Kierkegaard Honors Level Seminar: Reading *Fear and Trembling*

Fall 2017

**Credits:** 3 Credits

**External course:** University of Copenhagen Course

**Related Disciplines:** Philosophy, Religious Studies

**Instructor:** René Rosfort

**Place:** Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen, South Campus, Room 6B.0.22

**Schedule:** Mondays 15:00-17:30

**Description of course:** This course will provide an opportunity for students to work with some of the basic themes in Kierkegaard’s authorship through a close reading of one of his central works, *Fear and Trembling* (1843). This work is one of Kierkegaard’s most dense works, comprising intense lyrical pages, a reworking of the biblical story of Abraham, complex reflections on the relationship between ethics and religion, and perhaps most importantly a careful analysis of how to exist as an individual in terms of and against the norms of society. The course aims to provide students with a nuanced understanding of fundamental aspects of Kierkegaard’s thought (e.g. ethics, anxiety, the paradox, despair, faith, the absurd, and selfhood) through a close reading of this book. The systematic focus will be on the relation between individuality and society (autonomous existence and heteronomous norms), and on how to make sense of Kierkegaard’s Christian philosophy in a contemporary secular context.

**Instructor:** René Rosfort, PhD & MA (University of Copenhagen, 2008 & 2003). Associate Professor (Kierkegaard Research Centre, University of Copenhagen). E-mail: rer@teol.ku.dk

**Learning objectives of the course:** The close reading of this central work will provide the student with a solid introduction to Kierkegaard’s philosophy, and to his peculiar existential way of doing philosophy. The student will also be engaged with central questions in contemporary philosophy that have informed and shaped the way we approach and use Kierkegaard today. Moreover, since Kierkegaard’s thought is firmly rooted in a Christian foundation, the student will work with the issue of how understand and deal with religious arguments in a secular discussion.

**Required texts:**

   University Press 2015.

**DIS Contact:**
Sanne Rasmussen, Program Coordinator, European Humanities Department, sra@dis.dk
Approach to Teaching: The sessions are structured as a combination of reading and discussion with a focus on engaging the student. The students are required to prepare one question or critical comment for each session. These questions will encourage and guide the discussion in class. The student can expect a lively and systematically oriented teacher who will attempt to make the issues both interesting and relevant to a contemporary setting while maintaining a substantial theoretical level and the necessary historical perspective.

Expectations of the students: I expect you to have done the required reading. There will be at least four hours of preparation for each session. This will give us material to generate a conversation about Kierkegaard’s text and the philosophical problems at stake in the text. I encourage engaged participation in the discussions, and I expect that in the discussions you will make explicit use of both Kierkegaard’s text and the secondary readings.

Research Paper: An analytical/interpretive paper will be due toward the end of the semester. The University of Copenhagen requires a paper of 19,200-24,000 characters including spaces for bachelor’s students, including DIS students. This is roughly equivalent to 13-14 double-spaced pages. The requirement is 28,800-36,000 characters including spaces for UCPH master’s students. This is roughly equivalent to 18-22 double-spaced pages. You must include a character count on the front page of your paper. (You must receive a passing grade on the research paper to receive a final grade in the course. Late papers will be penalized a half-grade for each day after the due date.)

Grading:
Engaged participation: 20%
Final paper: 80%

Attendance: Class attendance is required, including classes with guest lecturers. According to UCPH policy, all students must be present 75% of the time to receive a grade. (For DIS students: the DIS Director of Teaching and Learning, and the Director of Student Affairs, must be notified if you are absent four times or more).

Plagiarism Policy: In accordance with UCPH rules for academic ethics, there will be a no tolerance policy towards cheating and plagiarism. The submission of any paper which is not your own work will result in an automatic F for the course and possible notification of your home university.

Disability and Resource Statement
Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should immediately contact Office of Academic Support (acadsupp@dis.dk) to coordinate this. In order to receive accommodations, students should inform the instructor of approved DIS accommodations.
Course Schedule

Session 1 (August 28): Introduction: Anxiety, Ethics, and God
Primary Reading:
• Arne Grøn. *The Concept of Anxiety in Kierkegaard*, Preface + Ch. 1, pp. vii-xiv + 1-50 / BA, Forord + Kap. 1, s. 9-12 + 13-56.

Secondary Reading:

Session 2 (September 4): Doubt, Faith, and Existence
Primary Reading:
• Søren Kierkegaard. *Fear and Trembling*, Preface (pp. 41-43) / SKS 4, s. 101-104.
• Arne Grøn. *The Concept of Anxiety in Kierkegaard*, Ch. 2, pp. 51-63 / BA, Kap. 2, s. 57-69.

Secondary Reading

Session 3 (September 18): Moods, Emotions, and Thinking
Primary Reading:
• Søren Kierkegaard. *Fear and Trembling*, Attunement (pp. 41-43) / SKS 4, s. 105-111.
• Arne Grøn. *The Concept of Anxiety in Kierkegaard*, Ch. 3, pp. 64-86 / BA, Kap. 3, s. 69-88.

Secondary Reading

Session 4 (September 25): In Praise of an Anti-Hero
Primary Reading:
• Søren Kierkegaard. *Fear and Trembling*, Speech in Praise of Abraham (pp. 49-56) / SKS 4, s. 112-119.

Secondary Reading
Final Syllabus

Session 5 (October 2): The Joy of Faith
Primary Reading:
• Søren Kierkegaard. Fear and Trembling, Problemata. Preamble from the Heart (pp. 57-72) / SKS 4, s. 123-138.
• Arne Gren. The Concept of Anxiety in Kierkegaard, Ch. 5, pp. 107-113 / BA, Kap. 5, s.108-112.

Secondary Reading

Session 6 (October 16): The Movement of Faith
Primary Reading:
• Søren Kierkegaard. Fear and Trembling, Problemata. Preamble from the Heart (pp. 72-82) / SKS 4, s. 138-147.
• Arne Gren. The Concept of Anxiety in Kierkegaard, Ch. 6, pp. 114-119 / BA, Kap. 5, s.113-117.

Secondary Reading

Session 7 (October 23): Beyond the Ethical?
Primary Reading:
• Søren Kierkegaard. Fear and Trembling, Problemata I (pp. 83-95) / SKS 4, s. 148-159.
• Arne Gren. The Concept of Anxiety in Kierkegaard, Ch. 7, pp. 120-132 / BA, Kap. 7, 118-128.

Secondary Reading

Session 8 (November 6): Coram Deo and the Question of Duty
Primary Reading:
• Søren Kierkegaard. Fear and Trembling, Problemata II (pp. 96-108) / SKS 4, s. 148-159.
• Arne Gren. The Concept of Anxiety in Kierkegaard, Ch. 8, pp. 133-142 / BA, Kap. 8, s. 129-137.

Secondary Reading
Session 9 (November 13): Ethics and Aesthetics
Primary Reading
• Søren Kierkegaard. Fear and Trembling, Problemata III (pp. 109-120) / SKS 4, s. 172-184.
• Arne Grøn. The Concept of Anxiety in Kierkegaard, Ch. 9, pp. 143-155 / BA, Kap. 9, s. 138-149.

Secondary Reading

Session 10 (November 20): Absurdity and the Limits of Philosophy
Primary Reading:
• Søren Kierkegaard. Fear and Trembling, Problemata III (pp. 120-132) / SKS 4, s. 184-195.
• Arne Grøn. The Concept of Anxiety in Kierkegaard, Ch. 10, pp. 156-163. / BA, Kap. 10, s. 150-156.

Secondary Reading

Session 11 (November 27): The Meaning of Silence
Primary Reading:
• Søren Kierkegaard. Fear and Trembling, Problemata III (pp. 132-144) / SKS 4, s. 195-207.

Secondary Reading

Session 12 (December 4): The Perpetual Beginning of Faith
Primary Reading:
• Søren Kierkegaard. Fear and Trembling, Epilogue (pp. 145-147) / SKS 4, s. 208-210.

Secondary Reading

Final Paper (due Monday, December 11)