

Sara Heinämaa, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, 184 pp.

On the day of Simone de Beauvoir's death, 15 April 1986, the French newspaper *Libération* ran the headline 'And if the most philosophical of the two was not the one we think?', thereby inaugurating a new era of Beauvoir research aiming to bring out the philosophical significance of her work. One of the reasons for the 'notorious scandal' (Mahon 1997, p. ix) of the neglect of Beauvoir as a philosopher is that she did not commit herself to philosophy in the classical way, but wanted to explore human existence in a number of different genres: novels, essays, autobiography, drama.

Indeed, one of the great paradoxes of the figure of Beauvoir is her status as a woman, writer and intellectual who had the courage to defy the standards of her contemporaries, both in her life and in her writing – and at the same time her modesty verging on self-effacement in utterances such as: 'Sartre was a philosopher, and me, I am not'¹. Even if her own gender and the main topic of her most famous work, *The Second Sex*², made it only too predictable that

¹ This Beauvoir said in 1979 in an interview with Margaret Simons and Jessica Benjamin (Simons 1999). Similar statements are to be found in her memoirs.

² *Le Deuxième sexe*, the translations given here are my own. Her choice of woman as a theme for analysis in *The Second Sex* was controversial enough to relegate, still at the present time, this groundwork of feminist philosophy and theory to the sociology section of most French book stores.

she was forgotten, precisely, as a philosopher³ – why did she still not affirm that she, as a woman, was one?

Beauvoir scholars have dealt with this problem in different ways. Some have taken her at her word and regard her œuvre as literary and socio-historical. Others have identified philosophical components restating the ideas of her companion, Jean-Paul Sartre, in her essayistic work. This has been common among feminist theorists, who often deemed Beauvoir's essays, and in particular *The Second Sex*, to be based on 'Sartre's existential philosophy' and attributed their presumed shortcomings to those of *Being and Nothingness*, its dualistic ontology and its understanding of human relations as inherently conflictive (Lloyd 1984, Moi 1985, Gatens 1991).

In the last two decades or so, a number of scholars have begun to rehabilitate Beauvoir as a philosopher in her own right, not just as a feminist or literary appendix to Sartre. Some of them have more or less openly ignored Beauvoir's opinion on this matter (e.g. Butler 1986, Bergoffen 1997, Mahon 1997); after all, it is quite legitimate not to accept an author's judgements of his or her work as the final authority on it. Yet others have brought the innovative character of her philosophical practice to the fore, calling attention to the essayistic style of her undisputedly philosophical texts as well as the philosophical import of her novels and memoirs, and seen it as a radical questioning of philosophy in the traditional sense (e.g. Moubachir 1972, Le Dœuff 1989, Vintges 1992).

The current research on Beauvoir is based on a close study of her texts in relation to other sources than Sartre – Hegel, Søren Kierkegaard, and, in particular, modern phenomenology (Kruks 1990, Lundgren-Gothlin 1991, Fullbrook & Fullbrook 1993, 1998, Simons 1995, 1999, Arp 2001) – but also on recently discovered material, such as Beauvoir's letters to Sartre, and her 1927 and 1939–41 diaries⁴.

The Finnish philosopher Sara Heinämaa has contributed to this research in a number of articles, and her work has now resulted in her first book in English, *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir*⁵. As the title indicates, Heinämaa wants to take earlier discussions a step further. Even though the feminist classic from 1949 is at the center of her

³ According to some commentators, the exclusion of Beauvoir from the philosophical canon is a fairly recent phenomenon – she was, after all, considered one of the existentialist spokespersons at her time (Fullbrook & Fullbrook 2000, Gothlin 1998, Badinter 2002).

⁴ Beauvoir's letters and war diary were found by her adopted daughter Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir and published in 1990 (Beauvoir 1990a, 1990b). On the 1927 diary, see Simons (2001).

⁵ Heinämaa has already published a book on the same theme, in Finnish (1996).

book, her aim is not to ‘offer an exegesis’ (2003, p. xi) of *The Second Sex*, but to show how a ‘phenomenology of sexual difference’ could be developed out of this work, once its numerous interconnections with modern phenomenology – and its shortcomings, as regards the gendered character of the living body – have been established. It is an exciting project that points to the yet undiscovered richness in Beauvoir’s essayistic work, and to the importance of exploring a domain that has not been accepted as philosophically relevant.

Heinämaa’s point of departure is the observation that Beauvoir’s theories are still largely considered to be empirically founded (or un-founded) and, as such, surpassed not only by modern empirical research but also by feminist criticism of the sciences. Her claim is that Beauvoir’s ideas have to be assessed in the light of Edmund Husserl’s and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenologies, rather than Sartre’s existentialism, if their philosophical gist is to be understood properly.

In Heinämaa’s view, *The Second Sex* is not a socio-historical study, but ‘a phenomenological inquiry into the constitution of the meaning of sexual difference’ (2003, p. xiii). Even if the influence of phenomenology on Beauvoir’s work is now generally recognized, Heinämaa’s aim is to take this insight further: we need, in her view, to understand Beauvoir’s analysis in relation to Husserl’s notion of a ‘rigorous science’ (2003, p. xiv), or more particularly, his idea of the living body. In addition, Beauvoir’s description of sexuality and the sexual difference is compared to Merleau-Ponty’s description of the living body as one’s own body and as a unity of meaning.

Moreover, in giving prominence to the phenomenological dimension of *The Second Sex*, Heinämaa wants to refute a number of standard interpretations of this work. *The Second Sex* is not, as some of Beauvoir’s detractors have claimed, an ‘argument against femininity’ (2003, p. xv). Nor does it advance the thesis that woman is the absolute Other. Beauvoir does not first pretend that the cause of women’s oppression is their biology, only to affirm later on that ‘no biological, psychological or economic destiny term what character the human female will take on in society’ (Beauvoir 1949, II, p. 13/1953, p. 295). She does not even, according to Heinämaa, put forward a theory that distinguishes between sex and gender.

Particularly Beauvoir’s affirmation that women, to a greater extent than men, are ‘enslaved to the species’ (1949, I, p. 398/1953, p. 285) – given their paramount role in gestation and care of young offspring – has been interpreted as her disapproving of womanhood in general. This idea seems to contradict the main thesis of *The Second Sex*, that ‘one is not born woman, but becomes one’, and its substantiation in the detailed analysis of the historical, mythological and ideological roots of the positioning of woman as the mysterious Other to

the male subject. It also rebuts the general existentialist perspective of freedom and choice explicitly defended by Beauvoir.

According to Heinämaa, these apparent contradictions can be resolved if we understand the phenomenological character of Beauvoir's inquiry. What is more, it will become clear that in *The Second Sex* Beauvoir not only dismantles a mythology of the Feminine, but also, positively, discloses 'a feminine way of relating to the world' (2003, p. xv); in other words, that she outlines a phenomenology of sexual difference. Heinämaa therefore undertakes to trace the prehistory of this project, as a field of phenomenological research in Husserl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, among others. This is not to say that Beauvoir simply fulfils Husserl's programme, in exploring an area that earlier phenomenologists had not yet developed. Heinämaa acknowledges that the philosophical background of *The Second Sex* is more complex and refers to Michèle Le Dœuff's notion of the 'heterogeneous genesis' of this work: Beauvoir was also influenced on the one hand by the philosophies of Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, on the other by feminist writers such as Christine de Pisan, Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill and Virginia Woolf. In these feminist thinkers, says Heinämaa, we find the roots of Beauvoir's idea that the sexual difference structures our experience in a fundamental way, whereas the philosophical and scientific tradition has presented man as the universal norm, and woman as a mere exception. Therefore, Beauvoir calls into question the neutrality of this tradition, including the phenomenological movement. However, in Heinämaa's interpretation, she does not thereby leave the phenomenological framework behind – contrary to what for example Le Dœuff has claimed.

Furthermore, Heinämaa wants to shed light on 'recent developments in feminist philosophy' (2003, p. xvii), especially the relation between Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray. Heinämaa's aim is to show that these theorists are not as opposed as is commonly believed. Now, this seems like a separate undertaking, and it is in fact not developed in the book.

The first chapter, 'The Philosopher and the Writer,' brings up the above-mentioned issue of Beauvoir's apparent rejection of the epithet philosopher, and relates it to Kierkegaard's disapproval of systematic philosophy. Heinämaa compares Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writing with the different viewpoints explored in Beauvoir's novels, so as to disclose the philosophical functioning of these discordant voices. The endeavour to find the universal anchored in living experience can also be designated as a fundamental characteristic of phenomenology. In the second part of the chapter, Heinämaa therefore goes on to elucidate Husserl's philosophical project. She emphasizes the prominence

given to imagination in his 'eidetic science' and likens it to Beauvoir's efforts to present, in fictional form, 'a universal singular' (2003, p. 16).

As the title of the second chapter, 'The Living Body,' suggests, Heinämaa accounts in it for this notion as it was developed by Husserl in *Ideas I and II*, *Cartesian Meditations* and *Crisis*, and by Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*. The purpose is to show its connection with Beauvoir's analyses in *The Second Sex*, but it is only in the third chapter, 'Sexual and Erotic Bodies,' that the question of historical influences is addressed. We have evidence from Beauvoir's autobiography and from interviews that she discussed Husserl's phenomenology with Sartre, among others, and that she read Husserl's *Lectures on Internal Time-Consciousness*, Heidegger's *Being and Time*, a book by Eugen Fink and another by Emmanuel Levinas. Needless to say, she was familiar with Sartre's works. She also knew Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, both through personal acquaintance and through his work, and she refers sympathetically to his ideas in *The Second Sex*. Thus, we can legitimately conclude that Beauvoir knew of the basic ideas of phenomenology, and that she was enthused by them.

Heinämaa's competent introduction to the phenomenological exploration of the living body makes up nearly half of her book. Towards the end of the third chapter, she begins to examine Beauvoir's own contribution. In Heinämaa's reading, Beauvoir's aim is to foreground experiences ignored not only by the natural and human sciences, but also by phenomenology itself: *The Second Sex* is thus a study of the constitution of the meaning of notions such as 'woman', 'man', 'feminine' and so on. The body that is in focus here is not the empirical object of natural sciences, as many interpreters have thought – resulting in the misconception that Beauvoir takes the 'cause' of women's oppression to be their biology. Rather, it is the living body, as a source of meaning, and hence as a historical and cultural being, that interests Beauvoir.

In other words, Beauvoir's study of the meaning of the female body and of women's experiences uncovers a fundamental bias within phenomenology itself. The alleged universality of its descriptions of the living body is based on the exclusion of a whole range of experiences that are fundamental to its meaning. In fact, there is a 'principal difference ... in men's and women's experiences of their own bodies' (2003, p. 75) that must be accounted for, summarized by Beauvoir: 'Woman, like man, *is* her body, but her body is something else than she is' (1949, I, p. 67/1953, p. 61)⁶.

⁶ Beauvoir here refers to Merleau-Ponty's notion of one's own body, 'I am my body'.

In chapter four, 'Questions About Women', Heinämaa calls attention to the different meanings of 'woman' or 'femininity' in *The Second Sex*. Firstly, it is a notion with negative implications, the myth of the eternal Feminine, which Beauvoir rejects. Secondly, however, the idea of femininity has a constructive function, in that it stands for a certain generality in women's experience, which distinguishes it from male experience in several ways, but is, at the same time, dynamic, and gets its meaning from the manner in which individual women actually live. *The Second Sex*, writes Heinämaa, 'is an attempt to defend an intermediate view that rejects the idea of an eternal unchanging essence of femininity without falling into particularism or nominalism' (2003, p. 83). In consequence, the 'Otherness' that women are said to incarnate in Beauvoir's eyes is part of the mythology of the Feminine. Heinämaa reminds us of the well-known phrase from the *The Second Sex* – 'He is the Subject, he is the Absolute: she is the Other' (1949, I, p. 15/1953, p. 16) – and takes a stand against the interpretation of this statement as a positive thesis.

In the last part of the fourth chapter Heinämaa discusses Beauvoir's notion of objectivity, which has been criticized by feminist commentators for presupposing detachment, in the rationalist sense of rising above worldly involvement. Heinämaa shows that this notion must be understood, rather, in the phenomenological sense, where disinterestedness means a 'stepping back' from our participation in the world, so that an unprejudiced description of its meaning can be achieved. The purpose of the phenomenological suspension of our ties to the world is precisely to *understand* them, not to escape from them.

In Heinämaa's opinion, it is against the background of this notion of objectivity that Beauvoir's ethics must be assessed. Beauvoir states that the perspective of her analysis in *The Second Sex* is existentialist ethics (1949, I, p. 31/1953, p. 28), i.e. the moral theory developed in her essays 'Pyrrhus and Cineas' and 'Towards a an Ethics of Ambiguity', written a few years earlier (Beauvoir 1944, 1947). According to Heinämaa, the ethics worked out by Beauvoir is not normative but 'critical' (2003, p. 95): it implies the uncovering of the human origin of all values. In *The Second Sex* the focus is the values that pertain to the hierarchy between men and women. The three different theoretical models that could serve to explain this hierarchy, and that Beauvoir examines in the first part of her book, namely the biological, the psychoanalytical and the historical materialist perspectives, are insufficient, in that they leave their own values unaccounted for.

This discussion is continued in chapter five, 'A Genealogy of Subjection', where Heinämaa suggests that the purpose of *The Second Sex* is to provide a genealogy of the gender hierarchy. In other words, Beauvoir's concern with the theoretical models mentioned was not that they could not come up with

a good enough explanation, but that they presupposed the very values they feigned to give a rationale for. What makes the subjection of women appear to have a biological foundation is, as Heinämaa points out, that there is no traceable event in the history of humankind where it could be said to have been established. We know of no golden age, nor, indeed, of any faraway innocent tribe, where men and women were equal. Hence, even radical changes in material conditions have not been sufficient to abolish the hierarchy between men and women. Yet, instead of drawing the conclusion that it is 'natural', Beauvoir shows that, from an existential-phenomenological perspective, no 'fact' whatsoever can provide a human being with a destiny, since a human fact has significance only in the context of a situation.

What a genealogy exposes, then, is that the 'origin' of the subjection of women is nothing but repeated signifying acts that take on a functional difference that has no meaning when separated from the human context where it comes into play. Accordingly, this meaning is not determined beforehand and can be transformed, as Heinämaa says, in 'a series of numerous minute abstentions and deviations' (2003, p. 105).

This chapter also contains a phenomenological analysis of the body in labour, which engages with some of Beauvoir's reflections on the matter and develops them in the light of contemporary feminist discussions. Here Heinämaa wants to bring to light the 'intermediate mode' of the body in labour, as a body in between activity and passivity (2003, p. 115).

The sixth and last chapter, 'The Mythology of Femininity', is a short elaboration on some of the former issues, rather than a conclusion. Heinämaa proposes that a 'theory of projection' can be found in Beauvoir's analysis of the mythology of femininity: men project their own unbearable finitude on women. She also introduces the philosophies of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard as an influence on Beauvoir's idea that women have become associated with the most conspicuous sign of man's carnality: death. Heinämaa's book ends with the remark that we do not yet have a phenomenology of sexual difference, but perhaps 'a basic understanding of the topics of such an enterprise' (2003, p. 134).

Now, to what extent is Heinämaa's project really carried out in the book? Or, to put it differently, what exactly *is* her project? Is it a book on Beauvoir and *The Second Sex*, as she says in the 'Introduction', or is it rather an outline of a phenomenology of sexual difference, based on what was written on this theme by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir – as the title of the book suggests?

However, if Beauvoir's work and its sources of inspiration are in focus, it is not clear to me why Heinämaa so often quotes works that Beauvoir apparently never read. It is, for example, implausible that she was familiar

with *Ideas II* or *Crisis*⁷. Nevertheless, Heinämaa often argues as if she was directly influenced by these texts. Alternatively, Heinämaa may simply want to contextualize Beauvoir's writing, with a view to clarify its philosophical significance. In that case, the intellectual environment may be as important as the details of her reading. But then what is the reason for excluding Hegel from this discussion, whose philosophy we know that Beauvoir studied in detail, and whose name appears time and again in her essays – or Alexandre Kojève's interpretation of the German idealist philosopher, which had an indisputable impact on French intellectual life from the 30s and onwards? Of course, it is perfectly legitimate – and not much explored in the literature – to focus on the phenomenological aspects of Beauvoir's work; yet, Heinämaa wants to establish that *The Second Sex* in fact is a phenomenological study 'in its aims and its methods' (2003, p. xii).

Another ambiguity in Heinämaa's text is created by her tendency to attribute her own ideas to Beauvoir, as if she was hiding her own thinking behind that of her forerunner. In spite of the abundant references, at certain crucial places there is no indication of where in Beauvoir's texts Heinämaa finds her arguments. In chapter four, for example, Heinämaa takes up the contention found in the first part of *The Second Sex*, that sexual differentiation is not necessary either in a biological or an ontological sense, and claims (2003, p. 86): 'On this point Beauvoir takes issue with Merleau-Ponty.' It is true that in this passage Beauvoir refers to Merleau-Ponty's idea that there are no arbitrary attributes of existence. She admits that sexual difference is necessary from the point of view of concrete existence, which is what Merleau-Ponty is talking about. Nevertheless, she maintains that incarnation, temporality and reproduction are necessary in a more radical sense, in that without them nothing such as existence would be possible. But this does not yet imply a certain *kind* of body, nor a certain kind of reproduction. Her argument here is mainly directed against Hegel. Heinämaa, however, imputes to Merleau-Ponty the view that 'no part or capacity of the human body is more fundamental than the others' (2003, p. 87). This is a curious misrepresentation of his ideas: Merleau-Ponty certainly does not claim that the brain, for example, is no more essential than any other part of the body! One of his key theses is that it is not on the basis of organs or functions as physiologically defined that we can differentiate between the

⁷ Except from what Merleau-Ponty might have passed on, from his brief visit in Louvain in 1939.

more or less ‘fundamental’ aspects of the living body, but rather in terms of *levels* of behaviour or existence.

Another argument that Heinämaa attributes to Beauvoir is based on a quote from Merleau-Ponty that I can by no means find cited or alluded to in *The Second Sex*. It ends: ‘If ... we define man by his experience ... then a man without hands or without the sexual system is as inconceivable as a man without thought’ (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p. 198/1962, p. 170). Heinämaa claims (2003, p. 87): ‘Beauvoir ... thinks that the parallel of genitals and hands is misleading.’ And further down: ‘... Beauvoir criticizes Merleau-Ponty’s account for abstractness: it bypasses the duality of our embodiment.’ But in view of Beauvoir’s criticism of Hegel, which I just outlined, neither hands *nor* genitals are necessary in the way that temporality is. On the other hand, it is true that Beauvoir’s phenomenological inquiry into the notions of woman and of sexual difference points to a blind spot in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, and perhaps in phenomenology (as in philosophy, not surprisingly, in general), and hence to an area where philosophical work is acutely being called for. Unfortunately, Heinämaa never really enters into that domain.

The main achievement of Heinämaa’s study is her successful refutation, with the help of the phenomenological perspective, of the interpretation of Beauvoir’s analysis of the ‘becoming’ of woman as an *explanation* of women’s oppression. To the extent that ‘gender’ is understood as the causal product of certain biological givens and a socio-psychological development, she is also right to contest the interpretation of Beauvoir’s work in terms of the sex/gender distinction. However, this is certainly not the only way to understand that distinction, and more generally, I cannot see how a ‘phenomenology of sexual difference’ could be developed without addressing these notions. Indeed, the meaning of the relation between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ is a fundamental issue for a philosopher like Merleau-Ponty, for instance.

According to Heinämaa, Beauvoir brings two types of existence, feminine and masculine, to the fore, each with a certain unity and generality. Heinämaa calls it a ‘holistic view’ of the feminine (2003, p. 85), in that it is a whole, in which emotional, sexual, intellectual and practical experiences are internally related, and must be studied together. Even though Heinämaa’s interpretation is generally convincing, she pushes certain terminological details in Beauvoir’s writing too far, as when she notices her repeated employment of the adjective ‘*féminin*’ in French (2003, p. 83). However, this expression is not equivalent to the English ‘*feminine*’; it corresponds to the English ‘women’s’, in expressions such as ‘*droit de vote féminin*,’ the French translation of ‘women’s suffrage.’ Beauvoir’s usage here is simply standard French.

In addressing the issue of woman's absolute Otherness, Heinämaa rightly insists on the critical character of Beauvoir's statements and their role in the uncovering of the ideological constitution of the gender hierarchy. Woman is construed mythically as the subordinated, inessential sex, or even as sexuality, in contrast to man, who is defined as pure consciousness. Hard as it is to see how Beauvoir's reasoning here could be taken as a positive affirmation of what women really are, I am at pains to follow Heinämaa when she draws the exact opposite conclusion (2003, p. 91): 'Instead of explaining "why woman is Other", Beauvoir argues that she is not.'

Beauvoir is unquestionably unraveling a tradition that theorizes on woman as lack, as deviation and contingency, in the assertion of her 'Otherness'. But the point is – and this is where, in my opinion, Beauvoir has profoundly contributed to feminist theory and activism – that the constitution of womanhood structures individual women's experience, even of themselves.

As we have seen, in Heinämaa's interpretation of Beauvoir, the notion of 'woman' – or 'femininity' – is 'a dynamic, open structure' of which the individual woman is a stylistic variation: 'she both realizes the feminine way of relating to the world and modifies it' (2003, p. 85). There is no sex/gender 'dualism' here, no biological determinism, nor nominalism or 'linguistic monism' (to speak with Susan Bordo). But in that case the two notions of the feminine that Heinämaa distinguishes between must be seen as intertwined, and it becomes impossible to state that woman is *not* the Other.

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir actually affirms that a great number of women are reduced to being the Other. The reason is that they are restrained from action, and thus cannot become anything else than what they are considered to be: 'An existing being *is* nothing else than what it is doing' (1949, I, p. 40/1953, p. 287). So if woman is the Other when considered in her pure immanent presence, as Beauvoir says, then this 'considered' cannot be taken as an external point of view that might simply be false. There is no hidden truth too 'fluctuating' for us to grasp, since a person is only what she makes herself being, and women are all too often prevented from making anything.

Heinämaa is right, however, to problematize the notion of Otherness in Beauvoir, even though she does not go far enough here. In that it is a myth, Otherness is a position women can never completely attain – in fact, being the absolute Other would require considering oneself this way, which is impossible: however minimal, the very act of 'considering oneself' is a form of transcendence. There is what Merleau-Ponty would call a 'dialectical relation' between immanence and transcendence, otherness and freedom.

So 'woman' as the absolute Other is a norm that individual women can never completely live up to: 'the "true woman" is she who accepts herself as

the Other' (1949, I, p. 406/1953, p. 291). Notwithstanding, women are 'the Other' to the extent that their freedom is limited by their situation. Seeing that the situation is both material and symbolic it cannot be transformed in any straightforward way: legal and economic equality is not sufficient. On the other hand, economical and social independence is certainly, in Beauvoir's view, a necessary condition for women's possibility to exist in an authentic way.

Nevertheless, Heinämaa insists that Beauvoir's aims in *The Second Sex* are 'not practical' (2003, p. 92), and that the ethics she founds her analysis on is not a normative, but a 'critical' ethics (2003, p. 95). She maintains that Beauvoir 'does not pose the question on women in the interest of promoting public good or personal happiness' (2003, p. 92). But what Beauvoir is in fact saying in the section cited is that 'public good' can only be understood in terms of the concrete opportunities that the individuals in a society are given and that these opportunities should not be confounded with the idea of happiness. Instead, they must be understood in terms of *freedom* (1949, I, pp. 30–31/1953, pp. 8–29)⁸. Furthermore, the ethics that Beauvoir formulates in 'Towards an Ethics of Ambiguity' is 'critical' in the sense that it does not propose a system of rules with the help of which we could calculate the moral quality of our actions, but examines the conditions of the possibility of an ethics. Nonetheless, the aim of her essays on morals, as well as of *The Second Sex*, is clearly normative. This is also the opinion of all other Beauvoir scholars that I know of who have written on her ethics⁹.

Even more curious is the support that Heinämaa claims to find in Le Dœuff's influential study, *Hipparchia's Choice*, where, according to the Finnish philosopher, 'Le Dœuff refutes this common view [that Beauvoir defends the values of freedom and authenticity]' (2003, p. 99). But Le Dœuff's argument shows just the opposite: the merit of Beauvoir's work, in her eyes, is that it explicitly states what values it endorses, in contrast to Sartre's, which – in line with a whole philosophical and scientific tradition – presents its values as theoretical results (1989, pp. 104 ff./1991, pp. 88ff.). This is what, in Le Dœuff's view, makes *The Second Sex* a philosophical work, since it allows for criticism and discussion of its principles. Moreover, according to Le Dœuff, it is precisely through this ethical perspective that Beauvoir transforms the existential phenomenology

⁸ Arp calls attention to the same passages in order to show that it is the moral principles of 'Towards an Ethics of Ambiguity' that forms the perspective of the analyses of *The Second Sex* (2001, pp. 136 ff.).

⁹ Including the recent study on the 1947 essay by Kristana Arp (2001).

that was her starting point: her analysis is no longer a disinterested description of its object, but modifies it.

It looks as though Heinämaa, in her effort to line up Beauvoir's work with Husserlian phenomenology, overlooks the very political implications that occasioned its extraordinary impact. She was undoubtedly inspired by phenomenology, but to compare her project to that of Husserl's 'rigorous science' and the foundationalist ideal that it implies, seems to me profoundly misleading: Beauvoir very consciously writes from the position of a woman, hence from the perspective of someone whose objectivity can immediately be challenged. She is not just describing different 'styles of being' in any neutral sense, but is concerned with discourses (literary, philosophical, scientific) on women and sexuality. In uncovering the social and political role in the construction of 'womanhood', she discloses its hidden normative character, and the often painful contradictions that a woman's 'style of being' involves.

Heinämaa's book is full of challenging ideas and gives rise to a great deal of questions. One would have wished, however, that at least some of them had been discussed more profoundly. Only in a few short passages Heinämaa refrains from numerous comparisons with one or another acclaimed philosopher and delineates an analysis that might constitute a 'first move toward a phenomenology of sexual difference' (2003, p. 134).

But the reader is left frustrated as the very idea of such a phenomenology is not examined in Heinämaa's text. It is hard to see how *The Second Sex* could be constricted to the phenomenological framework. Moreover, we have no indication of how to conceive of a 'genealogy' of the hierarchy between the sexes that is both, as Heinämaa suggests, an 'archaeological' search, à la Husserl of the *Crisis*, for the primordial meaning of the sexual difference, and a Nietzschean-Foucauldian genealogy of a norm that has no other origin but the acts that perpetuate it.

Important as it may be to show Beauvoir's – just like any other thinker's – anchoring in a philosophical tradition, it seems to me that the revolutionary impact of *The Second Sex* is due to its opening up of a tradition. Of course, this happened under the influence from several different sources. But her way of using vast ranges of material as the basis of her analysis – biological, psychoanalytical, sociological, economical theories as well as mythology and literature – was, to my knowledge, unprecedented.

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