



ВЫСШАЯ ШКОЛА ЭКОНОМИКИ
НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЙ ИССЛЕДОВАТЕЛЬСКИЙ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ
САНКТ-ПЕТЕРБУРГ

Meaning of Life Existentialism

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Introduction to Philosophy

* Presentation is for educational purposes only. I do not claim authorship for all texts and pictures in the presentation.

Danger!



Existentialism may cause

- **Anxiety**
- **Dread**
- **Anguish**
- **Despair**

*Особо тяжелые последствия см.:
Курочкин Н.В. Смерть экзистенциалиста. 1989 г.

Outline

1. What is the meaning of life?
2. Existence vs Essence
3. Existence Precedes Essence
4. Soren Kierkegaard
5. The death of God
6. Sartre: Abandonment, Anguish, Despair
7. The secret of Happiness

What is the meaning of life?

Existence and Essence

1. Existence - that something is
2. Essence – what something is

Existence Precedes Essence

Classical View:

- Existence is accidental to essence.
- The 'margining' of one's existence depends on essence

Essence -----> Existence

- * Plato's forms
- * Aristotle's **eudaimonia**

Existentialist View:

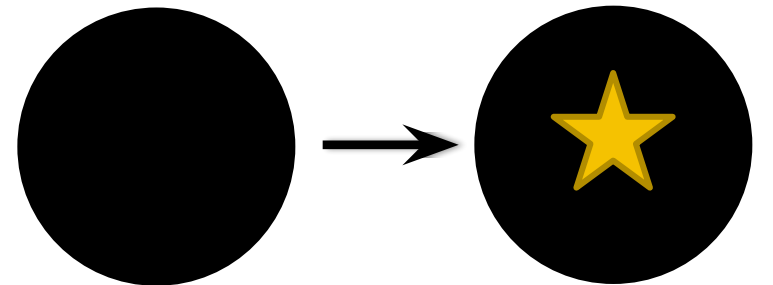
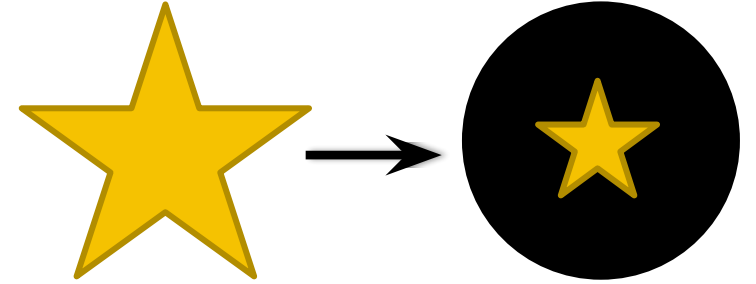
Existence determines essence

Meaning or essence is forged through an exiting form of life

Existence -----> Essence

Meaning is both

- *Ungrounded
- *Pluralistic



Soren Kierkegaard



Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

For Kierkegaard, the only important entity is the “existing individual” and in his writings were intended to try to help the existing individual lead a meaningful, fulfilled life. Kierkegaard denies the possibility of a collective, social solution to the problem of how to live one’s life.

Three spheres of existence:

1. Aesthetic sphere (despair)
2. Ethical sphere (despair*despair)
3. Religious sphere (despair³)

Is it possible to be a member of the human race without being either an aesthetic, ethical or religious person?

Yes, for Kierkegaard.

One could refuse to live a reflective, principled life.

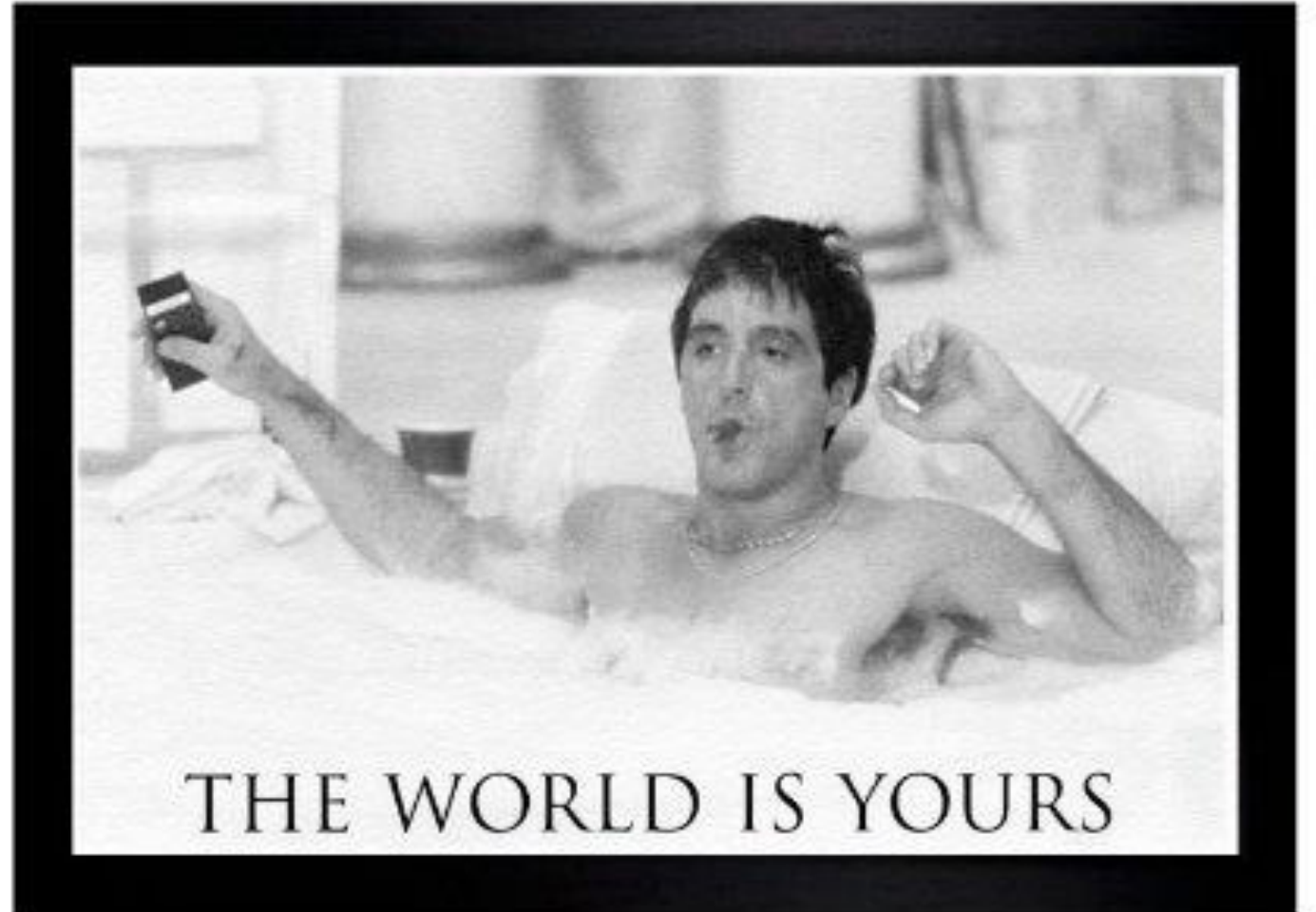
If so, one would be a very poor specimen of a human being, according to Kierkegaard.



Aesthetic sphere

- "To live for oneself."
- The person living within the aesthetic sphere is concerned with personal satisfaction.

You'd either achieve your goals or not. In both cases you wouldn't be happy



Ethical sphere

- One in which the individual thinks in terms of what's best for the community, ideally all, not just for himself or herself.
- An ethical life requires the individual to take others into account and perform those actions which would be best for all concerned.
- One thinks in terms of universals, absolutes, good and evil, rather than just what pleases or displeases oneself.

Where did these moral absolute come from?

Religious sphere

The ethical and the religious are intimately connected: a person can be ethically serious without being religious, but the religious stage includes the ethical. Whereas living in the ethical sphere involves a commitment to some moral absolute, living in the religious sphere involves a commitment and relation to the Christian God.

One believes in God, one has faith, in spite of – and actually because of – the absurdity or paradoxicalness of the belief

if one is a believer, that with God all things are possible, even things which are physically and logically impossible. Of course, this is irrational, but according to Kierkegaard, that is the nature of religious faith.

In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard argues that, from the perspective of the religious sphere, anyone who does not have a relationship with God is, to some degree or other, in despair because he or she has not recognized or accepted the eternal part of himself or herself.

Religious sphere

Kierkegaard says that “without risk there is no faith.”

If we know that God exists, if we have proof of His existence, there would be no need of, or place for faith.

Since we don't have proof of God's existence, the possibility of faith exists.



Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)



He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster. And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.

- The Birth of Tragedy (1872)
- Human, All Too Human (1878)
- The Gay Science (1882)
- Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883)
- Beyond Good and Evil (1886)
- On the Genealogy of Morality (1887)
- Twilight of the Idols (1888)
- The Antichrist (1888)

The Death of God

Consequences of the Death of God:

- No moral guarantor
- No pre-established essence
- No objective meaning or intrinsic value
- Epistemology = perspectivism
- Nihilism?



nihilism = meaninglessness



Passive
Nihilism

(European Buddhism)



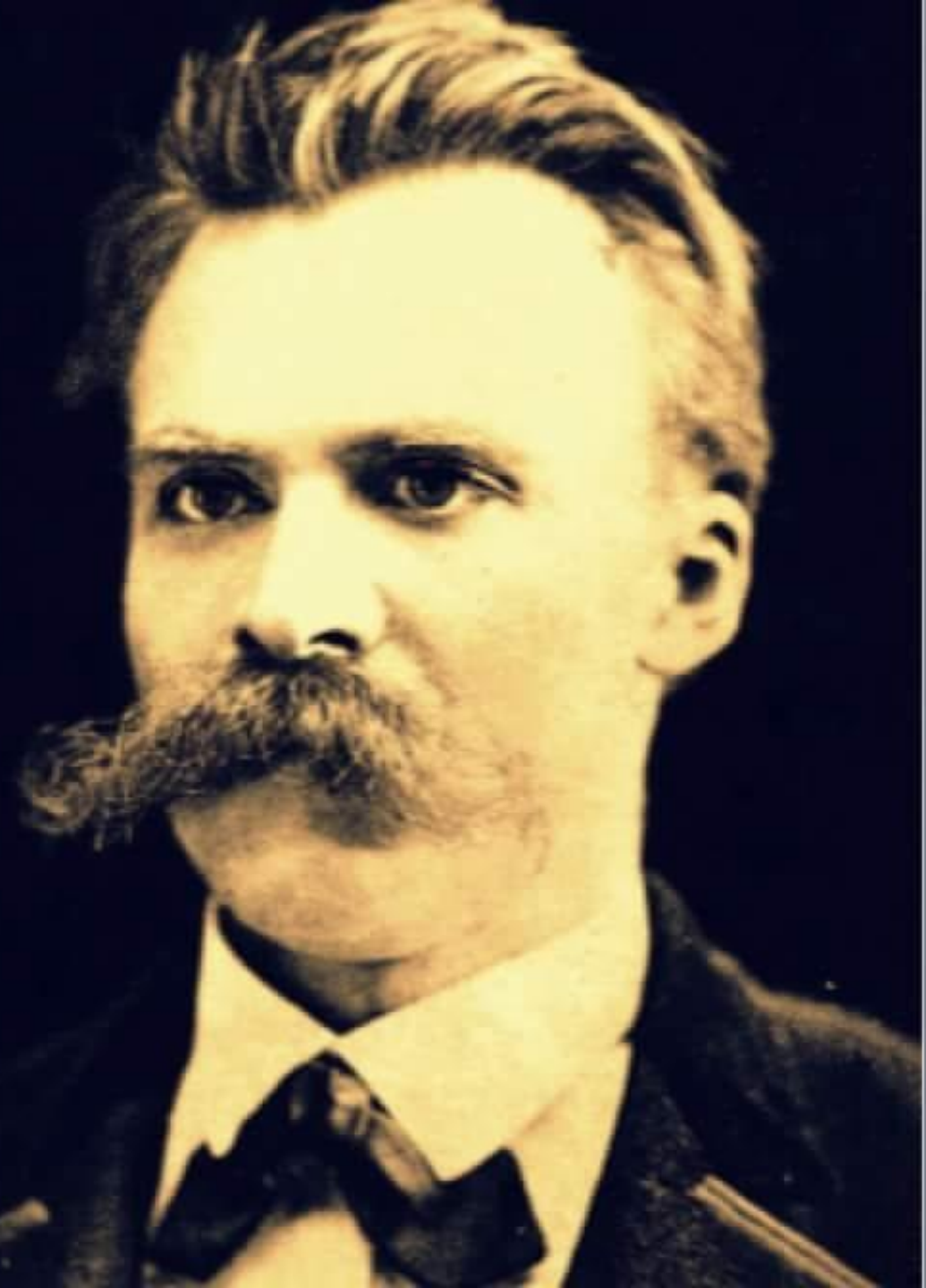
Active
Nihilism

(Make Meaning)

Roses are red
Violets are blue
God is dead,
Killed by me and you.

To:

From:



If there is no God...

"If there is no God, everything is permitted"

is widely attributed to Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (Sartre was the first to do so in his *Being and Nothingness*), he simply never said it.

If there is a God, then everything is permitted
Lacan

<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/04/17/3478816.htm>

Jean-Paul Sartre



... man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself (p.28).

Jean-Paul Sartre *Existentialism and Humanism*



Abandonment

For Sartre 'abandonment' means specifically abandonment by God. This doesn't imply that God as a metaphysical entity actually existed at some point, and went away: Sartre is echoing Nietzsche's famous pronouncement: 'God is dead'. Nietzsche did not mean that God had once been alive, but rather that the belief in God was no longer a tenable position in the late nineteenth century. By using the word 'abandonment' in a metaphorical way Sartre emphasises the sense of loss caused by the realisation that there is no God to warrant our moral choices, no divinity to give us guidelines as to how to achieve salvation. The choice of word stresses the solitary position of human beings alone in the universe with no external source of objective value.

The main consequence of abandonment is, as we have seen, the absence of any objective source of moral law: Sartre objected to the approach of some atheistic moralists who, recognising that God didn't exist, simply clung to a secular version of Christian morality without its Guarantor. In order to meet the criticism that without God there can be no morality, Sartre develops his theory about the implications of freedom and the associated state of anguish.

https://philosophynow.org/issues/15/A_students_guide_to_Jean-Paul_Sartres_Existentialism_and_Humanism

Anguish

Not only am I responsible for everything that I am, but also when choosing any particular action I not only commit myself to it but am choosing as “a legislator deciding for the whole of mankind” (p. 30). So, to take an example Sartre uses, if I choose to marry and to have children I thereby commit not only myself but the whole of humankind to the practice of this form of monogamy. This is in many ways reminiscent of Immanuel Kant's concept of universalisability: the view that if something is morally right for one person to do, it must also be morally right for anyone in relevantly similar circumstances . Sartre labels the experience of this extended responsibility (which he takes to be an unavoidable aspect of the human condition) ‘anguish’, likening it to the feeling of responsibility experienced by a military leader whose decisions have possibly grave consequences for the soldiers under his command. Like Abraham whom God instructed to sacrifice his son, we are in a state of anguish performing actions, the outcome of which we cannot ascertain, with a great weight of responsibility: “Everything happens to every man as though the whole human race had its eyes fixed upon what he is doing and regulated its conduct accordingly” (p. 32).



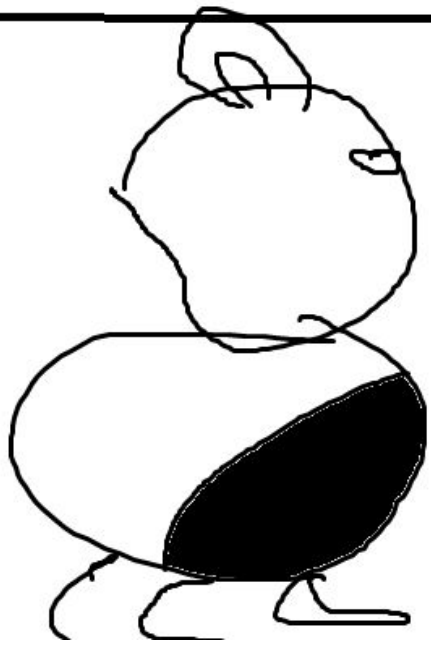
Despair

Despair, like abandonment and anguish, is an emotive term. Sartre means by it simply the existentialist's attitude to the recalcitrance or obstinacy of the aspects of the world that are beyond our control (and in particular other people: in his play *No Exit* one of the characters declares "Hell is other people"). Whatever I desire to do, other people or external events may thwart. The attitude of despair is one of stoic indifference to the way things turn out: "When Descartes said 'Conquer yourself rather than the world', what he meant was, at bottom, the same – that we should act without hope" (p.39). We cannot rely on anything which is outside our control, but this does not mean we should abandon ourselves to inaction: on the contrary, Sartre argues that it should lead us to commit ourselves to a course of action since there is no reality except in action.





hello snoopy
why so sad?



**EXISTENCE IS
MEANINGLESS**
charlie brown

The secret of Happiness

The secret of happiness is: Find something more important than you are and dedicate your life to it.

Daniel Dennett

