

# **Søren Kierkegaard: The Individual Between the Religious and the Secular**

University of Copenhagen Department of Theology Summer Course 2024

July 3 to July 22

**Teacher:** Aaron James Goldman, PhD Harvard University, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Lund University. Mail: [aaron.goldman@ctr.lu.se](mailto:aaron.goldman@ctr.lu.se)

**Location:** Classroom 6B.0.22, Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen, Karen Blixens Plads 16, 2300 Copenhagen S.

**Time:** Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 10–12 and 13–14

**Course Content:** This course serves two purposes: First, it offers a general survey of the thought of Denmark's most globally famous philosopher and Christian theologian, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855); second, it specifically assays Kierkegaard's interrogation of becoming an individual in the dynamics between the religious and the secular.

Kierkegaard's authorship centers on the existential project of becoming oneself. According to Kierkegaard, this is a difficult ethical and religious task that presents itself to every human individual—and at the same time, it is a task that demands the individual challenge their preconceptions about the content and limits of both morality and religiosity. In brief, Kierkegaard's interpretation of Christianity requires that the individual confront and develop a new relationship to their own religiosity, in addition to what is ethically required of them.

In this course, students will engage with several of Kierkegaard's major works in order to formulate answers to the following questions: 1) What are the goals and structure of Kierkegaard's existential project, and how does it hang together? 2) How does Kierkegaard conceive the relationship between significant conceptual dyads, including: religious/secular, Christian/non-Christian, theology/philosophy, faith/reason, Christendom/'Paganism,' and sacred/ordinary history? 3) How can Kierkegaard's thinking be deployed in philosophical, ethical, and political discussions of today, and to what extent do Kierkegaard's thoroughgoing Christian commitments generate challenges for applying his thinking outside of specifically Christian contexts and communities.

**Excursions:** Every week, there will be an afternoon excursion into the heart of Kierkegaard's Copenhagen. We will visit some of Kierkegaard's most beloved locations in Copenhagen, where we will do onsite readings and discuss the central dimensions of his thought.

### 1. **Weds. July 3**

Historical Introduction; and *Either/Or – The Problem: ‘Marry or Do Not Marry?’*

Reading:

- Title page & “Preface” to *Either/Or I* by “Victor Eremita,” pp. 1–15
- “Diapsalmata” and “Crop Rotation” by “A,” in *Either/Or I*, pp. 17–43, 281–300
- *Optional reading*: “The Esthetic Validity of Marriage” (selections) and “The Balance Between the Esthetic and the Ethical...” (selections) by “Assessor Wilhelm” in *Either/Or II*, pp. 8–31, 155–169, 250–271

### 2. **Fri. July 5**

Kierkegaard and the Invention or Discovery of Christianity, Part 1

Reading:

- Plato, *Meno* (trans. Grube), pp. 870–897 in *Plato: Complete Works*
- *Philosophical Fragments* by “Johannes Climacus,” pp. 1–36
- Excursion 1: Kierkegaard’s Copenhagen, Part One

### 3. **Mon. July 8**

Kierkegaard and the Invention or Discovery of Christianity, Part 2

Reading:

- Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *The Collected Works of Spinoza, Vol. I* (trans. Curley), ID1–1P11 (pp. 408–419)
- *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 37–71

### 4. **Weds. July 10**

Kierkegaard and the Invention or Discovery of Christianity, Part 3

- Lessing, “On the proof of the spirit and of power,” (trans. Nisbet), in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, pp. 83–88
- *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 72–111

### 5. **Fri. July 12**

Kierkegaard and the Theological; and Indirect Communication and Kierkegaard’s Authorial Strategy

- *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, by “Johannes Climacus,” pp. 586–616
- *Practice in Christianity*, by “Anti-Climacus,” pp. 23–40, 67–68, 133–136
- Excursion 2: Kierkegaard’s Copenhagen, Part Two

### 6. **Mon. July 15**

What is it like to have faith and to love?, Part 1

- Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Meditations 1 and 2), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. 2 (trans. Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch) pp. 12–23
- *Fear and Trembling*, by “Johannes de silentio,” pp. 1–24
- *Works of Love*, pp. 1–16

7. **Weds. July 17**

What is it like to have faith and to love?, Part 2

- *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 25–81
- Optional reading: Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis* (trans. Walker), pp. 87–175

8. **Friday. July 19**

What is it like to have faith and to love?, Part 3

- *Works of Love*, pp. 17–90, and optional: pp. 135–174
- Excursion 3: Kierkegaard's Copenhagen, Part Three

9. **Mon. July 22**

Selfhood: Sin and Despair

*Sickness unto Death*, by “Anti-Climacus,” pp. 1–28, 75–131.

**Requirements and exam:**

*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, 24,000–28,800 characters, based on 600–800 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, 36,000–48,000 characters, 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 Thursday 15 August in Digital Exam <https://eksamen.ku.dk/>**

**Required readings list**

Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Translated by John Cottingham. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Volume II [of III]. Edited by Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984. **pp. 12–23.**

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments, Volume I: Text*. Edited and translated by Hong and Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992. **pp. 586–616. [pp. 617–630 for in-class exercise.]**

—. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments, Volume II: Historical Introduction, Supplement, Notes, and Index*. Edited and translated by Hong and Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992. **[only includes footnotes and index corresponding to preceding entry]**

- *Either/Or, Part I*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987. **pp. 1–15, 17–43, 281–300.**
- *Fear and Trembling*. In *Fear and Trembling / Repetition*. Edited and translated by Hong and Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983. **pp. 1–81.**
- *Philosophical Fragments*. In *Philosophical Fragments / Johannes Climacus*. Edited and translated by Hong and Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985. **pp. 1–111.**
- *Practice in Christianity*. Edited and translated by Hong and Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991. **pp. 23–40, 67–68, 133–136.**
- *The Sickness Unto Death*. Edited and translated by Hong and Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980. **pp. 1–28, 75–131.**
- *Works of Love*. Edited and translated by Hong and Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995. **pp. 1–90. [pp. 135–174 are optional readings.]**
- Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. “On the proof of the spirit and of power.” In *Philosophical and Theological Writings*. Edited and translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005. **pp. 83–88.**
- Plato. *Meno*. Translated by G. M. A. Grube. In *Plato: Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997. **pp. 870–897.**
- Spinoza, Baruch. *Ethics*. In *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Volume I [of II]. Edited and translated by Edwin Curley. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985. **pp. 408–419.**

#### **Additional optional readings list**

- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either/Or, Part II*. Edited and translated by Hong and Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987. **pp. 8–31, 155–169, 250–271.**

#### **Additional sources I will draw from for in-class activities**

- Badiou, Alain. *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. Translated by Ray Brassier. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. **pp. 1–64.**
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Point of View*. Edited and translated by Hong and Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998. **pp. 1–56.**