TRUTH and TRUTHFULNESS:

Biblical, Philosophical and Theological Approaches

**PhD course and conference at Aarhus University
August 15-16, 2022**

Keynote Speakers:

Jan Dietrich, University of Bonn

Troels Engberg-Pedersen, University of Copenhagen

Claudia Welz, Aarhus University

Thomas Schwarz Wentzer, Aarhus University

Registration by August 1

at https://phdcourses.dk/Course/82011

Everyone is welcome!

Program

August 15, 2022

12.00-13.00: Lunch

13.00-14.15: **Welcome and keynote address by Jan Dietrich** (University of Bonn): "Truth in the Hebrew Bible: In comparison with ancient Greece and the ancient Near East"

14.15-14.30: Coffee break

14.30-15.30: **Reading session 1**: Truth(fulness) in antiquity (the Hebrew Bible, Plato, and the New Testament)

15.30-16.00: **PhD session:**

- Mathis Kreitzscheck (University of Göttingen): "Truth(fulness) and Falsehood in Ancient Near Eastern Historical Texts"

16.00-16.15: Coffee break

16.15-17.30: Keynote address by Troels Engberg-Pedersen (University of Copenhagen): "Truth from Stoicism into the New Testament (Paul and John)"

August 16, 2022

9.00-10.00: **Reading session 2**: Truth(fulness) in modernity (Kierkegaard and Heidegger)

10.00-10.15: Coffee break

10.15-11.30: **Keynote address by Claudia Welz** (Aarhus University): "Being Truthful vis-à-vis Each Other: Existential, Pragmatic, and Dialogical Approaches to Truth in Kierkegaard, Rosenzweig, and Buber"

11.30-12.30: **PhD session:**

- Hannah Lang (Aarhus University): "'Children and fools tell the truth': The role of children or 'the childish' in a Kierkegaardian conception of truth"
- Ville Hämäläinen (Tampere University): "Retelling the Truth: The Dialogical Truth in Kierkegaard, and Bakhtin"

12.30-13.30: Lunch

13.30-14.45: **Keynote address by Thomas Schwarz Wentzer** (Aarhus University): "Being and Truth. On Heidegger's Account of Truth as *aletheia*"

14.45-15.00: Coffee break

14.30-15.30: **PhD session:**

- Anders Hee Nørbjerg Poulsen (University of Southern Denmark): "Struggling with 'Truth' as a Concern in Metaethics"
- Anne Eggert Stevns (Aarhus University): "'Truthfulness' as Selfless Love of the Other"

15:30-16:00: Rounding off: Concluding discussion

AARHUS UNIVERSITY

Description

The ideas of truth and truthfulness have led to the question 'What is truth?' – including the development of a number of truth theories and truth criteria. One of the most famous is the correspondence theory according to which a belief is true if it corresponds to a fact or, in other words, if an *adaequatio intellectus et rei* is manifest. However, if the 'thing' or object of knowledge in question is elusive, the human mind or consciousness cannot easily identify whether or to what extent a proposition corresponds to a certain state of affairs.

This problem applies particularly to theological questions concerning the possibility (or impossibility) of knowing God. Biblical Job, for instance, cannot understand why he, without any fault on his side, is hit by one stroke of fate after the other, losing his home and belongings, his health, his children. His wife recommends: "Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9, NIV) Job, however, does not want to cut his bond to God but argues with him. After a divine demonstration of power, Job proclaims:

I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42:1-6, NIV).

What are the epistemological implications of these verses: How does the encounter *with* God influence human knowledge *about* God and about how he relates to different events taking place in our world? How can we account for the transition from hearsay to understanding, and what is the role of vision and audition in gaining 'true' insight?

This PhD course reflects upon the role of 'relationality' and 'dialogue' in approaching questions of truth, and it does so by considering both the God-relationship and interhuman relations. Moreover, it focuses on the connection between the abstract noun 'truth' and the character trait of 'truthfulness' in order to explore the potential of the second-person perspective in the search for a truth that resides not only in what we *say*, but also in what we *do* (in the sense of *veritatem facere*) and *become*.

We invite PhD papers (20 minutes + 10 minutes discussion) about 'truth and truthfulness.' If you are interested, please submit an abstract (300-500 words) by December 30, 2021.

Aim
The aim of this course is to provide
1. an overview of the occurrences and meanings of the Hebrew words 'emunah' and 'emet' in Biblical literature as compared to other ancient epistemologies, for instance in Egypt and Mesopotamia
2. an introduction into the Greek term 'aletheia' as used in Plato and The New Testament, with a view to the reception and modification of this term in Heidegger's *Being and Time* where truth is determined as *a-letheia*
3. a discussion of the existential, pragmatic, and dialogical understanding of truth in the writings of Søren Kierkegaard, Franz Rosenzweig, and Martin Buber.

Literature

Literature that will be discussed during the course
- Biblical texts, including ancient Near Eastern and ancient Egyptian texts (will be sent via mail)
- Ancient Greek texts, especially Plato (will be sent via mail)
- Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (see www.sks.dk, translation will be sent via mail)
- Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §44 (translation by Macquarrie & Robinson, available at http://pdf-objects.com/files/Heidegger-Martin-Being-and-Time-trans.-Macquarrie-Robinson-Blackwell-1962.pdf)

Additional literature for individual preparation
- https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/truth/
- Ernst Tugendhat: "Heideggers Idee von Wahrheit" In: Otto Pöggeler (ed.), *Heidegger. Perspektiven zur Deutung seines Werkes.* Königstein: Athenäum. 1984. 286-298.
- Ernst Tugendhat: *Der Wahrheitsbegriff bei Husserl und Heidegger.* Berlin: De Gruyter 1970.
- Kristina Lafont: *Heidegger, Language and World-Disclosure*, Cambridge University Press 2000.
- Daniel Dahlstrom: *Heidegger's Concept of Truth*, Cambridge University Press 2001.
- Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *John and Philosophy: A New Reading of the Fourth Gospel,* Oxford: OUP 2017.
- Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Pauline Epistemology: Nous and Pneuma in Stoicism and Paul" in: *Der Nous bei Paulus und in seiner Umwelt: Griechisch-römische, frühjüdische und frühchristliche Perspektiven,* ed. Jörg Frey and M. Nägele, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2021, 21-41.
- Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Paul's Temporal Thinking: 2 Cor 2:14-7:4 as Paraenetic Autobiography" in: *New Testament Studies* 67:2 (April 2021), 157-180.
- Claudia Welz, "Wahrhaftigkeit zwischen *aletheia* und *emet:* Kierkegaards Existenzdenken, Heideggers Ontologie und Bubers Dialogphilosophie" in: *Hermeneutische Blätter* 24:1 (2018): *Wahrhaftigkeit,* 200-215.
- Claudia Welz, "Trust and Lament: Faith in the Face of Godforsakenness" in: Eva Harasta and Brian Brock (eds.), *Evoking Lament: A Theological Discussion*, London/New York: Continuum Press/T&T Clark 2009, 118-135.

Abstracts of PhD papers

Anne Eggert Stevns (Aarhus University:
"'Truthfulness' as selfless love of the other"

"Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality" (Murdoch 1997, 215 'The Sublime and the Good').

In this presentation I take departure in this quote from an essay by philosopher Iris Murdoch. A central theme in my PhD-thesis is the connection between goodness and truthful knowledge in Murdoch's thought. Regarding this connection, other-directed love, particularly intersubjective love, plays a central role. In this presentation I want to address the claim made by Murdoch that truthful knowledge of reality, in particular the reality of other persons, is an *ethical task* of selfless *love*.

Love is, by Murdoch, described in Plato-inspired terms as Eros or 'the energy of the soul': a needy but resourceful desire for the perfect 'good', the (always partial) satisfaction of which always comes about through Eros' encounter with other(s). Love is, for Murdoch, the 'energy' that animates our continuous discursive disclosure of the realities with which we are confronted, in particular the reality of other human individuals. For Murdoch, love is thus not simply a 'state of mind', but signifies the nature of human intentionality as such, which is already ethically qualified in terms of a hierarchy of 'quality'. The quality of love is understood as reaching from the lowest egoistic and illusion-ridden stage to the highest selfless and other-directed stage, and the quality of our love is seen as the condition for our failure or success in articulating truthful knowledge of the reality that we confront. In this regard, my aim is to address an important Murdochian distinction between truthfulness and truth. Truthfulness signifies the moral goodness of selfless human love as the continuous 'activity' of being 'truthful' to the phenomenon (person) that one is in a (potentially) endless and ongoing process of 'articulating'. Truth in an absolute or unconditional sense is the ideal endpoint of 'perfect truth' (the idea of the Good) that animates this activity, but always silently withdraws as a no-thing-ness – the Good is not an object, but an idea(l) of perfect intelligibility (compare here Heidegger's idea of *Sein* as a continuous 'presence' of the 'unconditional' that withdraws).

Ville Hämäläinen (Tampere University):
"Retelling the Truth: The Dialogical Truth in Kierkegaard, and Bakhtin"

In this paper, I will approach truth in Søren Kierkegaard's thought and its dialogical aspects in the light of a Russian literary scholar, and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin. Dialogue is a common device in Kierkegaard's writings. The use of dialogue is not without recalling the Socratic dialogue and the maieutic method: one does not tell the truth or give a right answer but evokes the interlocutor to seek the truth by oneself. From Kierkegaard's standpoint, it is impossible to tell the Christian truth directly.

In his theory of polyphony, Mikhail Bakhtin suggests the distinction between monologic and dialogical truth. In the former, the truth is propositional and finalized by the individual consciousness. The dialogical truth, instead, emerges in a free conversation, while different truths are put to the test. The dialogical truth is not a closed system but remains open and unfinalized. In Bakhtin's thought, the same applies to the language as well. The language is an endless dialogue between already-said and not-yet-said. Here lies the foreign word which is any spoken or written word by someone other. One can either monologize it by making it a word of one's own or address it toward the other.

I will concentrate on Johannes Climacus' *Philosophical Fragments* and Chapter 2, "The God as a Teacher and Savior: A Poetical Venture." Despite the continual reference to Socrates in Philosophical Fragments, the text is not the most obvious one to examine dialogism in it. In the chapter, an imaginary interlocutor of Climacus argues that the story, that is the gospel, he is retelling is only the shabbiest plagiarism of the truth, which even a child knows.

In her recent article on polyphony in Kierkegaard, Iben Damgaard (2020) argues that the imaginary opponent in *Philosophical Fragments* offers a self-critical standpoint toward the act of rewriting. Based on Damgaard's argument, I propose that the imaginary interlocutor implies the openness of the dialogical

AARHUS UNIVERSITY

truth. As George Pattison (2001) puts it, not only are Kierkegaard's works written in a dialogue form, but the text invites the reader to join the dialogue and make a choice. For Kierkegaard, one should choose the truth in Christ, but the choice is out of the author's control. Therefore, the dialogue is a dangerous form since the reader can make the wrong choice.

The notion of dialogicity improves the approach to the truth in Kierkegaard. The original gospel serves as the foreign word behind the retelling. While *Philosophical Fragments* is not a dialogue *per se*, Climacus opens one and invites the reader to join the dialogue. Here lies the intersection of the Socratic method and the Christian truth that Climacus offers. Climacus understands the truth in its strictest sense. For Climacus, Christ is the truth, while a human being is always wrong and untruth. I argue that concentrating on dialogical aspects of the truth can offer a more multifaceted notion of the truth in Kierkegaard. I will propose a reconciliation between the Bakhtinian unfinalized truth and Climacus' strict notion of Christ as truth.

References

Damgaard, Iben 2020. "Look, there he stands – the god. Where? There. Can you not see him?"
Poetic Refigurations of Christ in Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky. In Anna Vind, Iben Damgaard, Kirsten Busch Nielsen, and Sven Rune Havsteen (eds.), *In-Visibility : Reflections Upon Visibility and Transcendence in Theology, Philosophy and the Arts* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, pp. 85–104.

Pattison, George 2001. Freedom's Dangerous Dialogue: Reading Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard Together. In George Pattison, and D. O. Thompson (eds.), *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Studies in Russian Literature), pp. 237–256.

Anders Hee Nørbjerg Poulsen (University of Southern Denmark):
"Struggling with 'truth' as a concern in meta-ethics"

My presentation is divided into three sections. The first section takes its starting point in the question: When meta-ethics was the answer, what was then the question that gave rise to meta-ethics? I suggest the question: How to do philosophy that is not *a priori*? One answer to that question is meta-ethics – due to inspiration from logical positivism and *the verification principle*. Moving from the establishment of meta-ethics I will in the next section present a main question within meta-ethics, namely the question about the *truth* of ethical statements. The question of truth of ethical statements will be related to the *correspondence theory of truth*. In other words, the question of truth of ethical statements takes as it's framework the classical idea of truth as correspondence: To what state of affairs or facts do an ethical statement correspond? A natural or non-natural fact? Maybe is the idea that there could be facts which makes an ethical statement true an *error theory*, since such a fact would be *queer* (Mackie)? These questions are hard to answer. Therefore, in the final third section of m presentation, I will – by the aid of Kant's distinction between two *Anwendungen* of the *Vernunft* (i.e., *practical* and *theoretical*) – suggest a different framework than one which is set up by the *verification principle* and the *correspondence theory of truth*. That is, a framework that is based on the *practical Anwendung of the Vernunft*. Being aware of what could be called Kant's constructivism I will – tentatively – suggest that the notion of *meaning* or *sense* might be called for in meta-ethics. The relevant *human* question is not: To what state of affairs or facts do an ethical statement correspond, but rather is an ethical statement meaningful, does it make sense?

Mathis Kreitzscheck (University of Göttingen):
"Truth(fulness) and falsehood in Ancient Near Eastern Historical Texts"

This paper presents parts of my PhD-project on historiography and historical thought in the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament, supervised by Prof. Dr. R. G. Kratz at Göttingen University, to be handed in at the end of 2022.
While it is part of the everyday work of historians to inquire about the veracity of their sources, they seldomly get glimpses into the disposition of ancient writers towards what is true. This paper will focus on metatextual verification methods in Ancient Near Eastern Historical Texts. In the vast number of royal

inscriptions, annals, and chronicles from Mesopotamia to Egypt, we find three distinct ways to assert the reader/audience that the narrative is true: curses against name exchange, the "humblebrag", and explicit truth claims. For the paper, I will focus on the latter.

While these explicit truth claims are relatively rare, they appear in very similar fashion in otherwise unrelated inscriptions in Old Akkadian, Neo Babylonian, Neo Assyrian, Hittite, Old Persian, and Egyptian. The examples are thus spread over multiple languages, places, and three millennia, but all have in common that they assert and defend "the truth" (such as *maat* in Egyptian or *kittu* in Akkadian) of a narrative account against the accusation of lying. In these examples, vocabulary and phraseology show that truth means the factual correctness of the account in question. Moreover, it can be shown that often the means of asserting truth are borrowed from or influenced by the means of truth finding in legal procedures. While these texts are not historiography in any narrow sense of the word, we can already grasp one crucial element of a narrative that considers itself historiography or historical writing, i. e., the necessity to convince the reader/audience of its veracity.

Impulse for further discussion: One can contextualize the findings further by comparing them to metatextual notes in the Old Testament, such as source citations (e. g. 2 Kgs 8:23; Esth 10:2) or the hint to archaeological remains (e. g. Jos 4:9). While the density of such verification notes in the Hebrew Text is much higher, they differ in strategy and perspective. Eventually, both corpora share verification strategies with Greek historiographers such as Herodotus and – in one instance – Berossus – and it may be possible to establish such claims to truthfulness as conceptual links between the development of classic historiography, the Old Testament, and Ancient Near Eastern texts.

Hannah Lang (Aarhus University):
"'Children and fools tell the truth': The role of children or 'the childish' in a Kierkegaardian conception of truth"

At the PhD course "Truth and Truthfulness: Biblical, Philosophical, and Theological Approaches", I wish to present a paper on the relation between children and truth in Søren Kierkegaard's existential philosophy. The point of departure will be the saying "children and fools tell the truth", which refers to a general understanding that children have a more direct or naïve way of conceiving the world making them more prone to speaking the truth. I will argue that Kierkegaard similarly emphasizes children's way of accessing the world and childlike characteristics, such as primitivity, naivety, and playfulness (e.g., *SKS* 4, 209). This relates to Kierkegaard's critique of knowledge: he criticizes the obsession with objectivity and conclusions and a general lack of primitivity and naivety when it comes to existence (e.g., *SKS* 7, 254; *SKS* 27, 417). Accordingly, childhood is not portrayed as an ignorant position, but it represents an important and necessary correction to common knowledge to live in truthfulness (for truth as *inwardness* or *subjectivity*) (e.g., SKS 7, 229).

The paper will reflect on what concept of truth this constitutes as the above-mentioned relation between children and truth also entails a demolition of knowledge; there is a negativity at play. This is closely related to the dialogical style in Kierkegaard's writings, to his indirect communication, thus the paper also investigates the role of dialogue in approaching questions of truth, as it is mentioned in the course description.

The relation between children and truth in Kierkegaard's existential thinking can also be related to new Danish literature about the experience of motherhood. For instance, author Josefine Klougart writes, in relation to her newly published novel *Alt dette kunne du få* (2021)[1]: "Our knowledge of the world will never be as great as it is during childhood where a concrete experience of the world is still undiminished by intellect and abstract thinking"[2]. Klougart's description of children's more direct approach to knowledge presents a contemporary perspective on Kierkegaard's thoughts.

The suggested paper relates to my PhD project which investigates birth and the beginning of life as a topic of existential philosophy focusing on Kierkegaard's existential thinking. More precisely, I am investigating

---

[1] Klougart, Josefine. 2021. *Alt dette kunne du få*. Copenhagen: Forlaget Gladiator.
[2] Klougart, Josefine. 2021. "Det er en mærkelig tid at være menneske i". Politiken. December 24, 2021 (my translation).

Kierkegaard descriptions of the beginning of life and its role in his existential thinking: how the childlike characteristics are of continuous relevance through life.

"And the truth shall make you free." Motto on Northwest Missouri State University building in Maryville.
[Photo: Creative Commons. CC BY-SA 2.5.]