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A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir

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This edition first published 2017
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Editorial Office

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Name: Hengehold, Laura, editor. | Bauer, Nancy, 1960– editor.
Title: A companion to Simone de Beauvoir / edited by Laura Hengehold, Nancy Bauer.
Description: Hoboken: Wiley, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index. |
Identifiers: LCCN 2017011141 (print) | LCCN 2017019347 (ebook) |
ISBN 97811118795972 (pdf) | ISBN 97811118795965 (epub) |
ISBN 97811118796023 (cloth)
Subjects: LCSH: Beauvoir, Simone de, 1908-1986.
Classification: LCC B2430.B344 (ebook) | LCC B2430.B344 C655 2017 (print) |
DDC 194–dc23
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017011141>

Cover Image: © Elliott Erwitt/Magnum Photos

Set in 10/12.5pt Photina by SPi Global, Pondicherry, India

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to extend my thanks to Nancy Bauer, with whom this project was first conceived, and without whom it would not have been possible. Her vision and guidance have been crucial to its completion. I would also like to acknowledge the patience and encouragement of our first editor at Wiley Blackwell, Liam Cooper, who really wanted this volume to see the light of day.

Many other editors at Wiley Blackwell, including Marissa Koors, Roshna Mohan, Manish Luthra, and Sakthivel Kandaswamy, deserve recognition for their later support of the huge task we had set ourselves. I owe a particularly concrete debt to Megan Weber and to our copy editor, Doreen Kruger, who helped me wrestle the manuscript into shape and patiently polish it. Their expertise, attention to detail, and dedication to getting things done the right way were essential, and exemplary. I also want to thank the Baker-Nord Center for the Humanities at Case Western Reserve University for financial support to assist me during the final phase of editing, and Maggie Kaminski, its administrative director, who provided sage tactical advice more than a few times. I should also mention my debt to Cheryl Toman, whose wide-ranging expertise in franco-phone studies and ongoing conversation regarding the art of translation are indispensable to me. And I would be lost without Renee Holland-Golphin's moral support and adroit management of my schedule.

Kyoo Lee, Sonia Kruks, Peg Simons, and Bill McBride generously lent their expertise to our efforts. Karen Thornton and Mark Eddy, the philosophy librarians at Case Western Reserve University, deserve special thanks for having, along with Emily Grosholz and Peg Simons, helped me sort through the thicket of available editions of Beauvoir's major texts referenced in these chapters. I am also grateful to Presses Universitaires de Sorbonne for permission to include Chapter 3 as a tribute to the late Ingrid Galster, an eminent intellectual historian, critic, and defender of Beauvoir whose work should be better known in English.

Finally, I wish to express my deepest thanks to the contributors for the opportunity to read, discuss, and publish their work. It has truly been an enjoyable process getting to know, in however cursory a fashion, such talented and knowledgeable scholars in so many different countries, and to learn about their different approaches not only to Beauvoir but to the philosophical traditions at whose crossroads she stands.

Introduction

LAURA HENGEGHOLD

In a 2006 essay, William McBride proposed that “Beauvoir must be put at the center of twentieth century philosophy, for *The Second Sex* is in a certain sense both more original than Sartre’s works and more evocative of the spirit of her age” (McBride 2006, 95).

These words from a noted American specialist in existentialism and continental political philosophy are all the more striking because at the time of her death in 1986, Beauvoir’s stature was nowhere near so secure – and as Margaret Simons recounts in her contribution to this volume, Beauvoir herself seemed determined to resist appropriation by philosophers. Even three years later after her death, at the end of the Cold War when many of the cultural changes of the 1970s seemed vulnerable to reversal, scholars in an academy dominated by French post-structuralism considered Beauvoir’s contribution to feminism outdated almost on arrival.

During the late 1970s and 1980s, Simone de Beauvoir’s ghost was an egalitarian among North Atlantic feminists who no longer wanted equality on men’s terms and suspected universalism for its suppression of difference. To this generation, structuralism and psychoanalysis seemed more “revolutionary” than existentialism although Beauvoir herself used them in writing *The Second Sex*. Meanwhile, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing would not bring Western feminists into contact and conflict with similar activists from around the globe until 1995. During the preceding two decades, therefore, Beauvoir was read primarily as a novelist and chronicler of intellectual culture, particularly in France, and even in anglophone universities there was scarcely a recognized field of “feminist philosophy” for which *The Second Sex* could be canonical.

How the situation has changed. Since the publication of *The Second Sex* we have seen not only an explosion of scholarship in women and gender studies but also in feminist philosophy. As Stella Sandford explains in “Beauvoir’s Transdisciplinarity,” the decades

of Beauvoir's productivity overlapped with an equally long timespan of reception, during which disciplines were created and dominant knowledge formations were altered, sometimes transformed. Beauvoir's work has endured and flowered in the last two decades, thanks primarily to the lasting influence of *The Second Sex* on the distribution of scholarly discourses dealing with gender, sexuality, and even old age. For anglophone readers, this engagement and expansion have been greatly assisted by the eight-volume *Beauvoir Series* edited by Margaret Simons for University of Illinois Press. The *Beauvoir Series* translates and/or reissues Beauvoir's shorter essays on philosophical, political, and literary topics; her early working diaries; some of her journalism; a play and a screenplay. *The Blackwell Companion to Simone de Beauvoir* tries to do justice to that breadth by including contributions from established and junior scholars in multiple disciplines from over ten countries.

The keystone to our presentation is *The Second Sex*, which Michèle Le Dœuff described as a book that "[put] an end to loneliness, which teaches people to see," and thereby "has greater and more immediate importance than all the manifestos in the world" (Le Dœuff 1989, 57). Indeed, Kyoo Lee notes in "Second Languageing *The Second Sex*," Beauvoir's work topped the *Guardian's* 2015 list of "Ten Books That Changed the World." The first volume of *The Second Sex* describes scientific and literary discourses, including outright myths, that have led women to be seen as radically Other to men in Western societies, if not globally. The second volume then describes the real lives, the lived experience or "*expérience vécue*" of women such as Beauvoir knew them, read about them in Western literature, or learned of them through anthropological texts about other cultures.

Beauvoir's text was shaped in part by her encounter, during a visit to the United States in 1947, with the ways that American racism positioned African Americans as Other, and by her reading of Gunnar Myrdal's influential report on American race relations, *An American Dilemma* (1944). Philosophically, her primary references are the German idealist philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, who was also important in the Marxist discourse of the time, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose most important work of structuralist anthropology she had the opportunity to read while researching her text. But Sartre and Merleau-Ponty are also found throughout the book, as well as Marx and Lacan. Despite philosophical, class, and cultural differences, women from many parts of the world were able to see their own situations reflected in *The Second Sex* and motivated to change them.

Part I. Re-reading *The Second Sex*. The first essays in this section address the historical and disciplinary context of *The Second Sex*, both at the time of its publication and today. "Beauvoir's Transdisciplinarity" introduces many themes that will resonate throughout the *Companion* by noting that *The Second Sex* is philosophical but also challenged disciplinary philosophy so as to make space in the contemporary episteme for gender and sexuality studies of various kinds. To Stella Sandford, the scope of Beauvoir's work resembles nothing so much as the Frankfurt School's projected transformation of traditional theory into critical theory. From a discourse of philosophy defined by its worldlessness, Beauvoir drew attention to philosophy's implication in that world and to the oppressive aspects of that world.

Contributions by Sandra Reineke and the late Ingrid Galster offer a sense of the cultural and political climate in which Beauvoir's work was first read, particularly with respect to the constraining images of female sexuality, maternity, and lesbianism in French medicine and the public sphere. Galster, who extensively researched Beauvoir's wartime activities, shows how the misogynist reaction to *The Second Sex* played out following the logic of cultural conflicts from the Occupation years. Turning to North America, Kathryn Gines investigates Beauvoir's debt to African-American writers such as Richard Wright and perhaps indirectly, W. E. B. Dubois, as well as mid-twentieth-century scholars on race, such as Gunnar and Alva Myrdal. Gines introduces a textual, philosophical, and political problem that is taken up in several chapters later in the volume: the analogy between sexual and racial discrimination in Beauvoir's Introduction to *The Second Sex*. This analogy has posed theoretical as well as practical obstacles for black women, whose existence it seems to negate, but it has also shaped the canon formed around Beauvoir's own work, for even when white feminists acknowledge the limits of this analogy, their scholarly debates tend to ignore black women's own writing on Beauvoir.

In the final chapter of this section, Emily Grosholz addresses the vicissitudes of Beauvoir's text in English. The history of the translation is useful background for any other chapter in this volume. First appearing in serial form in *Les temps modernes*, the journal edited by Beauvoir, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and others, the complete two-volume edition of *Le deuxième sexe* was released by Gallimard in 1949. It has since been translated into more than forty languages. Although many of these international translations were directly from French, others took the English version by H. M. Parshley as their guide. The defects of this translation by an accomplished and well-meaning scientist, in conflict with the commercial imperatives of the Knopf publishing house, were first exposed by Margaret Simons at a conference in 1979 and circulated by print in 1983 (Simons 1983, 559–64). In part, Beauvoir's relative invisibility as a thinker for several decades rather than as an activist or novelist can be blamed on Parshley's exclusion or omission of philosophically significant terms from his translation. Taken together, Reineke, Galster, Gines, and Grosholz show that the culture of reception, the language of reception, and the hierarchies and priorities of the academy are important factors in the history of *The Second Sex*.

This introductory section is followed by one focusing on "Central Themes" of Beauvoir's text. Chapters by Ruth Groenhout ("Beauvoir and the Biological Body") and Emily Parker ("Becoming Bodies") analyze Beauvoir's treatment of the body known by medicine and the body as "singularity." Groenhout engages with the work of Anne Fausto-Sterling, while Parker's chapter explores the metaphysical presuppositions of "postmodern" feminist theorists of human embodiment. Groenhout's and Parker's chapters are far-reaching because one cannot avoid reading Beauvoir's theory of embodiment, however it is understood, into her description of lived experiences such as girlhood, motherhood, and love.

In these chapters, Groenhout and Parker also introduce important – and multivalent – concepts that will reappear throughout the volume. For example, the *ambiguity* of experience rests on the contrast between *transcendence* and *immanence*, or the ability to go beyond what is given in experience and passive subjection to experience as framed and imposed by others. Ambiguity refers to the unfinished and ultimately undecidable

nature of human perception, interpretation, and action. Groenhout, Parker, and later contributors in the volume such as Michel Kail also distinguish between *naturalism*, particularly new approaches to naturalism, and the *biological determinism* with which naturalism has been conflated for many decades and which Beauvoir considered inimical to women's autonomy. Beauvoir's relationship to biology plays an important role in later chapters on maternity in *The Second Sex*, and the implications of biology and naturalism reappear in chapters by Lori Marso, Shannon Sullivan, and Alex Antonopoulos.

The following contributions to "Central Themes" deal with particular topics or chapters from *The Second Sex*, including the moral difficulties and opportunities posed by the situation of "woman," such as narcissism and reciprocity. Emily Zakin situates Beauvoir's critique of female narcissism with respect to her appropriation of psychoanalysis, particularly the work of Jacques Lacan. Mary Beth Mader offers a comparison between Beauvoir's account of the "training" of female children and adolescents and the account of boys' education and discipline found in Michel Foucault's descriptions of modern European power-knowledge constructs. In their examination of childhood, both of these authors draw attention to Beauvoir's claim that sexual differentiation requires internalization of an "almost originary" relationship to others.

Three chapters by Alison Stone, Sara Cohen Shabot, and Nancy Bauer address Beauvoir's controversial treatment of maternity in *The Second Sex*. As Reineke explained, Beauvoir was writing at a time when contraception and abortion were difficult and dangerous for Frenchwomen, and at the height of the French government's postwar pro-natalism campaign. Beauvoir's insistence on the significance of reproductive autonomy and her critique of romantic myths surrounding motherhood have been read as being hostile to the female body.¹ Her belief, reiterated in later interviews, that women's primary social identity must come from political and economic activities distinct from maternity has been criticized as a response to a specifically Western European cultural predicament that does not necessarily hold elsewhere in the world. Stone reviews the interpretations and agrees that Beauvoir's view of maternity is generally negative. By contrast, Shabot engages in personal reflection on her own experiences of motherhood and finds Beauvoir helpful for thinking about the impact of medicalized and romanticized views of childbearing labor on women's experiences of their bodies as transcending the given. For Bauer, the question posed by Beauvoir is how motherhood plays into men's and women's respective tendencies to renounce autonomy. Here, the structuring analogy to which Bauer draws attention in *The Second Sex* is between the classic Western relationship of mother to child and the sexist relationship of man to woman, both being efforts to secure recognition from a consciousness that has little opportunity to refuse it.

Tove Pettersen's consideration of love in *The Second Sex*, whether romantic heterosexual and lesbian love or love between parents and children, carries forward Bauer's investigation of the humanizing promise and the temptation to evasion that come with love. Pettersen argues that Beauvoir distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic love, where reciprocity is the primary touchstone for authentic love relationships.

Just as several chapters in this *Companion* highlight the relationships between history and biology, others focus on the relationship of history to myth. Beauvoir's central claim in the first volume of *The Second Sex* is that neither the biology, psychology, nor

radical economic analysis of her time can explain women's status as Other to men, although myths supporting this status can be found in history and literature. As Eva Bahovec explains later in the volume, the universality of Beauvoir's philosophical claims emerges from her study of structural anthropology, and not just the post-Kantian tradition of European philosophy, particularly Hegel. At the time when *The Second Sex* was written, France ruled over a large colonial empire. The anthropological sources available to Beauvoir took the Otherness of non-European peoples for granted and mythified their customs in ways that would not become clear until the dawn of decolonization.

In the chapter titled "Why is Woman the Other?" Ivoirian philosopher Tanella Boni explores the scholarly and the emotional context through which Beauvoir encountered African women both as idea and reality. She asks how complicity with some forms of foreignness (for example, Beauvoir's love for the American Nelson Algren) increases the apparent distance of other forms, and how bodily differences reinforce that distance. Boni's contribution deepens the investigation of love as a context for complicity or justice found in Bauer and Pettersen. Like Kathryn Gines, moreover, Boni addresses Beauvoir's troubled analogy between the situation of women, primarily white women, in the Western societies with which she was familiar and the situation of black men and women in the United States, though not in metropolitan France.

Part II. Beauvoir's Intellectual Engagements. For many decades, Beauvoir claimed not only to have been relatively uninterested in philosophy, but to have been influenced by only one philosopher, her partner Jean-Paul Sartre. Only recently has the wealth of Beauvoir's interaction with other philosophers such as Husserl, Hegel, or Merleau-Ponty been explored, or used as the basis for new philosophical work, whether in phenomenology or feminism. Every chapter in this collection situates Beauvoir in the context of philosophical and non-philosophical authors with whom she was in dialogue, but the second main section of this *Companion* is devoted to careful consideration of Beauvoir's intellectual debts to particular thinkers.

The influence of the nineteenth-century German idealist philosopher G. W. F. Hegel was first explored by Eva Lundgren-Gothlin in *Sex and Existence* in 1991 (Lundgren-Gothlin 1996). In "Beauvoir and Hegel," Kimberly Hutchings describes the trajectory of Beauvoir's engagements with Hegel, while Zeynep Direk ("Simone de Beauvoir's Relation to Hegel's Absolute") argues that *The Second Sex* proposes a very sophisticated internal critique of Hegel's assumption that Woman can remain an "absolute" other, as myths would suggest, without doing violence to his own conception of the Absolute. Rather than reading Beauvoir as anti-Hegelian, therefore, Direk sees her as an atheist participant in the largely Christian movement of philosophical personalism.

Jennifer McWeeny and William Wilkerson discuss Beauvoir's personal friendship and philosophical dialogue with Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty is best known for his proposal that subjectivity is thoroughly embodied and expresses its freedom in bodily ways. In "Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty," McWeeny asks whether Beauvoir's notion of *ambiguity* was a precursor to Merleau-Ponty's characterization of the interface between the human body and its world as one flesh. For Wilkerson, the question is ethical rather

than metaphysical: why is freedom so often a matter of authenticity or inauthenticity for Beauvoir but rarely for Merleau-Ponty?

Sonia Kruks discusses Beauvoir's debt to Marx and the way different historical strains of Marxism are represented in her texts, often without clear markers. The fact that Beauvoir, like Sartre, is critical of historical determinism should not be thought to undermine Beauvoir's belief that only socialism will truly free women. Kruks shows how Marxist problems are highlighted in Beauvoir's late text on aging in modern societies, *La Vieillesse* (*Old Age*, translated in the United States as *The Coming of Age*). In the chapter titled "Beauvoir Between Structuralism and 'Aleatory Materialism,'" Eva Bahovec asks whether Beauvoir's appropriation of Lévi-Strauss and Lacan might have led her ideas about philosophy of history in the same direction as Althusser, a structuralist Marxist whose work is normally considered antithetical to "existentialism." In the process, as Zakin did with Lacan, Bahovec brings Beauvoir into dialogue with thinkers who were her historical contemporaries but who are usually assigned to a subsequent generation of French intellectual culture.

Each of these chapters also gives influence a different significance in the reading and writing of philosophy. Christine Daigle's chapter, "Unweaving the Threads of Influence," addresses three points of reciprocal influence in Beauvoir's philosophical relationship with Sartre – ontological commitments, methodological commitments, and literary commitments. But Daigle also asks, in a Nietzschean spirit, why influence matters to us.

Part III. Beyond *The Second Sex*. Part III of the *Companion* explores the remainder of Beauvoir's corpus. The topic of the first part is "Beauvoir's Ethics and Political Philosophy" apart from *The Second Sex*. The texts in question include the early essays from Beauvoir's so-called "moral period," such as the classically existentialist "Pyrrhus and Cineas" and *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* [*The Ethics of Ambiguity*], the essays from *Privilèges*, and other texts now collected in the volume *Political Writings* (Beauvoir 2012). The section begins with a highly accessible chapter on "Pyrrhus and Cineas" by Kristana Arp, which explains why this essay is better suited for introducing students to existentialism than Sartre's now-classic "Existentialism is a Humanism." Arp shows how Beauvoir's essay does, in fact, address the familiar question of whether life has meaning, what that might be, and what conditions make that meaning possible.

Subsequent chapters in this section focus loosely on human conflict in a political, economic, or sexual context. Laura Hengehold reads *The Ethics of Ambiguity* with an eye to the role of separation and aggression in human existence and in sexual imagination, showing how these fundamental ethical concerns remain at the center of "anti-social" trends in queer theory. Lori Marso explores the implications of Beauvoir's refusal to rule out violence as a political tool. How does Beauvoir's awareness of the ever-present potential for conflict inform her understanding of freedom and oppression? Debra Bergoffen asks how Beauvoir's ideas about myths posing women as "the sex" are actualized in rape and in the related social degradation of sex workers. In these chapters, Beauvoir's public refusal to support the pardon of condemned Collaborationist writer Robert Brassilach and her advocacy on behalf of the Algerian militant Djamila Boupacha play a central role. In various ways, they tease out a Beauvoirian ethical perspective on the phenomenon of shame as well as violence.

In the final chapter of this section, Patricia Hill Collins investigates the concept of freedom found in all of Beauvoir's texts. While most of the chapters read Beauvoir as a phenomenologist, "Simone de Beauvoir, Women's Oppression and Existential Freedom" interrogates the political implications and theoretical obstacles that arise when Beauvoir philosophizes using universals and analogies like the analogy between race and gender. Like Sandford, Collins is concerned with the definitions of disciplinarity thrown into play by *The Second Sex* and with the problems of "methodological narcissism" that limit their ability to produce effective knowledge for all women. Beyond critiques of any specific analogy Beauvoir might have used, this chapter focuses on problems posed by analogy as philosophical method.

For most of her life, and by her own stated preference, Beauvoir identified with her role as a literary author and published seven major works of fiction, ranging from short story cycles to novellas, including the award-winning *Les Mandarins*. Yet all of her literary output was philosophically informed, and her notion of "committed literature" differs from Sartre's in important respects. The second section of Part III in this *Companion*, titled "Beauvoir and the Art of Philosophical Fiction," introduces readers to the range of issues found in Beauvoir's novels, lectures and essays on literature, as well as Beauvoir's introductions to the literary works of others. Meryl Altman leads off with "Beauvoir as Literary Writer." This chapter explores not only Beauvoir's criteria for literary excellence but asks how Beauvoir, among other feminists, has understood what makes writing political. Why, she asks, we do not read *The Second Sex* for its literary qualities as well as its theoretical insights? Altman, like Sandra Reineke, spends time on Beauvoir's early play "Les bouches inutiles" ("The Useless Mouths") and shows how this play prefigures many of the concerns about women's contingent social status in *The Second Sex*.

Anne van Leeuwen ("Simone de Beauvoir and the Dialectic of Desire") offers a reading of Beauvoir's first well-received novel, *L'Invitée* (*She Came to Stay*) in which Beauvoir's reworking of Hegel is considered from a structuralist psychoanalytic perspective. Van Leeuwen's reading of the novel, it should be noted, steps back from the emphasis on recognition in Beauvoir's ethics found in earlier chapters on love. In "The Failure of Female Identity in Simone de Beauvoir's Fiction," Shannon Mussett investigates the portrayals of feminine psychology in Beauvoir's novels, particularly *L'Invitée*, *Tous les hommes sont mortels* (*All Men are Mortal*), and *La femme rompue* (*The Woman Destroyed*). Beauvoir was famously criticized for not presenting "positive" female characters or for failing to encourage empathy with female characters that she believed were in the grip of sexist illusions or ethical errors. In different ways, Van Leeuwen's and Mussett's chapters are fruitful when read along with Zakin's earlier chapter on narcissism and Beauvoir's debt to Lacan. Mussett's treatment of *The Woman Destroyed* also complements Bauer's discussion of motherhood as destiny. Finally, Sally Scholz uses *Les Mandarins* to illustrate Beauvoir's understanding of the "metaphysical novel" found in the early essay, "Literature and Metaphysics."

Although Beauvoir was a trenchant critic of the myths enclosing women in the role of Other, including literary myths, she also invented myths about her own life and the relative place held by philosophy and literature, as well as Jean-Paul Sartre and other male and female lovers through the years. Beauvoir was a keen observer and chronicler

of her own life, her time, and the world around her. She published six volumes of memoirs, including accounts of her last days with her mother and with Sartre, two works of travel writing, and eventually, a significant body of personal letters. These are the subject of the final section of Part III, “Beauvoir’s Scope.”

First, Margaret Simons tells the story of her various efforts to confront Beauvoir for minimizing the role of philosophy in her personal myth and the way this has affected our understanding of the history of existentialism. Next, in “Witnessing Self, Witnessing Other,” Ursula Tidd describes the different narrative strategies by which Beauvoir synthesized a “self,” an “era,” or a “life” for readers in each of her historical genres. Tidd’s account presents war as a gendered experience, and explores World War II and the Algerian War as key moments when Beauvoir’s understanding of the relationship between gender and social situation changed. In doing so, Tidd shows how the existential-phenomenological understanding of *historicity* as an aspect of human situation also applies to the female body as situation.

Michel Kail’s contribution (“Women and Philosophy of History”) tackles the role of history in Beauvoir’s work head on. Readers, Kail argues, assumed Beauvoir had no distinctive philosophy of history because of Sartre’s well-known contributions to this domain in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, particularly the introduction published as *Search for a Method*. Kail, a former editor to *Les temps modernes*, shows how Beauvoir’s understanding of history is bound up with the *natural* dimension of human existence as well as the autobiographical dimension, and therefore cannot be reduced to a determinism. In this, his chapter complements Eva Bahovec’s on Beauvoir and structuralism.

Earlier in the volume, Sonia Kruks situated Beauvoir’s comments on Marxism with respect to the Cold War and justifications of right-wing thought in France. In “The Post-War World According to Beauvoir,” William McBride looks at Beauvoir’s full-length travel reports on her trips to the United States and China, *America Day by Day* and *The Long March*, during a time of political tension among the United States, the Soviet Union, and China. He reveals how the politics of translation concealed Beauvoir’s concerns about American racism from anglophone readers and how differently the Americans and the Chinese, who have since emerged as contemporary rivals, seemed to envision their future at the moment when Beauvoir encountered them.

In 1973, Simone de Beauvoir published one of the first significant gerontological studies of Western societies. As with *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir was inventing a new interdisciplinary field with political and existential significance around a familiar but disparaged population. The phenomenon of aging demonstrates that historicity is part of the individual human condition. In *Old Age (The Coming of Age)*, Beauvoir argued that the elderly *become* Other rather than, like women, being presumed Other from the start. However, while men can avoid the situation of being female, no human can avoid the situation of aging. In the chapter titled “Afterlives,” Penelope Deutscher plays with the multiple meanings of alterity, uniting themes from all Beauvoir’s writings on memory, time, historicity, and selfhood. She reads *Old Age* with an eye to the concept of *intersectionality* made prominent by African-American feminist theorists and asks how categories of experience like race or age tend to expand or limit one another’s scope in

the course of doing actual social science. This chapter adds Beauvoir's comparison between Other-as-woman and Other-as-elderly to the volume's ongoing discussion of analogical thinking, leading Deutscher to ask how analogies can be expanded or contracted to do justice to overlapping and complex forms of oppression.

Part IV. Beauvoir and Contemporary Feminism. Together with Gines and Collins, Deutscher's treatment of intersectionality situates Beauvoir's less known but equally provocative text on aging in the context of contemporary feminist concerns. Today, Beauvoir is read by scholars and the ordinary public in countries with their own movements and historical conflicts over kinship, gender, and community. How does the anti-naturalist concept of "becoming" woman translate from one historical context to another? In what ways does Beauvoir remain "*actuel*" or relevant to contemporary feminism, both in Europe and around the world?

On the one hand, Beauvoir's texts encounter biological and bioethical issues posed by scientific and technological advances, as well as the feminist philosophy of science that has emerged since her death. As Emily Anne Parker already hinted in an earlier chapter, biology and new materialism have become important counterparts to phenomenology in enabling us to make sense of Beauvoir's claims. Non-reductive forms of materialism do not seem to entail the determinism or teleological (and covertly religious) ideas about nature that proved so damaging to women's freedom in masculinist societies. How might these discourses change, for example, our reading of girlhood in *The Second Sex*? Moreover, what might Beauvoir's chapter look like if it were rewritten to include girls of many races and nationalities?

Although biological explanations for racism have been proven nonsensical, as Shannon Sullivan shows, racism and discrimination do have biological effects on those who are racially differentiated. Rather than critiquing Beauvoir's racism, "Race After Beauvoir" puts the theoretical resources of Beauvoir's chapter on "Biology" together with feminist science studies in the service of anti-racism. In "Who is the Subject of *The Second Sex*?" A. Alex Antonopoulos re-reads the same chapter of *The Second Sex* by way of Simone de Beauvoir's very early essay on the French biologist Claude Bernard. Antonopoulos points out that in French philosophy of science, the word *expérience* has the double meaning of "experience" (i.e., *expérience vécue*) and "experimentation." Playing on the difference between the external understanding of the body as shaped by genetics and the internal understanding of the body as shaped by endocrinology, Antonopoulos argues that the felt "error" of transmasculine experience resists both the scientific and political normalizing of the body in the history of biology.

On the other hand, Beauvoir's texts encounter contemporary forms of transnational feminism and the legacy of France's colonial presence in Algeria. Since they were first published, the Cold War has ended and formerly colonized countries have become independent. As Joan Scott points out, the status of women was even used as a litmus test for selecting new countries to join the European Union (Scott 2003). Women's rights and LGBT rights are often promoted as a sign of moral progress and sometimes used by wealthy nations to justify or deny international intervention or aid. Simone de Beauvoir's name was associated with atheism and rebellion against traditional French

Catholicism, however blunted it may have been by republican *laïcité*; today, atheism is accepted in Europe and European conflicts over religion center on Islam rather than Catholicism.

Although North African immigrants have been arriving in France since the nineteenth century, their current social situation is shaped by the politically controversial return of “white” French colonists (*pièdes noirs*) to the French metropole after the Algerian War and the influx of refugees from Algeria’s civil war in the 1990s. In “Misunderstanding in Paris,” Karen Vintges situates Beauvoir with respect to the larger European context of discomfort with Islam and non-European immigration. Popular opposition to these phenomena now threatens the European Union and the traditions of civil liberties that Western Europe has long taken for granted. Beauvoir’s ideas, to Vintges’ alarm, have been recruited by thinkers on the center right to feed arguments for why feminism is incompatible with religious tolerance and a pluralistic immigration policy.

As Patricia Hill Collins noted earlier in her chapter, it is interesting to see which of Beauvoir’s claims about sexism remain valid in the highly religious environment of French immigrants from North Africa, an environment in which mainstream racism toward young black and Arab men is a constant preoccupation for their lovers, sisters, and mothers. In “Beauvoir’s Legacy to the *Quartiers*,” Diane Perpich investigates the relevance of *The Second Sex* for French women’s rights activists of immigrant descent. By discussing the trajectories and struggles of specific activists against the backdrop of feminism’s changing self-conception in France, as well as in Quebec, Perpich shows where Beauvoir’s analysis of women’s oppression and even her style of self-narration remain alive for marginalized French women, although often in the form of a tacit cultural reference.

Kyoo Lee’s “philopoetic” intervention, “Second Languageing *The Second Sex*,” returns to the question of translation. Lee asks how Beauvoir’s ideas resonate and change when they migrate outside the sphere of European languages and intellectual influence. Specifically, she queries, “how does the self-renewing, textured temporality of “*On ne naît pas femme: on le devient*” translate – transfer and transform – itself into other “natural,” “major” “Continental” languages?” such as “Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Swahili ... Afrikaans, Japanese, Korean, Persian, Turkish, etc.” Lee examines the philosophical resonances carried by the words for “being born” and its subject, the “one,” in Korean and Chinese. She suggests that we have no reason to believe the “second” sex is necessarily bound to the “first” metaphysics of European thought. Indeed, this concluding chapter points us towards those linguistic and philosophical communities (for example, Latin America, most of Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and the Arab world) that were not represented in the final version of this *Companion*, and from which scholars will surely put together their own collections in coming decades.

When citing *The Second Sex*, all authors in this volume have used the 2009 English edition translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. However, it may be useful for readers to know that the British edition (published in 2009 and 2013 by Jonathan Cape) and the U.S. edition (published in 2009, 2010, and 2011 by Knopf and Vintage) have different introductions (by Sheila Rowbotham in the British case and by Judith Thurman in the American case). This means that the page numbers for citations to the English translation of *The Second Sex* may vary from chapter to chapter,

depending on the publisher. For the convenience of readers, all citations are accompanied by corresponding page numbers from the two-volume 1949 Gallimard "blanche" edition of *Le Deuxième Sexe*. This edition remained stable through numerous printings, while pagination varied in the "Folio" editions that appeared starting in 1970. A new Gallimard "blanche" edition with some minor changes was published in 2006 following Ingrid Galster's cinquentenary conference, and it is the basis for the 2010 English edition. But given the rate at which libraries renovate their collections, the 2006 edition may be difficult for many readers and students around the world to locate.

English translations of other works by Beauvoir are drawn from *The Beauvoir Series* published by The University of Illinois Press, of which six of eight volumes have appeared, and from the standard English translations of *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* [*The Ethics of Ambiguity*] and *La Vieillesse*. The latter was translated as *Old Age* in the UK and as *The Coming of Age* in the United States; articles in this *Companion* use both titles, but the text and its pagination are the same in both. Pagination of novels and memoirs in translation may vary from edition to edition.

For readers as well as teachers, this volume pairs contrasting approaches to a topic or text, or balances one introductory essay with another that pushes in new directions – whether feminist science studies, new materialism, queer and transgender theory, or the debates about political violence and secularism reshaping contemporary states. The *Companion* also includes some readings that challenge established stories of influence and historical context while questioning the very notions of influence and history from a Beauvoirian standpoint. While each section is focused on a specific aspect of Beauvoir's corpus, chapters in different sections engage in a dialogue with one another and rework earlier themes. Our goal was not just to provide a guide to the quasi-totality of Beauvoir's *oeuvre* for those who specialize in one area, but to offer a springboard for future philosophizing and transdisciplinary creativity in thinking about gender, freedom, and history.

Note

- 1 See, for example, the references to Elizabeth Spelman and Catriona MacKenzie in Chapters 6 and 12 by Groenhout and Bauer, respectively.

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Part I

Re-reading *The Second Sex*

A. *Reception and Scholarship*

Beauvoir's Transdisciplinarity: From Philosophy to Gender Theory

STELLA SANDFORD

Beauvoir's relation to both feminist philosophy and gender theory is far from straightforward, although the intellectual traditions of both seem to spring, at least in part, from the articulation of their bases in *The Second Sex*. Deeply embedded in the European traditions of philosophy, especially phenomenology and existentialism, *The Second Sex* rests on two connected, specifically feminist, philosophical innovations: first, the gendering of phenomenological experience; and second, the positing of a novel question (albeit in a classical philosophical form) for existential ontology: What is a woman? This question prepared the ground for contemporary discussions of the status and meaning of the category "woman," both in the French materialist and in the Anglo-American traditions.

The first innovation inspired the tradition of feminist phenomenology, one of the richest seams of feminist philosophy in the twentieth- and twenty-first century. Arguably, coupled with a Marxian influence, it also provided the model for the gender critique of an array of philosophical discourses (for example in epistemology, philosophy of science, ethics and aesthetics). In exposing the lie of the universalism of "Man" and insisting on a real, and not merely formal duality, Beauvoir seems, as well (although not uncontroversially) to have opened the question of "sexual difference" that would become so important for the psychoanalytically oriented francophone and Francophile feminist philosophy of the second half of the twentieth century. From an anglophone perspective, Beauvoir's posing of the novel philosophical problem of "Woman" in *The Second Sex* also seemed to crack open the distinction between sex and gender, thus positing a non-essentialist and non-biological account of gendered existence that provided the feminist impetus for the gender, queer and trans theories of later decades.

In the reception of *The Second Sex* in feminist philosophy and gender theory (broadly understood), these various strands have never been reconciled in a single theory or a single interpretation; indeed, they have often been pitted against each other. Beyond the

obvious claim, then, that *The Second Sex* was influential in many different directions, what is its critical place today in articulating the relation between feminist philosophy and gender theory?

Any answer to this question requires an account of Beauvoir's relation to philosophy. After a brief survey of recent attempts to identify the specificity of Beauvoir's philosophical contribution, I look at the transition from Beauvoir's early, more conventionally philosophical essays to the strikingly unconventional work that is *The Second Sex*. I argue that the philosophical innovations of *The Second Sex*, upon which the gender theory of the later twentieth century depends, were themselves dependent on Beauvoir's relations to other disciplines and other forms of intellectual production (especially anthropology, sociology and literature), such that Beauvoir's *philosophical* originality had multi- and interdisciplinary conditions of possibility. This aligns it more obviously with the twentieth-century tradition of critical theory rather than any "disciplinary" conception of philosophy. The trajectory from philosophy to gender theory is thus not necessarily a journey from one discipline to another but, as Beauvoir's example demonstrates, the possibility of a critical redefinition of the conception of philosophy such that it is able to take gender theory into account.

1. Beauvoir's Philosophy

Clearly, *The Second Sex* is not a conventionally philosophical work, and nor has it ever been received as such. But it was primarily in relation to studies of *The Second Sex* that the question of Beauvoir's philosophy – and Beauvoir's status as a philosopher – first arose. This was, of course, in the context of a discipline that was and remains – in both the continental and analytical traditions – defensive about its own definition and intellectual boundaries and, historically, inhospitable to women and "masculinist" (Le Doeuff 1991, 42). When explicitly feminist work in philosophy began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s, the mainstream reaction was largely hostile and the legitimacy of this work, *qua* philosophy, was denied. Feminist philosophers responded, in part, by criticizing the narrowness of the definition of philosophy that this involved. This criticism was just and right; but it does not mean that anything should now count as philosophy, or that philosophy is just whatever we want it to be. If, for example, we are to make claims about the philosophical significance or legacy of Beauvoir's work, we still need to be able to say something about the specificity of the discipline of philosophy to make those claims intelligible.

What is philosophy? This question is difficult to answer because there is no empirical unity of practice or of self-understanding among the diverse array of practices and texts that are gathered today under its name. Philosophy exists in the form of particular intellectual and institutional regimes of discourse, in particular, social and political and indeed geopolitical contexts. Recognizing this, we do not necessarily identify our own context and regime, exclusively, with philosophy. The diversity of these regimes means that the unity of philosophy (which makes the use of the word meaningful) lies not in any method, nor even in any common themes or questions; on the contrary, these precisely constitute its internal plurality. So where is it?

One answer is that the unity of philosophy is in its relation to its history. This does not contradict its de facto internal plurality, nor does it imply that there can be no contestation in our understanding of that history, or even in what constitutes it. Indeed, philosophy's critical relation to its own history, its self-renewal through interpretations of its history, is partly what gives rise to its internal plurality and to disagreements. At the same time there is a paradoxical unity-in-disunity of philosophy in relation to what we might loosely call its practice of abstraction. Within this, the scope of its field is unlimited (hence its quasi meta-disciplinary aspirations). Philosophy continually extends itself beyond its own historically defined areas to philosophize about new objects or about established objects in new ways. Any "unity" of philosophy is thus more than the empirical totality of its disciplinary practices in the present and certainly more than the hegemony of any particular form of practice.

The signal importance for philosophy of its own history accounts for the fact that many of the attempts to explain Beauvoir's philosophical significance have taken the form of accounts of her relations to her philosophical predecessors and contemporaries and her divergences from them. So, for example, central concepts in *The Second Sex* are said to be indebted to the late seventeenth-century French philosophy of the passions represented by Malebranche and Descartes (James 2003), to Rousseau (Scholz 2012), Hegel (Lundgren-Gothlin 1996; Bauer 2001; Sandford 2006), Heidegger (Gothlin 2003), Sartre (Vintges 1996) and Merleau-Ponty (Langer 2003; Weiss 2012). Beauvoir is said to be indebted to Descartes' methodological skepticism (Bauer 2001), Sartre's ontology (Arp 2001), and to the phenomenological tradition inaugurated by Husserl more generally (Vintges 1995, 1996; Bergoffen 1997; Heinämaa 2003). These accounts situate Beauvoir in the history of philosophy, explaining something of what one needs to know in order to appreciate the originality or interest of Beauvoir's use or understanding of specific concepts in relation to that tradition. In other words, they account for Beauvoir as a philosopher in terms of her critical, transformative relation to the history of philosophy.¹

On this basis, there have also been some attempts to construct "Beauvoir's philosophy," a distinctive philosophical oeuvre. In the philosophical monographs on Beauvoir in the last twenty years or so, these attempts have mainly focused on her development of an existentialist ethics, via readings of some of her early essays. Some of these accounts are based on claims about Beauvoir's peculiar philosophical method in relation to the history of philosophy (Bauer 2001, 4).² In a slightly different vein, Michel Kail (2006) argues that any attempt to understand Beauvoir's philosophy must begin from the recognition of her anti-naturalist or anaturalist phenomenological-existential concept of world. Justifying his reading, Kail contends that reading Beauvoir philosophically is a task of reconstruction, making explicit the founding concepts and problems in the absence of any programmatic statements about "her philosophy" from Beauvoir herself. This means that any claim about what constitutes "Beauvoir's philosophy" must be based on a strong interpretative, even speculative, reading. This helps explain why there is no consensus as to what constitutes Beauvoir's philosophy and as to which should be considered its main source texts. Some locate the most important moves firmly in the early essays on ethics (Arp 1995; Vintges 1996) or even earlier, in *She Came to Stay* and in Beauvoir's juvenilia (Simons 1999), while for others *The Second Sex* is the first decisive text (Bauer 2001).

2. The Shock of the New

Revisiting the question of Beauvoir's philosophy and her relation to philosophy from the point of view of literary genre, it is clear that Beauvoir's most conventionally philosophical works are her early essays and short books on predominantly ethical and political issues (Beauvoir later referred to this, somewhat disparagingly, as her "moral period" – Beauvoir 1965, 547). These include "Pyrrhus and Cineas" (1944), "Moral Idealism and Political Realism" and "Existentialism and Popular Wisdom" (both published in *Les temps modernes* in 1945), "An Eye for an Eye" (*Les temps modernes*, 1946), and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947). Why do we identify these as her most "conventionally" philosophical works? The answer lies, in part, in their form or genre, and in part in their subject matter and terms of reference. Existentialism was, at this time, a relatively recent phenomenon, but in a period of philosophical innovation in France (including, not least, the reception of Hegel and of German phenomenology) its novelty did not seem to count against it or preclude its claim to be philosophy. Beauvoir's early works are recognizable contributions to this new philosophical approach. The subheadings of "Pyrrhus and Cineas" make up a catalogue of common early twentieth-century philosophical concerns: "The Instant," "Infinity," "God," "Humanity," "Situation," "Others," "Devotion," "Communication," and "Action." All of these works deal with "classic" philosophical problems: freedom and action; the relation between ethics and politics; "subjective" and "objective" approaches to morality, value and meaning; the relation between the individual and the universal; death; evil; and the specificity of human being, which for Beauvoir, in this period, often refers to the "metaphysical fact" of the separation of consciousness (*EPW*, 212). The content, vocabulary, and references (notably Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger) in these essays all locate them firmly in a philosophical context, even if their existentialist positions are unconventional – even radical.

These works are, further, recognizable examples of a certain philosophical genre: the philosophical essay, in the French sense – in the tradition of Pascal.³ And while they bear witness to the breadth of Beauvoir's reading and knowledge, well beyond the confines of philosophy, they are sewn onto a philosophical canvas.⁴ We see this in library classifications of the work. Libraries using the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme, for example, are highly likely to shelve *The Ethics of Ambiguity* at 194 (French philosophy) or 171 (ethics); one is most unlikely to find *The Second Sex* in either of those sections.⁵

Since the 1990s, which witnessed a resurgence of interest in Beauvoir's work in the anglophone academy from philosophers, scholarly emphasis on the early philosophical works has grown. Further, there is some consensus (always surprising in philosophy) concerning what is philosophically innovative in them, in relation to existentialism specifically, but also more broadly. Two major themes stand out. First, there is the attempt to make the Other or others necessary to the meaningfulness of my freedom, which thus leads to the centrality of ethical and political questions *within* existentialism and to the privileging of the other's freedom. Second, there is the growing insistence on the claims of facticity or the claims of the situation on the subject. This leads to the reconceptualization of the subject *through* the idea of the situation and most particularly

through the body, and problematizes the intelligibility of a metaphysical or ontological concept of freedom divorced from political and social contexts. These and related themes led Beauvoir to the central philosophical concept of this early work: *ambiguity*. The idea of the fundamental ambiguity of human existence and the shift of emphasis from freedom to situatedness are most characteristic of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, but the various paradoxes of freedom and existence and the centrality of the situation are already beginning to be recognized in the most compelling of the other early works (PC, 113, 129; EE).

Fittingly, the relation of Beauvoir's subsequent writings to this early work is decidedly ambiguous. On the one hand, we can no doubt trace the vicissitudes of the early, innovative themes into *The Second Sex*⁶ and *Old Age*; we can see the preoccupation with the ethical and metaphysical "problem" of the other as the red thread running through all of Beauvoir's published work, of all genres, beginning in the works of fiction that either predate or are contemporary with the philosophical writings of the "moral period." The interpretation of Beauvoir's philosophical originality as the construction of a consistently anti-Cartesian account of the subject throughout her essays, plays, novels, and major works is indeed compelling. On the other hand, the intellectual scope and ambition of *The Second Sex*, and the sheer unexpectedness of its literary form, mark a new beginning in Beauvoir's work. In the third volume of her autobiography especially, Beauvoir's own criticisms of the idealism of her early work partly encompasses *The Second Sex*, but we can also see the bulk of *The Second Sex* as the result of a first tearing away from the particular forms of abstraction that, in her view, so compromise the earlier works. As these are *specifically philosophical* forms of abstraction we can see that the ambiguity of the relation of *The Second Sex* to Beauvoir's early philosophical essays is also an ambiguity in relation to philosophy itself – or, rather, a critique of philosophy *in its traditional forms*, beyond the implicit critique of specific philosophers. This critique is manifested, in part, by a move away from traditional philosophical genres. It seems paradoxical to say that we can best understand this critique of traditional philosophy by looking at the major philosophical innovation of *The Second Sex*, but it is not. It is, rather, the demonstration of the dialectical nature of Beauvoir's relation to philosophy.

If we judge the importance of an author's contribution to the discipline of philosophy by their influence – even granted that "influence" may wax and wane, and that we may judge this differently at different periods – we may identify Beauvoir's most important contribution as the articulation of a novel philosophical problem, the consequences of which then ripple backwards into our understanding of canonical texts in the history of philosophy. This problem is the guiding question of *The Second Sex*: What is a woman? And although, as we all now know, one is not born, but becomes, a woman, Beauvoir's legacy is not in her specific answer to the newly minted philosophical problem of "woman" – it is in posing the question itself. Beauvoir *left us with the problem*, and thus inaugurated a new area of philosophy: philosophy of sex and gender.⁷

As I have said, much of the interpretative, reconstructive work on Beauvoir's relation to the history of philosophy has demonstrated the philosophical background of Beauvoir's thought. But the emergence of "woman" as a philosophical problem in

The Second Sex is not the result of a path traced in the history of philosophy; it is more of a philosophical event than that. It is the first result of a philosophical interrogation of the intellectual grounds for the social, cultural, and political status of women – grounds that will turn out to be incoherent, contradictory, and confusing. Of course, the problem of woman is articulated in the Introduction to *The Second Sex* with philosophical vocabulary; much of Book II is clearly indebted to Hegelian, existentialist, and phenomenological philosophies; more specific claims can and have been made, such that the book performs a kind of phenomenological reduction to reveal the object “woman” with our naturalistic, everyday assumptions suspended. But the overarching philosophical achievement of *The Second Sex* is the transformation of the empirical datum “woman” into a philosophical object, an act of extraordinary philosophical imagination.

This is not to say that no one had before spoken of “woman” in a philosophical text, nor even that “woman” had never before functioned as a philosophical category. “Woman” was one of Rousseau’s favorite topics, for example, and the category of “woman” performs an important function in Hegel’s philosophy. *The Second Sex*, however, postulates “woman” as the central philosophical problem, not an element in a philosophy, and to this extent makes possible critical reflection on this aspect of the philosophies of Rousseau, Hegel, and so on. Within a broad ethical frame, “woman” becomes the object of an ontological study (what is a woman?), the object of an existentialist analysis (what is it *to be*, that is *to exist as*, a woman?) and the object – in the widest sense – of a phenomenological account (what is the lived experience of being a woman?).⁸ Beauvoir’s legacy, in this respect, is not a series of answers, but the opening of the conceptual space within which it has been possible to pose further questions and make attempts to answer them. This is demonstrated by the different, and indeed often incompatible positions of those who might legitimately claim to be the heirs of this legacy: Shulamith Firestone, Luce Irigaray, Monique Wittig, Christine Delphy, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler, among others.

3. From Philosophy ...

However, Beauvoir did not just introduce a new object for philosophical scrutiny, adding another possible topic to the considerable list of already existing topics. *The Second Sex* stands not just as a contribution to philosophy, but also – and perhaps more importantly – as a performative critique of its traditional forms. If *The Second Sex* only offered philosophy a novel conceptual object or puzzle that it could store in its historical repository alongside all the other ones (beauty, the good, truth, justice, evil, morality, value, consciousness, freedom, and so on) the contribution would have been merely additive; instead, the contribution was transformative.

To understand this we need to take seriously Beauvoir’s own criticisms of her early work, and to see how these inform the critical and theoretical work of *The Second Sex*. In *The Prime of Life*, the second volume of her autobiography, Beauvoir characterizes “Pyrrhus and Cineas” as individualistic, subjectivist, and tinged with a streak of idealism (PL, 549–50). In *Force of Circumstance* (the third volume) she is even harsher with her assessment of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Her main criticism is that the moral types of

The Ethics of Ambiguity (the nihilist, the aesthete, the adventurer, and so on) and its moral analyses more generally are too abstract:

the attitudes I examine are [in fact] explained by objective conditions; I limited myself to isolating their moral significance to such an extent that my portraits are not situated on any level of reality. I was in error when I thought I could define a morality independent of a social context. (FC, 76)

This tendency to a certain kind of abstraction is also described as “the idealism that blemishes these essays” (FC, 76). Perhaps confusingly, the same criticism is leveled at particular aspects of *The Second Sex*. Looking back on its content Beauvoir writes:

I should take a more materialist position today in the first volume. I should base the notion of woman as *other* and the Manichean argument it entails not on an idealistic and a priori struggle of consciousnesses, but on the facts of supply and demand. (FC, 202, translation modified)

What does Beauvoir mean by “idealism” in these criticisms? Although she is not attributing to her former self any explicit attachment to a position that would deny the existence of mind-independent entities, the accusation is related to this sense of idealism. For the problem with the earlier work, her criticisms imply, was its tendency to proceed as if the fact of individual consciousness and its strivings was primary, and that the salience of social relations and ways of being in the world could be deduced from this alone.⁹ One aspect of *The Second Sex* is singled out for the same criticism: the implicit claim, in the Introduction, that the explanation for the existence of the social relation of patriarchy rests, in the last instance, on an a priori feature of consciousness: “a fundamental hostility to any other consciousness is found in consciousness itself; the subject posits itself only in opposition; it asserts itself as the essential and sets up the other as inessential, as the object” (TSS 7/LDS I:17). In fact, the rest of the analyses of *The Second Sex* do not depend at all on this claim; indeed, they refute it by piling up the evidence for the case that the existence of woman is socially, politically, culturally, and ideologically constructed, such that no satisfactory answer to the question “What is a woman?” could possibly follow from an a priori axiom of consciousness.

In *Force of Circumstance* Beauvoir remembers a different starting point for *The Second Sex*, deciding to “give all my attention to finding out about the condition of woman in its broadest terms” (FC, 103). Obviously, she was never going to find out about “the condition of woman in general” (FC, 195) by studying only philosophy (which, to all intents and purposes falls under the category of “mythology” as far as “woman” is concerned). Her data comes from, among other sources, studies in physiology, anthropology, history and historiography, religious and mystical texts, law, literature, psychology, and biography. In *Force of Circumstance* Beauvoir says that she “tried to establish some order in the picture which at first appeared to me completely incoherent; in every case, man put himself forward as the Subject and considered the woman as an Object, the Other” (FC, 195). Thus Beauvoir structures the otherwise incoherent picture with philosophical categories that, although they may have a metaphysical lineage, function non-metaphysically in *The Second Sex* to describe the unequal and hierarchical

positions of men and women in the social relation. At the same time, the political charge that inevitably attaches to the “metaphysical” categories, and something of their ideological deployment, is revealed. It is in this context, in which the appearance of naturalness concerning “woman’s general condition” and the appearance of celestial objectivity concerning metaphysical categories have fallen away, that the philosophical question “What is a woman?” is able to be posed.

Luce Irigaray objected to this question, posed in this form: “there is no way I would ‘answer’ that question. The question ‘what is ...?’ is the question – the metaphysical question – to which the feminine does not allow itself to submit” (Irigaray 1985, 122). But for Beauvoir it was not a metaphysical question, although it mimicked the traditional form of one. The question emerges not from, or in the service of, a philosophical search after essences; it is the form in which Beauvoir expresses her critical approach to the mytho-ideology of “woman”. Rather than soliciting an answer it addresses itself critically to the discourses that think that they already know. And it does so not primarily out of philosophical interest, but as part of a project of social criticism with an emancipatory aim. To this extent we may see *The Second Sex* as part of that tradition now known as “critical theory.”

What is “critical theory”? Historically, the name is mainly attached to the thinkers of the “Frankfurt School,” notably Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse. The two features that are relevant here may be gleaned via Horkheimer’s essay “Traditional and Critical Theory.” First, “critical theory” examines and aims to explain social forms and phenomena (or “society itself”: Horkheimer 1972, 207) with an explicitly transformative and emancipatory agenda. Second, in positing itself as critical, it opposes itself to “traditional” theory, which includes both speculative philosophy and the empirical social sciences. Whereas critical theory works from the presupposition that the activity of intellectual production is part of the social-historical totality, traditional theory (or the thinking that produces it) conceives of itself as external to that totality. In this traditional theory is, for Horkheimer, inevitably idealist. If it posits a set of categories that bear no relation to things “as they are interpreted in the existing order” it tacitly condones “the existing order,” whereas critical theory tries to look at how things actually are (at what, for example, capitalism actually makes of the laborer) in order, precisely, to condemn it. Traditional theory unwittingly and uncritically reflects the social structure from whence it spawns. Thus the disciplinary division of intellectual labor, with its knowledge production related to discrete fields of entities, reflects the division of industrial labor – which means that the appearance of isolated spheres of inquiry (the illusion of their self-sufficiency and independence) masks the fact that they are “moments in the social process of production, even if they be almost or entirely unproductive in the narrower sense” (Horkheimer 1972, 197). The *soi-disant* “self-sufficient” and “independent” discipline par excellence is, of course, philosophy.

The Second Sex is a work of critical theory in this sense. *The Second Sex* is a critique of the society that produces woman as Other. It presents “woman” as she “is interpreted in the existing order,” as what society actually makes of her precisely in order to question this state of affairs (*TSS* 13/*LDS* I:25). Seen in this way the phenomenological approach in Volume II concerns the lived experience of alienation and might be compared to Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) quite as much

as anything from Merleau-Ponty or Sartre. It is obvious that Beauvoir's criticisms of her early work (and of the a priori philosophical abstractions of *The Second Sex*) can be seen as an example of the critique of the idealism of "traditional" philosophy by critical theory. It is less obvious, but nevertheless the case, that the same is true of *The Second Sex* itself, to the extent that it attempts to conduct its analyses from the same standpoint as its "object" ("woman"), immersed in the same concrete social forms, rather than from the external standpoint of a "traditional" theory. Or, to the extent that existentialist ethics is a "traditional" theory, its a priori abstractions are at odds with the concrete analyses of *The Second Sex* – which was, indeed, Beauvoir's later view of things.

4. ... To Gender Theory

We can think of the transition from Beauvoir's earlier works to *The Second Sex* as the transition from traditional philosophy to a philosophical transdisciplinarity. What do we mean by this?

All readers of *The Second Sex* can see that its range of reference and the diversity of its intellectual sources mean that it demonstrates what is usually called "interdisciplinarity" – indeed, that it is exemplary in this respect. Further, even when it is argued that gender studies constitutes a discipline in its own right (Pullkinen 2015), feminist theorists can usually agree on at least one thing – that the history and practice of feminist theorizing is unusually interdisciplinary. As Margaret Whitford argued in 1996, interdisciplinarity is an obligation in feminist research, including feminist research in philosophy. With any use of the category of "gender" for example,

one is more or less obliged to see what has happened to the concept in adjacent disciplines. And once one posits a structure as systemic, the supporting evidence cannot be confined to one discipline only, but gains in weight and plausibility from making links with evidence or arguments in other disciplines. (Whitford 1996, 33–4)

Writing from the standpoint of feminist philosophy, Whitford implies that anyone who does not do this is in danger of either reinventing the wheel or making claims that, from the standpoint of the knowledge of other disciplines, may seem naive or outdated. This is surely correct. Many readers of *The Second Sex* see Beauvoir's interdisciplinarity in these terms, and see it, further, leading to a synthetic result.

But there is more to it than this. For when interdisciplinary research yields a new concept, or redefines an existing concept in a way that was not previously seen in any of the disciplines on which it draws, that work becomes *transdisciplinary*.¹⁰ If we call this *philosophical* transdisciplinarity that is because the construction of the concept in question still involves a practice of abstraction associated with a claim to universality hitherto associated with philosophy. If we call it philosophical *transdisciplinarity* that is because, in positing the concept and the thought that thinks it as socially and historically conditioned it takes up a critical relation to philosophy traditionally understood and its tendency to idealism (in Beauvoir's sense). In *The Second Sex* "woman" is a concept like this.

If the most important theoretical legacy of *The Second Sex* is not Beauvoir's answer to the question "What is a woman?" but her posing of it, and the opening of the conceptual space for further questions, we must expect her successors to effect their own theoretical transformations. It may be true that, strictly speaking, there is no sex/gender distinction in *The Second Sex* (Sandford 1999; Gatens 2003), but the move from "woman" to "gender" in feminist theory was an extraordinarily productive development of Beauvoir's work. "Gender," as a critical or analytical (rather than descriptive or categorical) concept (Scott 1986) belongs to no discipline but troubles them all. "Gender theory," as in its still-powerful articulation in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), is just that critique of society and of idealist thinking (which Butler calls "metaphysics"), from the standpoint of the thinker embedded in it, which we call "critical theory." *The Second Sex* is the historical meeting point of critical theory and feminism, via philosophy. Gender theory, taking advantage of later developments (in psychoanalytic psychology and sociology especially) is one of its results.

Notes

- 1 Deutscher (2008, 14–15) puts this in a different way: Beauvoir "worked by means of alchemic conversion."
- 2 See also Bauer (2001, 17), Arp (1995), and Vintges (1996, 5).
- 3 Although as late as 1979 Beauvoir *contrasted* the "essay" genre – to which she assigned *The Ethics of Ambiguity* – with philosophy. See Simons's interview with Beauvoir (Simons 1999, 11).
- 4 Indeed, these are the essays collected together in the volume of Beauvoir's *Philosophical Writings* in the University of Illinois Press series of her works.
- 5 *The Second Sex* is normally found at 305.42 – 305 being the subsection of the Social Sciences for "Groups of People," .4 the part of that for "People by gender or sex." Using the Library of Congress Classification System *The Second Sex* is often shelved at HQ – the "Family, Marriage, Women" subclass of the social sciences. Elsewhere we see it under Literature, or Languages. My thanks to Cheryl Clark in the Kingston University library for help with this.
- 6 See, in particular, Arp (2001), chapter 7.
- 7 See Sandford (2006), chapter 5, "Woman."
- 8 There are, of course, more sympathetic attempts to think about the status of women philosophically, notably that of John Stuart Mill (influenced by Harriet Taylor Mill) in his essay "The Subjection of Women." But while Mill undoubtedly played an important role in demonstrating the inadequacy and incoherence of claims about women's natural inferiority and their natural capacities (or incapacities), he did not interrogate the category of 'woman' itself, as Beauvoir does. I have argued elsewhere that Plato's discussion of female guardians in *The Republic* does, effectively, raise ontological questions about 'woman' (Sandford 2010); but this interpretation of Plato has as its condition of possibility Beauvoir's conceptual distinction between "female" and "woman" and her attempt to specify the latter ontologically.
- 9 "I do not disapprove of my anxiety to provide existentialist morals with a material content [in 'Pyrrhus and Cineas']; the annoying thing was to be enmeshed with individualism still, at the very moment I thought I had escaped it. An individual, I thought, only receives a human dimension by recognizing the existence of others. Yet, in my essay, coexistence appears as a sort of accident that each individual should somehow surmount; he should begin by hammering out his 'project' in solitary state, and only then ask the mass of mankind to endorse its validity" (Beauvoir 1965, 549–50).

- 10 For a more detailed discussion of philosophy, gender theory and transdisciplinarity (in distinction from multi- and interdisciplinarity) see Sandford (2015). On transdisciplinarity more generally see Osborne (2015).

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Further Reading

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The Intellectual and Social Context of *The Second Sex*

SANDRA REINEKE

Beauvoir's landmark study *The Second Sex* (2009; *Le deuxième sexe* 1949) is synonymous with feminist analysis of women's oppression and it is now hailed as a major foundational text for feminist theory and activism. When *The Second Sex* was first published in France in 1949, however, it caused a major outrage because it dealt with a taboo subject – women's sexuality – and contained a harsh critique of patriarchal power structures. Beauvoir's main argument was that social institutions, such as marriage, motherhood, and the family, predefine women's and men's roles in a male-dominated society and subsequently denigrate women to the status of secondary citizens. Beauvoir buttressed her argument by showing how changing ideals of "femininity" are not essential aspects of women's identity based on biological sex. Rather, she argued, they are socially and culturally produced stereotypes that render women's experiences of their selves and their bodies as always already defined and inscribed as the weaker or lesser "sex" (Reineke 2011).

The significance of Beauvoir's analytical insights – captured in her now famous assertion that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (*TSS* 293/*LDS* II:13) – cannot be underestimated. In what follows I provide not an overview of Beauvoir's analysis, which is covered elsewhere in this book, but rather I attempt to situate her study – and her reasons for writing it – within the broader social and intellectual contexts of French society. In so doing, I present a clear picture of the times in which Beauvoir lived and wrote and of the intellectual environment that affected her work on the book. By extension, this context facilitates understanding of how Beauvoir's analytical insights became a springboard for the women's liberation movements of the 1970s and beyond, which demanded women's full equal citizenship rights.

1. Political and Socioeconomic Citizenship Rights

When Beauvoir began research for *The Second Sex*, French women's experiences of daily life were markedly different from today. First, women had only recently received the right to vote in 1944. The reason for this delay in acquiring political rights is related to French women's historical exclusion from politics and from public life, and this background is worth summarizing here briefly.

Historically, women's exclusion from politics and public life goes back to the Middle Ages. At that time, the region of modern-day France was made up of smaller entities governed by male rulers. Their succession to the throne was based on parts of the "Salic law," which excluded female offspring from power (Hanley and Denizard 1994). Much later, however, when the French monarchy ended with the Revolution of 1789, women's political marginalization continued because the Republican concept of citizenship did not include women. As historians of the French Revolution explain, women were denied active citizenship rights based on ideas of Republican virtue that idealized women's role as mothers in the home (Landes 1988; Fraisse 1994; Scott 1996, 2005). With the first Empire and the Napoleonic Code (*Code Napoléon*) of 1804, women's domestic role was further cemented. And towards the end of the century, following the Franco-Prussian War and the political upheavals of the Paris Commune of 1871, the French state enacted pro-natalist policies to increase the nation's birth rate and to further promote women's function as republican mothers (McMillan 1981; Moses 1984; Gullickson 1992; Cova 1997).

Throughout French history, the women's suffrage movement fought for women's right to vote, but when the issue finally appeared on the parliamentary agenda it was sidelined first by political debates surrounding an overhaul of the election system and later by the onset of World War I. It was not until after World War II, in 1944, that President de Gaulle finally gave French women the right to vote. But as Claire Duchen pointed out in her study of women's rights in France, women received the right to vote in the form of a presidential ordinance and not in the form of a legislative measure by Parliament. The ordinance by de Gaulle was meant as a gift to women for their contribution to the war efforts – not as an acknowledgement of women's equal status as citizens (Duchen 1994, 35–6). As Duchen explained: "The message to women citizens was that voting was a duty, a new responsibility, rather than a right" (1994, 35).

Furthermore, women's marginalization from public life continued during the state-led postwar recovery efforts, despite women's participation in the labor force. Before the war, French women contributed in great numbers to the farming and agricultural sectors. Following the war, however, women again found work in relatively large numbers but mostly in the service, or tertiary, sector where their employment was channeled into unskilled, low-paying wage jobs. Women were encouraged to give up these jobs when they married as an effort to boost the country's birth rate after the war. To this end, the state offered generous welfare allowances to women, including medical subsidies and family allowances that increased with each additional child (Tilly and Scott 1987; Gregory 2000). As a result, public education and job training that remained geared towards men and women's employment pattern was "discontinuous" and "interrupted for marriage and motherhood" (Duchen 1994, 149). This pattern contributed to women's generally lower income and their financial dependence on men.

The structure of the workforce thus continued to reinforce the ideal of female domesticity that viewed women as solely responsible for all household duties regardless of their employment status. The fast-growing mass consumer society of the 1940s and 1950s also promoted the reproduction of this ideal as advertisement agencies and newly flourishing popular magazines depicted women, not men, in charge of household purchases and gadgets that were made to replace the domestic servants from before the war (Weiner 1995; Stanley 2008).

In addition, and related to this, French women did not have access to birth control or abortion. Multiple pregnancies, childbirth, and child rearing made it more difficult for women than for men to gain and to keep employment. State policies regulating reproduction included the laws from 1920 and 1923 that prohibited the use of birth control (except male condoms), birth control advice, and abortion. The state enacted these policies for geopolitical reasons, fearing its belligerent neighbor Germany and dwindling demographic growth. The Vichy Regime turned abortion into a crime against the state that carried the death penalty for abortionists and women seeking abortions. After the war, the law returned to its previous status; but when *The Second Sex* was published, no more than six years had elapsed since Marie-Louise Giraud was imprisoned and guillotined for providing illegal abortions (Allison 1994; Roberts 1994; Accampo 2006).

The year Giraud was executed Beauvoir was thirty-five years old and had already started on what would become a uniquely successful career for a female philosopher and writer. While Beauvoir does not mention the less fortunate Giraud in her study, she keenly understood how frightening the criminalization of abortion was for women who often despaired over unwanted pregnancies and who had to seek out illegal abortions that posed risks to their health and their reproductive health. Thus, the issue of illegal abortion, discussed throughout *The Second Sex*, provided Beauvoir with an opportunity to show how all women were potentially affected by – and shared experiences of – certain key events and situations in patriarchal society. Seen this way, Beauvoir's study offered women a way to understand their shared yet diverse social experiences and – based on this understanding – to raise awareness in order to politically contest women's secondary status.

Twenty years later, in the 1970s, Beauvoir used consciousness-raising as a political tool to fight for women's reproductive rights. In this instance, Beauvoir and over 300 other women publicly acknowledged that they each had an illegal abortion in order to draw attention to the disparity between French law and women's actions. This publicity stunt by Beauvoir and hundreds of other women (some of whom were well-known public figures) started when a small group of women's rights activists approached Beauvoir about their plan to campaign for reproductive rights in France. They were able to convince Beauvoir to support their cause and help them with their political writing. To this end, the small group of concerned women met in Beauvoir's apartment in Paris to plan the next steps and together they started drafting a political petition that would challenge the French government's repressive laws denying women control of their own bodies. The final draft of this infamous petition, known today as "The Manifesto of the 343 Sluts" ("Manifeste des 343") was edited by Beauvoir. Its appearance in a major French news journal on April 5, 1971 struck the French public like thunder and brought widespread attention to the issue ("Le 'Manifeste des 343 salopes' paru dans le Nouvel Obs en 1971"; Reineke 2008–9, 68).

By the mid-1970s, the government could no longer ignore the political demands of the developing women's liberation movement (*Mouvement de la libération des femmes*, MLF) and Beauvoir's claim that for women to be truly liberated, social institutions and laws had to change. In 1975, the French government adopted a law that decriminalized abortion, and while women's rights activists believed that it did not go far enough, it nonetheless started to counter persistent sexual inequalities that continued to define women's existence (Reineke 2008–9, 68).

To further understand Beauvoir's distinctive analytical contribution to the study of women's oppression and the political struggle for women's equality, it is important to look at the intellectual environment in which Beauvoir wrote and how it affected her ideas. And it is to this context that I now turn.

2. Writing for Social Change

The year before *The Second Sex* was published in France, Beauvoir released an advanced excerpt from the book in the journal *Les temps modernes*. Beauvoir was co-editor of the journal, along with her partner Jean-Paul Sartre and a small number of other writers. They had resurrected the journal in 1945 from a desire to become more engaged with politically pressing issues following the collective trauma of war and the German occupation in France. The journal, which still exists, illustrates well the intellectual context – postwar existentialism – at the time that Beauvoir worked on *The Second Sex* (Goldthorpe 1992; Moi 1994).

Trained in the history of philosophy through her university studies, Beauvoir contributed to the growing French existentialist movement with a collection of short stories entitled *When Things of the Spirit Come First* (1986; *Quand prime le spirituel*, 1979) and her first novel entitled *She Came to Stay* (1984; *L'Invitée*, 1943). At that time, Beauvoir had already met Jean-Paul Sartre, another major intellectual contributor to French existentialist philosophy. The two had met during their university studies and, despite the fact that their teaching appointments and the war kept them apart over long periods of time, they would remain lifelong partners. As we now know, Beauvoir influenced Sartre's work on existentialist philosophy in no small way and both became influential public intellectuals in France (Simons 1999; Bauer 2001).

One major political issue, which the group around Beauvoir and Sartre wanted to address and raise public awareness about, was the protection of human rights to prevent the recurrence of totalitarian political regimes like the Nazi regime, which killed millions of people. Their effort was part of a larger postwar public discourse in France and elsewhere about the importance of furthering democracy and human rights to prevent totalitarianism. It included, for instance, the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 as an international legal instrument to protect citizens' human rights. It also included an attempt by French postwar intellectuals, such as Sartre, to reformulate Marxist theory in response to perceived human rights violations by the Soviet regime. Spurred on by these pressing issues, the group of intellectuals around Beauvoir and Sartre wanted to play an important part in this political cause, and they used the act of reading and writing to do so. This approach to writing as a significant political tool made their postwar philosophical and literary contributions – including the journal *Les temps*

modernes – unique and their work became known as “engaged literature” (*littérature engagée*) in postwar France (Whiting 1948). Beauvoir’s *oeuvre* contributed in many ways to this type of writing, including a philosophical essay entitled *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1976; *Pour une morale de l’ambiguïté*, 1947), which she published two years before *The Second Sex* (Marso 2006; Marso and Moynagh 2006; Kruks 2012).

In my reading of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir took this type of inquiry to the next analytical level. In her *magnum opus*, Beauvoir examines the oppression of women as a distinctive group of individuals based on their bodily difference from men. Analyzing women’s oppression as a violation of their individual freedoms and human rights, based on this bodily difference, contributes to the development of theoretical measures that can be used to gauge a political government’s legitimacy. In my view, Beauvoir’s analysis showed how women’s rights, as human rights, can provide a litmus test for the contemporary liberal-democratic state that ought to protect the individual freedoms of all of its citizens (Peters and Wolper 1995).

To develop her analysis in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir expanded the existentialist concept of “lived experience” to include women’s shared, albeit different, experiences of corporeality. She described these experiences in great detail. By extension, Beauvoir hoped to use the accounts of women’s shared corporeal experiences described in her book – which ranged from their experiences with childbirth and menstrual pain to repressed sexuality – as a vehicle to raise women’s individual and collective consciousness. While Beauvoir later stated that she did not intend to write *The Second Sex* as a political book to provoke collective political action, she nevertheless meant it to function as a contribution to feminist theory that would allow French women to understand how their citizenship rights were curtailed in important ways (Vintges 1995; Simons 1999; Holveck 2002). In a later interview Beauvoir stated:

When feminism reawakened in France, around 1970, at that time women didn’t have much by way of a solid theoretical basis for their beliefs, and so they appropriated *The Second Sex* and used it as a weapon in their struggle. But both in my conception of it and in objective fact, when it first appeared it was strictly a serious study... not at all combative. (Wenzel 1986, 7)

Beauvoir also explained that she wrote *The Second Sex* because she wanted to write about herself and had realized that in order to do so, she had to understand “the nature of women’s lives in general” (Wenzel 1986, 7). She shared this insight with the readers of the book in the opening pages where she wrote: “I hesitated a long time before writing a book on woman. The subject is irritating, especially for women; and it is not new” (TSS 3/LDS I:11). Then she continued:

It would never occur to a man to write a book on the singular situation of males in humanity. If I want to define myself, I first have to say, “I am a woman”: all other assertions will arise from this basic truth. (TSS 5/LDS I:13–14)

Intrigued by this, Beauvoir wanted to know: “Why do women not contest male sovereignty? [...] Where does this submission in woman come from?” (TSS 7/LDS II:17).

Beauvoir answered this question by showing how woman's submission to male domination stems from the fact that under patriarchy she "is" her body, which essentializes her identity in the roles of mother and wife, excluded from public life through her dependence on men. In her path-breaking analysis, Beauvoir wanted to show how women's bodies are a locus of patriarchal power that is beyond their control and thus keeps them in submission.

According to Beauvoir, for this to change, for women to be men's equals, women would have to be able to control their own bodies, including their bodies' reproductive functions. As long as women's reproduction is controlled and appropriated in patriarchy, women's human rights are violated and curtailed. Importantly, and in line with engaged writing, readers of Beauvoir's study would be able to recognize their shared lot with others whose secondary status was replicated through the social institutions of family and marriage, and who, through their shared consciousness, could come together to collectively fight these repressive institutions and laws that keep them subjugated (Reineke 2011).

While Beauvoir's analysis of women's oppression in *The Second Sex* was revolutionary, it was not the first time that she attempted to examine this issue. During the war, Beauvoir had written a stage play entitled *Who Shall Die?* (1983; *Les bouches inutiles*, 1945), which was performed and published in 1945. The play has not received much scholarly attention but has been reprinted in both French and English with a newly translated English title as *The Useless Mouths* (2011). In her analysis of the play, Virginia M. Fichera called it "a powerful forerunner to *Le deuxième sexe*" (Fichera 1986, 64) in which "Beauvoir abstracted the action of her play into a theoretical discussion of ... dialectical structures" (1986, 63).

The story's theoretical insights are worthwhile summarizing here briefly. It revolves around a fictional town in fourteenth-century Flanders, which has come under siege by the former king. The council members of the town are pressed to find a solution to the situation before all citizens starve to death. Presenting this existentialist issue to the audience or reader, Beauvoir developed three possible solutions in the play: one, give up and be ruled by the hated king; two, do not give up but starve to death; or three, throw out the "useless mouths," the elderly, injured, children, and women, in the hope that the food rations will last until reinforcements arrive in the spring.

In the play, Beauvoir staged the unthinkable; that is, she had the council members opt to sacrifice the women of the town along with all others who are of no use to the men. Beauvoir described how the council members' decision is based on their view that the women are unimportant, or useless, because the men could repopulate the town once rescued by reproducing with other women. In the council members' view, women are interchangeable; they have no subjective value other than the value attached to their corporeal function to reproduce the species and can thus be dispensed with.

The play ends with some of the women figuring out what the council members are up to and trying to change this chain of events. But Beauvoir left the ending of the play ambiguous for the audience and the reader as it finishes with everyone – men and women – assembling in the center of the town in preparation for a collective showdown with the armed forces outside.

To be sure, Beauvoir stated later that she did not think *The Useless Mouths* a great literary success. She said:

[i]t's not a play that I'm happy about. Besides, I don't think it was a very good play, and also it's not a play to which I've attached much importance. (Wenzel 1986, 9)

Despite its lack of acclaim, the play is noteworthy here for it shows that Beauvoir had conceptualized the notion of embodied subjectivity prior to her work on *The Second Sex*. Strikingly, her idea of embodied subjectivity is also present in a travel account, published in 1948 – a year prior to *The Second Sex* – following an invited lecture tour through the United States. On her tour, Beauvoir witnessed racial segregation and oppression and her observations and responses, chronicled in *America Day by Day* (1952; *L'Amérique au jour le jour*, 1948) foreground the corporeality of racial discrimination.

Yet it was not until the publication of *The Second Sex* in 1949 that Beauvoir's path-breaking theoretical insights about the role of embodied subjectivity in explaining systematic societal oppression – in this case women's oppression through the appropriation of their bodies under patriarchy – exploded onto the literary stage and catalyzed worldwide attention to these theoretical insights and the cause for women's rights as human rights.

In conclusion, while Beauvoir's theoretical insights in *The Second Sex* are a product of its distinct social and intellectual contexts, it offered a theoretical springboard (along with two of Beauvoir's other works briefly considered here) onto which fellow social theorists and activists in the past and present have built. First, these works contain key analytical insights of relevance for contemporary social theories of "intersectionality." In this area of theorizing, scholars show how a number of social identities, such as race, class, and sex, intersect in the constitution of oppressed or subjugated individuals and groups of individuals to deny their freedom (Davis 1983; Butler 1986). And second, these works contributed to the development of feminist theories that supported the postwar campaign for women's reproductive rights. The French campaign was successfully copied in other countries. It made Beauvoir into an icon of second-wave feminism both inside and outside France, and into a leading thinker of feminist theory. By extension, *The Second Sex*, which she considered the most important for women of all her books, became a paramount work on gender equality and the importance of equal citizenship rights for women and men in postwar democracies (Wenzel 1986, 12). While women's individual and human rights worldwide are still not taken as seriously as they should be, the political works by feminists such as Beauvoir have undoubtedly contributed to the many positive changes women and men have witnessed since Beauvoir wrote down her ideas.

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