

## Call for Papers

### International Conference “Existential Philosophy and Ethics”

Freie Universität Berlin, March 10-12, 2011

Deadline for abstracts (max. 1 page): Mai 15, 2010

The question of whether a system of ethics can be developed from existentialist principles has been long debated. One common objection to Kierkegaard, for example, is that he would close himself off from any form of sociability through a closed-off individual communication with God; he even speaks of a “suspension of the ethical.” In *Being and Time*, Heidegger famously denies the possibility of an ethical interpretation of human existence. In a similar way, Sartre admits in *Being and Nothingness* that from the perspective of the ontological description of human being, ethical consequences can only be derived in the mode of the “as if.”

But the actual course of existential philosophy tells a different story. From the beginning, existential thought opposed itself to narrowly self-directed academic philosophy and sought to apply itself to the concrete praxis of human life, as well as to related questions of moral philosophy. Although they differ in many ways, the various approaches of particular existential philosophers all center on the concept of human freedom, which Schelling described as the “faculty of good and evil.” This faculty stands as the condition of the possibility of any ethical system.

The conference is concerned with the paradox that existential philosophy either contains a strong connection to ethics or has a great distance from it – depending on the perspective chosen. Accordingly, we hope to address the following questions: How can we explain the fact that, despite its praxis-oriented approach, no significant ethical tradition has developed out of existential philosophy? Does the specific approach of existential philosophy preclude the possibility of discussing ethical questions? Or is existential philosophy measured against an excessively narrow concept of ethics, which it seeks to overcome? Should the concept of ethics be enlarged? Could this indicate the impossibility of developing an ethics in the traditional sense? Can positive social arrangements be derived from considerations about successful individual-to-self relationships? How does authenticity relate to social engagement?

In the spirit of existential philosophy, we wish to extend the discussion from the theoretical to the practical. All existentialists agree that freedom must always be understood as something practical, as an engagement of the individual with the world. This could be discussed through examples. We will address the question of whether the concrete social interactions of fraternity and violence can be justified within the framework of existentialism. Despite their seemingly obvious opposition to each other, both concepts appear equally in the existential tradition. Are they perhaps less contradictory than they seem at first glance, or do they really exclude each other? Does their equal status indicate the arbitrariness of ethical conclusions in existential

philosophy? The concrete ethical engagement of individual existentialist philosophers can be also be critically examined in this regard.

We are seeking contributions which deal with the systematic foundations of existentialistic ethics and which relate to one of the following topics.

## **Topics**

- 1) - Existential philosophy compared to traditional ethics
- 2) - Is there an existentialistic ethics?  
- Application to concrete values / attitudes:
- 3) - Can authenticity be established as a value?
- 4) - Can fraternity and/or violence be justified within existentialism?

Presentations should last no longer than 30 minutes and may be given in German, English or French. A publication of the contributions is planned.

Abstracts should be sent to Manuela Hackel [Manuela.hackel@fu-berlin.de](mailto:Manuela.hackel@fu-berlin.de)

## **Organizer**

- German Sartre Society
- Institute of Philosophy (department of the History of Philosophy), FU Berlin

## **Contact**

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