Unto Death* 'Preface,' Introduction,' 'Part One: The Sickness Unto Death is Despair, A: Despair is the Sickness unto Death; B: The Universality of this Sickness' (p.1-28)
  - A copy of 'Reading Journal' to date due

Feb. 27-March 3: Reading Week

March 7: Class 7

- *The Sickness Unto Death* 'C: 'The Forms of This Sickness (Despair)' (p.29-74).

March 14: Class 8

- *The Sickness Unto Death* 'Part Two: Despair is Sin; A: Despair is Sin' (p.75-104).

March 21: Class 9

- *The Sickness Unto Death* 'B: The Continuance of Sin' (p.105-131).

March 28: Class 10

- *Fear and Trembling* 'Preface' to end of 'Preliminary Expectoration' (p.1-53)

April 4: Class 11 (End of Term)

- *Fear and Trembling* 'Probleman I' to end of 'Problema II' (p.54-81)
  - Final Papers plus complete Reading Journal due

### **EXPECTATIONS, ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATIVE CRITERIA**

1. **Class participation:** This is designed as a 'reading' rather than a 'lecture' course. This means that the focus of each class shall be to engage together in a close reading of the text assigned for that week. Student participation will be vital to the success of the course – and thorough preparation will be demanded. Therefore, grading for this course will lean toward class participation, particularly how the student reveals adequate preparation and active engagement with the week's reading. **Class presentations, of which, depending on the number of students registered, there will be at least two,** are expected to be thought-provoking, questioning, and insightful. They will demonstrate patience and perseverance when clarity is not easily achieved. Sometimes Kierkegaard likes to tease – but there is always a purpose in his teasing!
2. **Reading Journal:** The purpose of the Journal is to help instill active reading habits, of personal, searching, engagement with the text as you read.
3. **Final Paper:** ideally, the topic for the final paper will emerge from each student's Reading Journals, the desire to push a certain question more broadly and deeply. The purpose of this paper is not to demonstrate one's library skills or internet prowess, but to demonstrate thinking with and into a chosen text.
4. Audit students are required to do all the reading and participate in the class discussions and exercises.
5. Certificate students are required to do all the reading, participate in the class discussions and exercises, and do the journal, handing in the sections of the journal as listed in the calendar.

### **SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

For a short introduction to Kierkegaard's life and thought, I suggest: Peter Vardy, *An Introduction to Kierkegaard* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2008).

For biographies, Walter Lowrie's *Short Life of Søren Kierkegaard* (The new edition with intro by Alistair Hannay) is a good place to begin (Princeton University Press).

For something more in depth: Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography* (trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse) (Princeton University Press, 2005).

*Unlike some courses, this course is not intended to be a research course, but rather a reading course; and the emphasis is to be on engaging the assigned primary texts. Nevertheless, for students desiring to research further, there is a wealth of Kierkegaard scholarship. Here are just a very few suggested books and articles, focusing on the books and topics we will read in class:*

Beabout, Gregory. *Freedom and Its Misuses: Kierkegaard on Anxiety and Despair* (Milwaukee: Marquette Univ. Press, 1996).

Carr, Karen L. "The Offense of Reason and the Passion of Faith: Kierkegaard and Anti-Rationalism" in *Faith and Philosophy*, 13 (1996).

Come, Arnold B. *Kierkegaard as Humanist: Discovering Myself* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens Univ. Press, 1995).

----- *Kierkegaard as Theologian: Recovering Myself* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens Univ. Press, 1997).

Elrod, John. *Being and Existence in Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Works* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975).

Evans, C. Stephen. *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript: The Religious Philosophy of Johannes Climacus* (Atlantic Highlands N.J.: Humanities Press, 1983).

----- *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1992).

Gouwens, David J. *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996).

Hannay, Alistair "Kierkegaard and the Variety of Despair" in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alistair Hannay & Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998).

Miller, Ed, L. "At the Centre of Kierkegaard: An Objective Absurdity" in *J. of Religious Studies*, 33 (1997).

Morelli, Elizabeth. "The Existence of the Self Before God in Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death*" in *Heythrop Journal*, 36 (1995).

Morris, T.F. "Kierkegaard's Understanding of Socrates" in *Int. J. for Philosophy of Religion*, 19 (1986).

Polk, Timothy. *The Biblical Kierkegaard: Reading by the Rule of Faith* (Macon: Mercer Univ. Press, 1997).

Rae, Murray A. *Kierkegaard's Vision of the Incarnation: By Faith Transformed* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

----- *Kierkegaard and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2010).

Sheil, Patrick. *Starting with Kierkegaard* (New York: Continuum, 2011)

Walker, Jeremy. *Kierkegaard: The Descent Into God* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1985).

Walsh, Sylvia. *Living Christianly: Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Christian Existence* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

Westphal, Merold. "Kierkegaard's Psychology of Unconscious Despair" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Sickness Unto Death*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer Univ. Press, 1987).

----- "Kierkegaard and Hegel" in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay & Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998).

----- *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014)