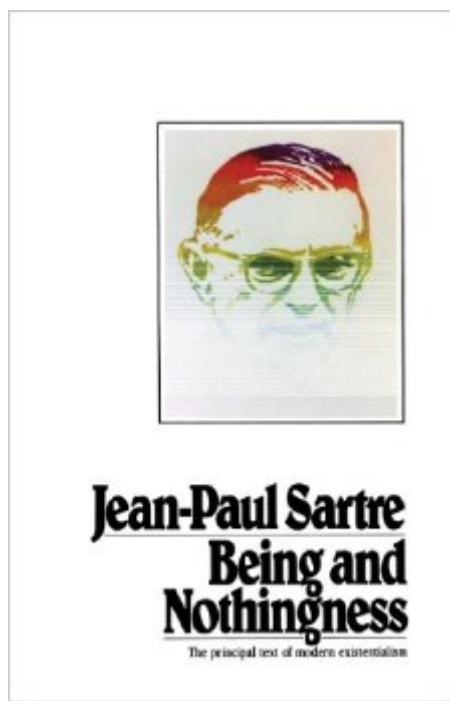


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Being And Nothingness



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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've read this book twice now, and it remains for me one of the greatest and most influential books I've ever read, certainly in philosophy. Is it a difficult read? Yes, certainly, but it's no more difficult than many other massive philosophical tomes out there such as Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, or Marx's *Capital*. Sartre didn't write the book with the general public in mind; what he wanted to do was describe and explain a formal existential philosophy for those who wanted to really get into the technical nuts and bolts. One of the reasons he wrote so many novels, plays and essays is because he wanted to illuminate his philosophy in living scenarios that would be more easily digested by the general public. If you've never read a philosophy book before, then this book is not the best place to start, if only because, in addition to its density and length, it presupposes a certain familiarity with other philosophical systems. If you're interested in Sartre, you'd be better off starting with his thin essay book "Existentialism", or his novel "Nausea", or one of the popular existentialist anthologies such as Walter Kaufmann's, or William Barrett's excellent study "Irrational Man". I disagree with an earlier commentor's suggestion that you skip the

first 2/3 of the book. I think it's important to start at the beginning (especially with Hazel Barnes' excellent introduction!) because Sartre methodically builds upon the ontology and the theory of consciousness that he lays out in the earlier parts of the book, and I think it's important to understand that fully before moving on.

One of the most influential books of 20th-century philosophy, *Being and Nothingness*, and others by Sartre, has probably been read by more beginning students of philosophy than any other. Sartre's approach to philosophy is eclectic, but he has unique solutions to some of the problems he is attempting to solve, particularly his treatment of the problem of how to handle the negation, a problem of great interest to Hegel, and carried over to a phenomenological setting by Sartre. His discussion of the "experiencing" of negation has to rank as one of the most interesting in contemporary philosophy. It is a topic also that Sartre apparently thought so important that he included it in the first chapter of the book. He does however prepare the reader for the analysis in an introduction to the book. Therein, he argues for the dissolving of the distinction between being and appearance, and to reject (in Nietzschean terms), "the illusion of worlds-behind-the-scene". This discussion also shows Sartre's training in the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger. The move away from the dualism of appearance and essence, and appearance and being has its consequences of course, and it is these consequences that Sartre expounds upon brilliantly in the rest of the book. One of these, interestingly, is the existence of an infinite series. The dualism of being and appearance is replaced by Sartre with the new dualism of finite and infinite. The appearance is finite, but to be grasped as an appearance of that which appears, says Sartre, it requires the series of appearances as infinite. In addition, Sartre also discusses his reasoning behind his rejection of the idealism of Berkeley.

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