

Joshua Schuster

Existential Risk

Description: To be alive is to be at risk. Hegel argued that only by risking one's life, finding a way to live through risk and make it bearable, does one become a self-conscious subject. Today, at the outset of the Anthropocene, risk is now pervasive at species levels. Rising extinction rates are rewriting philosophies of life and views about the longer and larger meaning of being. You are perhaps aware that Cambridge University hosts a Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, which has brought together physicists, conservation biologists, and analytic philosophers. Their aim is to study the large-scale risks facing human civilization. But what is existential risk, if all beings must by definition risk their existence at every moment?

This class will consider how philosophical ontologies and theories of life come to terms with existential risk. Readings will include: Hegel, Kojève, Heidegger, Sartre, Fanon, Brassier, Bostrom, Colebrook, Vizenor, Freud, Derrida, and Malabou.

Grading

60% final essay

15% oral presentation

25% class participation

Week 1

Intro; Nick Bostrom and Will Rees articles

Week 2

Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit*, excerpts; Heidegger *Being and Time*, excerpts

Week 3

Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," *Being and Nothingness*, excerpts; Heidegger "Letter on Humanism"

Week 4

Badiou *Being and Event*, excerpts

Week 5

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, excerpts; Schmitt *The Concept of the Political*

Week 6

Kojève *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*; Judith Butler, essays

Week 7

Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, excerpts; Georges Bataille *The Cradle of Humanity*;
Claire Colebrook, essays

Week 8

Roberto Esposito *Immunitas*

Week 9

Quentin Meillassoux *After Finitude*

Week 10

Essays on science and scientism: Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, Ray Brassier

Week 11

Nick Bostrom *Superintelligence*

Week 12

Stanislaw Lem *His Master's Voice*