PHI-3425: Søren Kierkegaard – Religious Poet

Ashoka University Spring Semester 2024

Cap – 50 students

Date & Time – Tuesday-Thursday 10:10-11:40

Instructor: Professor William McDonald

TA: TBA

*Course Description*

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) sought to provoke and awaken those who were religious merely by default into grasping their faith with passion. In the process, Kierkegaard produced withering critiques of his contemporaries, created a dialectic of existential types, delved into the dark corners of psychology (anxiety, despair, self-deception, narcissism) and its redemptive light (humour, joy, love, faith), seduced with aesthetic delights, bamboozled through his strategy of making things more difficult (against an age that tried to make everything easier) and published a complex authorship which coheres in an extraordinary unified whole.

This course will introduce Kierkegaard’s *oeuvre* by reading selections from his “first authorship” (*Either/Or* to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*) with occasional nods to his later works. We will examine philosophical, psychological, aesthetic and religious concepts and endeavour to situate them in historical context – bearing in mind Kierkegaard’s quest for an idea for which he could live and die.

*Required Readings from the “First Authorship”*

Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (volumes I & II) (20 February 1843)

Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (16 October 1843)

Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition* (16 October 1843)

Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (1843-44)

Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* (or *Philosophical Crumbs*) (13 June 1844)

Søren Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety* (17 June 1844)

*Reading from Elsewhere in Kierkegaard’s Oeuvre*

Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates* (1841)

*Learning Outcomes*

On completion of this course students will:

\* Have an understanding of the structure of Kierkegaard's "first authorship."

\* Have an understanding of the dialectic of existential types.

\* Have an understanding of some of Kierkegaard's key concepts.

\* Have an understanding of how Kierkegaard's work engaged with his contemporaries and thinkers of the past.

\* Have developed a critical perspective on some of Kierkegaard's central themes.

\* Have developed the capacity to ask critical questions regarding the texts.

*Attendance Policy*

Attendance is compulsory. You will be allowed up to four unexplained absences. Other absences will require documentation. Course participation is worth 15% of total mark and regular attendance will count towards participation.

*Assessment*

Participation: 15% (attendance + Perusall responses)

Class Presentation: 35% (either individual or group)

Final Essay: 50% (2000-3000 words)

*Presentation Grading Rubric*

*Clarity of exposition.* You will receive marks for giving a clear exposition of themes and concepts and for explaining difficult sections of the text.

*Demonstrating understanding of the text.* You will receive marks for showing that you have understood the text, particularly those parts whose meaning is not obvious.

*Raising questions about the text*. You will receive marks for raising questions about the text. You will receive marks for the quality of the questions, whether for their critical acumen or for the way in which they orient readings of the text or for the way in which they reflect genuine perplexity about the text.

*Promotion of Discussion*. You will receive marks for promoting discussion of the text among your classmates. You will earn marks especially for promoting critical discussion or insightful discussion.

*Final Essay Grading Rubric*

*Quality of the Question*. You will receive marks for (1) relevance of your question, (2) originality of your question, (3) significance of your question (does it open up interesting or important perspectives on the target texts?), (4) answerability of your question (is it really able to be answered?), (5) scope of the question (is it able to be answered adequately in 500 words?), (6) Clarity of your question (make sure your question is not muddled or ambiguous).

*Answer to the Question*. Does your answer actually answer the question you have posed? Is your answer clear and well-formulated?

*Evidence for your Answer*. Do you support your answer with evidence? Do you draw on evidence from the target texts? Do you introduce extra-textual evidence (context, theoretical perspectives)?

*Coherence of your Essay*. You will be evaluated on the coherence of the evidence and argument, or narrative, you create to answer the question. One form of coherence would be to offer your answer as the conclusion to an argument, in which your evidence forms the premises of your argument. Narrative coherence is somewhat looser, though should be devoid of inconsistencies. It should also offer a compelling answer to your question.