



Existential Ontology and Ethics

55-01.201.409, Hauptseminar Spring/Summer 2020
Tuesday 12:00-14:00, ONLINE COURSE

This twelve-week course offers a guided close reading of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. We begin with an exploration of self in isolation, to the encounter with another, to the call for solidarity with all people. What does it mean to be responsible to others both in our solitude and in coming together? We will seek to develop an existentialist ethics for today's world that encompasses both Being-in-Solitude and Being-with-Others.

Note: I designed and taught this online advanced seminar during the emergency covid-19 lockdown. Our weekly lectures and discussions over Zoom brought the readings into dialogue with our experience of several global crises that were personal and world-historical. The course began with an exploration of the ontological structure of self from psychic and embodied perspectives. As the lockdown slowly eased, we cautiously rediscovered the existence of the other. After months of isolation, many of us chose to participate in mass protests in support of Black Lives Matter. We turned to Sartre's caution against the emotional but limited experience of "We." We questioned how to be an ally to the oppressed both in our objectivity and subjectivity. De Beauvoir's text offered us an ethics of activism: the call to witness and actively respond to the horrors, joys, and uncertainties of the present in our responsibility to the ongoing fight for universal freedom.

Texts

Jean-Paul Sartre. *Being and Nothingness*.

Simone de Beauvoir. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

Readings

SELF

1. Sartre. Introduction. The Pursuit of Being
2. Sartre. Part One. The Problem of Nothingness. Chapter One. The Origin of Nothingness. I. The Question, II. Negations, III. The Origin of Nothingness
3. Sartre. Part Two. Being-For-Itself. Chapter One. Immediate Structures of the For-Itself. I. Presence to Self. II. Facticity of the For-Itself



OTHER

4. Sartre. Part Three. Being-for-Others. Chapter One. The Existence of Others. I. The Problem. IV. The Look
5. Sartre. Part Three. Chapter Two. The Body. III. The Third Ontological Dimension of the Body.

US

6. Sartre. Part Three. Chapter Three. Concrete Relations With Others. III. “Being-With” (*Mitsein*) and the “We”
7. Sartre. Part Four. Having, Doing, and Being. Chapter One. Being and Doing: Freedom. III. Freedom and Responsibility
8. de Beauvoir. I. Ambiguity and Freedom
9. de Beauvoir. II. Personal Freedom and Others
10. de Beauvoir. III. The Positive Aspects of Ambiguity, 1. The Aesthetic Attitude, 2. Freedom and Liberation
11. de Beauvoir. III. 3. The Antinomies of Action
12. de Beauvoir. III. 4. The Present and the Future
13. de Beauvoir. III. 5. Ambiguity
14. de Beauvoir. Conclusion

Course Material and Preparation: You are encouraged to read our course material in French if possible. Class lectures and discussions will be primarily held in English. We will compare English or German translations with the original texts when relevant. Full citations of the readings and secondary sources are available on Stine. The lectures will cover the above passages. Please make it your goal to closely read at least 15 pages of the assigned readings per week. Highlight passages that interest you, take notes, and prepare thoughtful questions and reflection for class discussion. Regular attendance and active participation are encouraged, however recorded lectures will be available for those who are unable to join us on Zoom. Lively class discussion will be a critical component of our time together. In addition to our weekly readings, it will be important to stay informed about current international events by drawing on different kinds of news sources.

Final Paper: ~5,000-7,000 words, English or German, double-space, Times New Roman, 12 font, 2,54 cm margins, choose a consistent citation style (further details will be discussed in class).