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PHL 467.01: Kierkegaard

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Kierkegaard

Tuesday/Thursday, 12:40-2 p.m., LA 146

This course will examine closely two of Kierkegaard’s best known works: *Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness unto Death*. We will address such topics as the distinction between the ethical and the religious (and whether the latter can ever trump the former), the nature of the self (which Kierkegaard defines as a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal, or freedom and necessity), and what significance despair has for characterizing the human condition. In the process we will consider why Kierkegaard employs pseudonyms and the nature of what he calls indirect communication.

Course Requirements

1. Attendance/Participation 10%
2. Short Papers 30%
3. Longer Papers (1750-2100 words) 60%

Course Objectives

After completing this course you should have obtained a working knowledge of Kierkegaard’s philosophical vocabulary, gained a critical understanding of two of his books, *Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness unto Death*, and become acquainted with his conception of a pseudonymous author and the related notion of indirect communication. In addition you should have developed your ability (i) to analyze philosophical texts, (ii) to articulate what you find valuable about a given text, and (iii) to offer reasons and appeal to textual evidence in support of your individual judgments.

Readings

Required Books

These books are required and can be purchased at the UM bookstore (it may also be worth checking the prices at www.amazon.com or www.bookfinder.com).

1. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Penguin, 1986; ISBN 978-0140444490)
2. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death* (Penguin, 1989; ISBN 978-0140445336)

Additional Required Readings

PDFs of additional individual readings will be made available in Moodle. If you want to print out all of the required readings, I will also make available a PDF of the entire Course Packet. I suggest that you print this file at Campus Quick Copy and have it bound. Double-sided printing costs \$0.13 per page. The file is formatted to be printed double-sided with the pages being flipped on the short edge (landscape).

Moodle

This course has a Moodle page (<http://umonline.umt.edu>). For more information on how to access Moodle, go to http://umonline.umt.edu/student/moodle_help.php.

Email

Any email that I send to the class will be sent to your university email address via Moodle. If you use another email address (such as Gmail or Yahoo), please forward your university email to this other account. For directions on how to do this see http://umt.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/820.

Accommodation for Disabilities

Whenever possible, and in accordance with civil rights laws, the University of Montana will attempt to provide reasonable modifications to courses for students with disabilities who request and require them. Please feel free to set up a time with me to discuss any modifications to this course you may require. For more information, contact Disability Services for Students (<http://life.umt.edu/dss/>), located in the Lommasson Center, room 154.

Attendance and Participation

Your attendance and participation are crucial for the success of this class and will play a significant role in determining whether or not our time together proves to be intellectually challenging and fulfilling. As many of you probably know, it is a university requirement that you attend all class meetings for courses in which you are enrolled (<http://www.umt.edu/catalog/acad/acadpolicy/default.html#attendance>). In my experience, students also get the most out of those classes that they regularly attend. In this course I will take attendance. Everyone may miss three classes, no questions asked (and no justifications/explanations required). After that, each absence will reduce your attendance/participation grade by 10% (that is, 1% of your final grade). If you have to miss a class, it is your responsibility to hand in ahead of time any work that is due and to obtain any new assignments that are handed out.

Participation has many facets and might be compared to citizenship. Those who are good classroom citizens are those who do three things: (i) come to class prepared, having read and thought about the assignment; (ii) take an active role in class discussions, sharing their critical insights and raising questions that help to generate further discussion and reflection; (iii) take an active role in learning the names of and respectfully listening to their fellow classmates, and in helping to foster a learning environment where all feel welcome to participate and respected as fellow inquirers regardless of the extent to which we may or may not happen to agree about a given topic under investigation.

Short Papers

You will be required to write six short papers, each of which should be no longer than one single-spaced, typed page (with normal margins and 12 point font size). These assignments will be worth 30% of your final grade. I will count the five best short papers you submit. Short papers cannot be handed in late.

Longer Papers

You will be required to write two longer papers. These should each be about 5-6 pages (1750-2100 words) and together will be worth 60% of your final grade (30% each). Longer papers that are handed in late will normally be penalized one-third of a letter grade for each day that they are late.

The Art of Reading

Reading, like writing, is an art that can only be acquired through extensive and intensive practice. In general, you should plan to read each assignment for this course two times before you come to class: (i) read it through once to get a sense of the overall shape of the discussion and what the chief issues and questions seem to be; (ii) read it a second time, reading more slowly and with an eye to how the different parts hang together. As Thoreau put it, "To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written. [...] [T]his only is reading, in a high sense, not that which lulls us as a luxury and suffers the nobler faculties to sleep the while, but what we have to stand on tip-toe to read and devote our most alert and wakeful hours to" ("Reading," *Walden*).

Plagiarism/Academic Dishonesty

I will not tolerate cheating or plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty in this course. In addition to being a violation of the University of Montana Student Conduct Code (http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php), cheating and plagiarizing also harm your fellow students by giving you an unfair advantage, and harm you since you thereby fail to take yourself seriously. While I think it is pretty self-evident what cheating is, people are not always clear about what plagiarism is. To start, plagiarism can be defined as a form of intellectual stealing and cheating. The Latin root means "to kidnap" and vividly captures what is at stake: when you plagiarize you steal someone else's intellectual child and pretend that you are its true parent. Specific examples of plagiarism include: (i) incorporating material from somewhere else (a book, an article, a website, an encyclopedia entry) without properly documenting this (and thereby giving the true author credit for her or his work); (ii) handing in work that you did not do (e.g., by purchasing a paper on the Internet or downloading text that you simply insert into your own paper or borrowing a paper that another student wrote). In general, the first instance of cheating or plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade ("F") for the course. Any instance of cheating or plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty is also subject to University sanction. If you have any questions about whether or not something might constitute plagiarism, please feel free to contact me; see also <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism>.

Schedule of Readings and Written Assignments

(Subject to change with advance notice)

CP = Course Packet

FT = *Fear and Trembling*

SUD = *The Sickness unto Death*

α = Alpha group

β = Beta group

Week 1

T 8/27 **Introduction**
Gardiner, "Life and Character" (CP #1)

Th 8/29 **Indirect Communication**
Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* (CP #2)

Week 2

T 9/3 **Pseudonymity**
Kierkegaard, "A First and Last Explanation" (CP #3)

Th 9/5 **The Aesthetic Life: Trying to Overcome Melancholy and Boredom**
Victor Eremita and "A," *Either/Or*, Vol. 1 (CP #4)
 α : Short Paper #1 Due

Week 3

T 9/10 **The Ethical Life: Freedom and the Art of Choosing (to be) Oneself**
Judge William ("B"), *Either/Or*, Vol. 2 (CP #5)
 β : Short Paper #1 Due

Th 9/12 **The Religious Life: Abraham, Father of Faith**
(1) Genesis 16-23:19 (CP #6)
(2) Johannes *de silentio*, FT, Preface; Attunement (39-48)

Week 4

T 9/17 **Knights of Infinite Resignation**
Johannes *de silentio*, FT, Speech in Praise of Abraham; Preamble from the Heart (49-66)
 α : Short Paper #2 Due

Th 9/19 **Knights of Faith**
Johannes *de silentio*, FT, Preamble from the Heart (67-82)
 β : Short Paper #2 Due

Week 5

T 9/24

Is there a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?

- (1) Johannes *de silentio*, FT, Problema I (83-95)
- (2) Kant, "Abraham and the Moral Law" (CP #7)

Th 9/26

Is there an Absolute Duty to God?

Johannes *de silentio*, FT, Problema II (96-108)
α: Short Paper #3 Due

Week 6

T 10/1

Was Abraham Ethical in Concealing his Purpose?

Johannes *de silentio*, FT, Problema III (109-127)
β: Short Paper #3 Due

Th 10/3

Was Abraham Ethical in Concealing his Purpose? (Cont.)

Johannes *de silentio*, FT, Problema III (127-144)

Week 7

T 10/8

The Costs of Faith

- (1) Johannes *de silentio*, FT, Epilogue (145-147)
- (2) Johannes Climacus, "A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature" (CP #8)

Longer Paper #1 Topics Handed Out

Th 10/10

Psychology, Ethics, Dogmatics

Vigilius Haufniensis, Introduction, *The Concept of Anxiety* (CP #9)

Week 8

T 10/15

Workshop Papers

Two Copies of Draft Due

Th 10/17

Anxiety

- (1) Vigilius Haufniensis, "The Concept of Anxiety," *The Concept of Anxiety* (CP #10)
- (2) Clare Carlisle, "The Problem of Sin" (CP #11, 90-101)

Week 9

T 10/22

Despair is the Sickness unto Death

- (1) Anti-Climacus, SUD, Preface; Introduction; Part One: A. (33-51)
- (2) Clare Carlisle, "The Problem of Sin" (CP #11, 101-109)

Longer Paper #1 Due

Th 10/24

Generality of this Sickness; Finitude/Infinitude

Anti-Climacus, SUD, Part One: B.; C.:A:(a) (52-65)

Week 10

T 10/29

Possibility/Necessity; Unconscious Despair

Anti-Climacus, SUD, Part One: C.:A:(b); C.:B:(a) (65-77)

α: Short Paper #4 Due

Th 10/31

Conscious Despair: Not Wanting to be Oneself

Anti-Climacus, SUD, Part One: C.:B:(b):a1 (77-91)

β: Short Paper #4 Due

Week 11

T 11/5

Conscious Despair: Not Wanting (Cont.)/Wanting to be Oneself

Anti-Climacus, SUD, Part One: C.:B:(b):a2; C.:B:(b):b (91-105)

Th 11/7

Despair is Sin

Anti-Climacus, SUD, Part Two: A. (107-120)

α: Short Paper #5 Due

Week 12

T 11/12

The Socratic Definition of Sin; Sin is Affirmative

Anti-Climacus, SUD, Part Two: A. (120-137)

β: Short Paper #5 Due

Th 11/14

The Continuation of Sin: Despairing over One's Sins; Offense

Anti-Climacus, SUD, Part Two: B. (138-158)

Week 13

T 11/19

The Continuation of Sin: The Sin of Abandoning Christianity

Anti-Climacus, SUD, Part Two: B. (158-165)

Longer Paper #2 Topics Handed Out

α: Short Paper #6 Due

Th 11/21

Kierkegaard's Authorship

Kierkegaard, *On My Work as an Author* (CP #12)

β: Short Paper #6 Due

Week 14

T 11/26

Workshop Papers

Two Copies of Draft Due

Th 11/28

No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

Week 15

T 12/3

A Nineteenth-Century Socrates

(1) Kierkegaard, "My Task" (CP #13)

(2) Muench, "Kierkegaard's Socratic Task" (CP #14)

Th 12/5

Conclusion

Longer Paper #2 Due