

Phil 338B: Kierkegaard

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Class meets Wednesdays, 6:30-9 in Olin 155.

Office Hours (Olin 151): 2:30–3:30 pm on Tuesday, 11–12 am on Wednesday, and 9–10 am on Thursday and by appointment

New!: 2008 Kierkegaard Seminar Class wiki available [here](#).

This course provides an overview of Kierkegaard's major works. We focus on pseudonymous works, but briefly discuss Kierkegaard's signed *Works of Love*. The primary goal of the course is to deepen your thinking through engaging with one of the deepest and most impassioned thinkers in history. Secondary goals of the course include teaching you to read difficult philosophical and theological works carefully, to write about and discuss them clearly, and to make use of secondary sources to enrich your engagement with primary texts.

Books:

Kierkegaard: A Biography, by Alastair Hannay.

Either/Or, by S. Kierkegaard, trans. Alastair Hannay.

Fear and Trembling/Repetition, by S. Kierkegaard, trans. Hong.

Philosophical Fragments, by S. Kierkegaard, trans. Edna Hong.

Sickness unto Death, by S. Kierkegaard, trans. Alastair Hannay.

Concluding Unscientific Postscript, volume 1, by S. Kierkegaard, trans. Edna Hong.

The Gift of Death by Jacques Derrida.

On Reserve:

Lots of essays and articles, and . . .

Connell, George and Stephen Evans, ed., *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community*

Evans, Stephen, *Passionate Reason*

Evans, Stephen, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*

Ferreira, M. Jamie, *Love's Grateful Striving*

Hannay, Alastair and Gordon Marino, *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*

Hannay, Alastair, *Kierkegaard*

Hannay, Alastair, *Kierkegaard: A Biography*

Perkins, Robert, *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, volumes 3, 4, 6, 7, 12, 16, 19

Gill, Jerry H., *Essays on Kierkegaard*

Derrida, Jacques, *The Gift of Death*

Taylor, Mark, *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard*

Levinas, Emanuel, *Proper Names*

Requirements

(1) Class Participation (10%)

Reading: Your primary responsibility in this class is to read the material closely, more than once, and think deeply about it. For many classes, there is a lot of reading, and the reading is very difficult, so you should be prepared to spend a significant amount of time each week reading. For each class, I have indicated (under the heading "close reading") the passages on which I expect to focus in class, but this does not imply that the rest

of the reading is insignificant. I expect you to be familiar with the entire reading for any given day and to draw on that familiarity in interpreting the passages on which we focus. I have also provided a list of questions to guide your reflection as you read. These questions do not exhaust the issues in the text, but they can provide some orientation for your preparation for class. Occasionally I will also assign short exercises to help you think about the reading. These will be included as part of class participation.

I have also listed secondary sources for each reading. These readings are optional, and you should use secondary sources with care (see the [attached guidelines for using secondary sources](#)). Still, these readings can help you make more sense of the readings and can point out problems and issues that are being discussed in the larger philosophical and theological community. Especially when you are writing the seminar paper or presenting for a given class, you will want to make use of these readings. (You might also want to look at the essays collected in the *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, hereafter abbreviated IKC, for each text.) Hannay's *Kierkegaard* (on reserve) as well as *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (in the bookstore and on reserve) have chapters dealing with specific Kierkegaardian texts. I recommend reading these sections in addition to the "optional readings."

Discussion: You are also expected to share your insights with the class. While it is very valuable for you to read the material closely on your own, the purpose of meeting as a class is to share insights, questions, and ideas. Since this is a small class, we cannot afford to have members who do not participate. You should come to class prepared to discuss. In addition, in this seminar we will interact significantly with each other's work. You should read each other's papers carefully and come with constructive ideas for development of those papers.

Attendance: This is a small seminar that meets only 13 times during the course of the semester. Thus the participation of every member in every class is important. You are expected to attend every seminar. (If you miss more than 2 classes, you should not expect to get better than a C for this portion of your grade. If you miss more than 3, you should not expect better than a D.)

(2) Seminar Paper (20%)

Each class will be divided into two parts. We will always start the class by discussing a significant piece of work by one of you. That means that each week, one of you will be responsible for writing a paper (2000-4000 words). You must distribute this paper no later than 5 PM on the Sunday preceding class, in order to give all of us enough time to read the paper carefully. A seminar paper that is late will automatically suffer a one grade point drop (from a B to a C, for instance). If the paper is more than 24 hours late, it will receive an F. This paper should engage with both the primary and secondary literature, and should also advance your own interpretation of and response to Kierkegaard. This should not be an exploratory paper, but a well-reasoned argument that engages with the text. The secondary literature gives examples of the sort of writing that is expected.

Because of the expectations for this seminar paper, you should not wait until the week that it is due to begin writing it. Although each week's reading builds to some extent off of previous weeks, each week's reading also stands largely on its own. You should start the reading for your seminar paper at least three weeks before it is due and have started writing (at least brainstorming) at least two weeks before the paper is due. (For a model of the level of writing and rewriting that I expect, see [The Philosophy Writing Tutor](#). Because your seminar paper should be at a more advanced level than the sample paper here, you will probably need to engage in more drafts, but this gives a good sense for what it takes to write a good philosophy paper.)

I strongly encourage you to meet with me to discuss the papers before they are due. (I am available by appointment on Thursdays before 10 am and from 11 am through 1 pm. Unfortunately, I will generally not be available to meet in person later on Thursday or Friday.) You should also feel free to use my regularly scheduled office hours. In addition, if you send me a draft of your paper by Friday morning at 9 am, I will

look it over and give you further comments on it.

(3) Presentation (20%)

Our discussion on the seminar paper will begin with a presentation by one of you. The presentation should focus on the paper written for that day's class. You should be constructively critical of the paper. You should raise significant objections and suggest ways that the argument can be fruitfully developed. You should feel free to connect your comments on the paper with your own interests, but the focus should be on the arguments and ideas in the seminar paper. Your introductory comments should not take longer than 10 minutes. In addition, you should come with specific questions to guide discussion for the first part of the class. (This might include passages from the reading that you want to read closely in the context of the seminar paper, or passages from the seminar paper that you want to look at more closely.)

I strongly recommend including a handout with your presentation. Your handout might include such things as: a summary of the thesis and main argument of the seminar paper; brief bullet points with your central questions, criticisms, extensions, and observations about the paper; quotes from the paper and/or Kierkegaard on which you particularly want to focus; key questions that you hope we will discuss as a class; and/or central issues from the primary reading that you think we need to discuss.

If you are leading discussion, I strongly recommend that you meet with me prior to class in order to discuss the presentation. I have set aside office hours on Wednesday morning (from 11-12) for these meetings. If this time is not available for you, or if you would like to meet further in advance of our class, you need to let me know that ahead of time so that we can arrange an alternative time.

(4) Questions on Seminar Papers and Kierkegaard Readings (20%)

If you are not the author or commentator of the seminar paper for the day, you should email to me at least one question or comment about the seminar paper and at least one question or comment about the primary Kierkegaard reading. These must be emailed to me no later than 9 am on the Wednesday that we discuss the material. These comments will be graded with a check, check-plus, or check-minus. Comments that are late are welcome, but you will receive a zero for those comments. At the end of the semester, I will drop your lowest 2 scores. (That means you get two "free passes," but use these sparingly. I will not generally excuse missed or late assignments beyond these two, even if you have an excuse through the Dean of Students. The point of the free passes is precisely to provide for such contingencies.)

(5) Final Paper (30%)

In addition to your seminar paper, you will be expected to write a significant paper (at least 4500 words) on Kierkegaard. The goal here is to approximate the level of thought that we find in the best secondary literature. These papers should focus on the primary texts that we read in this class, but should also include reference to relevant secondary sources, both among those assigned for class and beyond those. (I.e., you are actually going to have to get secondary sources yourselves.)

There are two options for the final paper. (1) You can write on a major issue from our discussions, the secondary literature, or your own reflections on Kierkegaard. You should formulate a clear question and argue convincingly for your answer. You may expand on your seminar paper, if your seminar paper topic warrants the expansion and you remain interested in the topic. (2) You can write a philosophical/theological encyclopedia entry on Kierkegaard. Outline the major contours of Kierkegaard's thought throughout his works, including some reference to influences on him and his influence on others. The goal would be to explain Kierkegaard's main ideas to a classmate who did not take the seminar.

I strongly recommend that you give me a draft of the paper. If you get me a polished draft (i.e., one that you consider a final draft), I will get comments back to you within 72 hours. (That means that if you get it to me less than 72 hours before the due date, you will probably not get comments.)

The final draft of the final paper is due on **the last day of class**.

Schedule of Classes

January 16. Introduction

Close Reading: first Diapsalm.

January 23. *Either/Or A* (pp. 21 - 241). Focus on "Crop Rotation" (pp. 223-241). The seminar paper writer should indicate whether we should have any additional focus.

Close Reading: 37, 223-241 (we'll read through as much of this together as we can).

Issues: (1) In what sense does this method avoid boredom? Is it a successful way to live a life? What criteria of evaluation are appropriate for determining success, according to A? Can A's life measure up to his own criteria of success?

(2) Does the "method" in Crop Rotation fit with the rest of A's writings?

(3) (Is A a "Romantic"?)

Optional reading:

IKC 3, first essay (a good overview of different approaches).

Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, ch. 3.

Mullen, "The German Romantic Background of Kierkegaard's Psychology" (focus especially on the last couple of pages).

(See too readings for Seducer's Diary.)

January 30. *Either/Or A*: "The Seducer's Diary" (pp. 243-376).

Close reading: TBA. You should also pick some of your favorite entries to discuss.

Issues: (1) Does Johannes have sex with Cordelia? Does it matter? (See Dewey, section one.)

(2) What legitimate complaint could Cordelia have against Johannes? Does he do anything wrong?

(3) Does Johannes's life fit with the "ethic" described in Crop Rotation?

(4) What does A think of Johannes? What should A think? (Is Mackey correct that A is "appalled" at Johannes (see p. 52)? Does the diary suggest that there is something wrong with A's view of life?)

Optional Reading: IKC 3, ch. 8 (by Dewey). (Good overview of approaches to this section.)

Mackey, "Some Versions of the Aesthete: Kierkegaard's Either/Or."

Connell, "To Be One Thing" (ch. 5)

February 6. *Either/Or B*. Focus on the second essay. Also read Kant's *Groundwork*.

Close Reading: 486-87 and 582-590.

Issues: (1) Is Judge Vilhelm correct that A just needs to choose?

(2) What does it mean to "choose" for Vilhelm?

(3a) Can someone make an ethical choice and be evil?

(3b) Can someone make an ethical choice and still rotate crops?

(3c) Could Johannes the Seducer be ethical? How would his life have to change?

(4) Is the Judge's way of life a successful way to live a life? What criteria of evaluation are appropriate for determining success, according to Vilhelm? Can Vilhelm's life measure up to his own criteria of success?

(5a) Is Judge Vilhelm a Kantian?

(5b) Is Judge Vilhelm a Christian?

Optional reading:

IKC 4, essays 1, 5, and 8. (In essay 5, ignore the historical details about Balle, unless you find them particularly interesting.)

Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (1971) chapter two.

Connell, "Judge Williams and Theonomous Ethics" in Connell and Adams, ed., *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community*.

Evans 1983: ch. 3.

Sullivan, "Fractured Passion in Kierkegaard's Either/Or"

February 13. *Either/Or* B. Focus on the fourth essay pp. 595-609. Also read Kant's *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Book One (on reserve).

Close Reading: we'll look at the whole sermon.

Issues: (1) Is B correct that "in this sermon he has grasped what I was saying to you and what I would have liked to say"? In what ways in the sermon consistent with B's position? In what ways is it different? If B understood the sermon fully, how would his life change?

(2) B hopes the letter will "make its impression on [A] in [his] tranquility." What kind of impression is this sermon likely to make on A?

Optional reading:

IKC 4, essays 11, (10), 6, and (5).

February 20. *Fear and Trembling*. Read the whole book but focus on pp. 27-81.

Also read Genesis 1-24.

Exercise (300 word max): Johannes de Silencio describes two knights of faith, one on pp. 38-40 and Abraham. Write a short description (either fictional or not) of a third example, and briefly explain why that person is a knight of faith.

Close reading: 41-48, 59-60.

Issues: (1) What is the difference between the knight of resignation and the knight of faith? Which is better? (Have you ever met a knight of resignation? A knight of faith?)

(2) How does Johannes answer each Problema? How would Kierkegaard? How should each be answered?

(3) Is Abraham's faith irrational, unethical, evil, and/or absurd? What kind of justification, if any, is there for Abraham's behavior? Can one be ethical and be a knight of faith? (See Adams 1981, Adams in IKC, Donnelly 1981, Derrida GD.)

Optional Reading:

Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, pp. 53-115, especially pp. 66-87.

Adams, "The Knight of Faith"

IKC 6, ch. 1.

Dietrichson, "Introduction to a Reappraisal of Fear and Trembling"

Evans, "Is the Concept of an Absolute Duty towards God Morally Unintelligible" (in Perkins)

Donnelly, "Kierkegaard's Problema I and Problema II: An Analytic Perspective" (in Perkins)

Mooney, "Understanding Abraham: Care, Faith, and the Absurd" (in Perkins)

Green (with response by Outka), "Enough is Enough! Fear and Trembling is Not about Ethics"

Bogen, "Kierkegaard and the Teleological Suspension of the Ethical"

Green, "Abraham, Isaac, and the Jewish Tradition" (see too Perkins, ch. 1)

February 27. *Philosophical Fragments*. Also read Plato's *Meno*.

Close Reading: pp. 9-11, 13-15, 26-28, 111.

Issues: (1) How does J.C. differ from Socrates?

(2) Does J.C. give us any reason to favor his project over Socrates's? (Evans 1992: ch. 8, Ferreira "The Faith/History Problem", IKC 7 ch. 3, Piety's "The Problem with the Fragments.")

(3) How does J.C. answer the three questions on the title page?

(4) Do J.C.'s critiques of traditional arguments (in ch. 3) work? What role do these critiques play in the overall project?

(5) What is the paradox? What does it mean to call this a paradox?

(6) What is the difference between the contemporary follower and the follower at second hand? Why isn't there a greater difference?

Optional Reading:

Evans, *Passionate Reason*. (See too Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*).

Ferreira, "The Faith/History Problem and Kierkegaard's A Priori 'Proof'"

Roberts, *Faith, Reason, and History: Rethinking Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments*.

Pojman, "Kierkegaard on Faith and History"

Blanchard, in Jerry Gill's *Essays on Kierkegaard*.

March 5. For this class, we have three options:

Option 1: *Philosophical Fragments*.

Option 2: Derrida's *Gift of Death*, especially pp. 53-115.

Option 3: *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, pp. 188-215.

Close Reading: To be determined (depending upon which option we choose).

Optional Reading will depend upon which option we choose.

SPRING BREAK

March 26. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, pp. 185-250. (I also strongly recommend that you read the appendix to this section, which gives Climacus's take on everything we've read so far this semester.)

Close Reading: 189, 193-98, 203-204, 207-210, 224, 234.

Issues: (1) What does "Truth is Subjectivity" mean? How is this related to "inwardness"?

(2) How can Climacus say both that subjectivity is truth and that subjectivity is untruth (p. 207)?

Optional Reading:

Schacht, "Kierkegaard on 'Truth is Subjectivity' and the 'Leap of Faith'"

Evans *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*: ch. 7.

Evans ch. 6 in *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*

Murphy, A.E., "On Kierkegaard's Claim that 'Truth is Subjectivity'"

Barrett, in IKC 12, ch.15.

April 2. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, pp. 561-629.

Close Reading: 572-73, 583-586.

Issues: (1) What is the distinction between Religiousness B (paradoxical-religious), Religiousness A, the ethical, and the aesthetic? What is the relationship between these?

- (2) Does Climacus give any reason to favor Religiousness B?
- (3) Why does Kierkegaard write using pseudonyms?

Optional Reading:

Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Teleological Suspension of Religiousness B" (in Connell, *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community*, ch. 7).
Miller, Ed, "At the Centre of Kierkegaard"
Weston, "Evading the Issue: The Strategy of Kierkegaard's Postscript"

April 9. *Works of Love* (I and II, pp. 3-90)

Close Reading: 13-14, 32-34, 40-42, 56-57, 71-72, 89.

- Issues: (1) Is Kierkegaard's view of love too "otherworldly"?
(2) Is it possible to have erotic love, friendship, and love of neighbor? For the same person?
(3) Is Kierkegaard's ideal of love impossible?
(4) Is love of neighbor a good kind of love (according to you)?

Optional Reading:

Adorno, "On Kierkegaard's Doctrine of Love"
Ferreira, "Other-worldliness in Kierkegaard's Works of Love".
Walsh, "Other-worldliness . . . -- a response" (response to Ferreira's article)
Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, esp. chapters. 1-4 (this book is very good).
IKC 16, chapters 6 and 3.

April 16. *The Sickness Unto Death*

Exercise: Write out (for yourself) a brief account of what sort of despair (if any) best characterizes yourself (or a pseudonym, if you prefer, but I think it works best if you choose yourself). Explain why you diagnose yourself in that way. In class I will check to make sure you have done this, but I will not collect them. (I will ask for volunteers to share.)

Close Reading: first three paragraphs, one of the accounts of despair (we'll decide which one in class).

- Issues: (1) What is Anti-Climacus's account of the soul? Of the self? What makes this account distinctive? Why is it significant for understanding despair? For understanding sin?
(2) What is the essence of despair? Which is more fundamental, despair not wanting to be oneself or despair wanting to be oneself? Does it matter? (See Hannay article.)
(3) What causes despair?
(4) What is the relationship between the first and second parts of this book?
(5) What causes sin?
(6) How is sin different from despair?

Optional Reading:

Beabout, "Kierkegaard on the Self and Despair" (This reading helps with the intro paragraphs. It even has pictures. J)
IKC 19, chapters 1, 2 (skip section one on Hegel), 7, and 11.
Mackey, "Deconstructing the Self: Kierkegaard's Sickness Unto Death"
Dietrichson, "Kierkegaard's Concept of the Self"
Hannay, "Basic Despair in the Sickness unto Death"
Hannay, "Paradigmatic Despair and the Quest for a Kierkegaardian Anthropology"
Beabout, "Existential Despair in Kierkegaard"

April 23. *The Sickness Unto Death*, continued, and Practice in Christianity III-I (handout).

(Bring ideas for last class.)

Close Reading: left over from above, and selections from Practice.

Issues: Same as above, plus . . .

(1) What is the significance of Jesus Christ for Anti-Climacus?

(2) What does this sermon add to *Sickness unto Death*?

(3) What does this sermon (delivered by Kierkegaard but reproduced by Anti-Climacus) say about the relationship between K and A-C? Are there parts of it that A-C would have said differently, or not at all?

April 30. Concluding Unscientific Class Discussion.

(Optional: *Works of Love* Second Series, IX: "The Work of Love in Recognizing One who is Dead")

For the last class, we will look again at whatever texts you choose (bring ideas on 4/23). If we have exhausted all there is to say about the texts we've read, we'll look at this optional essay from *Works of Love*.