

# PHILOSOPHY FOR BEGINNERS

## THE MEANINGS OF LIFE

**Living a Meaningful Life**  
**Week 12. 11<sup>th</sup> July 2018**





# What we'll cover today

- Recap on Hannah Arendt
- Which thinker struck you and why
- Course feedback
- Future directions for philosophy



# Newsweek

## EICHMANN ON TRIAL

—INTERNATIONAL—

APRIL 17, 1961 25c  
[COVER PRICE IN U.S.]

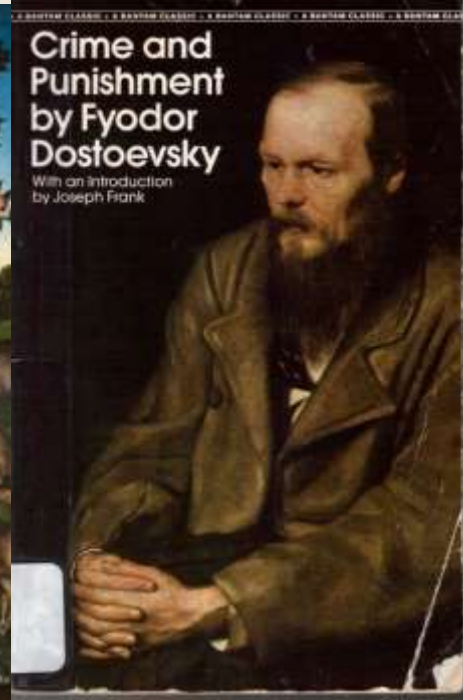


Who Is Guilty? Who Should Judge?



‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.’





# Course round-up

- Some of our thinkers included: Anselm, Descartes, Aquinas, Paley, Kant, Hume, Augustine, Ibn Sina, Spinoza, Ibn Rushd, Montaigne, Pascal, Al-Ghazali, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Kafka, Dostoevsky, Camus, Seneca, Sartre, Beauvoir, and Arendt...

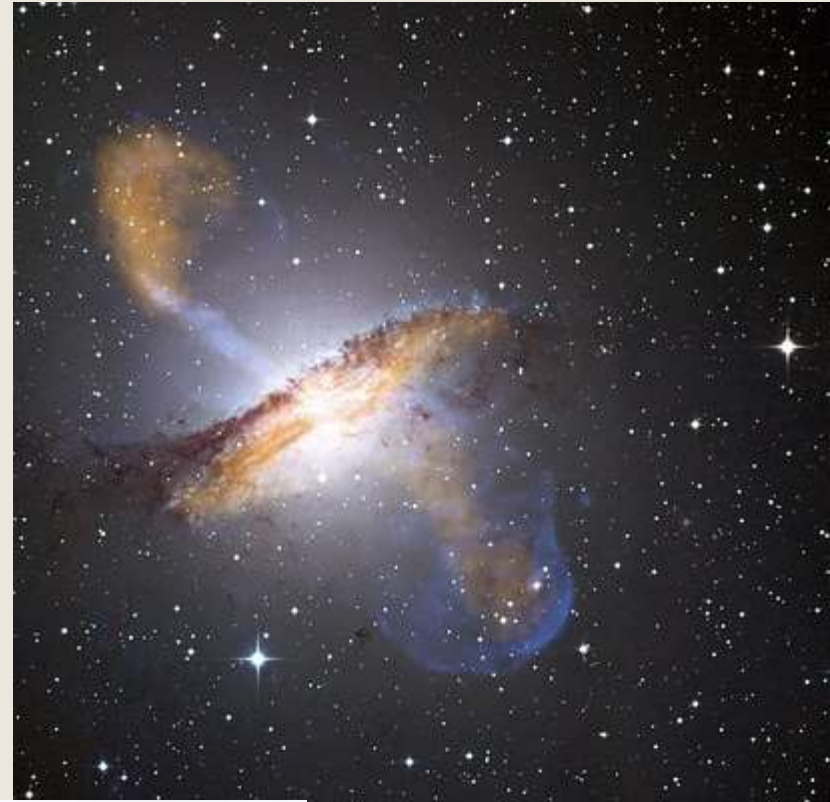
# Living a meaningful life

- What one particular thinker has struck you on this course, and why?
- Did any challenge your preconceptions, or change your view on the world?
- Is there one you'd like to learn more about?

*Have a think, then discuss with a neighbour, then we'll bring our discussions together...*











# Arguments for God

- *Ontological* – God's existence necessarily follows from his essence as the supreme being (*a priori*)
- *Cosmological* – everything that exists has a cause; the universe must have a cause; this very first cause is God (*a posteriori*)
- *Teleological* – the universe exhibits order, implying an intelligent designer (*a posteriori*)



# Problems...?

- *Ontological* argument is circular, relies on belief in God, and could prove existence of anything perfect
- *Anthropocentrism*: arguments assume from human reasoning that the world was made *for us*, without taking account of coincidence, evolution, the limits of human knowledge, etc. (Spinoza)
- Why does the observation of ‘order’ suppose that there must be a beginning, or creator? Why assume everything must have a cause? (Hume)
- *Evil and death*. The suffering and problems of the world might suggest an imperfect designer (Hume)



..and that was  
the Archers  
omnibus....

What's going on  
down there?  
...Whoops

*Disease*

*World*

*Moral Evil*

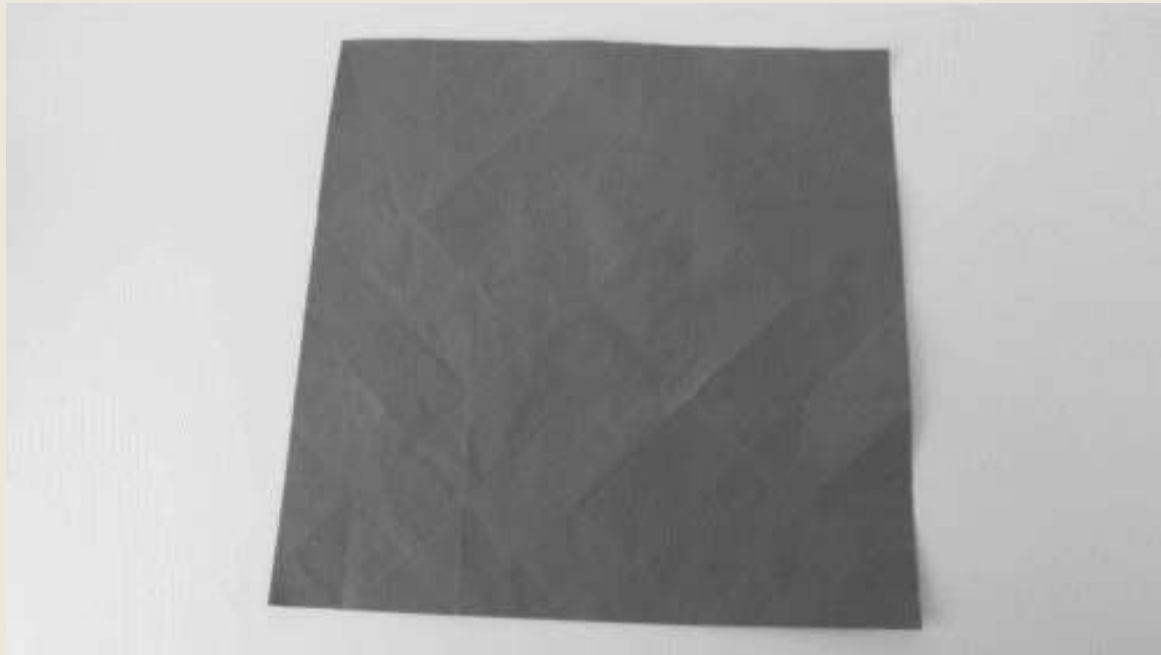
*Natural Evil*

# Problem of evil

- *If* God is an intelligent designer, why do terrible things happen so often – disease, earthquakes, genocide, death, cruelty to children or animals?
- *If* God is an omnipotent, benevolent, omniscient being, as the traditional theistic claim goes, why would He allow (or create) evil?
- *Logical problem of evil*: evil cannot logically co-exist with an omnipotent God (Epicurus)
- *Evidential problem of evil*: evil logically consistent with God, but lowers probability He exists

# Spinoza's God

- God's qualities cannot be grasped in human terms
- God does not have 'free will' to do things differently – this is an anthropocentric error, nor does God have any 'plans' for the world – everything that is, must be
- Spinoza's God is more like what we'd imagine the universe, or all energy to be... *deus sive natura*

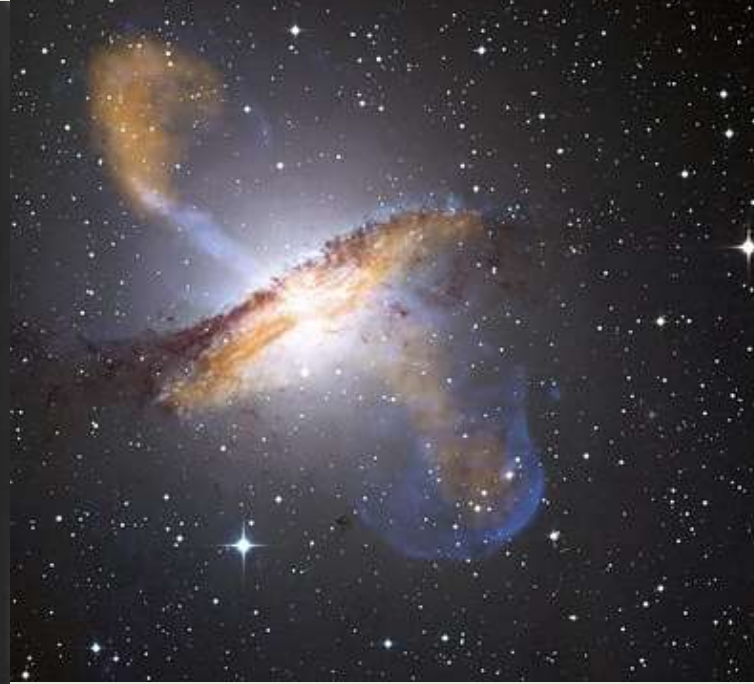
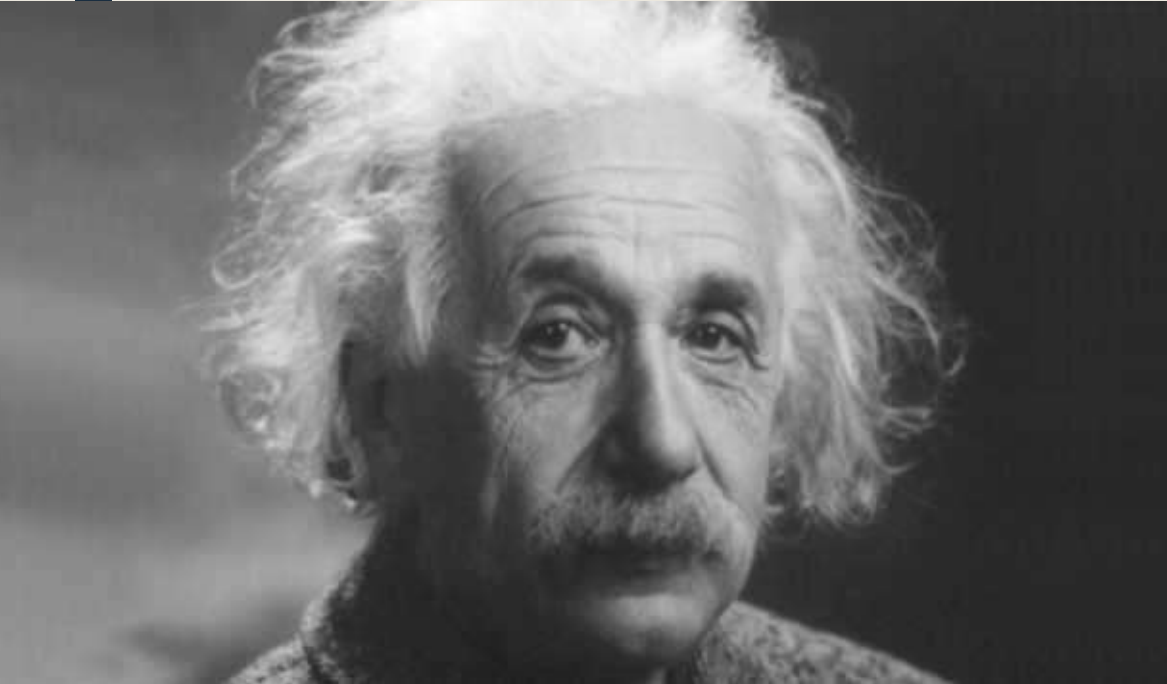




# *Fayd* (emanation in Islam)

- Neo-Platonism influenced Christianity, Islam, and many other traditions
- In Islam, al-Farabi and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) stressed immanence over creation, arguing that God is an eternal emanator
- The world arises out of God's superabundance and good will
- Al-Ghazali would later challenge this as limiting the absolute free will and power of God
- But a re-union with the Absolute would have a lasting influence in Sufism





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\* Lanthanide series

57 <b>La</b> 138.91	58 <b>Ce</b> 140.12	59 <b>Pr</b> 140.91	60 <b>Nd</b> 144.24	61 <b>Pm</b> (145)	62 <b>Sm</b> 150.36	63 <b>Eu</b> 151.96	64 <b>Gd</b> 157.25	65 <b>Tb</b> 158.93	66 <b>Dy</b> 162.50	67 <b>Ho</b> 164.93	68 <b>Er</b> 167.26	69 <b>Tm</b> 168.93	70 <b>Yb</b> 173.05	71 <b>Lu</b> 174.97
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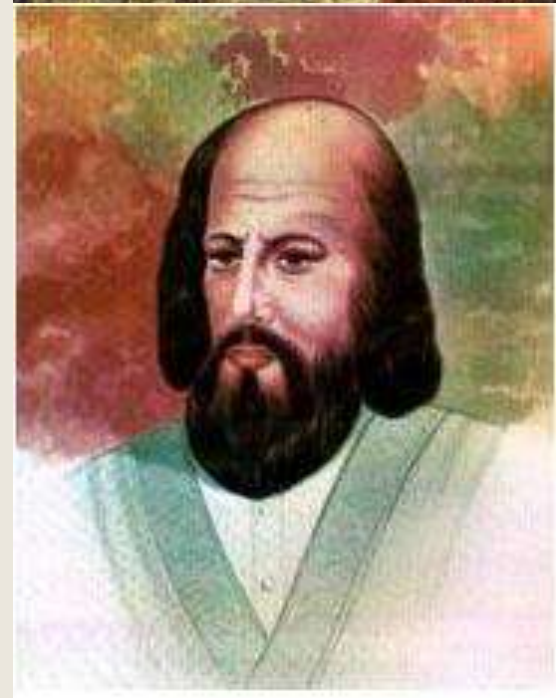
# Actinide series

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# How should we live?

- For Spinoza, God is an entirely impersonal force. We cannot connect with God through praying or hoping He will love or forgive us
- So how then should we live?
- Are we even free to make choices?
- And what purpose does religion have, if it is so often a 'sanctuary of ignorance'?





# Pascal's wager

	<i>God exists</i>	<i>God does not exist</i>
<i>Wager for God</i>	Infinite gain	Finite loss
<i>Wager against God</i>	Finite or infinite loss	Finite gain

- In believing, I risk a little to gain eternal happiness
- In not believing I risk a lot, and gain relatively little
- *Therefore*, it is rational for me to believe in God

(We also explored theories of divine command, skepticism in Montaigne and obedience in al-Ghazali)



Marry, and you will regret it; don't marry, you will also regret it; marry or don't marry, you will regret it either way. Laugh at the world's foolishness, you will regret it; weep over it, you will regret that too; laugh at the world's foolishness or weep over it , you will regret it either way ... Hang yourself, you will regret it; do not hang yourself, and you will regret that too; hang yourself or don't hang yourself, you'll regret it either way; whether you hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret both. This, gentlemen, is the essence of all philosophy.

- *Either/Or*





# Kierkegaard

- Kierkegaard does not present faith as being a matter of claiming certainty, regardless of evidence – it involves a leap of faith
- It is a passionate commitment to *uncertainty* in the full realisation that what is being committed to is objectively absurd
- Truth is something subjective, that one lives
- Freedom produces anxiety in us, the burden of choice – and we flee it, in despair...



# The burden of freedom

And that was what we did. We corrected your great deed and founded it upon *miracle, mystery* and *authority*. And people were glad that they had once been brought together into a flock and that at last from their hearts had been removed such a terrible gift, which had brought them so much torment.

Were we right, to teach and act thus, would you say? Did we not love mankind, when we so humbly admitted his helplessness, lightening his burden with love and allowing his feeble nature even sin, but with our permission? Why have you come to get in our way now? And why do you gaze at me so silently and sincerely with those meek eyes of yours? – Dostoevsky, *The Grand Inquisitor*

# Existentialism

- Emphasis on the thinking, feeling, acting, desiring individual – what's it like to *be me*
- Confusion, anxiety or uncertainty in a meaningless world
- Life has no intrinsic meaning or value (*nihilism*), at least as far as we know...
- But – each of us has the power to give meaning to our own lives. We can make the leap of faith, revalue our values, accept and even love fate (*amor fati*)...





‘Dream as if you’ll live forever, live as if you’ll die today’ – James Dean

# Camus

- Philosophy begins with the problem of life's meaninglessness...
- The confrontation between the human need for meaning and the 'unreasonable silence of the world'
- The human condition is defined by suffering, anxiety and inevitability of death
- But Camus encourages us to face this depressing situation and embrace it as *ours*
- Through revolt and rebellion we can meaning for our lives, a meaning based on our relations and solidarity with others





'I am condemned to be free'  
'Hell is other people'



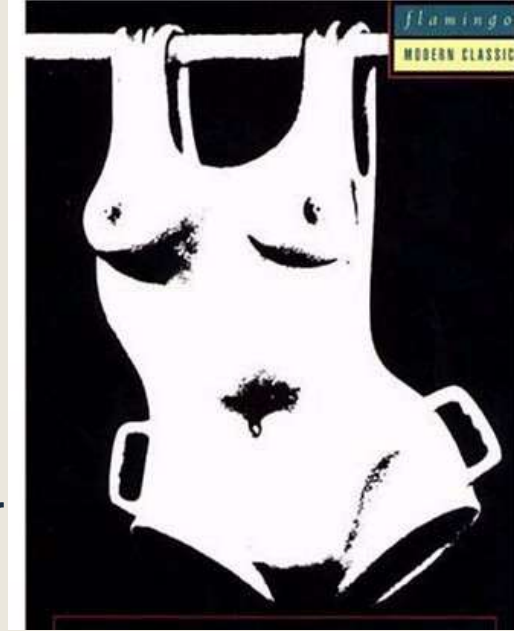


‘I wish that every human life might  
be pure transparent freedom.’



# Bad faith and freedom

- Sartre and Beauvoir call 'bad faith' the situations where we do not face up to or recognise our fundamental freedom
- Sartre's waiter, or Beauvoir's sub-man, serious man, narcissistic woman fail to take responsibility for making meaning of their own lives
- Their existentialism tries to fill the gap left by faith and religion: to provide answers, purposes and ethical commitments in an absurd world
- *Who are you most convinced by?*



# Lasting questions

- Does freedom result in anxiety?
- Is the world the absurd, meaningless place the existentialists make out – and is it possible to find meaning and hope amid that?
- Is an authentic, purposeful and meaningful life possible in the modern world?
- What changes can you go about making to the way you think and live that fully realise the freedom you have?

# End of course paperwork

- Please fill out the course evaluation forms *and* the RARPA form
- If there's any particular suggestions about the course content, teaching style or any other particular courses you'd like to cover at Mary Ward Centre, do write them down

# Next term

- This is the last in the Introduction to Philosophy series
- Many congratulations for all your hard work, enthusiasm and brilliant ideas
- ‘The unexamined life is not worth living!’  
I hope you’ll keep exploring further
- There are Intermediate classes running this September at Mary Ward, and check out City Lit and the London School of Philosophy too
- For guidance or further questions, give me an email over the summer:  
[dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk](mailto:dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk)

