Editor's Introduction

More than twenty years after her death, the magnetism and authority of Simone de Beauvoir's writings continue to inspire new theories and connections in philosophical thinking. The resulting explosion of interest and scholarship treats her as a fully independent thinker, expressing her own views on ethics, politics, sexuality, literature, existentialism, and phenomenology. Although she now stands on her own as one the most far-reaching and innovative minds of the last century, one significant indicator of her importance has been neglected. True philosophers are extensively discussed in relation to other canonical figures in the philosophical tradition. To that end, our collection places Beauvoir in an engagement with the full spectrum of the philosophical tradition by bringing her into one-on-one conversation with individual thinkers from Plato to Irigaray. This volume thus presents Beauvoir's intellectual relationship to a remarkably wide array of thinkers: her influences, her contemporaries, and her successors, written by scholars whose expertise centers not only on Beauvoir, but also each thinker with whom they put her in direct conversation.

Thus far, scholars have demonstrated Beauvoir's independence from the circle of Sartre by showing that she either originated some of his ideas or that her ideas differ from his. Rather than address either of these approaches, our collection offers a third way to view her as a philosopher in her own right. By showing how she dialogued with a variety of thinkers and intellectuals of her own choosing, the essays in this volume show that Beauvoir sought to offer her voice as a unique response to the philosophical canon. Additionally, Beauvoir's writings inspired the works of a number of contemporary feminist thinkers, thus broadening the very definition of what constitutes the Western "canon" and offering a trajectory into future thinking that is intimately tied to the traditional sense of the history of Western philosophy. Each chapter reveals how Beauvoir's engagement with philosophers and intellectuals is remarkable in its breadth—including meditations on philosophers with approaches as different as Bergson and Kant, political thinkers like Rousseau and Marx, unexpected connections with philosophers such as Plato, important but marginal voices like Sade, as well as current philosophers such as Butler and hooks. In fact, *Beauvoir and Western Thought from Plato to Butler* has no article on the

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relationship to Sartre, in order to highlight the richness of her unique philosophical background and the independence with which she chose philosophical interlocutors apart from her association with Sartre.

BEAUVOIR IS NOT A PHILOSOPHER

What does it mean to call oneself a philosopher? What does it mean to take a position of theoretical engagement with prominent figures in the history of Western philosophy while remaining critical of the overall project and methodology of truth formulation at play in this history? That Beauvoir was never comfortable with the mantle of philosopher is well known. Yet, equally clear is her impact on philosophical thought in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as well as her thorough knowledge of and dialogue with thinkers ranging from the Greeks to the phenomenologists. As in most matters, Beauvoir's simultaneous unease with being a "philosopher" and advocacy of philosophical theory illustrates her notion of ambiguity as the core fact of human existence.

As some of the authors in this collection point out, when Beauvoir objects to the position of the philosopher, she is largely criticizing the omniscient and atemporal claims of systematic and scientific truth. The scope of his systematicity is part of why Beauvoir abdicated to Sartre—a thinker deliberately absent from the present collection—in matters philosophical. Much debate has taken place over the status of Beauvoir as a philosopher and how far we are to believe her own self-proclamations as to her philosophical inferiority.

Toril Moi, guided by Michèle Le Doeuff, points to an important event in the young Beauvoir's development as a thinker and a philosopher. As Beauvoir recounts in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, she confronted Sartre in 1929 at the age of twenty-one for the first time with her own philosophy. She writes that,

> Day after day, and all day long I set myself up against Sartre, and in our discussions I was simply not in his class. One morning in the Luxembourg Gardens, near the Medici fountain, I outlined for him that pluralist ethics which I had cobbled together to vindicate the people I liked but whom I didn't want to resemble: he took it apart. *I clung to my system*, because it authorized me to look upon my heart as the arbiter of good and evil. (Moi 1994, 15–16; emphasis added)[1]

Sartre challenged Beauvoir for three hours and she eventually gave up her burgeoning philosophical system. According to Moi, this pivotal account "consciously or unconsciously, demonstrates the way in which the philosophical initiative now belongs to Sartre" (Moi 1994, 17). On Moi's read, Beauvoir accepts (at an early stage in her intellectual development) that Sartre is the leader in philosophical ability. Similarly, in her work on this passage, Le Doeuff argues that Beauvoir's self-effacement regarding her own abilities and her admiration for Sartre and his

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"gang" is a "sad" state of affairs. Le Doeuff laments, "All her life she kept repeating that she 'left the philosophy to Sartre,' as though there were room for only one person" (Le Doeuff 1991, 136–139).

Although the readings offered by Moi and Le Doeuff regarding Beauvoir's abnegation of philosophy are legitimate and in many ways accurate, they do not fully address what it is about *philosophy* that Beauvoir renounces. Educated in philosophy from a young age, pursuing philosophical studies all through her most formative years, Beauvoir was certainly interested in advanced studies in philosophy as more than just a component of her overall education.[2] In the above passage, the young Beauvoir argues for three hours to protect the *system* that she has developed. As she debates with Sartre during this episode, she experiences not only the insecurities she has regarding her own understanding, but more importantly, the *limits* of philosophical systems in general. She continues the above passage from *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* saying, "I had realized, in the course of our discussion, that many of my opinions were based only on prejudice, dishonesty, or hastily formed concepts, that my reasoning was at fault and that my ideas were in a muddle" (Beauvoir 1959, 344; Moi 1991, 16). Beauvoir realizes that the system that she had developed was in fact no system at all, but rather a hodgepodge of ideas, prejudices, and personal opinions. In other words, her system was not *scientific*—it did not offer a unified and systematic interpretation of the world. By her own self-evaluation, Beauvoir was too enmeshed in the personal and the prejudicial to offer Sartre an ahistorical, atemporal, and universally valid philosophical position. Even at an early age, Beauvoir displayed an admiration for the systematicity of philosophy as evinced by her admiration of Sartre and her captivation with many of the great philosophers,[3] while still maintaining a healthy skepticism and suspicion as to its ability to address the human condition in all of its complexity.

In the *Prime of Life* we find the famous assertion made by Beauvoir that she is not a philosopher because she does not build systems. In an extensive passage she claims,

> I did not regard myself as a philosopher: I was well aware that the ease with which I penetrated to the heart of a text stemmed, precisely, from my lack of originality. In this field a genuinely creative talent is so rare that queries as to why I did not attempt to join the elite are surely otiose: it would be more useful to explain *how* certain individuals are capable of getting results from that conscious venture into lunacy known as a "philosophical system," from which they derive that obsessional attitude which endows their tentative patterns with universal insight and applicability. (Beauvoir 1960, 265)

Beauvoir says two important things in this elusive passage. On the one hand, she acknowledges that she can penetrate philosophical texts with great ease, yet curiously she attributes this ability to a "lack of originality" on her part. It seems strange that

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she would associate understanding philosophy with unoriginal thinking, especially when it is precisely her highly original appropriation and reconfiguration of other philosophers that makes her their equal. On the other hand, this passage shows her association of "philosophy" with "system" and her distaste for the "lunacy" of systematicity and the obsessional character one must possess to engage in such an enterprise. She goes on to claim, almost with flippancy, that this stubbornness is all but absent in women because "women are not by nature prone to obsessions of this type" (Beauvoir 1960, 266). Partially self-revelatory, but said more in jest, Beauvoir mocks the professional philosopher while admitting that her feminine conditioning did not orient her to such studies.

But perhaps taking Beauvoir at her own words in an entirely literal fashion ignores the ambiguity to which she struggled so desperately to give voice. She clearly associates philosophy with the systematicity for which she has little patience. Problematically, Moi argues that in the above passage, Beauvoir shows that she suffers from an "excessive ambition" such that "if she cannot produce an original philosophical system of her own, become the master philosopher *par excellence*, she would rather not do philosophy at all" (Moi 1991, 33). Although clearly there is an element of competitiveness to Beauvoir, to write off her wariness of the philosophical endeavor as merely indicative of her overzealous ambition ignores a deeper insight. Such suspicion on Beauvoir's part, attests to her general mistrust of the philosophical project of unifying all reality under a set of logical principles that are universal and ahistorical, that is, *scientific* in a deeply Hegelian sense. For Beauvoir, to make philosophy scientific is to speak from the perspective of the absolute, which is the standpoint of perfect truth where all doubt is removed. Such a perspective is not only impossible from the position of a finite individual, it is also dangerous and potentially tyrannical.

By focusing on contingency and individual experience, Beauvoir altogether avoids the teleological drive that plagues systems from Plato to Marx. To counter the problematic absolutism of so many thinkers in the history of philosophy, Beauvoir avers that the philosopher is always involved in her philosophy. One could argue that this is why she devoted so much of her energy to chronicling her own autobiography as she came to the awareness of her theories. One cannot eliminate the personal for Beauvoir, and this is why she begins her greatest philosophical text with the assertion: "*I* hesitated a long time before writing a book on woman," thereby showing us that it is *her* doing the analysis, not some depersonalized *philosopher* (Beauvoir 2010, 3; emphasis added). The fact that she is a woman will have everything to do with what is questioned and how it is questioned.

At the conclusion of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir offers a sensitive and personal account of why she chooses existentialism, with its emphasis on the finite individual and the fundamental absurdity of existence, over the grand justifications of systematic philosophy. She writes,

> As soon as one considers a system abstractly and theoretically, one puts himself, in effect, on the plane of the universal, thus, of the infinite. That

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> is why reading the Hegelian system is so comforting. I remember having experienced a great feeling of calm on reading Hegel in the impersonal framework of the Bibliothèque Nationale in August 1940. But once I got into the street again, into my life, out of the system, beneath a real sky, the system was no longer of any use to me: what it had offered me, under a show of the infinite, was the consolations of death; and I again wanted to live in the midst of living men. (Beauvoir 1976, 158)

To live among human beings is to live among a plurality of contingent, factical, and absurd situations, deeds, and beliefs. Beauvoir here rejects the validation of all contingency and sacrifice in a final, grand culmination of history. She emphasizes the role of the individual not only in ethical action, but in the very investigation of philosophically understanding the human condition. Beauvoir's approach, which preserves the thickness of individual experience, makes all the difference in coming to terms with the complexities and realities of oppression, authoritarianism, alienation, and exclusion. Her rejection of strict systematicity grants her a sensitivity to those people who are silenced by the universal, those institutions that demand unquestioned allegiance, and those practices that rob the existent of the joy and struggle of living in the infinitely expansive moment.

BEAUVOIR IS A PHILOSOPHER

Yet, if Beauvoir rejects systematic philosophy and its pretensions, she nonetheless remains a philosopher. Indeed, in her century, rejection of systematic philosophy was a badge of honor for philosophers ranging from Wittgenstein to Deleuze and Guattari. In this respect, Beauvoir was always ahead of Sartre, the system builder. What is more, her rejection of system is neither haphazard nor due to any lack of ability: her autobiographical claims about inabilities hold little validity when one looks at her incisive discussions of figures in the tradition. She shows considerable knowledge of and insight into the systematic practice of philosophy. Thus, we must say that she rejects system for thoroughly principled, one might even add, *philosophical* reasons. System kills the living ambiguity that forms the ground of all philosophical thought, and it is this ground that Beauvoir seeks to think about, understand, and display.

Her philosophy thus consists precisely in the attempt to articulate this ground without falsifying it. On the one hand, this produced some discussions that any would recognize as philosophy, since, one philosophical issue above all others runs through her work: the problem of the self and the Other. Her first novel, *L'invitée,* portrayed the unsuccessful attempt of one woman, Françoise, to preserve her individuality at the cost of all other people. Yet, Beauvoir had already abandoned Françoise's ideal by the time the novel went to press. Subsequently, her philosophico-moral essays of the 1940s, *Pyrrhus and Cineas* and *Ethics of Ambiguity* begin with an individual's freedom, but in these works the individual's freedom cannot be fully realized unless the freedom of the Other is acknowledged and included in one's

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own project. If Beauvoir's ethical thinking comprises her most famous contribution to the school of existentialism, and the most "typically" philosophical aspect of all her writing, this probably results from her most abiding interest in the need an individual freedom has for another freedom. Such an interest cannot but result in something that will resemble modern ethics in at least one important sense: it concerns the form of the relationship the individual has with other people.

On the other hand, this interest in ethics and the relation of the self to Other can only be seen as an attempt to understand the living ground of all human existence. As two or more individual freedoms will always be indeterminate and unpredictable, there can be no way ultimately to describe or theorize their relationship in advance. Individual freedoms disclose the world to themselves and to Others in unique and individual ways. This practical fact means that no ultimate standard for living, no single way of disclosing the world, can establish itself as ultimate or universal without engaging in a kind of tyranny or false totalization. Beauvoir, although committed to human individual freedom, rejects any form of humanism that would establish a nature or *telos* in human affairs, and she equally rejects religious standards, not because they are simply false, but because even they would be understood on human terms and offer no help. Yet, even though she encourages us to reject all of these "foreign absolutes" (Beauvoir 1976, 14), Beauvoir also stops short of the negative notion of absurdity. The world we live in, according to Beauvoir, is not and can never be devoid of meaning: "human spontaneity always projects itself towards something. The psychoanalyst discovers a meaning even in abortive acts and attacks of hysteria" (Beauvoir, 1976, 25). Human beings populate the world with meaning, and this meaning is passed on from generation to generation through the process of childhood and socialization, both of which assume paramount importance in her mature thought. It is the task of each individual to take up his or her place in this social nexus of meanings, and to do so in ways that reflect an individual's own unique brilliance at living. In this respect, her ethics is also classical: Beauvoir offers practical guidance on living a "good life"—but here *eudaemonia* is replaced with a struggle to attain a justification that can never be complete, and which again comes from Others as much as it comes from oneself. And she cannot honestly offer any abstract principles or ideals for living this free life; she can at best illustrate it with concrete examples.

Beauvoir's specifically philosophical work on self and Other thus ends up leading away from "typical" philosophical approaches. She criticized her own philosophical writings often and for the same reasons that she criticized philosophical systems—for being too abstract and for leading away from the real ground of thought. Literature and autobiography were more able to show the genuine human existence, as were her more "specific" analyses of such experiences as gender and old age.

Her analyses of these phenomena arise out of her belief that individual freedoms living in a world devoid of absolutes will produce conflict and the denial of the freedom of some by others. Indeed, she shares with Sartre and Heidegger some

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notion of inauthentic living or bad faith. In her scheme, people fall into bad faith or dishonesty when they try to hold onto a particular way of living or value as absolute, typically out of fear or anxiety. The tendency toward this kind of life builds itself into the very structure of human consciousness and freedom: as beings without a determinate nature, the struggle to maintain meaning and justification falls into a degenerated state of allowing an external absolute to determine our existence.[4] Only individual human effort, supported by the freedom of others, can prevent this, but that means we can look only to ourselves and to others for success. It also means that, paradoxically, failure is the very condition necessitating success and for this reason Beauvoir eschews any utopian ideals: complete harmonizing of wills is neither possible nor desirable.

The perspective she opens up thus finds that oppression is the greatest evil that can be named—the denial of one's freedom by another:

> Only man can be an enemy for man; only he can rob him of the meaning of his acts and his life because it also belongs to him alone to confirm it in its existence, to recognize it in actual fact as freedom. . . . . if [other men] keep me below the level which they have conquered and on the basis of which new conquests will be achieved, then they are cutting me off from the future; they are changing me into a thing. (Beauvoir 1976, 82)

Beauvoir's concern with this particular human evil stretches across the entirety of her career. From her young worries about the ill effects of the repressive structures of the Catholic Church, through her ethics, and on to her mature discussions of gender, race, class, and age as social locations fraught with oppression and inequality.

This work on oppression, particularly the groundbreaking discussion of gender in her chef d'oeuvre, *The Second Sex,* is among her most famous, but it is important to see the deep connections between this work and her overall philosophical project. We must see just *how* it is also philosophy, in other words. Beauvoir's view that any individual's freedom can only be realized in relation to another means that the distorted structures of socialization, like those of gender, consign much of humanity to an imperfect realization of their freedom and their own selves. While this is obvious for women or racial minorities who live under the yoke of domination, Beauvoir maintains that oppressive structures require bad faith on the part of the oppressors as well, and so distort all human living. The initially abstract discussions of bad faith and the lack of genuine human freedom in the earlier work becomes explicit, concrete explanations of how humans refuse the freedom that defines them, and refuse it in ways that produce inequalities and deformations across all of society.

Some might brand this later work as "less philosophical" because it is less "universal," but Beauvoir, in fact, turns this criticism around. Just as she rejects the pretensions of system builders for freezing the fluidity of living experience, so she deliberately turns away from the idea that a universal human knowledge can be found and that a universal human condition is the object philosophers seek to

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describe. Even the most basic descriptions of human experience, discovered by her phenomenologically trained companions, contain unacknowledged distortions and blind spots because they neglect to see human existence as *gendered*. Since there could be no real universal human experience or knowledge, philosophy begins with concrete particularity and must stay at this level if it is not to falsify itself. Although not a system builder, Beauvoir's methods and subject matter remain remarkably consistent and consonant, and also a testament to doing philosophy in a way that never denies ambiguity but allows it to appear irreducibly.

BEAUVOIR AND WESTERN THOUGHT

True to the stated desire to place Beauvoir in a dialogue with the rich traditions of Western philosophy from her past, present, and future, this collection presents twelve original essays. The authors trace a historical trajectory of Beauvoir's engagement with philosophers from the past, her dialogue with her contemporary milieu and her impact on later thinkers.

Beginning with Beauvoir's relationship to ancient Greek philosophy is a fitting place to open up any historical treatment of Beauvoir's thought. Exploring an unexpected connection between Beauvoir and Plato, in "The Literary Grounding of Metaphysics: Beauvoir and Plato on Philosophical Fiction," Shannon M. Mussett writes on the theme of metaphysical fiction. Providing an in-depth analysis of Beauvoir's essay, "Literature and Metaphysics," Mussett applies Beauvoir's study of philosophy and literature to Plato's *Phaedrus*. Teasing out a number of key elements of the metaphysical novel—such as the emphasis on the ambiguous nature of experience, the *activity* of system building over the presentation of a completed system, and a focus on lived embodiment as the ground for systematic and scientific truth—Mussett finds Plato to be a model of the kind of philosophical fiction that Beauvoir advocates as the highest expression of both metaphysics *and* literature. Mussett argues that: "Given the significance of philosophical literature to Beauvoir's corpus, Plato becomes a central figure in understanding what her existentialism seeks to accomplish in its stated aim to disclose the singular and finite texture of existence." The interpretative approach provided by Mussett's treatment of Beauvoir opens up a reading not only of the *Phaedrus*, but also of any Platonic dialogue depicting robust descriptions of character, setting, plot, and myth.

Sally J. Scholz presents an intriguing connection between Beauvoir and Rousseau on the role of festivals in their respective philosophies. In "Existence, Freedom, and the Festival: Rousseau and Beauvoir," Scholz investigates the commitments between the individual and his or her community as revealed in these temporary yet recurrent events. Not only do Rousseau and Beauvoir share a belief in the significance of the festival in understanding the relationship between the members of the community to each other and to the whole, both philosophers share the belief that the festival embodies freedom. Scholz demonstrates how for Rousseau and Beauvoir, "festivals illustrate our most vibrant human characteristics—those we

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embrace as well as those we scorn—while also simply providing a space for communal celebration." As rare sites of exuberant merriment and social self-reflection, festivals honor our freedom as well as serve as vehicles to uncover and even remedy social inequities according to the philosophies of both Beauvoir and Rousseau.

William S. Wilkerson's "A Different Kind of Universality: Beauvoir and Kant on Universal Ethics," traces out the complex relationship between Kantian ethics and Beauvoir's own ethics. While Beauvoir disavowed the Kantian aspects of her own thought, they nonetheless both articulate an ethic of autonomy that sees obligation arising from the very fact of human freedom. Yet, they differ significantly: Kant argues that this human freedom is inherently rational; Beauvoir sees human freedom originating in our very lack of a predetermined nature. As a consequence, no singular moral principle can guide human living, and her ethics thus turns out to be explicitly anti-universal. Wilkerson writes that "Beauvoir does not solve the problem of conflicting freedoms in a higher universality; she only shows how it arises and offers practical advice for living with it." However, Beauvoir can still be said to have a kind of universality; rather than the "spatial" universal that Kant portrays in which all individuals are equally and always already obligated, Beauvoir describes a temporal universality that requires individuals to continually will their own ambiguity as a positive fact about themselves.

In "Simone de Beauvoir and the Marquis de Sade: Contesting the Logic of Sovereignty and the Politics of Terror and Rape," Debra Bergoffen portrays the ambiguity of Beauvoir's thought with respect to the person and thought of the Marquis de Sade. On the one hand, Beauvoir sees in Sade an authentic recognition of the difficulties of intersubjectivity; on the other hand, she is repelled by Sade's own view of sovereignty which denies a fully human and free status to individuals (despite Sade's own protestations about the illegitimate sovereignty of the state). Bergoffen writes, "the logic which circumscribes the possibility of being an individual in Sade's world by making it a matter of class privilege or terrorist power operates today when certain peoples claim the right and use their power to expel others from the sphere of the human." With this, she masterfully connects the discussion of Sade with Beauvoir's later writing on the Boupacha case and the current use of terror and rape as tools of war and conquest. Bergoffen shows how Beauvoir's reading of Sade remains relevant today by providing us with an embodied standard for condemning sovereignty, terror, and rape.

The chapter by William L. McBride, "Beauvoir and Marx," considers the relationship of Beauvoir's thought to that of Marx. Noting that there are relatively few references to Marx and Marxism in her published writings, McBride nevertheless shows that Beauvoir's understanding of Marx was deep and accurate. More importantly, McBride shows the curious contradiction in her relationship with Marx. Her thought in *The Second Sex* is indebted to Marx's democratic idea of a society of equals, and she sees Marx as sympathetic to the oppression of women. Typically, as McBride shows, Beauvoir defends Marx, even if she retains a critical distance. Conversely, the very thought and direction of *The Second Sex* ends up radically

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transforming and resituating Marxist thought. By showing both the validity of the existential-phenomenological approach for understanding oppression, and also the necessity of thinking about gender as a world-historical fact on the same level as class, Beauvoir's work shows the limits of a Marxist approach that thinks only in terms of class and what emerges "from *The Second Sex* and the vast intellectual movement that it ultimately generated was in fact no longer the Marxism of Marx."

In "Saving Time: Temporality, Recurrence, and Transcendence in Beauvoir's Nietzschean Cycles," Elaine P. Miller unearths a deep association between Beauvoir and Nietzsche on the centrality of willing. Specifically, Miller focuses on the way that Beauvoir utilizes a Nietzschean conception of willing through time as a way to both critique the confinement of women to immanence as well as to show the possibilities of escaping the cyclic time of housework and domestic life in general. The repetitive and alienating time of labor in Marx reappears in Beauvoir's analysis of woman's confinement to mostly uncreative work. Avoiding the pitfalls of indifference and fanaticism, Nietzsche's conception of the eternal return provides Beauvoir with a positive model of repetition and a way out of this cycle of immanence. This view of transcendence, Miller argues, "is a self-surpassing that takes place firmly within this existence, and one that will always give rise to further self-overcomings." As such, Beauvoir reiterates the fundamental insight of Zarathustra by transforming all "it was" into "thus I willed it" through the artful transformation out of immanence and into transcendence.

"Beauvoir and Husserl: An Unorthodox Approach to *The Second Sex*," by Sara Heinämaa, takes up the question of the body in Beauvoir's thought in relation to both Husserl and the phenomenological tradition more generally. Heinämaa shows that Beauvoir's approach to the body and gender in *The Second Sex* is more radical than might be thought. Beauvoir does not just reject masculine standards for understanding women; she shows instead that there are no gender-neutral understandings or standards that could be used to think about human existence. Hence, Beauvoir's contributions to the phenomenology of human existence consist not just in "adding" the perspective of women but most importantly in showing how both men's and women's existence is misunderstood because of gender bias. Beauvoir's "discourse on feminine experience implies fundamental claims about human existence," and, Heinämaa argues, "by developing this discourse further we can question certain dominant ideas of 20th century phenomenology of embodiment." She concludes by showing how pregnant embodiment causes us to rethink many of the common understandings of how the body is lived.

Margaret A. Simons provides striking evidence of the influence that Henri Bergson had on Beauvoir's early philosophical development in the paper, "Beauvoir and Bergson: A Question of Influence." Continuing her work on the recently compiled and translated student diaries, Simons shows that despite Beauvoir's autobiographical protestations against being a kind of "female Bergson," she was in fact quite captivated by Bergsonian philosophy long before her introduction to thinkers such as Hegel, Marx, Sartre, or Husserl. As a result, her theories of

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intersubjectivity, freedom, and bad faith were initially developed in communication with the Bergsonian ideas of the social self and the deep self, intuition, and the importance of literature to philosophy. Simons notes, "Beauvoir's autobiographical erasure of her early enthusiasm for Bergson's philosophy is part of a wider autobiographical erasure of her work in philosophy," which has been a consistent problem in Beauvoir scholarship. Even though Beauvoir later distances herself from Bergson, his obvious influence, as discovered in Simons' work in the diaries, allows us to contextualize this erasure within the larger question of Beauvoir as a philosopher. With this in mind, Simons concludes with an analysis Beauvoir's early fiction, *When Things of the Spirit Come First* and *She Came to Stay*, reading them through the lens of key Bergsonian ideas.

In "Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty: Philosophers of Ambiguity," Gail Weiss discusses the centrality of ambiguity to both of these philosophers. Although Weiss notes that both consider ambiguity to be among their central concepts, she nicely displays the different use each thinker made of ambiguity. For Merleau-Ponty, ambiguity fundamentally names the indeterminacy in the field of our perception. Since perception is our most basic and primary hold on the world, this ambiguity ramifies throughout the whole of our existence, into or conceptual understandings and even our freedom. As Weiss shows, Beauvoir acknowledges this ambiguity by focusing her discussion on the ambiguity of our desire to exist and to be. We are always caught, Beauvoir argues, between a desire to disclose a world in all its ambiguity, and a desire to trap being in a singular project that denies ambiguity. Yet, this does not mean that we can escape the desire to avoid ambiguity; rather it is "in affirming the competing desires that produce the failure, that I succeed existentially and ethically in assuming the ambiguity of my existence."

Erin McCarthy's chapter, "From Beauvoir to Irigaray: Making Meaning out of Maternity," explores the connection between Beauvoir and Irigaray on the issue reproduction. Noting the bind feminists face in discussing maternity because of the historical weight of women's confinement to their biological bodies, McCarthy finds that both Beauvoir and Irigaray offer us a way to approach maternity as liberatory—even if a woman does not bear any biological children—and worthy of celebration. Although both feminists offer views to support maternity as a positive experience of embodiment, McCarthy argues that Irigaray takes us further than Beauvoir, who found the myth of maternity to be a particularly virulent force in women's oppression. Thus, as McCarthy informs us, "where Beauvoir seeks to escape the myth of maternity through first exposing and then rejecting it, Irigaray embraces the maternal as a metaphor" insofar as woman's becoming is always in flux and full of the possibilities of creative movement. As such, a characterization of women that has long served as a site of historical oppression gives way to a positive form of embodiment and transcendence.

Ann V. Murphy's chapter, "Ambiguity and Precarious Life: Tracing Beauvoir's Legacy in the Work of Judith Butler," begins by addressing Beauvoir's often troubled acceptance in philosophical circles and popular culture. Briefly acknowledging

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Beauvoir's influence on Butler's theory of gender performativity, the main focus of Murphy's article surrounds Butler's more recent theory of corporeal vulnerability. Murphy argues "that Butler's recent philosophy of vulnerability—couched in the language of dispossession and precariousness—is deeply resonant with Beauvoir's own thinking on the ambiguity that accompanies all human action to the degree that it is haunted, permanently, by the possibility of violence." Murphy expands our understanding of Beauvoir's influence on Butler in the latter's development of not only the notions of vulnerability, but also precariousness, interdependency, and their social and ethical implications. Carefully studying Beauvoir's formulation of ambiguity alongside Butler's notion of precariousness, Murphy discovers many previously unexplored correlations between these two thinkers along the lines of violence, responsibility, and the obfuscation of the fragility of the human condition.

The final chapter of the collection, "True Philosophers: Beauvoir and bell" illuminates not only Beauvoir's importance to contemporary philosophy but the way in which philosophers speak to each other across time and space. As a contemporary feminist who continues to impact culture in profound ways, bell hooks provides an essay which serves as both an extension of the historical treatment of Beauvoir's thought, as well as a disruption of the very notion of canonical thinking. Unsettling the boundaries of thinking generally, hooks works both within and outside of traditional Western philosophy in her corpus and this essay is no different. In many ways, hooks's own strategy to write on the margins illuminates how Beauvoir, too, was a part the Western philosophical tradition, as well one of its greatest twentieth-century critics. In her only sustained treatment of Beauvoir's philosophy to date, hooks writes of the profound impact that Beauvoir's philosophy and autobiography had on her as she moved from the segregated South of her childhood, through her college education, and into her status as independent thinker and writer. As hooks notes, Beauvoir's "life, her work, was vital to my survival and personal growth for she was the one female intellectual, thinker/writer who had lived fully the life of the mind as I longed to live it." Regardless of the fact that hooks and Beauvoir offer fundamentally opposed positions on gender, their shared dedication to the philosophical life and feminist movement unite them in surprising and moving ways. hooks's writing stands as a testament to the profound impact that Beauvoir has on contemporary philosophy as well as confirms the continued relevance and power of contemporary feminist scholarship.

This collection reveals the complexity and depth of Beauvoir's relationship to Western philosophy. Not only was Beauvoir a revolutionary thinker on the issues of gender, age, and oppression, she was deeply committed to dialoguing with the rich traditions that educated her throughout her life. Her work is a testament to the achievements of the kind of philosophy that relentlessly challenges itself and in so doing, opens up radically new pathways of thinking. As every author in this collection illustrates, Beauvoir is a force that remains relevant not only to the study of the history of philosophy, but also to contemporary and future advances in philosophical discovery.

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NOTES

1. This passage can also be found in Beauvoir 1959, 344. See also Le Doeuff 1991, 136.
2. See Simons 1999 for one of many rich discussions of Beauvoir's philosophical development as a student.
3. With the recent publication of Beauvoir's student diaries (Beauvoir 2006), her profound understanding and admiration of a surprising number of philosophers has been made all the more apparent.
4. Beauvoir's fascination with the allure of the absolute is a central theme not only of her philosophical work, but her literary writings as well. See Mussett 2005.

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