Anxious Ontology: 
Reading Søren Kierkegaard between Idealism and Materialism

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In much of the recent secondary literature, Søren Kierkegaard has been read as pre-figuring much of what took place in 20th century European philosophy. Often this reading places Kierkegaard in a philosophical lineage that came to be embodied in the ethical, hermeneutic, and deconstructive methods which are often considered to be parts of the larger post-modern sensibility of 20th century philosophy. In this paper I will break from this tradition of considering Kierkegaard’s relation to 20th century philosophical trends by considering him in both the 19th century context of German Idealism and the recent 21st century turn to speculative, or transcendental, materialism. In particular, I will focus on Kierkegaard’s *The Concept of Anxiety*, reading this text both as a response to theories of immediacy emerging in German Idealism and as pre-figuring recent materialist re-considerations of Idealism. Along with providing my own attempt at a 21st century reading of Kierkegaard, I will place my argument into dialogue with two recent interpretations of Kierkegaard offered by David Kangas and Slavoj Žižek. At the heart of my argument will be the claim that Kierkegaard’s potential relevance to 21st century debates is dependent on a rigorous re-consideration of his indebtedness to the philosophical climate of the early 19th century.

**Speaker Bio:** Michael Burns is currently completing his PhD in Philosophy at the University of Dundee. His primary research interests are Søren Kierkegaard, German Idealism, and Contemporary European Philosophy. He has published articles in *The Heythrop Journal, Political Theology, Angelaki,* and in edited volumes on Kierkegaard and Continental Philosophy of Religion. He is co-editor of the forthcoming volume *Becoming the Impossible: Politics, Ontology and Religion in Søren Kierkegaard.*