



Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy, and Feminism

By Nancy Bauer

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In the introduction to *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir notes that "a man never begins by establishing himself as an individual of a certain sex: his being a man poses no problem." Nancy Bauer begins her book by asking: "Then what kind of a problem does being a woman pose?" Bauer's aim is to show that in answering this question *The Second Sex* dramatizes the extent to which being a woman poses a philosophical problem.

This book is a call for philosophers as well as feminists to turn, or return to, *The Second Sex*. Bauer shows that Beauvoir's magnum opus, written a quarter-century before the development of contemporary feminist philosophy, constitutes a meditation on the relationship between women and philosophy that remains profoundly undervalued. She argues that the extraordinary effect *The Second Sex* has had on women's lives, then and now, can be traced to Beauvoir's discovery of a new way to philosophize?a way grounded in her identity as a woman. In offering a new interpretation of *The Second Sex*, Bauer shows how philosophy can be politically productive for women while remaining genuinely philosophical.

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Editorial Review

Review

In her concise but closely argued book, Bauer demonstrates the philosophical importance of Beauvoir's work, not only as foundational for contemporary feminism but as a major contribution to philosophy.... A real must-have for libraries serving serious women's studies programs.

(*Choice*)

A powerfully argued, lucid and fascinating book which, as well as offering a timely reassessment of Beauvoir's thought, raises important questions for feminism about the most effective way to undermine masculine privilege.

(Lois McNay *Times Literary Supplement*)

A brilliant study of Simone de Beauvoir's masterpiece.

(Hilary Putnam)

Bauer's subtle and original elucidation of Beauvoir's philosophical relationship to Descartes, Hegel, and Sartre is a truly important contribution to the field of feminism and philosophy?and to feminist theory in general.

(Toril Moi)

About the Author

Nancy Bauer is assistant professor of philosophy at Tufts University.

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