"Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of a true education.” – ML King, Jr.

“A very popular error: having the courage of one’s convictions; rather, it is a matter of having the courage for an attack on one’s convictions!!” – Friedrich Nietzsche

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Course Rationale
This course will trace out several themes in the thought of Søren Kierkegaard, the grandfather of modern existentialist thought. We will begin with an analysis of his own understanding of his authorship in The Point of View for My Work as an Author as an entry point to his mature philosophy. From there, we will utilize the idea that one must become a self as a guiding thread for the rest of the course. As we move through Kierkegaard’s works, we will examine, inter alia, his views on subjective and objective truth; his relationship to Hegelian Absolute Knowledge; his diagnosis of the “leveling” of the present age (the press, the public, etc.); his analyses of anxiety and despair; and humanity’s relationship to God, sin, grace, and passion. Throughout the course, we will examine his complex relationship to “Christendom.”

I don’t study the history of philosophy simply for its own sake – to know what Plato or Descartes or Kant thought – nor do I expect you to do so. Rather, I hope more than anything else that by seriously engaging with each of these texts, some of which will call your own presuppositions about the world into question quite radically, you will not simply learn “what Kierkegaard thought” about these important issues, but will also begin to develop your own positions in thoughtful dialogue with the texts. (This is a fundamentally Kierkegaardian position: to treat the texts of the father of existentialism simply as something to extract a “system” from is to miss the point doubly!) To do that, however, each of us has to do what any reasonable person must do in any conversation: come to every text with an open mind, listen critically to what it has to say, analyze carefully the arguments that it gives us, and consider the possibility that what we currently believe – and, more essentially, how we live – might actually be wrong.

Required Texts
Rental Text: This is a special topics seminar; there is therefore no rental text for the course.
Supplemental Texts: The Essential Kierkegaard; Fear and Trembling/Repetition; we will also be reading about ½ of The Sickness Unto Death, which will be on reserve and/or available as an electronic resource; other short selections may be found on my homepage. When you see <Web> on the syllabus, you should go to my homepage, follow the links to this class, and print out and read the required selection. Please bring the selected reading to class with you each day so we can refer to it actively in our discussions.

Course Objectives
Beyond the substantive philosophical goals of 1) developing an understanding of Kierkegaard’s positions (and their implications) on the complex issues described above and 2) developing your own positions in dialogue with Kierkegaard, I also hope that you will improve your 3) critical reading skills as well as both your 4) written and 5) oral communication abilities over the course of this semester, through the practice of reading, writing about, and discussing these complex philosophical texts. To do so, you will have to put in enough time and effort outside of class: it’s not enough to come to class and listen to the lectures, you’ve got to practice doing philosophy on your own.

Reading philosophy is hard work, though, and most students find it very difficult to understand the texts we will be looking at with a single reading. Consequently, you may find it necessary to read a selection carefully twice or more before class. For this reason, most of the readings I have selected are fairly short. I expect that you will spend, at minimum, two hours outside of class preparing (reading, taking notes,
Course Policies and Expectations

Attendance: If you aren’t here, you obviously can’t participate in the discussions, so excessive absences will be reflected in your participation grade. The absolute maximum number of allowed absences for this class is 6 (7 absences = automatic failure of this course). I take attendance at the beginning of virtually every class; entering the class late (after I have done so) will constitute ½ an absence. In general, “A”-range participation grades will not be awarded to students with 3+ absences.

Preparation and Participation: Since philosophy from Socrates on has been dialogue-oriented, and to help fulfill objective (5) above, students are expected to participate actively in class discussions. This class will be run seminar-style, by which I mean I will do some lecturing, but ideally we will mostly discuss the texts as a group. This will not work unless everyone is well-prepared for the class! You should always feel free to ask questions in class. I expect that all seminar members will treat each other with the respect necessary for a philosophical discussion. At the end of the term, I will also ask you to turn in a worksheet evaluating your own participation and preparation over the course of the semester. I weigh these self-evaluations heavily in assigning class participation grades. (You can find this worksheet on my web page.)

You are responsible for all emails sent to your catamount.wcu.edu account.

In-class time: You have a total of roughly 35 hours of in-class instructional time over the next 3.5 months. Sleeping, text messaging, talking on cell phones, using laptops for reasons besides note-taking, side conversations, and working on other class assignments or personal activities during class are all unacceptable uses of this time. I do not mind if you bring a drink, but I would prefer that you not eat or use tobacco products in this class. All of these activities tend to disrupt the concentration and focus of other students in the class; consequently, engaging in them will constitute grounds for my asking you to leave the class. Please silence your cell phone ringers before class begins.

Attitude: Philosophy and religion classes are natural places for dialogue. For any dialogue to work, however, all the participants must maintain an attitude of humility and openness, both to the text and to the interpretations and comments of others about the issue under discussion. (I will often refer to this attitude as a “hermeneutics of charity.”) This does not preclude critique of others’ positions: we will not be leaving behind our capacity for judgment. Here are a few other helpful rules of thumb for our class discussions:

- Everyone should be prepared to offer contributions on the reading for that day. If you can’t express something in your own words, you don’t have a good grasp of it yet. As this class is intended to improve your oral articulation, “I’m not good at talking in class” is no more valid an excuse not to speak than “I’m not good at papers” would be to avoid the written assignments.
- On the flip, side, one or two people should not dominate the discussion every day. This is unhelpful to you as well as others in the class. It does not give you the chance to hear different opinions and interpretations that might be helpful to your own developing thoughts, and it also does not allow others in the class to work on their own articulation. Do not be offended if I ask you to allow some of your colleagues to participate more on a particular day.
- Philosophical claims, not persons, should be the object of assessment, discussion, and criticism. “Ad hominem” attacks are uniformly unhelpful, only serve to silence legitimate discussions, and should be avoided in genuine dialogues.

Completion of Assignments: All assignments should be completed by you and turned in on time. NOTE:

- If you must miss class, it is your responsibility to make other arrangements for turning in work due on that day, to get class notes from another student in the class, to find out if any assignments have been made for the next class, and to turn those in on time.
• Departmental policy dictates that late assignments will be docked one full grade for each calendar day late (including weekends) unless you have made prior arrangements with me. Assignments will not be accepted more than a week after their due date (= zero).

• As the point of a philosophy course is for you to learn to think for yourself, plagiarism (taking credit for someone else’s words or ideas) constitutes grounds for failure of this class.

• ALL assignments must be turned in to receive a passing grade for the course.

In short, then, you should be present, on time, and prepared to discuss the material for each class session with a charitable attitude, having carefully read and thought about it before class; and complete all assignments by their due date and on your own (unless instructed otherwise).

Course Assessment

Final grades for the course will be calculated as follows:

1) Formal Papers/Text Summaries: 40% total:
   • Three short papers, minimum 1200 words each. Due dates are listed in the schedule of readings.
   • Two annotated bibliographies of four-six journal articles or monograph chapters. Each of these bibliographies should be focused around a particular issue (which may be the same for both bibliographies); again, specific due dates are listed below. The goal here is to lead you into the research you will need to do for your term paper. You should begin your research with the secondary literature list on this syllabus.

2) Research Paper (minimum 3000 words) and Abstract: 15%.

3) Midterm Examination: 10%

4) Comprehensive Final Examination: 15%

5) Class Preparation and Participation: 20% (Neglecting to bring your book or printed copy of the material from the website to class will constitute a participation grade of zero for that day.) I reserve the right to give quizzes if I believe you are not reading the text well enough prior to class. Since this is a seminar, you should plan on bringing to class each day a couple of written comments or questions about the text. I adhere to the grading policies found in the Western Carolina University Undergraduate Studies Catalog. Please refer to it for the official policies regarding the awarding of grades on written work. Final grades of “A” are, as defined there, reserved not merely for satisfactorily completing all requirements for the class, but for “Excellent” work over the course of the semester.

The numerical grading scale for the course is as follows: A = 93+; A- = 90-92; B+ = 87-89; B = 83-86; B- = 80-82; C+ = 77-79; C = 73-76; C- = 70-72; D+ = 67-69; D = 63-66; D- = 60-62; F = 59 and below.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Western Carolina University is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for students with documented disabilities. Students who require disability services or reasonable accommodations must identify themselves as having a disability and provide current diagnostic documentation to Disability Services. All information is confidential. Please contact Disability Services for more information at (828) 227-2716 or 144 Killian Annex.

Tentative Schedule of Readings and Class Discussion Topics

(Subject to change: it is your responsibility to make sure you know what the reading is for each class. EK = Essential Kierkegaard; FT = Fear and Trembling; SUD = The Sickness Unto Death.)

From the Aesthetic to the Ethical


Aug 27 Either/Or I. Unreflective and reflective aestheticism; the rotation of crops. (EK 46-62; I:48-272)
Sept 1 Labor Day: No Class
Sept 3 Either/Or I: 1) The diary of the Seducer. Love and Sex. 2) Tragedy. (EK 62-65; I:276-412); (<Web>)

***Short Paper #1 Due***

Sept 8 Two Ages: “The Present Age.” A Diagnosis of our times. Passion, reflection, decision, leveling, and envy. (EK 252-261; VIII: 64-84)
Sept 10 Two Ages: “The Present Age.” The “Public,” the “Press,” and chatter. (EK 261-268; VIII: 84-100)

Either/Or II. The Esthetic and Marriage. (EK 66-71; II:3-127)

Sept 17 Either/Or II. Choosing Oneself: Balancing the esthetic with the ethical. (EK 71-83; II:141-298)

***Short Paper #2 Due***

Sept 22 Fear and Trembling: Preface; Exordium; and Preliminary Expectoration: Variations on Genesis 22. (FT 5-53; III: 57-103) For background, consult Genesis chapters 17-18, 21-22; and Romans 4.
Sept 24 Fear and Trembling: Problema I. Anxiety and infinite resignation; a teleological suspension of the ethical? (FT 54-67; III: 104-116)

Sept 29 Fear and Trembling: Problema II and III. Is there an Absolute Duty to God? Was it Ethically Defensible for Abraham to Conceal His Understanding? (FT 68-101; III: 117-149)
Oct 1 Fear and Trembling: Problema III, continued. (FT 102-123; III:149-168)

Oct 6 ***Mid-term examination***
Oct 8 Philosophical Fragments. Socrates and the Teacher. (EK 116-125; IV: 173-272)
The Point of View for My Work as an Author. Becoming-aware & deception. (EK 464-468; XIII: 538-542)

Oct 9-14 Fall Break: No Class Thursday through Tuesday
Oct 15 The Concept of Anxiety. Anxiety and freedom. (EK 138-155; IV: 276-423)

Oct 20 Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Possibility and Actuality; System and Existence. (EK 187-198; VII: 154-155, 6-98)

***Short Paper #3 Due***

Oct 22 Advising Day: No Class


***Annotated Bibliography #1 Due***

Nov 3 Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Humor; “A” and “B;” revocation. (EK 230-246; VII: 434-548)
Nov 5 The Sickness Unto Death. Selfhood as synthesis; despair as universal. (SUD 5-28; XI: 117-141)

Nov 12 The Sickness Unto Death. Conscious despair: willing and selfhood. (SUD 47-67; XI: 159-178)

***Annotated Bibliography #2 Due***

Nov 17 The Sickness Unto Death. Defiance and sin. (SUD 67-74; XI: 178-185); (EK 361-371; XI:189-241)
Nov 19 Works of Love. Christianity as duty ethics. (EK 277-294; IX: 7-46)

***Self-evaluation (online) Due; Courseeval open November 10-21***

Nov 24 Dr. Whitmire at conference: No Class
Nov 26-30 Thanksgiving Break: No Class

***Research Papers Due [for NCUR evaluation] by email to me at noon on Saturday, November 29***

Dec 1 Works of Love. Eros and agape. Love’s edification. (<Web>; IX: 54-69); (EK 298-311: IX: 86-215)
Dec 3 Practice in Christianity. Back to the world; or “Religiousness C.” (EK 373-384; XII: xv-220)

Dec 11 (Thursday) 8:00-11:00 am ***Comprehensive Final Examination***
Important Secondary Literature to Consult

The following is a bit of a guide to the secondary literature published on Søren Kierkegaard since about 1975. You should begin – and may very well exhaust! – your annotated bibliographies and ongoing research for your term papers with the works on this list. To my mind, Alastair Hannay, Ed Mooney, Louis Mackey, Robert Perkins, and to some extent Merold Westphal have been the most important and interesting readers of Kierkegaard over the last 30 years (which does not entail that I necessarily agree with them). Pay particular attention to the sorts of things they say – and the kinds of reasons they give for saying them – about Kierkegaard and his Authorship. I have triple-asterisked a couple of my own most utilized resources.

Anthologies, Journals, and Yearbooks

The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard, edited by Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino. Cambridge Companion Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. As with all of the Cambridge Companions, there are some particularly useful articles here for various topics, as well as a couple of overview articles.

Foundations of Kierkegaard’s Visions of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard, edited by George B. Connell and C. Stephen Evans. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1992. Since the 1990’s, the classic vision of Kierkegaard as apolitical or anti-community has been challenged by a number of scholars. Many of the early attempts to problematize this vision of him are included here.

***International Kierkegaard Commentary. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press. Each volume in this series is dedicated to one or more of Kierkegaard’s works, e.g. volume 19 (a particularly good one!) is on The Sickness Unto Death. The authors are among the very best Kierkegaard scholars of the last 20 years. If you are writing about a particular text, you might want to get a copy of the IKC volume on that text, as it will be an invaluable resource.


***Kierkegaard Studies Yearbooks. Very helpful on a number of issues; published since 1996. Along with the IKC, probably the most important periodical for your bibliographical consultation. Some articles are rigorous philological studies; others are more philosophically oriented. For more information, see http://www.degruyter.de/journals/kist/detailEn.cfm.

Kierkegardiana. An older journal that publishes articles in multiple languages. Probably less helpful for your purposes than the Yearbooks, but you may find a useful article or two here.


Important Monographs with particular relevance to this course

Agacinski, Sylviane. *Aparté: Conceptions and Deaths of Søren Kierkegaard*. Translated by Kevin Newmark. Kierkegaard and Postmodernism. Tallahassee, Fla.: Florida State University Press, 1988. A classic example of the 1980’s deconstructive approach towards the Kierkegaardian authorship, asking us to consider (among other issues) whether the “Søren Kierkegaard” of the journals is anything more than another pseudonym.


***Mackey, Louis. *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971. Mackey was one of the most important readers of Kierkegaard for 20 years or so. This is his seminal volume, which treats Kierkegaard as a poet rather than chiefly as a philosopher or theologian (though this is, as you will see, a somewhat problematic distinction).***


***Westphal, Merold. *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard’s Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Purdue University Press Series in the History of Philosophy. West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1996. This is a particularly nice survey of Kierkegaard’s magnum opus. Westphal is one of the clearest scholars of 19th century philosophy out there.***