RELIGION 300 – KIERKEGAARD AND NIETZSCHE

FALL 2011

THURSDAYS
3:30 P.M. TO 4:50 P.M.
111 EGGERS

Dr. Marcia C. Robinson
Professor

Office: 511 HL
Office Hours: 12:45PM to 2:00PM, Wednesdays, and by appointment
Main Office: 501 HL  Phone: 315-443-3861
E-mail: mrobin03@syr.edu

Course Description

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are two of the most influential thinkers in the Modern Christian West. In addition to the fact that Nietzsche read Kierkegaard, the two together have influenced a host of other prominent religious thinkers, philosophers, theologians, psychologists, and artists from the late 19th century to the present, including, but not limited to Ludwig Wittgenstein, Karl Barth, Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, Emmanuel Levinas, Karl Jaspers, Theodor Adorno, Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, Jacques Derrida, Richard Wright, Henrik Ibsen, Paul Tillich, Isak Dinesen, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Cornel West.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are probably best known for their acerbic critiques of modern European Christendom. Both thinkers challenged what they took to be the dispassionate character of their respective 19th-century bourgeois societies by focusing on religion. In doing so, both also came to champion the creative or aesthetic dimensions of human existence. Indeed, scholars have often compared the two figures because of their shared focus on the individual; their shared critique of bourgeois Christendom, particularly for its role in hindering the formation of authentic selves; and their shared use of poetic, aesthetic, or aphoristic forms to convey their ideas.

In this course, we too will focus on these shared features of their thought. We, however, will also consider differences between these two provocateurs on religion and human being. Noting the fact that they operated within different national and ethnic milieux (Denmark and Germany), and at opposite ends of the 19th century, we will pay attention to the way in which they represent two distinct perspectives on religion and selfhood, indeed two distinct perspectives on the relation between religion and art or the aesthetic in the development of the self.
Required Course Texts


Other Required Readings on Reserve

Other required readings listed on the schedule below or assigned in class will be posted on Blackboard. Students should make their own copies of these readings and bring them to class.

Course Requirements and Grading

In addition to the weekly reading assignments, students will be required to: 1) **participate in class through informal discussion** and short writing assignments, and 2) a final essay.

_Class participation_, comprised of reading assignments, informal class discussion, and short, weekly writing assignments, will account for one half of a student’s grade. A student’s regular participation in class discussion will be noted over the course of the semester. A letter grade will be assessed for it based upon the quality of a student’s verbal participation—insightfulness, preparedness, and clarity. The fundamental part of a student’s class participation grade, though, will be constituted of short, weekly, writing assignments. These writing assignments will serve as the basis of class discussion. Students will pick passages from the readings that they find interesting, and write at least one page of commentary on their chosen passage. In doing so, students should identify and analyze an issue in their chosen passage, and be ready to discuss it in class. To facilitate this, students should type their papers, putting the quoted passage at the top of the page, providing a citation for it, and then providing at least one page of double-spaced commentary. Students should write no more than two pages of commentary. They should also be prepared to turn in their papers.
at the end of each class session. These short writing assignments will not be graded individually, but collectively at mid-term and at the end of the course, when students will also turn in short assessment papers (of no more than three, typed, double-spaced pages) of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. This should give students a sense of how they are doing and have done in class when they do their final essay. Both the mid-term and final set of short papers, with assessment papers, will be worth up to 100 points per set. The final class participation grade will be an average of the two sets of short papers—increased, balanced, or lowered by my assessment of a student’s participation in class discussion. In other words, the average of writing assignments will be reduced by the assessment of a student’s verbal contributions to class discussion only if s/he never contributes anything to class discussion. Students should be prepared to meet with me at the end of the semester to discuss their final paper.

Please note that failure to attend the course regularly and timely can also hurt a student’s class participation grade. Therefore, MAKE SURE THAT YOU ATTEND REGULARLY AND TIMELY. Irregular attendance, including regular tardiness, will diminish your overall class participation grade in the following manner:

- One absence = No deductions.
- Two to Three absences = 5 points each.
- Each absence thereafter = 10 points per instance.
- Regular tardiness = 10 points per instance.

These penalties will be enforced. However, if you are having problems or have special issues, do not hesitate to inform me immediately.

The final essay will account for the second half of a student’s grade. Students will write an essay comparing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche on selfhood in religious terms. In order to write this paper, students should choose pertinent passages from the writings of both figures by selecting from course texts. The works chosen should include readings covered in class. Students may also use selections from one or more readings not covered in class, yet part of an anthology used in class such as the Marino existentialism anthology. This essay should follow a standard paper style, preferably University of Chicago (see Turabian’s style manual). Students should make sure to proof their papers for errors in grammar and spelling, as well as for clarity and consistency of argument. Students should cite all sources that they use. This essay will be worth up to 100 points.

Grade Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>74-76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C- = 70-73
D = 60-69
F = 0-59

Fractions of points will be rounded to the nearest whole point only at my discretion, and only in regard to the final grade.

Expectations and Policies

Attendance: Students are expected to attend each class session regularly and timely. STUDENTS ARE NOT FULLY PRESENT UNLESS THEY BRING ALL REQUIRED READING MATERIAL FOR THE DAY TO CLASS, ALONG WITH ANY ASSIGNED WRITING.

Preparation: Students are expected to be prepared for each class and to submit all assignments when due. TARDY WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. STUDENTS SHOULD ALSO BRING ALL REQUIRED READING MATERIAL FOR THE DAY TO CLASS AS WELL. ONE IS NOT FULLY PREPARED WITHOUT THESE MATERIALS.

Respect: Students are expected to be attentive and courteous to me and each other. This means no talking while others are talking; no entering and exiting while class is in session (unless there is an emergency or this is part of the structure of a presentation); no cell-phone calls; no text messaging or sending or writing e-mails; no reading newspapers during class; no chewing gum or eating; no putting on makeup or combing one’s hair; and so forth.

Problems: If you have problems with the assignments or anything else that might affect your performance, please contact me immediately. Email is best, but also call the main office of the Dept. of Religion at (315) 443-3861, and leave a message with one of the secretaries.

Plagiarism: Avoid the hint of plagiarism. If you use someone else’s ideas or words, including in a paraphrase, cite the source and put the words that you use in quotation marks.

Holidays: The University no longer observes any religious holidays. Therefore, students planning to do so must contact me well ahead of time so that they might arrange to be absent without penalty and to complete any missed assignments. Students will not be given the opportunity to avoid a penalty, if they do not contact me ahead of time.

Disability: Syracuse University and I value diversity and seek to promote meaningful access to educational opportunities for all students. This includes supporting Section 504 of
the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at (315) 443-4498 or (315) 443-1371 (TDD). They are located at 804 University Avenue, Room 309.

### TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF LECTURES, ASSIGNMENTS, & FILMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Tues., 8/30</td>
<td><strong>Introductions &amp; Introduction to the Course.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thurs., 9/1</td>
<td><strong>Getting Immersed in Kierkegaard’s and Nietzsche’s Mindset: The Malaise of Modern Western Christendom.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assignment:** Please read the selections from Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* at pp. 193-230 and from Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* at pp. 495-505 in the Marino anthology. Mark a passage or two in each selection that you find interesting and would like to discuss in class, and consider what the overarching theme or issue might be in each.

For the broader context of the course, begin reading the Introduction, Chapter 1, and the Rousseau, Hume, and Kant sections in Chapter 3 in the Livingston textbook and Thomas Flynn’s *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*. These textbooks are for your aid throughout the course.

| 2.   | Tues., 9/6-Thurs., 9/8 | **Introduction to Kierkegaard/Kierkegaard’s Project for Danish Christendom: The Point of View.** |

**Assignment:** For Tues., 9/6, please read the entries from 1835 in Kierkegaard’s *Journals* in the Bretall anthology at pp. 3-5 and the entry from Kierkegaard’s *Point of View for My Work as an Author* in the Bretall anthology at pp. 324-339. For Thurs., 9/8, select a passage from the *Point of View*, and write a short paper of 1-3 typed, double-spaced pages, keeping in mind what SK says in the journal entry from Gilleleje. For context, you may find Bretall’s introduction to *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, Flynn’s discussion of SK in *Existentialism: A Short Introduction*, and Chapter 15 in Livingston helpful, but do not rely on any of these secondary works in your commentary. The focus in your paper should be on a passage in SK’s text and the issue(s) that it raises.
3. Tues., 9/13  **Kierkegaard’s Copenhagen: “The Present Age.”**

Kierkegaard gives one of his most succinct critiques of Danish Christendom in “The Present Age,” the second half of a literary review entitled *Two Ages*. Key ideas in this work include his unique concepts of “leveling” and “reflection.”

**Assignments:** Read pp. 260-269 in the Bretall anthology. Select a passage for discussion and write a short commentary on it.

3.-9. Thurs., 9/15-

Thurs., 10/27  **Types of Selfhood: Aesthetic, Ethical, and Religious.**

Over the next six and a half weeks, we will examine Kierkegaard’s conceptions of “existence spheres” by reading selections from *Either/Or, Fear and Trembling, the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Practice in Christianity, Philosophical Fragments, Christian Discourses, Works of Love*, and the *Sickness Unto Death*. Most selections that we will read are in the Bretall anthology. Those not in the anthology are available on Blackboard.

**Assignments:** For Thurs., 9/15, please read the “Diary of the Seducer” from Part I of *Either/Or*, with the “Diapsalmata,” at pp. 33-80 in the Bretall anthology. Pick several passages that you would like to discuss, focusing on the diary. Make some notes on issues by considering how the two selections might be related.

4. For Tues., 9/20, read the “Aesthetic Validity of Marriage” and “Equilibrium” from *Either/Or, Part II* at pp. 80-108 in the Bretall anthology. Pick several noteworthy passages from these selections. Focus a short paper, however, on a passage from “Equilibrium.” In this paper, also consider whether or not the judge responds adequately to the aesthete by asking what freedom and religion might mean for both figures.

For Thurs., 9/22, read the opening pages from *Fear and Trembling* as well as the passage from Genesis 22 on Blackboard. Then read the selection from *Fear and Trembling* at pp. 118-134 in the Bretall anthology. Mark passages and note issues that you would like to discuss in the first section on the knights of faith and resignation. Focus, however, on “Problem 1.”

5. For Tues., 9/27, select a passage and write a short paper that considers the meaning of faith in these selections from *Fear and Trembling*. Allow the opening pages from *Fear and Trembling* on Blackboard and the eulogy to
Abraham in the first section in Bretall to illuminate the problem of faith in the second. As you do, consider the issues raised in *Fear and Trembling* in light of what the judge says in *Either/Or, II*.

The theme of the difficulty of faith raised in *Fear and Trembling* will continue in our reading of selections from the *Philosophical Fragments* and the *Christian Discourses*, but from different perspectives. For Thurs., 9/29, please read the king and the maiden story in the *Philosophical Fragments* at pp. 164-172 in Bretall and the discourse on weakness and strength from the *Christian Discourses* on Blackboard. Consider the complex relationship between God and human beings in the king and the maiden story in light of the same relationship as it is discussed in the discourse on weakness and strength. Mark some passages in both selections, and be prepared to discuss what is necessary for this relationship to be “happy” for both subjects.

6.

**NO CLASSES** on Tues., 10/4 and Thurs., 10/6. During this week, I will be out of town attending to a relative undergoing surgery. Please, however, make good use of your time off by doing the following:

a) Write a short paper on the selections from the *Fragments* and the *Christian Discourses* discussed the previous week. Utilize the passages that you selected for class discussion. Also consider how these passages give you a different perspective on faith in SK’s thought. **This paper is due 10/11 at the beginning of class.**

b) Start reading the selection from the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* at pp. 193-231 in Bretall. Select a passage from each major section demarcated in this selection (i.e., at pp. 193-194; 195-207, top; 207-210; 210, bott.-226, top; 226-231). Focus your attention, though, on pp. 210, bott.-226, top, since this is where you will choose a passage on which to write a paper next week, after considerable discussion.

7.

On Tues., 10/11, and Thurs., 10/13, be ready to discuss briefly pp. 193-210 in Bretall, but to focus on pp. 210-231 on both days. Have several passages and issues identified before you come to class so that we can move directly into discussion. **After class on 10/13,** write a paper focusing on a single passage and issue or set of issues from pp. 210-231 in Bretall. **This paper is due at the beginning of class on 10/18.** The purpose for having you do the paper after our discussion is this. The readings from the *Postscript* will be some of the most complex that we encounter; therefore, I want you not only to have time to read it, but also to have the benefit of discussion.
On Tues., 10/18, and Thurs., 10/20, we will continue to discuss the religious sphere of existence—and specifically the problem of faith—by moving to selections from *Works of Love* and from *Practice* [or *Training*] *in Christianity*. The selection from *Works of Love* and the second of two selections from *Practice* [or *Training*] *in Christianity* are on Blackboard. The first of the two selections from *Practice* [or *Training*] *in Christianity* is in the Bretall anthology.

For Tues., 10/18, please read the selection from *Works of Love*, and select several passages from it that might help us to interpret the Abraham and Isaac story that *Fear and Trembling* addresses from another perspective.

For 10/20, we will continue to ponder the selection from *Works of Love*, but we will now consider what it offers to our discussion of the problem of faith—from *Fear and Trembling* onward—in light of “The Inviter” from *Training in Christianity* in Bretall at pp. 397-413, and in light of the selection from *Practice in Christianity* on Blackboard.

*After class today* (10/20), write a short paper on how *Works of Love* might be said to elaborate the issue of “sacrificing” the beloved. Is the beloved actually being sacrificed? Or does this mean something entirely different? *This paper is due at the beginning of class on 10/25.*

We will complete our study of Kierkegaard this week (10/25 and 10/27) by focusing on a selection from the *Sickness Unto Death* in the Marino anthology. Our purpose here will be to use the discussion of the self as spirit in the *Sickness Unto Death* to sum up Kierkegaard’s meaning of selfhood in religious terms, with references to the aesthetic. For Tues., 10/25, please read pp. 41-72 in the Marino anthology. Identify passages and issues that you would like to discuss. For Thurs., 10/27, please read pp. 72-105, and identify passages and issues that you would like to discuss. On both days, consider how this work might relate to all of the others that we have read.

*After class on Thursday, 10/27*, write a short essay of no more than three, typed, double-spaced pages assessing Kierkegaard’s conception of the self in religious terms. What ultimately does he mean by religion, and why is it important to being an authentic self in modern Christendom? In answering these questions, go back to Kierkegaard’s avowed project in *Point of View* and his analysis of his age in the *Two Ages*. Be sure, though, to use all of the texts that we have studied thus far, even though you should make one text your focal or organizing text for references to the others. Be sure to take into consideration our discussions, and keep in mind that we have been reading works under various pseudonyms with perspectives that may or may not agree. *This is not an exam. It,*
however, is an important exercise that is meant to give you an
time to demonstrate what you know about Kierkegaard. *It will be
used, along with all of your other papers thus far, to determine your
mid-term grade.* In other words, this paper completes your first set of
papers. The primary purpose of this exercise is to give you a basis for
comparing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in your final paper. *This paper is
due by the beginning of class on Tues., 11/1.*

10. Tues., 11/1-
11/3 Thurs., 11/3

**Introduction to Nietzsche/Nietzsche’s Project for European
Christendom: Ecce Homo.**

**Assignment:** For Tues., 11/1, start reading the editor’s introduction and
pp. 3-44 in Large’s translation of *Ecce Homo.* I will introduce Nietzsche
today, but be ready to start discussing the first part of *Ecce Homo.* To this
end, identify several passages that you would like to discuss, and write
down some issues to raise in class during our opening discussion. On
Thurs., 11/3, we will continue our discussion of *Ecce Homo* as needed, but
will move toward his critique of Christianity and European Christendom
by looking at selections from *The Gay Science.* To this end, please read
pp. 95-96, 447-450 (corresponding to sections 125, 343, 344) from *The
Gay Science* as excerpted and translated in Gordon Kaufmann’s anthology.
As with Kierkegaard, you may find Livingston, Flynn, and the editorial
remarks of the translators and editors of the Nietzsche works helpful.

11. Tues., 11/8-
11/10 Thurs., 11/10

**Nietzsche’s Scathing Critique of Christianity and Modern
Christendom: “The Anti-Christ.”**

**Assignment:** Over the next two days, we will read the entire selection
from “The Anti-Christ” from the *Revaluation of All Values* in the
Kaufmann anthology. For 11/8, please read the entire selection; identify
several passages for discussion; and note several issues. For 11/10, please
prepare a short paper on a specific passage and issue or set of issues. Be
prepared to discuss your paper and the text in class.

12.-14. Tues., 11/15-
12/1 Thurs., 12/1

**Nietzsche’s Ethic of Self-Becoming and Self-Overcoming: Thus Spoke
Zarathustra.**

**Assignment:** Over the next three weeks, we will focus on Nietzsche’s
*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in the Kaufmann anthology. We will read
selected speeches from the work, along with selections from The Birth of Tragedy. As a way of illuminating Zarathustra, we will not only use The Birth of Tragedy, but we may also use small selections from The Twilight of the Gods, The Wanderer, Toward a Genealogy of Morals, The Wagner Case, some of the letters, and perhaps some of the aphorisms in the early works. Most of this material is in the Kaufmann. Any other passages used will be placed on Blackboard. Tues., 11/15 will be a day of discussion only, while Thurs., 11/18, Tues., 11/29, and Thurs., 12/1 will be days when papers will be the basis of discussion along with the texts. Therefore, on those days, please prepare a short paper. Details about readings will be provided as we reach these days.

13. Tues., 11/22- Thurs., 11/24 **NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK.** Please continue reading through Nietzsche’s Zarathustra and other writings as needed. Also begin thinking how you will assess him, since you can use this week to work on your short discussion papers.


15. Tues., 12/6 **Assessing Nietzsche.**

**Assignment:** Read pp. 45-95 in Large’s translation of Ecce Homo, and write a short paper that assesses Nietzsche’s project in light of what he says about it in Ecce Homo, and what you have studied over the last five weeks. As with Kierkegaard, explain what role religion plays in his conception of authentic human being. This will complete your second set of papers, on which I will attempt to provide feedback as soon as possible (i.e., by Sunday, 12/11).

16. Thurs., 12/15 **FINAL ESSAYS DUE AT 4:00 PM IN DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION OFFICE. NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**