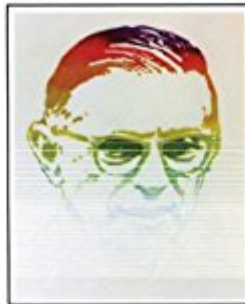




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Being And Nothingness



Jean-Paul Sartre
Being and
Nothingness
The principal text of modern existentialism



Synopsis

Born in Paris in 1905, Sartre was a professor of philosophy when he joined the French Army at the outbreak of World War II. Captured by the Germans, he was released, after nearly a year, in 1941. He immediately joined the French resistance as a journalist. In the postwar era Jean-Paul Sartre - philosopher, critic, novelist, and dramatist - became one of the most influential men of this century. He died in Paris in 1980.

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Customer Reviews

Jean-Paul Sartre, the seminal smarty-pants of mid-century thinking, launched the existentialist fleet with the publication of *Being and Nothingness* in 1943. Though the book is thick, dense, and unfriendly to careless readers, it is indispensable to those interested in the philosophy of consciousness and free will. Some of his arguments are fallacious, others are unclear, but for the most part Sartre's thoughts penetrate deeply into fundamental philosophical territory. Basing his conception of self-consciousness loosely on Heidegger's "being," Sartre proceeds to sharply delineate between conscious actions ("for themselves") and unconscious ("in themselves"). It is a conscious choice, he claims, to live one's life "authentically" and in a unified fashion, or not--this is the fundamental freedom of our lives. Drawing on history and his own rich imagination for examples, Sartre offers compelling supplements to his more formal arguments. The waiter who detaches himself from his job-role sticks in the reader's memory with greater tenacity than the lengthy discussion of inauthentic life and serves to bring the full force of the argument to life. Even if you're

not an angst-addicted poet from North Beach, *Being and Nothingness* offers you a deep conversation with a brilliant mind--unfortunately, a rare find these days. --Rob Lightner

"There can be no doubt that this is a philosophy to be reckoned with, both for its own intrinsic power and as a profound symptom of our time." (The New York Times)

Being and Nothingness is the best known and most comprehensive exposition of Sartre's philosophical system. The following comments pertain to the Washington Square unabridged version of the text. One of Sartre's objectives in *Being and Nothingness* is to develop an understanding of knowledge that avoids what he sees as the two extremes of idealism and realism (Cartesian dualism). Very much in the existential/phenomenological tradition of early twentieth century continental philosophy, the starting point for Sartre's system is the public shared world rather than the private world of thought. From this perspective he puts forth a tripartite ontology, consisting of 'being-in-itself', 'being-for-itself' and 'being-for-others'. While Sartre's discussion of being-in-itself and being-for-itself are laborious and not particularly original (heavily indebted to Heidegger), he is most interesting in his phenomenological discussion of what it is like to be in a shared world with others. At its best, *Being and Nothingness* provides an interesting and eclectic mix of philosophy and psychology which challenges the reader to recall and interact with an array of thinkers and ideas. While not without some strength the book is a difficult read on several fronts, first, the subject matter is dense (the nature of being), and, second, Sartre's awkward and pretentious prose cloud examination of this already challenging subject. Indeed, the combination of poor style and sheer length (800 pages) causes many readers to skim the text or put it away entirely. Potential readers should be forewarned, this is rambling and repetitive text which reads very much like an early manuscript. While Sartre has his followers, to many commentators he is seen more as a political activist and public personality than a serious thinker, often being criticized for misunderstanding and misrepresenting the works of others. While the Washington Square version is relatively inexpensive, the font is small and the quality of the print is lacking in sharpness - this could be a specific problem with my copy, but, I think that it is likely a wider print issue. Overall, while Sartre's popularity has been eclipsed by other existential thinkers of the period, *Being and Nothingness* continues to have some historic significance, and, as a result, may be worth a look by students of twentieth century continental philosophy. I would not normally recommend a commentary in place of an original text, however, if ever there was a case to do so, this would be it - Joseph Catalano's commentary is good in this regard, he does a commendable job of summarizing

and representing Sartre's ideas.

Jean-Paul Sartre's "Being and Nothingness" is the fundamental text of Existentialism. His examination of ontology constantly reviews previous existential philosophy by building on, and refuting, the work of prior philosophers. Sartre begins with a framework on nothingness and negations. Nothingness does not have being but is supported by being. It comes into existence through the for-itself and allows consciousness to exist. Negations are acts which contain negativity as part of their structure (ex: absence.) He then progresses to an examination of Bad Faith. This is essentially a false consciousness which a person pursues to flee from their own freedom. The most theoretically important part of the book regarding ontology is Sartre's explanation of Being-for-itself and Being-for-others. Being-for-itself is an examination of the works of Descartes, Husserl, etc, into the nature of the individuals being and consciousness. "The Other" is a concept from Hegel that Sartre alters to explain others around us. For Sartre "The Other" is in a constant battle to deprive the other person of their freedom without extinguishing their being. The second half of his treatise deals with issues mostly empirical in nature. Sartre has an impeccable knowledge of philosophy and the physical science up to 1943 (philosophy, biology, psychology, psychics, etc..) He uses the theory of ontology to reexamine empirical issues where he finds scientific fields lacking. In the end Sartre devises a 'Existential Psychoanalysis' (Existentialism) to examine psychological phenomenon through an ontological lens. For Sartre humans are thrown into the world, in a situation, but have absolute freedom over choice. They are responsible for their choice. Whether they chose to actively pursue something or passively submit THEY ARE RESPONSIBLE. This responsibility is not meant as an ethical judgment but rather a statement of fact. Sartre almost completely eschews ethical judgments in "Being and Nothingness." His objective throughout the work is to explain the ontological foundation of being. He reserves 2 pages at the end of the book discussing ethics. His advice is to strive for a synthesis of the being-in-itself with the being-for-itself (a true single consciousness between body and mind.) A person can then strive to attain their values (which are subjective in nature.) Note: Sartre assumes his readers have read essentially every existential philosopher since Plato. He gives brief descriptions of each philosopher's theory but I strongly recommend you read their work before "Being and Nothingness." Sartre also uses incredibly obtuse language (which is made worse through translation.) While not as bad as other philosophers his work forces the person to actively read everything he says. Sartre commands an excellent understanding of science but actively rejects some of its most basic premises because science fails to ask the right questions. While some of the science he talks about has long been

disproven for the most part his understanding of science remains valid. Note #2: I read the Gramercy edition. I strongly recommend "Being and Nothingness" to anyone interested in ontology with a strong background in philosophy and the psychical sciences.

Great book if you know what he really talks about. It is more than an ontology of metaphysics, it is a look at early cognitive science, and the early stages of psychiatric neurosurgery of the temporal lobe.

I do not have any trouble understanding this work. The most significant section is "Freedom and Responsibility." Sartre lets us know quite well that what goes on around us is OURS. We are responsible for the world as it is. Yes, the Syrians, all, are responsible for their condition now in 2016. Try to outrun your situation, you run right into bad faith. Do not lie to yourself. . . .

After finally understanding his jargon, the book was enlightening and liberating.

I had a major breakthrough with Being and Nothingness, open my head. It took me a while before it sunk into my head, then pow saw how free I can be when I tap into nothingness which in turn is everything. Without the identity and bondage of body rather the freedom of being in- itself for the itself. Live for life itself!

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