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INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN *THE SECOND SEX*: BETWEEN PHENOMENOLOGY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

Erika Ruonakoski

This chapter analyzes Simone de Beauvoir's way of combining different theoretical frameworks, in particular, those of phenomenology and psychoanalysis. To elucidate the nature of Beauvoirian interdisciplinarity, I will examine Beauvoir's discussion of penis envy and her application of Helene Deutsch's views. I will argue that the combination of psychoanalysis and phenomenology in *The Second Sex* brings about an inner tension, of which those interested in applying Beauvoir's interdisciplinary approach should be aware.

1. Introduction

Simone de Beauvoir's thoughts and works were humanist in more than one sense of the word. First, she was a specialist in one of the human sciences, thanks to her training as a philosopher. Second, her philosophical position could be characterized as one based on existentialist and atheistic humanism. This form of humanism does not celebrate the glory of the human being as an abstract entity but puts its faith in singular human beings, who are seen as the ultimate source of all values (Beauvoir, 1945a; 1976; 2003; 2004a; Sartre, 1965, pp. 55–56; 1970, pp. 93–94). Third, Beauvoir also followed in the footsteps of the Renaissance humanists in the sense that she had a profound interest in different fields of research and in the intricacies of the human experience. She was an avid reader who did not hesitate to apply research from disciplines other than philosophy when this research appeared to be suited to her purposes. She was always reaching toward the other humanities and beyond, coming up with examples from ancient Greece and Rome, investigating works of fiction, and looking into the new psychological and sociological discoveries so that she could form a more nuanced picture of human existence.

This chapter examines whether Beauvoir's use of other disciplines is unproblematic or whether we can detect a tension or an incongruity between her phenomenological-existentialist point of departure and her application of other disciplines, particularly that of psychoanalysis. How are we to understand the interdisciplinarity of Beauvoir's approach? The answers to these questions are relevant not only to historians of ideas or Beauvoir scholars, but also to all those interested in her method and those who consider applying her method to their work.

Within the humanities, both phenomenology and psychoanalysis are influential—though not dominant—theoretical frameworks. Both have developed tools for investigating the human experience, and human experience is one of the central concerns of humanist scholars. The ways in which phenomenology and psychoanalysis describe experience are not identical though; in some instances, they are not even compatible.

Nonetheless, Beauvoir fearlessly attempted to use these frameworks side-by-side in her magnum opus, *The Second Sex*. While the unabridged English translation of the work (2010) appeared as one book that consisted of two major sections, "Facts and Myths" and "Lived Experience", the French original was published in two separate volumes, *Le deuxième sexe, tome 1 : Les faits et les mythes* (The second sex, vol. I: Facts and myths) and *Le deuxième sexe, tome 2 : L'expérience vécue*, (The second sex, vol. II: Lived experience), both in 1949. These two volumes exhibit somewhat different attitudes toward psychoanalysis. The first volume criticizes different disciplines, among them psychoanalysis, for their tendency to explain human behavior in a deterministic manner and therefore, without a serious effort to accommodate the aspect of freedom within them. The second volume, however, focuses on psychoanalytic case studies and actually draws from them to describe and explicate girls' and women's experiences. Thus, in the second volume, Beauvoir's attitude toward psychoanalysis became more ambivalent and her general approach more interdisciplinary in the sense that psychoanalytic descriptions contribute to her conception of the variations within women's experiences and how these experiences can be interpreted.

I will begin my discussion of Beauvoir's approach by briefly examining her philosophical background and the demands that the phenomenological method entails. Then I will demonstrate how phenomenology and psychoanalysis meet in Beauvoir's conception of the body and how she describes subjectivity and the formation of meaning in a historical context with the help of these approaches.

To elucidate Beauvoir's use of psychoanalysis, I will investigate one of the key examples discussed in "Lived Experience," namely penis envy. Using this example, Beauvoir illuminates the role of freedom in meaning formation and illustrates how bodily differences can sometimes turn into *signs* of inferiority and superiority, even if they cannot as such create hierarchical relationships between groups of people.

In this connection, I will discuss the problems in Beauvoir's assimilation of psychoanalysis. I will suggest that some of these problems originate from her shifting from the phenomenological attitude toward the so-called natural attitude, whereas other problems have their source in her ambivalent relationship to psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch's somewhat reactionary ideas on the psychology of women. I will go beyond a discussion of the birth of penis envy to girls' later experiences of their genitals, namely the "eroticization" of the vagina in first intercourse, which was presupposed by both Deutsch and Beauvoir. I will finish by considering different ways of understanding and applying Beauvoirian interdisciplinarity: one is more rigorously phenomenological and the other more freely combines elements from different disciplines.

2. Phenomenology as Beauvoir's Point of Departure

The Second Sex is an investigation of the constitution of woman as a secondary and derivative human being. It discusses a wide selection of material from fields as diverse as biology, psychology, history, sociology, and anthropology. Some have argued, however, that Beauvoir's most fundamental theoretical framework is the phenomenological-existentialist tradition of philosophy (Heinämaa, 2003). I will not contest this interpretation, although it is equally true that the book incorporates theoretical influences from other philosophical sources as well, most notably from G. W. F. Hegel and Karl Marx. *The Second Sex* is a consistently existentialist book in that it speaks about and for freedom and against acts of bad faith, through which the subject attempts to escape freedom and oppress others. Yet, whether *The Second Sex* is *consistently phenomenological* is still open to debate.

Applying the Husserlian phenomenological method famously involves putting scientific, religious, and everyday claims about "how things are" into "brackets." This means that the truth of these claims is neither denied nor accepted; the focus is elsewhere, on how things appear to the perceiving, experiencing body-consciousness. Adopting *the phenomenological attitude*, the philosopher looks into "how things appear" (for instance, how one's body appears to oneself) instead of positing them as such and such (for instance, positing that all women are narcissists). The latter attitude is called *the natural attitude*. This attitude is "natural" in the sense that it characterizes most of our interactions with the world: things appear to us as existing and laden with values and uses. Edmund Husserl claims that apart from phenomenology, which is "the rigorous science," the sciences operate within the natural attitude (1976, pp. 48–53). The question central to my investigation is whether Beauvoir consistently adheres to the phenomenological attitude or occasionally adopts the natural attitude.

There is a lot of evidence to support the idea that Beauvoir's point of departure is, indeed, phenomenological. For instance, in "Lived Experience"

Beauvoir describes how girls' and women's bodies *appear* to them. In *Facts and Myths*, she explicitly states that she adopts the position shared by Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and with it, their conception of the body: the body is a situation and as such "our grasp of the world and the outline of our projects" (2010, p. 46; 2008a, p. 75; see also Heinämaa, 2003, p. 25). According to Beauvoir, the world "appears different to us depending on how it is grasped" (2010, p. 44; 2008a, p. 73), that is, depending on the body. Therefore, the question of the body is crucial—but not that of the body as merely a physical object but that of the lived body. In Beauvoir's account, one of the ambiguities of the human existence is that the body is both "a thing of the world and a point of view on this world" (2010, p. 24; 2008a, p. 42). This formulation is quite close to that of Husserl, who argues that the body is the zero-point of orientation to the world and yet also an object in the world (1952, pp. 158–160).

An interesting similarity can be found between *The Second Sex* and Merleau-Ponty's *La phénoménologie de la perception* (1998, *Phenomenology of perception*). In her review of Merleau-Ponty's book, Beauvoir compliments his phenomenological elucidation of the lived experience. She writes:

Merleau-Ponty does not invent a system; he starts from established facts and he demonstrates that it is impossible to account for them on an experimental plane. Instead they imply an entire relationship between man and the world, and it is this relationship that he patiently brings out. (2004c, pp. 163–164; 1945b, p. 367)

Curiously enough, this procession from "facts" to the lived experience is reflected also in the two volumes of *The Second Sex*: the biological, psychological, and historical "facts" (*faits*) about women are dealt with in the first volume, "Facts and Myths," while the lived experience of girls and women is described in the second volume, "Lived Experience." Moreover, Beauvoir explicitly argues in "Facts and Myths" that the meaning of human phenomena cannot be found in scientific facts alone—they need to be considered in the light of the human existence. This is in accordance with what she considers to be Merleau-Ponty's approach.

In comparison to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, however, Beauvoir articulates the historical and embodied constraints of lived meanings more clearly and in a more detailed manner. Psychoanalytic theories and case studies are of help to her in this endeavor. Another difference between the philosophies of Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty is that Merleau-Ponty aspires to describe the universal structures of human experience, even using pathological cases to investigate these structures, while Beauvoir is more interested in *questioning* what was considered universal in reference to women. In this sense, her project is critical rather than constructive. However, although Beauvoir questions the normality of some psychic formations, for example

female masochism, she does think that a human condition exists that we all share: each of us experiences the ambiguity of being both a privileged subject and an object to other such subjects; a unique individual and yet only one of the numerous individuals in a community; embodied yet also conscious; mortal yet aware of it; a being of both spirit and matter (see 1976; 2003).

Thus far, nothing contradicts the view that *The Second Sex* is unreservedly phenomenological. Nevertheless, to better understand the matter, it is necessary to analyze Beauvoir's way of treating "the data" provided by different disciplines. We will be able to note that while Beauvoir rejects the determinism embedded in certain explanatory models, she does not abandon these models altogether.

3. Against Determinism

"Facts and Myths" begins with a description of the ways in which biology, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism explain women's inferior status and "femininity." The functioning of the female body, including the chromosomal structure and hormones and phenomena that typically appear at various times of women's lives, such as ovulation, menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause, are all objects of investigation in the science of biology. Beauvoir argues, however, that biologists tend to explain women's lives in terms of passivity and determinism. For this reason, they fail to recognize important aspects of women's existence.

One aspect of women's existence is historicity. In Beauvoir's view, historical materialism rightly proposes that humankind is not an animal species but a historical reality. As such, it appropriates nature instead of passively submitting to it. From this point of view, a woman is not merely a sexual organism, for her consciousness of herself reflects a situation that is dependent on the economic structure of the society and on the level of technological development in that society. According to the Engelsian interpretation of the history of family, the invention of new tools after the discovery of copper and iron gave rise to private property, the property of *men*, who came to possess land, slaves, and women. Nevertheless, Beauvoir criticizes Engels's view that the history of women essentially depends on the history of technology: it is not enough to consider the material possibilities of women to explain their singular situation (2010, pp. 62–63, 67–68; 2008b, pp. 98–100, 106–108).

Beauvoir also argues that materialism fails to acknowledge the unrestrained character of sexuality. In matters of sexuality, psychoanalysis has more explicative power. In addition, she applauds psychoanalysis's focus on *the lived body* instead of on *the body as an object*. Psychoanalysis holds that "no factor intervenes in psychic life without taking on a human meaning"; for this reason, Beauvoir claims that psychoanalysis is more progressive than psychophysiology (2010, p. 49; 2008a, p. 80). This view is very close to that

of Merleau-Ponty, who praises the ability of psychoanalysis to account for meaning formation and argues that phenomenology and psychoanalysis are compatible (1998, pp. 184–187; 2012, pp. 160–163). In a similar manner, Sartre underlines that both psychoanalysis and existential psychoanalysis look for the meaning of action (2001, p. 615).

Beauvoir writes, “Freudianism’s value derives from the fact that the existent is a body: the way he experiences himself as a body in the presence of other bodies concretely translates his existential situation” (2010, p. 49, 68; 2008b, p. 107). This kind of statement may account for the view that her fundamental idea of explaining sex in terms of the lived body *comes from* psychoanalysis (for example, Kristeva, 2011, p. 84). However, in “Facts and Myths” Beauvoir’s attitude toward psychoanalysis remains chiefly critical; the role of psychoanalysis is clearly secondary in comparison to existential-phenomenological philosophy. It is more plausible to interpret Beauvoir’s comments about the lived body and psychoanalysis as meaning that both phenomenology and Freudianism have discovered the same thing: the significance of embodiment. Beauvoir appears to regard the phenomenological and psychoanalytical ways of dealing with embodiment as largely convergent and compatible (2010, p. 49, 68; 2008b, p. 107). Yet, in “Facts and Myths” she points out that the failings of psychoanalysis are similar to those of biological explanations and historical materialism: all these explanatory models fail to consider their findings from the overall perspective of existence, which alone can give them meaning (2010, p. 68; 2008a, pp. 107–108).

Beauvoir also presents us with other criticisms of psychoanalytic theories. Many of these criticisms are similar to those that Sartre had proposed: at the end of *Being and Nothingness* (1943), he had rejected psychoanalysis as such and had formulated the basic ideas of *existential psychoanalysis*, which appears to have influenced Beauvoir (see also Sartre, 1947; 1971; 2011; Beauvoir, 1955; 1966).

According to Sartre’s critique, traditional psychoanalysis operates only in the past: an individual’s behavior symbolizes the past. Existential psychoanalysis, on the other hand, sees the human being as always oriented toward the future and as an agent of choice (2001, pp. 503–504). Similarly, Beauvoir argues that in psychoanalysis, “the individual is always explained through his link to the past and not with respect to a future toward which he projects himself” (2010, p. 60; 2008a, pp. 95–96). She also declares that the problems of psychoanalysis lie in its reductionism and inability to take choice into account (2010, pp. 55–56; 2008a, pp. 88–91). Most famously, perhaps, she challenges the view of some psychoanalysts that anatomy determines how a girl views herself, others, and the world, and she claims that psychoanalysis describes girls and women only as distortions of the male model (2010, pp. 60–61; 2008a, pp. 96–97; cf. Roudinesco, 2011, p. 34). Like Sartre, Beauvoir rejects the idea of the unconscious and replaces it with the concept of bad faith,

which, up to a point, transforms psychological problems into questions of choice (see Roudinesco, 2011, p. 39).

Beauvoir's belief in the power of conscious choices is not as firm as Sartre's, though (see Kruks, 1992, pp. 97–102; Heinämaa, 2009, p. 18; cf. Merleau-Ponty, 1998, pp. 496–520; 2012, pp. 458–483). She admits that in some cases, one may be too oppressed to even think critically about the nature of one's situation or to see what one's choices are. However, as soon as one has come to acknowledge these, one has to choose between authenticity and bad faith; either one works for collective liberation or lets oneself be lulled into a state of complicity. Therefore, the fundamental challenge for the individual is not recovering from neurosis but taking responsibility for one's actions.

In short, Beauvoir takes the idea of the lived body from phenomenology and answers the question, "How do girls and women live their bodies?" with the help of psychoanalytic case studies and excerpts from the works of women writers. She dwells on the concrete experiences of women, charting the development of the female body, its bloody and painful cycles, as well as its inevitable decay, using psychoanalytic case studies to demonstrate the infinite plurality of women's experience and the meanings related to the female and male bodies. Through the multitude of examples she discusses, it becomes evident that the human experience and the meanings that evolve within it are in constant flux.

However, to think of psychoanalysis merely as a provider of examples would be simplistic, for along with the descriptions of women's experience, Beauvoir also seems to adopt general ways of interpreting this experience. Her understanding of family dynamics—the jealousies, the early attachment and symbiosis with the mother, the meaning of weaning—is based on psychoanalytic literature. To further elucidate the role of psychoanalysis in *The Second Sex*, I will examine Beauvoir's view of female embodiment in reference to Deutsch's two-volume work, *The Psychology of Women* (1946; 1971).

4. Deutsch and Beauvoir on Femininity, Penis Envy, and Genital Trauma

"Lived Experience" describes how girls come to live their bodies and form meanings pertaining to these bodies, and how grown women carry on or reject these meanings. Each girl or woman does this in her own way, according to her individual background and inclinations, and yet in a socially shared and restrictive situation that bears on the bodily possibilities. According to Beauvoir, one of the meanings related to "femininity" and "woman" is "lack": women are perceived as lacking in comparison to men. Beauvoir argues that the conception of women as secondary and lacking human beings repeats itself throughout the history; yet in her view, the discourse of psychoanalysis plays a special role in theorizing this lack.

Beauvoir appears to regard Deutsch's *The Psychology of Women* as a reliable description of women's experiences: she cites its case studies in a benevolent manner in "Lived Experience" and even repeats many of its literary examples. Her avoidance of open critique is surprising, considering that Deutsch advocates the traditional, bourgeois role for women that Beauvoir set out to challenge. Nevertheless, she does keep a critical distance from Deutsch's ideas regarding typical "feminine" characteristics even if she does not crusade against the idea of Deutschian femininity (see Lecarme-Tabone, 2011).

Moreover, Deutsch is not totally insensitive to the fact that the women who live in different environments have different kinds of complexes as well as different kinds of experiences, but she finds these differences to be superficial: "[C]ertain feminine psychic manifestations are constant and are subject to cultural influences only to the extent that now one and now another of their aspects is intensified" (1971, p. 386). She argues that to be feminine is to be inherently masochistic and passive. By contrast, Beauvoir does not see masochism as inherent to women but as something that girls are pushed toward by a life of few choices (2010, for example, pp. 304–311; 2008b, pp. 42–51): "[T]he reason must be sought not in a mysterious feminine soul but in the child's situation" (2010, p. 311; 2008b, p. 51). Beauvoir consistently discusses women's existence in terms of future orientation and possibilities. This is a far cry from the attempts of psychoanalysts such as Deutsch to find regularities in the mixed data of clinical experience and to thereby determine the feminine character. Unlike Deutsch, Beauvoir emphasizes the social constraints that guide girls and women to accept "feminine" ways. She refrains from determining women conclusively: as long as there is oppression, the oppressed cannot live up to their potential.

To fully understand the relationship between psychoanalysis and Beauvoir's understanding of meaning formation, it is useful to examine her position, as well as that of Deutsch, on the penis envy hypothesis (see also Björk, 2011). As is well known, Sigmund Freud was the first to present this hypothesis. According to him, penis envy arises when the little girl (between three and five years of age) realizes that she has no penis. This results in resentment of the mother and a growing affection toward the father (Freud, 1981b, p. 195; 1949, p. 96; see also Hamon, 2000). Therefore, the female castration complex depends on the girl's experience that *she has already been castrated* (Freud, 1981a, p. 229; 1948, p. 522). Deutsch, on the other hand, points out that a girl of eighteen months may exhibit complete indifference at the sight of the penis. Hence, merely *seeing the penis* cannot cause penis envy. This sense of lack has to be the result of other factors (1971, p. 234, 236; see also Beauvoir, 2010, p. 288; 2008b, p. 20). According to Deutsch, penis envy is real and common enough to be considered "normal," but chronologically, it is a secondary formation and can only strengthen the impulses that derive from

the girl's earlier experience of her body (1971, p. 238; cf. Horney, 1923, pp. 25–26).

Beauvoir starts her discussion of penis envy by emphasizing the various forms it may take: "Most accept today that penis envy manifests itself in very different ways depending on the individual case" (2010, p. 287; 2008b, p. 19). She then endeavors to demonstrate how girls in different circumstances end up experiencing the genital difference between themselves and boys in varying manners. In early childhood, girls can be totally indifferent toward the penis, or they can even experience disgust toward this "anomaly," this "growth," or "vague hanging thing like nodules, teats and warts," argues Beauvoir, following Deutsch (2010, p. 288; 2008b, p. 20).

Beauvoir points out that the envy the girl experiences may be quite superficial because it is merely one envy among many. Similarly, Deutsch argues that the little girl may envy the penis just because children have a general tendency toward envy. In many cases, the envy is practically oriented: the penis is practical for urinating (Beauvoir, 2010, p. 288; 2008b, pp. 20–21; Deutsch, 1971, pp. 236–238). On the other hand, Beauvoir argues that directing and governing a stream of water means "carrying off a little victory over natural laws" (2010, p. 289; 2008b, p. 21). Echoing Deutsch, she explains that girls think they may have had a penis, and that they have been made girls through parental intervention: the penis has been cut off. Again, in unison with Deutsch, Beauvoir argues that for this "castration" to become a source of frustration, an earlier and deeper sense of lack is required (2010, pp. 291–292; 2008b, p. 25; cf. Freud, 1981b, p. 195; 1949, p. 96). Deutsch writes and Beauvoir quotes her, "The girl's discovery of her anatomic difference from the boy is for her a confirmation of a lack she previously felt herself—its rationalization, so to speak" (Deutsch, 1971, p. 237; cf. Beauvoir, 2010, p. 292; 2008b, p. 26).

While both Deutsch and Beauvoir agree that penis envy is only a secondary formation in the girl's psyche and not the original reason for her experience of lack, their explanations for the primary lack differ. Deutsch still attributes this experience of lack to the girl's inevitable psychological-anatomical processes, namely *the female castration complex*, or, as she prefers to call it, *the genital trauma*. According to Deutsch, penis envy is only one of the manifestations of the genital trauma, never its primary cause. In the phallic or clitoris phase of her development, the little girl needs a genital outlet for her aggressions. Deutsch suspects that, as an organ, the clitoris is not an adequate outlet for the little girl's genital urges, and therefore, the girl gives up masturbation, subsequently claiming that she had a penis but no longer has one. (Deutsch, 1971, pp. 227–229.) Now the little girl finds herself *organless* and "the inhibited activity undergoes a turn toward passivity," (ibid., p. 229). Unfortunately, the passive genital organ, namely the vagina, becomes available to the individual much later. Hence, the girl's lack has a

twofold character: she deems the clitoris inadequate and the vagina does not exist for her yet. According to Deutsch, the individual manifestations of the genital trauma vary, but the trauma itself is based on anatomy and instincts and is, therefore, transhistorical (*ibid.*, pp. 229–230; cf. Horney, 1993, pp. 214–233).

Beauvoir does not discuss this fundamental discrepancy between Deutsch's view and hers, nor does she point out that in the end, her position is quite similar Karen Horney's (see Roudinesco, 2011, p. 38). In terms of scholarly writing, Beauvoir's attitude can be criticized as offhand. Yet in the context of her general project, it appears justified: she seems to be more interested in providing an overall description of how the body acquires meanings than explicating in detail how her position differs from or resembles that of other thinkers. She piggybacks on Deutsch's description of penis envy as long as it does not contradict her own philosophy of freedom, and when this is no longer the case, she smoothly turns toward other theorists.

Unlike Beauvoir, Horney openly challenges Deutsch's views on the psychology of women. She argues that Deutsch's anatomical reductionism is unfounded, and that evidence for Deutsch's claims on the universality of masochism in women is weak: it consists solely of the stories of some neurotic women and girls in a patriarchal society (1993, p. 216). According to Horney, social and cultural factors may well explain women's experiences of impotency, inadequacy, and envy (for example, 1993, pp. 232–233). Despite her discretion toward Deutsch, Beauvoir shares this idea. For her, the original reason for girls' experience of lack is their lesser value within their families and in the society. In this scenario, penis envy and the castration complex become contingent matters.

Beauvoir holds that even if there is no penis envy, the absence of penis does play a role in the little girl's destiny, namely in the process of alienation. Possibly influenced by the theories of Jacques Lacan, Henri Wallon, and Gaétan Gatian de Clérambault, she embraces the idea that the child has to become the other to acquire an ego (see Roudinesco, 2011, pp. 40–42; cf. Roudinesco, 1990, p. 512). According to Beauvoir, boys learn to alienate themselves in the penis, while girls are provided with dolls and are encouraged to objectify their entire bodies, as if they too were dolls. Similarly, girls are encouraged toward passivity, while boys are not. As Beauvoir puts it, passivity is not a biological given, but a destiny imposed on women by their teachers and society (2010, pp. 292–294; 2008b, pp. 26–29; but cf. 2010, p. 391, 406; 2008b, p. 155, 176; see also Björk, 2011, 202).

How various parts of women's anatomy are lived and what kinds of meanings they acquire depends on their multifaceted historical and personal situations and on how they decide to face those situations. Beauvoir writes:

If the little girl feels powerless to satisfy her desires of masturbation or exhibition, if her parents repress her onanism, if she feels less loved or less valued than her brothers, then she will project her dissatisfaction onto the male organ. (2010, p. 292; 2008b, pp. 25–26)

In other words, little girls do not *automatically* experience the absence of a penis as a lack, although *some* girls' experience of their genitalia might become marked by a sense of lack. This happens when these girls' personal histories and the dominating values of their environment intervene in their meaning-giving processes in a specific manner.

In Beauvoir's view, a girl is not free to give her body whatever meanings she might wish: one does not originally choose one's anatomy even if one can try to change it or influence others' perception of it later in one's life. Menstruation, menopause, and the possibilities of pregnancy and of being raped are not chosen either, even if one may influence these processes and possibilities in a number of ways. Certainly there are also social factors that guide the individual experience. Through the impulses from her historical, psychological, biological, and domestic situation but also on her own initiative, the girl comes to understand the relationship between herself, women, men, and the world. The process is both passive and active, both restricted by the historical and social circumstances and subject to the questioning activity of a free agent. Thanks to the mutability of circumstances and the freedom of the subject, there is no reason why all girls and women in all eras should consider themselves inferior to men, anatomically or otherwise.

5. An Unhappy Marriage of Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis?

It appears, now, that Beauvoir's descriptions benefitted from the insights of psychoanalysts. Yet we may question whether her way of applying psychoanalytic descriptions is altogether unproblematic.

As previously mentioned, the chief function of psychoanalytical descriptions in "Lived Experience" is to elucidate the plurality and formation of women's experience. These descriptions illustrate that the course of a woman's life is not inscribed in stone, and the last part of the second volume, consisting of "The Independent Woman" and the "Conclusion," confirms this idea. In these chapters, Beauvoir elaborates on the differences between the *status quo* and the possibilities of women. In this regard, her account of the future role of the castration complex and the Oedipus complex is intriguing:

If the little girl were brought up from the first with the same demands and rewards, the same severity and freedom, as her brothers, taking part in the same studies, the same games, promised the same future, surrounded with women and men who seemed to her undoubted equals, the meanings of the castration complex and the Oedipus complex would be

profoundly modified. [...]he would not be oriented towards passivity. (Beauvoir 1988, 735.)

When this passage is compared to her statement that some, but not all, girls experience penis envy, she appears to be vacillating between questioning the necessity of psychological structures such as penis envy and the castration complex and deeming them necessary. Another option would be to read the above passage as saying that the change in the meaning of the complexes could also involve their gradual disappearance.

Even if we might be tempted to choose the last interpretation to explain away what seems to be an unpleasant inconsistency within a phenomenological framework, other passages in *The Second Sex* require our critical attention. For example, when Beauvoir describes the process of alienation in boys and girls, her approach is arguably more psychoanalytic than phenomenological: she approaches the experience of little girls and boys by positing psychological mechanisms on the basis of the behavior of some children and adults. To do this, one must step out of the sphere of appearing, hence, outside the phenomenological attitude, and into the natural one.

In addition, it appears that Beauvoir takes some of Deutsch's problematic ideas on the later developments of girls and women for granted. Even if Beauvoir's emphasis is on plurality and emancipation, in some cases, her position seems to merge with Deutsch's universalizing positions. For instance, one of the most astonishing statements of *The Second Sex*, namely that virginity is lost through a kind of rape, can be tracked back to *The Psychology of Women*. Deutsch writes: "The 'undiscovered' vagina is—in normal, favorable instances—eroticized by an act of rape" (1946, p. 79). She underlines that she does not refer here to the "puberal fantasy in which the young girl realistically desires and fears the sexual act as a rape" (ibid.).

In Deutsch's view, however, this fantasy is preparation for a milder but dynamically identical process, which manifests itself in "man's aggressive penetration" and in the "'overpowering' of the vagina and its transformation into an erogenous sexual zone" (ibid., pp. 79–80). Hence, Deutsch is more interested in the psychological dynamics of the situation than in the actual pain that the woman may feel when her hymen is torn. Even so, Deutsch also pays attention to the pain, which is supposedly inevitable: "A painful bodily injury—the breaking of the hymen and the forcible stretching and enlargement of the vagina by the penis—are the prelude to woman's first complete sexual enjoyment" (ibid., p. 81). In the first volume of *The Psychology of Women*, Deutsch also presents an evolutionary theory for the sexual act, hypothesizing that the sexual act was, for women, initially an act of violence and that it only gradually became an act of pleasure for them (1971, p. 222).

To sum up, the Deutschian view presupposes that if a woman does not have sensations in her vagina before her first intercourse, then the first inter-

course is an act of rape. Conversely, if she does have sensations in her vagina before the first intercourse, then that intercourse need not be an act of rape, because in the latter case, the woman is already an erotic subject who cannot be turned into one by an aggressive act.

Beauvoir writes in a very Deutschian vein, “The woman is penetrated and impregnated through the vagina; it becomes an erotic center only through the intervention of the male, and this always constitutes a kind of rape” (2008b, p. 147, my translation). Neither does Beauvoir contest Deutsch’s descriptions of young girls’ rape fantasies. She does underline, however, that these fantasies are only fantasies and do not presuppose a masochistic character in a girl or a woman.

By the time Beauvoir was writing *The Second Sex*, psychoanalysts such as Horney, Melanie Klein, and Josine Müller had already suggested that even little girls were likely to have sensations in their vaginas (Roudinesco, 2011, p. 35). As can be concluded from our discussion thus far, this view also contests the idea that the man simultaneously “rapes” the young girl and “erotici- zizes” her vagina. Beauvoir was aware of these alternative accounts but was not convinced by them. She writes, “some psychiatrists hold that vaginal sensitivity exists in some little girls, but this opinion is quite fanciful; anyway vaginal sensitivity would have only secondary importance” (2008b, p. 146, my translation; see Beauvoir, 2010, p. 384). By this she means that in the case of virginal girls, vaginal pleasure would be secondary to clitoral pleasure. Yet, if her goal is simply to emphasize the autonomy and importance of the clitoral system, her adoption of Deutsch’s vocabulary, which makes all young girls objects of man’s manipulative actions and their development into women man’s accomplishment, is questionable. Similar choices of words are symptomatic enough to lead us to question whether Deutsch’s idea of female masochism—the idea that Beauvoir rejects in principle—accidentally springs up here and there (for example, 2010, pp. 404–405, 415; 2008b, p. 173, 187).

The previously discussed universalizing tendencies of Deutsch’s writing reappear in Beauvoir’s description of first intercourse: as we noted, the vagina becomes an erotic center *only* through the intervention of the male. True, Beauvoir remarks at the beginning of the second volume, “‘in the present state of education and customs’ must be understood to follow most of my affirmations” (2010, p. 279; 2008b, p. 9). Nevertheless, it is doubtful that this gesture could change all her arguments with a universalistic ring into non-universalistic arguments—and I do not believe that she meant for this to happen. Yet it is clear to the reader of *The Second Sex* that her emphasis is on the multiplicity, freedom, and the possibilities of women’s existence, and that all ready-made “feminine” destinies are regarded as being fabricated in bad faith.

Another critique worth noting in this context is that according to some psychoanalysts, Beauvoir exhibits insensitivity toward, or even ignorance about, some of the finer points of the Freudian theory (Kristeva, 2011, pp. 84–85; Roudinesco, 2011, p. 37. See also Stavro, 2008, p. 11). Yet we can side

with Julia Kristeva, who thinks it unfair to take the present understanding of this theory as a criterion for evaluating Beauvoir's possible shortcomings (Kristeva, 2011, p. 85). We must bear in mind that *The Second Sex* was an important contribution to the French psychoanalytic scene of Beauvoir's time. Not only was her work the first to investigate emancipation and sexuality together, it was also the first to discuss women's sexuality in a comprehensive way in France. In addition, Beauvoir was the first to introduce the British school's discussion of female sexuality to France (Roudinesco, 1990, pp. 511–512).

Importantly, Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex*, which is well over a thousand pages, in only two years (1978, p. 196n; 1963, p. 204n). Her breathtakingly busy schedule might have contributed to some of the problems in the work. She wrote about *The Second Sex* in her memoirs:

Oh! I admit that one can criticize the style and the composition. I could easily go back and cut it down to a much more elegant work. But at the time I was discovering my ideas as I was explaining them, and that was the best I could do. (1978, p. 202; 1963, p. 210)

Beauvoir even had some specific changes in mind: she should have taken a more materialistic position in the first volume (1978, p. 204; 1963, p. 210). She says nothing, however, on phenomenological rigor. Thus, I think that although her approach had a solid background in phenomenological–existentialist philosophy, a conflation of different theories and empirical descriptions played the central role in her writing.

One way of answering the question, “How can we apply Beauvoir's approach?” would, therefore, be: “Feel free to make theoretical innovations!” This is, indeed, worthy advice for any researcher. In terms of content, however, the suggestion is empty. It may, therefore, be illuminating to consider more specific ways of practicing Beauvoirian interdisciplinarity.

6. How to Apply Beauvoir's Approach

I will now present two models that can be used when applying Beauvoir's approach to contemporary research. The first model recognizes that her approach is somewhat different from rigorous phenomenology—for one thing, she appears to accept some of the psychoanalytic theoretical constructs, at least provisionally. Accordingly, the first approach allows theoretical constructions from different disciplines to be used as long as vigilance in reference to the fundamental freedom of the subject is maintained. For instance, if we want to describe the lived experience of girls and women today, we can still try to explain this experience in terms of penis envy and the Oedipus complex or whatever happens to be the current theoretical model in psychoa-

analysis. The danger is that, if we follow this approach, we impose ready-made models on experience instead of remaining open to different possibilities.

The second model is more rigorously phenomenological and requires us to leave out the elements that appear as inconsistencies within this theoretical framework. Again, we could resort to the descriptions of experience that psychoanalysts have gathered, while setting aside the explanatory models of this experience (penis envy, the genital trauma, the Oedipus complex, narcissism, alienation). The research questions could still be quite similar to Beauvoir's: How does one's own body, and its relationship to male bodies, appear to girls and women in a particular historical situation? Now, however, the description of this experience would not be directed by the aforementioned psychoanalytic constellations. Instead, the meaning formation within different aspects of female embodiment would be investigated in a less restricted or prefigured way.

It is this second approach that Merleau-Ponty suggests we should take toward empirical descriptions: we should see them as descriptions of experience and bracket their theoretical interpretations (1995, pp. 120–121; see also Ruonakoski, 2007; 2011, p. 41). For both Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir, the idea was to examine different experiences in the larger context of existence. Yet, even for Merleau-Ponty, who articulated his theoretical point of departure more explicitly than Beauvoir did, empirical research did not provide *only* examples. *In practice*, it also suggested models for interpreting the described experience and behavior. This may be partly because the objects of empirical descriptions have been preselected. In addition, an empirical description may, as such, be misleading.

Certainly it is possible for the phenomenologist to slip away from the phenomenological attitude, which addresses the appearing of things, to the natural attitude, which posits things as such and such. But this shift from one attitude to another may not be the worst threat to the integrity of the research. A more common problem is that both scientists and philosophers have the same blind spot, due to their partly shared historical background, and for this reason they are inclined to make similar interpretations and omit similar things from their investigations. For instance, phenomenologists may examine psychoanalytic descriptions of children's behavior to transcend their own limited powers of imagining different kinds of experience. Yet, if those descriptions point in the same direction as the other variations of experience, phenomenologists may find it difficult to challenge the selection of the data and the interpretations given by psychoanalysts.

The two alternative ways of applying Beauvoir's approach to contemporary research proposed here may not look altogether different at first glance, since in both cases, the historicity and limited nature of scientific research plays a role, and questionable assumptions can be made. Yet the motivating attitude is different: In the first model, the researcher operates from within the natural attitude, relying on scientific theories as providers of knowledge of

how things are. In the second model, the researcher methodically refrains, or at least attempts to refrain, from making judgments on how things are and instead focuses on how they appear to the subject. A truly phenomenological approach to psychological descriptions, or to descriptions of any other discipline, requires bracketing the suppositions of that discipline and asking how the targeted phenomena manifest themselves in different cases.

As I pointed out at the start of this chapter, phenomenological-existentialist philosophy and psychoanalysis are both theoretical approaches applied by humanist scholars from a variety of disciplines. For many, Beauvoir's interdisciplinary approach may appear to be a useful tool, especially for those interested in both phenomenology and psychoanalysis. Her pluralist description of the sexed body-subject is particularly appealing: there are many ways of being girls or women, boys or men, or persons without a definable sex. We are our bodies.

As a person with female genitalia, I have, to some extent, different possibilities than someone with male genitalia. When reading a text, I relate to it not only according to the universal structures of experience but also according to my particular situation in the world as a female body. If I encounter another living body, the same is true: I encounter others from my own unique, historically and personally defined perspective. This perspective cannot be reduced to only my gendered position in society, since there are, of course, numerous other factors that connect and divide us in addition to differences of sex. When we think of the perspective of others—for instance, the perceptually encountered other or the writer of an ancient poem—this is again applicable: others are not merely representative of their class, historical era, or sex, but dynamic, ever-shifting situations, sources of subjective experience.

Thinkers such as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty have similar views of subjectivity, but Beauvoir was the first to discuss the question of sex to such an extent. She was also the first to incorporate such concrete and detailed descriptions of it in a philosophical account of oppression and freedom. This account is valuable in many ways, despite the criticisms presented in this chapter. Nevertheless, if and when we want to combine our own project with hers, it is important that we be aware of the inner tensions of her approach, whichever attitude we end up taking toward them.

In this chapter, I have presented roughly three kinds of tensions: (1) conservatism versus emancipation, (2) universalism versus multiplicity, and (3) the natural attitude versus the phenomenological attitude. I believe that the first two tensions are not serious problems for feminist scholars who are inspired by Beauvoir's work. Reactionary interpretations of women's experience creeping into an emancipatory work is a problem that we may not be able to eliminate altogether, as we can never really know beforehand how things will appear in retrospect: we may conserve something that is not worth conserving from the point of view of freedom. Yet the answer to the problem is simple: we must remain vigilant. Vigilance combined with precision is also

the solution to the second tension, between the universalizing and non-universalizing tendencies in Beauvoir's approach.

The third kind of tension, however, calls for a conscious choice to be made between the different threads in Beauvoir's interdisciplinarity. The fundamental question is whether we want to take the rigorously phenomenological path or the one that allows us to adopt the natural attitude. After we have answered this question, our project will be on firmer ground.

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