Laura Hengehold
Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy of Individuation: The Problem of The Second Sex
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Reviewed by Dorothea Olkowski, 2019

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Quote: "Formulating Beauvoir's question, "Are there even women?" as a Deleuzean problem for which an Idea is the solution gives Hengehold the intellectual space to think about Beauvoir in new ways."

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lthough this book is first and foremost a book about the philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir, it is much more than this. To begin, the author's stated goal is"to understand the process through which Beauvoir's own life and concepts were generated, differentiated from others, and participate in the differentiating and becoming of concepts that [Gilles] Deleuze identifies with philosophy 'itself,'apart from any individual thinker" (4). Additionally, the book is packed with significant accounts of competing and complementary philosophical positions from a wide range of philosophers, notably Henri Bergson, Michel Foucault, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jean-Paul Sartre, to name only the most prominent. As such, it is also a book that may have been long in the making, entertaining the many ideas and debates of a seriou A s and deep thinker over a long period of time. As a result, it is difficult at times to separate the several lines of thought that run through the book in order to determine if Beauvoir can in fact be read as a creator of concepts for a philosophy of radical difference and repetition for phenomenological concepts, and as a philosopher whose concepts clarify Deleuze's thought and possibly qualify Beauvoir's name to be added to that list of conceptual personae cited by Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

Carrying this out is no easy task. First of all it demands the setting to right of the many retrograde positions attributed to Beauvoir over time by her critics, such as the misunderstanding of Beauvoir's concept of transcendence (36), the misidentification of Beauvoir's philosophy with that of Sartre (chapter 3), or Hegel (chapter 4), her supposed over-valorization of male traits and

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activities (135), the claim that *The Second Sex* universalizes or remains idealist (151), as well as the notion that Beauvoir seeks to make women merely equal to men, incorporating male hierarchies and values (172). In part these arguments are successfully carried out by reference to Beauvoir's own writings as well as to the work of other scholars of Beauvoir, but a crucial aspect of Hengehold's argument for Beauvoir relies on resituating Beauvoir's concepts by means of those of Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari. The questions this raises have to do with the extent to which this can be done or even if it can be done at all. That is, can a fundamentally phenomenological philosophy--even one that is remarkably creative and original--be reformulated in terms of a philosophy of constant creation that repudiates the thresholds of lived experience and meaning?

The difficulties this presents can be seen most clearly in the concept of the singularity. It is a concept originally used in physics to describe "a point or region of space-time at which some physical quantity such as density, mass or energy, the temperature or strength of the gravitational field becomes infinite . . . [signaling] a breakdown in the description of the world in mathematical terms" because the equations cease to be useful or meaningful and because once this point is reached, there is no way to determine what will happen afterwards (Smolin 1997, 79-80). Thus prediction and regularity disappear. Deleuze connects the concept of singularity to repetition where what is repeated is difference-in-itself because the connection between what has happened and what will happen is broken. This is what is called the ideal event or event of sense, and it is not identifiable with denotation, manifestation, or signification, and is not attributable to a subject but to a state of affairs and the expression of a proposition by means of verbs, such as in the case of Alice in Wonderland, to grow or to shrink, to eat or to be eaten. As such, it expresses both the actions and passions of bodies, the ways in which they coexist, and their ideational attributes, that is, incorporeal events.

Hengehold most often addresses singularity in its impersonal and pre-individual transcendental aspects, which Deleuze is careful to insist do not resemble either an undifferentiated ground of the world nor consciousness. For Deleuze, this is the nomadic aspect of singularities "no longer imprisoned within the fixed individuality of the infinite Being . . . nor inside the sedentary boundaries of the finite subject (the notorious limits of knowledge)" (Deleuze 1990, 107). The latter eliminates the possibility of a personal"I," a synthetic unity of apperception, or a horizon of pure intentionalities and retentions, all of which retain centers of individuation. Whatever the outcome of singularities, it is neither a metaphysical Being (God) nor a finite synthetic Person, usually associated with mankind. Deleuze refers to this not as the individuation of "a" being but as the individuation of Being that relegates every predicate or property to a bottomless abyss. Hengehold would like to affiliate this Dionysian, this free and unbound, energy with Beauvoir's conception of individuation. Such an affiliation, although admirable, seems unlikely.

Deleuze has been rightly criticized by feminists for not taking seriously the real, lived becomings of women that Hengehold addresses via Beauvoir throughout her book--women who struggle with sexism, maternity, recognition, sex, ethics, and politics. All of this is simply not what interests Deleuze. When he does address a particular woman, such as Virginia Woolf, it is to regard her writing not as that of a woman but as molecular confrontations, a Body without Organs, an unbound energy, a persona who writes as a troop of monkeys, a school of fish, as nothing but variable relations. To effect a destratification of "woman" from the plane on which

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she is defined as Other would not have led Beauvoir to write about “the inhibition and self-consciousness imposed on women’s public activities and personal enjoyment” as Beauvoir does (9). It would have required much more of her, something like Artaud’s schizophrenia or Fanny’s desert dream, a teeming crowd, a swarm of bees, a micromultiplicity, intensities, races, tribes, an unconscious that is fundamentally a crowd.

Nevertheless, as a reading of Beauvoir, this book is exemplary in that it frees her thought from the dualities and reductivism to which it has been subject. Formulating Beauvoir’s question, “Are there even women?” as a Deleuzean problem for which an Idea is the solution gives Hengehold the intellectual space to think about Beauvoir in new ways. She postulates that for Beauvoir, women’s dependence on men has been given the status of a natural phenomenon, a sense that makes it possible to make true and false claims about the past, present, and future, and that its origin is an event that did not happen but again, is a sense. Yet she also acknowledges that Beauvoir’s chapter on“History” in *The Second Sex* gives women a history, lays the groundwork for contemporary women’s history, and gives their situation different meanings and also includes their own complicity. Beauvoir thus addresses women as women and asks what this means for women as women. Even if she does this in a new way, that is, by not universalizing or essentializing women, history remains firmly within the context of what Deleuze calls the opinions, meaning the ambiguity of perceptions of women-subjects who confront or do not confront historical imperatives.

A similar situation arises with Beauvoir’s treatment of equality. Hengehold argues that, against Sartre, Beauvoir advocates for reciprocity or reciprocal recognition between men and women using the“familiar republican language of equality” because it seems that women would eventually win economic and social equality (172). Lacking such equality, women are alienated from their bodies and subject to hypocrisy in marriage. This hierarchy can also be applied to racial and class inequalities even though Beauvoir does not specifically characterize it as such. Yet even as this discourse challenges class, racial and sexual discourse, and institutions, it also legitimizes them with the idea that residual inequalities were justified by the overall rise of freedom. Thus, in addition to recognition and reciprocity, Beauvoir argues for individuation through transcendence defined, as Hengehold insists correctly, in opposition to immanence so that“transcendence must be *converted* through a deliberate choice of oneself and one’s meaning for the sake of the other’s freedom” (36-37).

These lived and historical considerations do not enter into Deleuze’s consideration of equality and hierarchy. Equality, for Deleuze, is the immediate presence of Being in everything regardless of the inequalities of experience.“[E]qual being is immediately present in everything . . . even though things reside unequally in this equal being” (37). Equality is the demonic or delirious distribution in space so as to confound barriers and not to divide fairly or according to the“sedentary structures of representation.” Hierarchy in this context is the state in which nothing is separated from what it can do, a measure of the power of a nomadic nomos or of a distribution in a space without precise limits, and so not a measure of principle. Individuality is always equivocal in and for Being, which is One (39).

For Deleuze and Guattari, even such expansive phenomenological concepts as Beauvoir’s are understood to be the expression of a three-part set of acts of transcendence that enable the subject

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to constitute a sensory world filled with objects, an intersubjective world that includes others, and finally, the common ideal world of scientific, mathematical, and logical formations. Because of this, they argue, the only notion of immanence that survives is immanence to a subject whose acts are relative to the lived and whose concepts arise out of the lived. There is always too much subjectivity and not enough of Being, or as they express it eventually, the Cosmos.

As an eye-opening and intelligent account of Beauvoir's philosophy, Hengehold's book is well worth reading. Its limitations arise to some extent from its sources. Secondary sources for Beauvoir rarely go beyond 2012, potentially missing out on the more recent and often alternative approaches to her work. Equally problematic are the secondary sources on Deleuze. Hengehold relies nearly exclusively on male scholars, thereby missing the opportunity to cite more recent work on Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari published by feminist Deleuze scholars whose accounts of this material greatly exceed the limited subject of becoming-women. If strong feminist scholars do not pay attention to the scholarly work of feminists whose research and publications approach material that is of great interest to feminists but dominated by male scholars, then Beauvoir's radical call for new ideas and methods continues to go unanswered.

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