

Professors J. Conant & J. Lear
Fall Quarter – 2002
Departments of Philosophy & Social Thought
University of Chicago

Seminar on *Either/Or*

*** Syllabus ***

Schedule of the seminar

- Sept. 30 Introductory Meeting
- Oct. 7 Victor Eremita's Preface (E/O, Vol I)
- Oct. 14 Diapsalmata (E/O, Vol I)
 The Immediate Stages of the Erotic (E/O, Vol I)
- Oct. 21 The Rotation Method (E/O, Vol I)
 The Immediate Stages of the Erotic (continued)
- Oct. 28 The Diary of the Seducer (E/O, Vol I)
- Nov. 4 Aesthetic Validity of Marriage, first half (E/O, Vol II)
- Nov. 11 Aesthetic Validity of Marriage, second half
- Nov. 18 Equilibrium Between the Aesthetical and the Ethical, first half (E/O, Vol II)
- Nov. 25 Equilibrium Between the Aesthetical and the Ethical, second half
- Dec. 2 Ultimatum (E/O, Vol II)
 A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature, Selection (CUP)

A First and Last Declaration (CUP)

Readings

The primary texts for the course

Either/Or, Volume I 1st choice: the Swenson & Swenson translation (which is out of print)
2nd choice: the Hong & Hong translation (which is in print)

Either/Or, Volume II 1st choice: the Walter Lowrie translation (which is out of print)
2nd choice: the Hong & Hong translation (which is in print)

Two additional required readings from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

1. Johannes Climacus's discussion of *Either/Or* in "Appendix: A Glance at a Contemporary Effort in Danish Literature"; pp. 225-234 & 261-266 of the Swenson & Lowrie translation of CUP, pp. 251-261 & 294-300 of the Hong & Hong translation
2. Søren Kierkegaard's "A First and Last Declaration" appended to the conclusion of CUP; pp. 551 - 554 (but not numbered as such) in the Swenson & Lowrie translation of CUP, pp. 621 - 630 of the Hong & Hong translation

Additional required readings from *Either/Or, Vol. I* not mentioned in the schedule

1. "The Ancient Tragical Motif as Reflected in the Modern"
2. "Shadowgraphs"
3. "The Unhappiest Man"
4. "The First Love"

Two recommended (but in no way required) books by Kierkegaard

1. *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*
2. *The Diary of Søren Kierkegaard* (edited by Peter Rohde)

Three helpful quotations about *Either/Or* from Kierkegaard's Journals

1. I called the work 'Either/Or' and tried in the Preface to explain the meaning of the title. After familiarizing myself with each of its parts, I allowed the thing through a process of contemplation to come together in my mind as a whole work. My proposal was that the reader should do the same. For him too the whole thing was to confront him like a single point that divides everything into a disjunction. But, for this to happen, the reader would have to enter into a relation of self-activity with the book – as I had intended throughout that he should and as I had sought to bring about by abstaining completely from saying anything about the plan of the work within the work itself. In any case, I was in no position to have any more definite view on this matter than other reader of the work, should there be one. The plan of the work as a whole is a task for self-activity, and to impose my own understanding on the reader seemed to me an offensive and impertinent meddling. Every person experiences an either/or in his life.... But the grasp of the plan will differ according to the degree of the individual's development. (*Papirer* 44 IV B 59)
2. *My program: Either/Or*
It is laughter that must be used – hence the line in the last diapsalm in *Either/Or*. But laughter must first of all be divinely consecrated and devoutly dedicated. This was wrought on the greatest possible scale.... And this is how the comic must be used. The laughter must not be permitted to prevail or even to be the final note – no, the laughter is merely a power that serves to throw light on the trumperies and illusions [of the reader] in a manner that enables me to achieve, if possible, my purpose: namely, “to influence by means of the ideal”.(*Papirer* XI B 56)
3. What if I had written at the back of the second edition of *Either/Or*:
Postscript
I hereby retract this book. It was a necessary deception in order to deceive people, if I could, into the religious, as has constantly been my task all along.
Maieutically, it certainly has had an impact. Nevertheless, I do not need to retract it, for I have never claimed to be its author. (*Papirer* 49 X I A 192)

An Excerpt from Kierkegaard's “A First and Last Declaration”

My Pseudonymity or polynymity has not had a casual ground in my person ... but it has an *essential* ground in the character of the *production*.... [I]n the pseudonymous works there is not a single word which is mine, I have no opinion about these works except as a third person, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them, since such a thing is impossible in the case of a doubly reflected communication. One single word of mine uttered personally in my own name would be an instance of presumptuous self-forgetfulness, and dialectically viewed it would incur with one word the guilt of annihilating the pseudonyms. Just so far as I am from being

the Seducer or the Judge in *Either/Or*, just so far am I from being the editor Victor Eremita, precisely so far.... My wish, my prayer, is that, if it might occur to anyone to quote a particular saying from the books, he would do me the favor to cite the name of the respective pseudonymous author. (CUP, S&L, pp. 551-2; H&H, p. 625-627)

Two helpful remarks about *Either /Or* by Johannes Climacus

1. I became a tragi-comically interested witness of the productions of Victor Eremita and the other pseudonyms. Whether my interpretation is the same as that of the authors, I can of course not know with certainty, since I am only a reader; on the other hand, it gives me pleasure to see that the pseudonyms, presumably aware of the relation subsisting between the method of indirect communication and the truth as inwardness, have themselves said nothing, nor misused a preface to assume an official attitude toward the production, as if an author were in a purely legal sense the best interpreter of his own words; or as if it could help a reader that an author had intended this or that, if it was not realized; or as if it were certain that it was realized because the author himself says so in the preface.... *Either/Or*, whose very title is suggestive, exhibits the existential relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical in existing individualities.... The fact that there is no result and no finite decision is an indirect expression for the truth as inwardness.... The preface itself says something about it, but not didactically, for then I could know with certainty, but in the merry form of jest and hypothesis. The fact that there is no author is a means of keeping the reader at a distance. (CUP, S&L, pp. 225-226; H&H, p. 252)
2. [T]he second part of *Either/Or* answers and corrects every misdirection in the first part ... except that the ethicist addresses himself throughout only to the essence of the matter, and nowhere takes direct cognizance of what according to the plan of the work as a whole he cannot be supposed to know. It is thus left to the reader to put two and two together, if he so desires; but nothing is done to minister to a reader's indolence. To be sure, it is just this that readers want.... In relation to the pseudonymous authors this expectation is unquestionably a misunderstanding on the part of a reader. (CUP, S&L, pp. 264-5; H&H, p. 298)

Giving the Last Word to Kierkegaard

When I am dead there will be something for the university lecturers to poke into. The abject scoundrels. And yet. What's the use, what's the use? Even though this be printed and read again and again, the lecturers will still make a profit out of me, teach about me, maybe adding a comment like this: "The peculiar thing about this is that it cannot be taught." (*The Diary of Søren Kierkegaard*, pp. 147-8)