Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialist Ethics as a Prophylactic for Ideology Obsession and Ideology Addiction: An Uplifting Philosophy for Philosophical Practice

Guy du Plessis[1]
I-System Institute for Transdisciplinary Studies
Utah State University

Abstract: Central to the philosophical practice is the application of philosophers' work by philosophical practitioners to inspire, educate, and guide their clients. For example, in Logic-Based Therapy (LBT), a philosophical practice methodology developed by Elliot Cohen, philosophical practitioners help their clients to find an uplifting philosophy that promotes a guiding virtue that acts as an antidote to unrealistic and often self-defeating conclusions derived from irrational premises. In this essay, I will explore the existential ethics of Simone de Beauvoir, a French existentialist philosopher, and writer. I present the argument that Beauvoir's existential ethics, more specifically her articulation of ambiguity, can act as an uplifting philosophy, as per LBT methodology, which could be of value to philosophical practitioners to inspire, educate and guide their counselees for confronting problems of living. I will present my discussion of Beauvoir's existential ethics in the context of ideological obsession and ideology addiction, which is often supported by the reasoning that underlies the cardinal fallacy of existential perfectionism. I will argue that Beauvoir's existential ethics could serve as a prophylactic for ideological obsession and ideology addiction. I will also suggest that LBT may be particularly suited when addressing the self-defeating, unrealistic conclusions derived from irrational premises in practical reasoning that may fuel ideological obsession because it could provide a methodology to address irrational beliefs in a way that could mitigate the fragmentation anxiety that may arise when relinquishing maladaptive self-object organizations.

Keywords: Simone de Beauvoir, Ideological Obsession, Ideology Addiction, Self-deception, Philosophical Practice

Central to the philosophical practice is the application of philosophers' work by philosophical practitioners to inspire, educate, and guide their clients. For example, in Logic-Based Therapy (LBT), a philosophical practice methodology developed by Elliot Cohen, philosophical practitioners help their clients to find an *uplifting philosophy* that promotes a *guiding virtue* that acts as an *antidote* to "self-defeating, unrealistic conclusions [derived] from irrational premises in practical reasoning" (Cohen, 2013, ix) and thus provides "a rational framework for confronting problems of living" (Cohen 2013, xix).[2]

In this essay, I will explore the existential ethics of Simone de Beauvoir and present the argument that it can act as an uplifting philosophy, as per Cohen's methodology, and therefore has utility for philosophical practice. More specifically, Beauvoir's' articulation of ubiquity can promote the guiding virtue of *unconditional life acceptance* - which is the ability to accept imperfections in realities inherent in everyday life, as an antidote to the cardinal fallacy of *existential perfectionism* - interpreted as demanding perfection and that bad things must not happen in the world and when the world fails to live up to one's idealized image of it one perceives the world to be all bad (Cohen, 2013). In LBT, eleven cardinal fallacies are specified where each has an associated guiding virtue that

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[1] Contact: guy@guyduplessis.com

[2] The methodology of LBT is defined in six steps: (1) identify the emotional reasoning; (2) check for fallacies in the premises; (3) refute any fallacy; (4) identify the guiding virtue for each fallacy; (5) find an uplifting philosophy that promotes the guiding virtue; and (6) apply the philosophy by implementing a plan of action for the client (Cohen, 2013).

acts as an antidote for a given cardinal fallacy. This then points the way for choosing a philosophical perspective or uplifting philosophy for promoting that guiding virtue.

Beauvoir was a French existentialist philosopher, writer, social theorist, and feminist activist. She was a contemporary of her countryman and existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and had a significant influence on the development of existentialism. Beauvoir's method, as Sartre's in his book *Being and Nothingness*, can be understood as an existential-phenomenological exploration of human existence.

Beauvoir wrote several philosophically oriented essays and novels. In this article, my focus will be on one of her more well-known essays *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948). This work first appeared in four installments in *Les Temps Modernes*, a French journal, founded by Beauvoir, Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The first and third installments appeared in the same issues that carried portions of Merleau-Ponty's *Humanism and Terror* (1947). In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, she attempts to outline some existentialist ethics and insists that only phenomenology can provide the foundation for ethics that we could wholeheartedly embrace. It can be argued that for de Beauvoir this foundational phenomenology is Merleau-Ponty's (1945), not Sartre's. Beauvoir points out that Sartre (1958) chiefly stresses the opposition of the two states of being: being-for-itself (*pour-soi*) and the being-in-itself (*en-soi*) and the absolute freedom of the for-itself, in contrast to Merleau-Ponty who argues that the subject is never a pure for-itself.

I will present my discussion of Beauvoir's existential ethics in the context of ideological obsession, and an extreme form of it that I refer to as ideology addiction, which is often supported by the reasoning that underlies the cardinal fallacy of existential perfectionism. I will argue that Beauvoir's existential ethics could serve as a prophylactic for ideological obsession and ideology addiction. I will also suggest that LBT may be particularly suited when addressing the "self-defeating, unrealistic conclusions [derived] from irrational premises in practical reasoning" (Cohen, 2013, ix) that may fuel ideological obsession because it could provide a methodology to address irrational beliefs in a way that could mitigate the fragmentation anxiety that may arise when relinquishing maladaptive self-object organizations.

In her book *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948), Beauvoir presents her notion of ambiguity within the context of Sartre's existential-phenomenological analysis in *Being and Nothingness* (1958). Therefore, a brief overview of Sartre's phenomenological analysis will be presented. I will contrast my discussion of Sartre with that of Sigmund Freud's (1915/1957, 1923/1961) depth-psychology, as Sartre's phenomenological analysis and his notion of 'bad faith' can be understood as a reaction against Freud's psychic determinism, as well as a critique of Freud's depth-psychological account of self-deception.

Any ethical project requires that one identifies and fairly assesses one's motivations. Therefore, any ethical theory must be congruent with the structure of human motivation. Ethics, therefore, demands insight into how self-deception about motivation is possible.

Sartre's Theory of Bad Faith

Philosophers are seldom famous in their own lifetime. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80) was an exception. In the Liberation period after World War Two, he was a celebrity and public intellectual par excellence. For example, thousands attended his public lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism*, towards the end of 1945. In this lecture he gave the eager public a more accessible version of his book, *Being and Nothingness* (1943), where he presents the notion of *mauvaise foi*, translated as bad faith. Sartre's theory of bad faith can be understood as a critique of Sigmund Freud's depth-psychological account of self-deception. Sartre's (1943, 570) theory of mind and his own methodology, existential psychoanalysis, attempts to remain faithful to Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, simply put, that all psychic acts are coextensive with consciousness.

In the philosophical literature, and according to the traditional model, self-deception requires an individual to hold contradictory beliefs, and the individual must intentionally believe something which s/he knows to be false. The traditional model has raised two paradoxes, the so-called static paradox, *i.e.* "How can an individual hold contradictory beliefs simultaneously?", and the dynamic or strategic paradox, *i.e.* "How can an individual deceive herself without her intentions being rendered ineffective?" (Mele, 2001).

Yet, for those that ascribe to a depth-psychological perspective, the problem of self-deception is not so problematic. According to depth-psychological perspectives, individuals can hide their own motivations from themselves (Lockie, 2003). Central to Freud's (1915/1957, 1923/1961) theory of mind, and his therapeutic methodology of psychoanalysis, is the premise that we can be motivated by unconscious drives or impulses of

which we are not aware – which push for satisfaction, even at the expense of our conscious beliefs and wishes. The aim of psychoanalysis is to bring awareness to these "hidden" drives.[3] According to Freud (1915), these concealed motivations are not merely 'descriptively unconscious,' instead, they are 'dynamically unconscious,' which highlights that the individual is actively (through the use of defence mechanisms) trying to keep motivations out of awareness. Moreover, the unconscious is not accessible to our awareness and is composed of non-conceptual and symbolic elements that cannot be communicated through language.

It must be noted that this notion predates Freud, for instance, *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* by Von Hartmann was published in 1869. And prior to that, Arthur Schopenhauer (1819/1969), in *The World as Will and Representation*, argued for a conceptual and aconceptual divide of the mind. He was critical of Immanuel Kant's theory of mind which claim that all cognition is conceptual. Similarly, Friedrich Nietzsche (1881/1982, 76) proposed that "[a]ll our so-called consciousness is a more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable, but felt text."

In Sartre's book, *Being and Nothingness* (1958), a section entitled 'Bad Faith and Lies' he argues that Freud does not provide a sufficient justification for self-deception by making a distinction between conscious and unconscious mental processes. His main critique of Freud's depth-psychological approach, and in particular his account of self-deception, can be summed up as: Freud is charged with splitting the subject into meta-psychological parts (Conscious, Preconscious, Unconscious, or Id, Ego, Superego) and provides a misguided mechanistic explanation of how there can be a "liar" and a "lied to" duality within a single consciousness, which simply transfers the problem where it remains unsolved, thus consisting in a pseudo-explanation (which today might be called a 'homuncular fallacy'). Sartre claims that in the act of repression, there is awareness of the drive that is being repressed as well as an awareness of the actions that aim to satisfy it – and simply put, these are both rational activities. According to Sartre the Freudian 'censor' must first register the drive or impulse before preventing it from becoming conscious. Sartre (1958, 52-53) argues that

> [i]t is not sufficient that [the censor] discern the condemned drives; it must also apprehend them as to be repressed, which implies in it at the very least an awareness of its activity. In a word, how could the censor discern the impulses needing to be repressed without being conscious of discerning them? … [a]ll knowing is consciousness of knowing.

Sartre (1958, 55) argues for a phenomenological account of self-deception. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre provides such a phenomenological account of self-deception or bad faith in an example of a woman who for the first time has consented to go out with a man. This is an example of bad faith because the woman is aware of the man's sexual interest in her, and the potential consequences of that, but because of her ambivalence, she pretends that nothing is being asked of her.

Why is this woman in bad faith? For Sartre, she is in bad faith or self-deceived because she conceals something from herself at the same instant, she brings it to conscious awareness (Webber, 2013).

I now turn to Beauvoir's notion of ambiguity.

Ambiguity

A central theme in Beauvoir's (1948) *The Ethics of Ambiguity* is her articulation of ambiguity. The term ambiguity is derived from the Latin *ambiguitas*, meaning doubt, uncertainty, or paradox. She states that "[t]o attain his truth, man must not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of his being but, on the contrary, accept the task of realizing it." (Beauvoir, 1948, 13).

Typically, in Western philosophy, the notion of ambiguity is seen as undesirable epistemologically and ethically, as it relates to the Cartesian project of achieving indubitable certainty. Consequently, Cartesian philosophy aims to eliminate ambiguity. Yet, for Beauvoir, ambiguity is an undeniable feature of our being-in-the-world (*Dasein*), and something to be embraced, not denounced. Moreover, by accepting our ambiguity it lays the foundation for an ethics that is unchained from the misguided quest for perfection.

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[3] Freud (1915, 1923) provides an account of self-deception in his discussion of illusion, repression, and delusion. He uses the words *Selbstbetrug* and *Selbsttäuschung* interchangeably when referring to self-deception. *Selbstbetrug* is usually translated as 'self-deceit', or 'deception', while *Selbsttäuschung* is usually translated as 'self-deceit' or 'delusion.'

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* Beauvoir argues that both the reduction of consciousness to material bodies and the reduction of the material world to objects of consciousness are unacceptable, and that both these forms of reductionism are an inadequate foundation for ethics. Discussing the philosophers who committed both forms of reductionism, she comments that "the ethics which they have proposed to their disciples has always pursued the same goal. It has been a matter of eliminating the ambiguity by making oneself pure inwardness or pure externality, by escaping from the sensible world or by being engulfed in it, by yielding to eternity or enclosing oneself in the pure moment" (Beauvoir, 1948, 35).

Simply put, the central feature of her articulation of ambiguity is that on the one hand, we are agents or a choosing subject, and on the other hand, an object of both others' perceptions and one's own, that is thrown into a world of forces that are beyond our control. It must be noted that she is not strictly Cartesian, instead, she views the mind-body interaction as 'situated' or 'embodied,' and not mind acting on the body. For Beauvoir (1948, 22) this ambiguity or tension is not to be regarded as a flaw that should be eliminated - instead, she advises that if "we do not succeed in fleeing it, let us therefore try to look the truth in the face. Let us try to assume our fundamental ambiguity. It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our life that we must draw our strength to live and our reason for acting."

Beauvoir's suggestion and ethics could be seen as an alternative to the philosophy of the "absurd and despair" often associated with existentialism – and that man is not a "useless passion" as suggested by Sartre. Instead, our dilemma or 'failure' is what necessitates ethics. And, Beauvoir notes, "without failure, no ethics" (1948, 10). She notes that only existentialism gives "a real role to evil" (1948, 34). For example, in the philosophy of Socrates, Plato, and Spinoza wrongdoing or evil is explained as a fundamental error or abnormality, as no one is willfully bad, and with adequate knowledge, one can avoid this aberration. Thus, according to Beauvoir, these philosophers approached this 'dilemma' through denial as they have sought to either reduce humans to mind/inwardness/eternity or by affirming instead the sensible world/externality/transitoriness – and both are misguided reductions. Moreover, optimistic forms of humanism view the natural world and human beings as whole and perfect in themselves, and thus fail to give an adequate account for evil.

For example, George Hegel (1830/2007) tells us, simply put, that if ethical law became natural law, we would inhabit some utopian state. Hegel and others 'optimists,' seem to hold the assumption that man's fundamental state is some type of perfect union with Nature/God/Spirt/State, and we simply must 'remove' the hinderance to this perfect utopic state. And here I agree with her, we do not live in a universe of plentitude, where were merely have to remove the hinderance to our innate perfect state/union/non-dual oneness with God/Spirit/State.

This denial of our ambiguity and perfectionistic tendency I believe lays the foundation for many types of ideological obsession and zealotry - religious or political. The quest for perfectionism, individually and collectively, is the source of much misery and evil in the world. Individually, perfectionism is often a defense mechanism against shame and narcissistic injury and collectively it manifests as world-denying and a phantasy for utopia (Du Plessis, 2018). Exemplified by the atrocities caused by the collectivist utopic ideals of the most influential and destructive 20th-century political theories – communism and National Socialism – viz. collectivism, historicism, and utopianism. Although National Socialism and communism represent opposites on the political spectrum, they have more commonalities than differences, and think otherwise according to English philosopher Sir Roger Scruton (2016, p. 201) "is to betray the most superficial understanding of modern history." Scruton argues that "[c]ommunism, like fascism, involved the attempt to create a mass popular movement and a state bound together under the rule of a single party, in which there [would] be total cohesion around a common goal … Both aimed to achieve a new kind of social order, unmediated by institutions, displaying an immediate and fraternal cohesiveness" (Scruton, 2016, 200-201). Both ideologies argued that a particular form of collectivist utopic society should be pursued. Both involved a particular conception of social relations cohering around a common goal, guided by a prior historicist vision. Both, typical of collectivist and utopic ideologies, identify an 'other' as the 'hindrance' to their utopia – and thus can justify unspeakable horrors in their 'noble' quest to remove the 'hindrance' to their collective utopia. Throughout history the basic assumptions and the psychodynamics of the collectivist and utopic mind have not changed, it is merely the type of 'other' - the 'hindrance' - they identified that changes.

In his book *The Poverty of Historicism*, Austrian-British philosopher Sir Karl Popper (2002) criticized historicist attempts to foretell the future, arguing that social experiments based on such theories were doomed to failure, because human history is strongly influenced by the growth of knowledge, and we cannot predict the future

growth of scientific knowledge. Moreover, Popper noted we should be wary of the professed 'selflessness' of proponents of collectivist ideologies:

> Collectivism is not opposed to egoism, nor is it identical to altruism or unselfishness. A collectivist can be a group egoist. He can selfishly defend the interest of his own group, in contradistinction to all other groups. Collective egoism or group egoism (e.g., national egoism or class egoism) is a very common thing. That such a thing exists shows clearly enough that collectivism as such is not opposed to selfishness' (Popper et al. 2008, 65).

Collectivist and utopic ideologies, based on perfectionistic ideals, typically breed what Nietzsche called *ressentiment*. Nietzsche (1998) argues that men of *ressentiment* are "cellar rats full of revenge and hatred," concealing "a whole, vibrating realm of subterranean revenge" (quoted in Leiter, 2002, 203). It is not hard to see why collectivist utopias, often based on unrealistic and perfectionistic views of human nature and social relations, can lead to *ressentiment*, since utopia can never be actualized. And often there is an 'other' that hinders the actualization of the utopia, onto which collective *ressentiment* is projected. Thus, by acknowledging the inherent ambiguity or 'fallenness' of our condition we may thus accept that the suffering and misery in the world are not an aberration that must be 'fixed.' Once we accept the imperfection and ambiguity of our existence, the desire for a future utopia may seem less appealing.

I propose that a refusal to accept the imperfection and inherent ambiguity of the human condition can lead to ideological obsession and zealotry – and this is supported by a cardinal fallacy that Cohen calls existential perfectionism – which involves demanding perfection and that bad things must not happen in the world and when the world fails to live up to one's idealized image of it one perceives the world to be all bad. I suggest that de Beauvoir's existential ethics, and in particular her articulation of ambiguity, can act as an uplifting philosophy, within the context of LBT methodology, which can serve as an antidote to existential perfectionism through promoting the guiding virtue of unconditional life acceptance - which is the ability to accept imperfections in realities inherent everyday life. Practicing unconditional life acceptance can lead to an attitude, what Cohen calls, of metaphysical security. Simply put, the metaphysically secure person accepts the imperfections of reality.

In the next section, I explore an extreme form of ideological obsession, that I refer to as 'ideology addiction.' The term 'ideology' has many definitions and for the purpose of this essay and for my articulation of ideology addition I will apply the definition of ideology used by Karl Popper (1994, 17) in his book *The Myth of the Framework*. He defines the term ideology as "any non-scientific theory, or creed, or view of the world which proves attractive, and which interests people, including scientists." Moreover, I view ideology as a *pharmakon*. In ancient Greek, the word *pharmakon* meant both "cure" and "poison." Ideology as a *pharmakon* can provide a sense of purpose, meaning, and direction to individuals and communities, offering a framework for understanding the world and a basis for action, and can also be a source of dogmatism, intolerance, and violence, leading to the oppression and suffering of those who do not adhere to its beliefs. The focus of this article is when ideology as a *pharmakon* becomes poisonous.

In conclusion, the suggestion of accepting imperfection as a fundamental trait of our being-in-the-world is a potentially liberating feature of Beauvoir's ethics and can act as an antidote to the flawed logic that often upholds ideological obsession – and on a more macro scale can serve as a foundation for an ethics that can act as a prophylactic for ideological addiction.

Theory of Ideology Addiction: Narcissists in Wonderland

I have previously presented a theory of ideology addiction (TIA) where I present the argument that the exposure and adherence to an ideology can be mood-altering or psychoactive and consequently potentially addictive – in particular, the 'intoxication' when being transmogrified into a utopic fantasy world. I suggested that an extreme type of ideological obsession and zealotry, called ideology addiction (IA), could possibly be classified as a type of mental health disorder (Du Plessis, 2018, 2019b). The notion that the exposure and adherence to an ideology are mood-altering or potentially addictive is not a novel idea,[4] and by conceptualizing extreme ideological

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[4] A similar idea more specifically articulated as "political addiction," was discussed by Drew Westen (2007) in his book *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*. In this book, Westen argues that people's political beliefs and behaviors are heavily influenced by

obsession as 'ideology addiction'[5] I attempt to further emphasize that it warrants serious consideration as to whether it should indeed be classified as a behavioral addiction and mental health disorder, and potentially a new entity in future psychiatric nosology. As with all addictions and mental health disorders, an adequate diagnosis informs correct treatment and prevention.

The question of 'what is a mental disorder?' is central to the philosophy of psychiatry, and it is beyond the scope of this article to enter into a discussion around this complex issue, but it is important to note that there always exists the real possibility of erroneously classifying various kinds of social deviance or behavioral variation as 'disorder', when they are better conceptualized using other categories, such as 'non-pathological individual differences', or 'lifestyle choice.' So, the issue of whether the phenomena I conceptualize as ideology addiction is best classified as mental health disorder and should be considered a new entity in psychiatric nosology or more suited for other categories, warrants further research and debate. For the purpose of the article, I will apply the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition* criteria of a mental health disorder which "is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or development processes underlying mental functioning," (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, 20) and propose what I define as ideology addiction fits this criterion.

The psychoactive properties and addictive potential of ideology were already noted by Nietzsche in the 1880s. For example, in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886/1989, 91) he describes the dual nature of religion as a *pharmakon*:

> Religion, as a fundamental conviction that the world is admirable and inestimable, as the driving force behind any metaphysical construction of a world for oneself, has hitherto belonged to the basic requirements of a strong and robust soul: it is only since man has been afflicted with acute miseries and spiritual and physical plagues that he has been in need of anesthetics and narcotics in the form of religious beliefs.

And in *Twilight of the Idols* (1889/1990) he points out that ideology as a *pharmakon* can anesthetize whole cultures and induce mass narcosis, when he referred to Christianity, alongside alcohol, as "two great European narcotics" (1990, 72). Jason Ciaccio (2018, 121) notes that

> Nietzsche does not simply correlate Christianity and alcohol; he looks to understand the former in terms of the latter. Divested of its transcendent aspirations, the effect of Christianity begins to look entirely similar to that of alcoholism, and Nietzsche often evaluates them in identical terms. They produce a common physiological effect: a dulling of pain and deadening of affect.

Nietzsche highlights the psychoactive properties of ideology when he argues that "Christianity anaesthetizes, and its physiological depression is the same as that of alcohol. Both are palliatives…both tend towards quiescence and resignation, or in other words: nihilism" (Ciaccio, 2018, 121). In *The Genealogy of Morals,* he suggests that the "ascetic priest" is heavily implicated in Christian narcosis, who "comes to prominence only in the presence of a waning of life, a physiological disturbance in need of medication. The sufferer, unable to act out against an external cause of suffering, experiences a discomfort in need of narcotic relief, and the ascetic priest is a dealer of narcotics—guilt, sin, and ressentiment" (Ciaccio, 2018, 121) In *The Genealogy*, Nietzsche, discussing the ascetic priest as a peddler of metaphysical narcotics argues that the

> venting of his affects represents the greatest attempt on the part of the suffering to win relief—anesthesia—the narcotic he cannot help desiring to deaden pain of any kind. This alone, I surmise, constitutes the actual cause of ressentiment, vengefulness, and the like: to deaden pain by means of affects. (2000, 563)

Ciarro (2018, 121) argues that "by locating the cause of suffering inwardly, as guilt and sin, the ascetic priest enables the sufferer to release tension" by identifying and therefore acting out "against the putative cause of

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emotional factors, and that some individuals may become "addicted" to the emotional highs and lows of political engagement. And more recently the correlation between addiction an ideological obsession was also noted by Jocelyn Bélanger (2021, 4) when he stated that "[r]adicalization is an addiction to an ideology; it is an obsession to a belief system stoked by the loss of personal significance that triggers a set of sociocognitive mechanisms leaving individuals prone to engaging in ideological violence."

suffering: one's self." And by these means, the ascetic priest provides a means to alleviate the discomfort of those not capable of coping with suffering and thus provides, what Nietzsche refers to as, "a repose of deepest sleep" (2000, 570).

One could argue with Nietzsche's declaration that "God is dead" in *The Gay Science* (1882/1972, 181) also heralded that Western society lost its primary metaphysical narcotic and "repose of deepest sleep" - and that it was not a statement, but a warning that "when we unchained the earth from its sun" what "water is there for us to clean ourselves?" and "[w]hat festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent?" – a warning that we will now seek out, and "invent," perhaps more terrifying narcotics (ideologies and psychoactive substances) that provide a "repose of deepest sleep." This may explain the wide-scale adoption of secular and utopic political ideologies (for example communism and Marxism) in the 20th Century – and the results clearly speak for themselves.

A Psychodynamic View of Ideology Addiction

My thesis is that an individual in the grip of an ideology addiction exhibits behaviour common to all addicted populations and that a similar psychodynamic process underlies any addictive process (Du Plessis, 2018). There would be a multitude of ways to try and articulate ideology addiction, as with any type of addiction, but for the purpose of this article, I will focus on a psychodynamic perspective and acknowledge that it would be a partial account.

My argument is that ideological obsession can be a way to meet the archaic narcissistic needs of the individual, and an ideology if often chosen that satisfies archaic narcissistic needs – not necessarily because of its logical consistency. Simply put, from a psychodynamic perspective, ideology addiction, like substance use disorders, could be understood as the result of a narcissistic disturbance of self-experience and deficits in self capabilities, and may provide a misguided solution to narcissistic injury and shame (Du Plessis, 2018, 2019)

More specifically from a self-psychology perspective, narcissistic injury can lead to a porous or scant psychic structure that is in constant threat of psychic fragmentation or annihilation. The individual with narcissistic injury often has a chronic, archaic 'hunger' for self-object experiences that provide psychological homeostasis, and is characterized by a continuing search for satisfaction of unmet self-object needs (Kohut, 1971, 1977; Du Plessis, 2023). Ideology, as a *pharmakon*, can be understood as a self-object experience that provides a much-needed psychic structure for such individuals and transports them into a transmogrified fantasy world. The individual who is ideologically possessed is a "narcissist in wonderland" under the influence of "intoxicating fantasies" (see Ulman & Paul, 2000).

In the context of radical and extremist political ideologies, I will argue that there is archaic narcissistic 'hunger' for self-object experiences (idealization, mirroring) at play as a causal factor in determining an individual's choice of political orientation. For example, although 'extreme left' political ideologies, like communism, and 'extreme right' political ideologies, like National Socialism, presents themselves conceptually as two opposing ideological positions, a psychological perspective may view it that the logical and conceptual content of these ideological positions is superfluous. Rather, the psychological dynamics that motivate both adherents are similar. At the root lies a form of archaic narcissism that leads to the mode-of-being of *ressentiment* and a yearning for a future utopia, and what distinguishes the ideologues of the extreme left from the extreme right is the type of narcissistic transference each applies to soothe their unstable inner worlds. In the same way that drugs of choice play a particular psychodynamic function as argued by the self-medication hypothesis (Du Plessis, 2018, 2019, 2023).

To elucidate the above hypothesis, I will apply a typological perspective. There are many typological perspectives that can be applied in the context of psychoactive substances, and the most basic is the typology of stimulants (uppers) and depressants (downers). Psychoactive substances like benzodiazepines, tranquilizers, and heroin are classified as depressants, and psychoactive substances like cocaine and methamphetamine are classified as stimulants. My thesis is that there is a correlation between the type of disturbance of self-experience and choice of either stimulants or depressants, and choice of a type of ideology and that the psychoactive properties of an ideology, as a *pharmakon,* can correlate with those classes of psychoactive substances.

Sir Rodger Scruton (2016) states in his book *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands* that "the public ideology of communism is one of *equality and emancipation*, while that of fascism emphasizes *distinction and triumph*" (p. 201). Using Scruton's distinction, I propose that extreme left ideologies like communism can be understood as a 'pathological

depressant-like ideology' of "equality and emancipation" and extreme right ideologies like National Socialism as a 'pathological stimulant-like ideology' of "distinction and triumph."

According to Kohut, (as cited in Ulman and Paul, 2006) "the self should be conceptualized as a lifelong arc linking two polar sets of experiences: on one side, a pole of ambitions related to the original grandiosity as it was affirmed by the mirroring self-object…on the other side, a pole of idealizations, the person's realized goals" (p. 30). Informed by Kohut's bipolar self-model, Harry Ulman and Leonard Paul view addiction as a psychological end result of developmental arrest in the bipolarity of the formation of the self. According to Kohut (in Ulman & Paul, 2006, 396) an "individual may be subject to specific outcomes resulting from a disturbance" in either the pole of grandiosity or the pole of omnipotence. Owing to the specific accompanying mood disorder of each of the possible disturbances of the poles of the self, individuals will be attracted to certain psychoactive substances, which can be understood as an attempt at rectifying a specific deficit in self and coping style, and I argue that the same is true for the choice of ideology.

Therefore, by using the above binary typology, I propose that the psychoactive properties of certain classes of psychoactive substances could correlate with the psychoactive properties of certain types of ideologies, for example, depressants with extreme left ideologies of "equality and emancipation," and stimulants with extreme right ideologies of "distinction and triumph." Moreover, disturbances in Kohut's (1971, 1977) poles of the self can be correlated with the choice of psychoactive substance, for example, the pole of grandiosity with depressants and the pole of omnipotence with stimulants. Therefore, extreme left 'depressant-like' ideologies of "equality and emancipation" are a source of archaic needs for admiration (mirroring) often provided by the mother. Extreme right 'stimulant-like' ideologies of "distinction and triumph" are a source of archaic needs for powerful others (idealization) often provided by the father. Thus, one could also propose failures in early attachments unconsciously drive the choice of ideology, and an ideology acts as a structural prosthesis and satisfaction of a chronic, archaic "hunger" for self-object experiences, and the ideology addict is characterized by a continuing search for satisfaction of unmet self-object needs.

In conclusion, the zealotry and 'activism' of the ideology addict is fundamentally a narcissistic project, a misguided attempt at self-repair and satisfaction of archaic narcissistic needs, and seldom motivated by the ideals of the ideology. Echoing a similar sentiment, Eric Hoffer, author of *The True Believer*, reminded us to be wary of those who profess to be selfless in their political or religious activism.

> The burning conviction that we have a holy duty toward others is often a way of attaching our drowning selves to a passing raft. What looks like giving a hand is often a holding on for dear life. Take away our holy duties and you leave our lives puny and meaningless. There is no doubt that in exchanging a self-centred for a selfless life we gain enormously in self-esteem. The *vanity of the selfless,* even those who practice utmost humility, *is boundless.* (1951, 23) (italics mine)

Logic-Based Therapy and Fragmentation Anxiety

It was noted in my discussion of Beauvoir's existential ethics how any ethics demands insight into how self-deception about motivation is possible, and I did so in the context of Freud's and Sartre's accounts of self-deception. In the next section, I will return to the notion of self-deception and will highlight how self-deception can be seen as a protective mechanism against fragmentation anxiety which can occur in the ideologically obsessed or 'true believer' when their belief systems are confronted.

In pointing out the role that self-deception plays for the ideologically obsessed Scruton notes that what is "[m]ost important is the way in which ideology of the kind I discuss [in *Fools, Frauds, and Firebrands*] insulates itself against criticism, regards non-believers as a threat, and refuses to examine evidence coming from outside the closed circle of gratifying ideas" (personal communication, 5 August 2018). For the ideologically possessed or ideology addict self-deception can be understood as a protective mechanism against 'narcissistic mortification' and psychic fragmentation or annihilation. When ideology serves the dynamic function of a 'psychic prostheses' for a feeble and unstable self, the ideologue must rely on self-deception to maintain his or her ideological worldview.

According to Kohut (1977), fragmentation anxiety may emerge at crucial moments of psychic change, when an existing maladaptive self-object organization is about to be given up. For the ideologue, irrational systems of belief may be tenaciously retained because a threat to the coherence of the ideology is experienced as a direct

attack on his/her sense of self and identity and conjures up powerful archaic fears of psychic fragmentation and annihilation.

It must be noted that the fear of fragmentation is a universal human phenomenon, experienced unconsciously as a constant threat (Kohut, 1971, 1977). This fear is rooted in the need for a coherent and integrated sense of self, which is developed through self-object functions provided by caregivers during early childhood. As individuals develop, they form self-object systems with a wide range of human phenomena, including linguistic, cultural, imagistic, and behavioral routines and organizations. These systems serve to maintain a sense of coherence and continuity in the self, thereby reducing the threat of fragmentation. When these systems are threatened, such as by confrontation with competing belief systems, the resulting disintegration anxiety can be intense. The self-deception often displayed by the ideologically obsessed can be seen as an exemplar of this fear. Overall, fragmentation anxiety is not unique to ideologues but is a natural part of being human, rooted in the need for a coherent and integrated sense of self.

Therefore, to maintain psychic homeostasis the ideologically obsessed must do everything in his or her power to rebuff any 'attacks of reality,' and eliminate the threat, or face a profoundly disturbing and frightening emotional experience. Therefore, as Scruton points out, the ideologue or ideology addict must insulate him or herself "against criticism," and often perform extreme mental gymnastics to counteract evidence that contradicts their beliefs.

Consequently, addressing the self-deception and flawed logic (for example, practical reasoning that is based on existential perfectionism) that supports ideological obsession would require an intervention that would also need to mitigate the dread of fragmentation anxiety.

I suggest that LBT could potentially provide a methodology to address irrational beliefs in a way that might mitigate the fragmentation anxiety that may arise when relinquishing maladaptive self-object organizations Du Plessis, 2022). The reason being that identifying guiding virtues and finding an uplifting philosophy can help individuals slowly change maladaptive beliefs for more adaptive beliefs without a significant threat to the stability of the self. When one considers the self-object functions provided by the ideology and the role it plays in maintaining homeostasis in the self, it is clear that more is needed than merely dismantling the logic of an individual's belief system. The uplifting philosophy and guiding virtues, as suggested by LBT, can provide new ways to form self-object systems beyond that of the ideology. In short, the individual needs other sources of self-object experiences to replace those provided by the ideology, otherwise, it may lead to excessive fragmentation anxiety.

The argument presented may support the research that indicates that countermessages do more harm than good (Ferguson, 2016; Rosand & Winterbotham, 2019). Countermessaging or counternarratives to change people's political opinions is a widespread approach to prevent violent political activism. In short, LBT may therefore provide an alternative 'deracilization' intervention to the typical countermessaging employed to counteract ideological racialization, as it could mitigate fragmentation anxiety when addressing the irrational beliefs that uphold extreme ideologies.

Conclusion

In this essay, I explored the existential ethics of Simone de Beauvoir, more specifically her articulation of ambiguity, and presented the argument that it can act as an uplifting philosophy, as per LBT methodology. I presented my discussion of Beauvoir's existential ethics in the context of ideological obsession and ideology addiction, which is often supported by the reasoning that underlies the cardinal fallacy of existential perfectionism. I argued that de Beauvoir's existential ethics could act as a prophylactic for ideological obsession and ideology addiction. I provided a brief discussion of ideology addiction from a psychodynamic perspective. I also suggested that LBT may be particularly suited when addressing the self-defeating, unrealistic conclusions derived from irrational premises in practical reasoning that may fuel ideological obsession, because it could provide a methodology to address irrational beliefs in a way that might mitigate the fragmentation anxiety that may arise when relinquishing maladaptive self-object organizations.

Overall, the essay's examination of de Beauvoir's existential ethics represents a contribution to the broader literature on existential philosophy and philosophical practice.

The article has several limitations and did not attempt to show how Beauvoir's ethics can be applied within the methodology of LBT. This can be addressed in a future article. Moreover, this article is exploratory

and speculative, in particular my theory of ideology addiction, and whether it should be considered a mental health disorder. Moreover, due to the breadth of this article, many of the ideas discussed were not explored in-depth or comprehensively.

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