Gazing into the Abyss:
Schopenhauer and Nietzsche
PHIL 18a, Spring 2016

Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, 1:00-2:00
Instructor: Ben Sherman
Office: Rabb Graduate Center rm. 306
Email: shermanb@brandeis.edu
Office Hours: Monday 2:00-3:00, Wednesday 11:00-12:00

Course Description
Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) were philosophical outsiders during their own lifetimes, but have grown in influence during the last century to become two of the most widely-read and respected philosophers in history. In this course, we will closely examine the ideas that made them so unpopular during the 1800s, and later inspired intellectuals, artists, and philosophers in both the Continental and Analytic traditions. Both thinkers propose that we live in a godless world, that suffering is inescapable, and that the will does not merely respond to reality, but shapes it. Nietzsche goes still further, positing that most philosophy throughout history has tried to escape life, rather than dealing with it; that morality hampers what is noblest and healthiest in human beings; and that humankind “is something that must be overcome.” To better understand these ideas, which continue shaping intellectual life in the 21st century, we must join these 19th century philosophers, “gazing into the abyss.” (If Nietzsche is right, the abyss might gaze back.)

Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week)
Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Learning Goals
1. Introduce students to the work of two important figures in the history of philosophy
2. Familiarize the class with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche’s theories and central concepts
3. Examine the philosophical methods used—and in some cases pioneered—by these thinkers

Laptop Policy
No laptops, please, as they are apt to distract from class discussions.

Academic Integrity
All material submitted for a grade should be the student’s own original, independent work. All uses of others’ work should be properly documented through notes and citations. Unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, and any other violation of University policies on academic integrity will result in disciplinary action, which can include grading penalties, suspension, or dismissal. If you have questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please consult the Rights and Responsibilities Handbook, contact the Office of Student Development and Conduct, or ask the instructor. More information can be found at http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/sres/index.html.
Disability
Please let me know as soon as possible if you have a documented disability on record at Brandeis. I will
be glad to make the appropriate arrangements.

Readings
Most readings will be drawn from two of Schopenhauer’s books, On the Fourfold Root of the
Principle of Sufficient Reason and The World as Will and Representation vol. 1 (both translated
by E. F. J. Payne); and two anthologies of Nietzsche’s work, Basic Writings of Nietzsche and The
Portable Nietzsche (both edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann). Students should ensure
they have access to these works, and in these translations. All other required readings will be
made available online.

Requirements
All students are expected to participate in class discussion and take responsibility for
understanding key materials. Grades will be based on two papers and one in-class presentation.
Late Work: Assignments are to be turned in by the beginning of class the day they are due.
Late work will be penalized a mark for each day past the deadline (e.g., homework up to one day
late will fall from check to check-minus.)

Grading Schema:
5-8 page mid-term paper, 25%
In class presentation (dates to be arranged), 15%
10-15 page final paper, 50%
Prepared participation, 10%

Class Schedule
Weds, 1/13: Welcome and introduction
Thurs 1/14: Philosophical background—the Principle of Sufficient Reason and Kant

No class Monday 1/18 on account of Martin Luther King Day. Wednesday follows a Monday
schedule.
Weds 1/20-Thurs 1/21: Arthur Schopenhauer, On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient
Reason

Monday 1/25: Schopenhauer, Fourfold Root (cont’d) and “On Vision and Color” (Latte)
Weds 1/27-Thurs 1/28: Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, Prefaces and
Appendix

Monday 2/1-Thurs 2/4: Schopenhauer, World as Will, First Book

Monday 2/8-Thurs 2/11: World as Will, Second Book

February Break: Feb 15-19
Monday 2/22-Thurs 2/25: World as Will, Third Book

Monday 2/29-Thurs 3/3: World as Will, Fourth Book

Monday 3/7-Thurs 3/10: Schopenhauer, excerpt from Parerga and Paralipomena
  Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, sect. 1-15 (in Basic Writings)

Weds 3/16: Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, First Part (in Portable Nietzsche)
Thurs 3/17: Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Second Part

Mon 3/21: Nietzsche, Zarathustra, Third Part

Mid-term paper due


March Recess: Friday March 25- Monday March 28

  Prejudices of Philosophers” (in Basic Writings)

  Interludes”
Thurs 4/7: Nietzsche, BG&E Part 6, “We Scholars”

Monday 4/11: Nietzsche, BG&E Part 7, “Our Virtues” up through §231
  Optional: Part 7 §§232-239; Part 8, “Peoples and Fatherlands”
  Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, Preface
Thurs 4/14: Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals I, “‘Good and Evil,’ ‘Good and Bad’”

Monday 4/18: Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals II, “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like”
Weds 4/20: Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals III, “What is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?”
Note: Thursday April 21 follows a Friday schedule

Passover Break: Friday April 22-Friday April 29

Monday 5/2: Class choice of text (TBD before Passover Break), either The Case of Wagner,
  Twilight of the Idols, The Antichrist, or Ecce Homo

Final paper due Thursday, 5/12