Vol 13, Issue: 01 (S), 2026

ABAAD Journal

ISSN: 2353 – 0030
EISSN: 2602-697X

Simone de Beauvoir's concept of freedom

مفهوم الحرية عند سيمون دي بوفوار

Malika Hafiane* مليكة حفيان
likahafiane@gmail.com

Occidental Philosophy

Djillali Liabes University of Sidi Bel abbes

Received: 02-05-2025 | Accepted: 09-05-2026 | Published: 10-06-2026

****

Abstract:

Simone de Beauvoir's concept of freedom differs significantly from that of other existentialist philosophers, as she links it to the transcendence of the self for the realization of the freedom of others, a purpose through which existential commitment is activated. Furthermore, Beauvoir connects freedom to the ethics of ambiguity, insofar as it precludes any possibility of self-absorption or closure. She also conceptualizes violence as an imposed reality that cannot be denied, yet asserts that it demands to be confronted with wisdom.

Keywords: Beauvoir; freedom; existence; ethics of ambiguity; violence.

ملخص:

يختلف مفهوم الحرية عند سيمون دي بوفوار عن باقي الفلاسفة الوجوديين، حيث تربطه بتسامي الذات من أجل تحقيق حرية الآخرين إذ لأجل هذا الغرض يفعّل الالتزام الوجودي. وتربط بوفوار الحرية بأخلاقيات الغموض من حيث إنها تمنع أي إمكانية للتصرف الذاتي أو الانغلاق. وترى أن العنف تصرف مفروض علينا ولا يمكن إنكاره، إلا أن الأمر يستدعي منا مواجهته بحكمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: بوفوار؛ الحرية؛ الوجود؛ أخلاقيات الغموض؛ العنف.

* Corresponding author: likahafiane@gmail.com.

1. Introduction:

It can be said suffice to say that Beauvoir's investment in the intimate relationship with Sartre in creative work, whether in the literary field such as the novel, the letter, or theatrical texts, made her think philosophically. She is truly an existential philosopher who addressed the problem of freedom for the individual, especially the oppressed woman, and for society, such as the state of occupation by colonial policies.

Of course, political events had a profound impact on philosophical thought, profoundly affecting it. These events oppressed and despised humanity and robbed it of its freedom.

For this reason, we decided to address the topic of freedom according to Simone de Beauvoir: What is Beauvoir's concept of freedom? What is its relationship to commitment? How does she view the ethics of ambiguity?

It is not right to delve into an analysis of a very important topic, which is still a topic of interest today, without presenting Beauvoir's life, because her personal life, with all its problems and difficult circumstances, had a wide-ranging impact on her philosophical thinking and her philosophical treatment of the winter of questions and issues of general concern to humanity and women.

2. Beauvoir's personal and intellectual life

2.1 Private life and Study carrer:

Simone-Ernestine de Beauvoir, Lucie Marie Bertrand de Beauvoir, known as Simone de Beauvoir (born 9January 1908, died 14April 1986), was the eldest daughter of Georges Bertrand de Beauvoir, he was a cultured man (lawyer). While her mother, François Brassier, was the daughter of a wealthy businessman and a devout Catholic. Her sister Helene, was born two years later. The family struggled to maintain the same bourgeois standard of living even after losing much of its fortune after World War (I), and Simone's mother insisted on sending her two daughters to a prestigious convent for religious education. Simone was a religious person as a child and intended to become a nun until she had a crisis of faith at the age of fourteen which led her to become an atheist for the rest of her life.

Beauvoir is a French writer, thinker, existentialist philosopher, political activist, the pioneer of feminist, Sartre's companion, left-wing intellectual. and social theorist.

Although she does not consider herself a philosopher, she has had a significant influence on feminism and feminist existentialism. Beauvoir has written numerous novels, essays,

biographies, and studies on philosophy, politics, and social issues. She wanted the class struggle and the gender struggle to be waged simultaneously. Politically engaged, she met Mao, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara.

She is best known for her novels, including "The guest" and "The Mandarins", as well as her book "The Second Sex", Simone was a thinker from an early age, encouraged by her father, who was open-minded and cherished freedom for himself and others. He often boasted about his daughter, saying, "Simone thinks like a man And with her great ambition "She made herself a writer" (Rétif, 1998)

After passing the baccalaureate exam in mathematics and philosophy in 1925, Simone studied mathematics at the Collège Sainte-Marie. She later studied philosophy at the Sorbonne, writing her thesis on Leibniz.

She initially worked with Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Claude Lévi-Strauss while the three were completing their teaching careers at the same high school. Although Beauvoir did not join the "École Normale Supérieure", she attended some classes there to prepare for her philosophy exam. This institution is one of the most prestigious French educational institutions.

Her goal was to provide the French Republic with a new type of learner capable of reasoning in a way that differed from the usual pattern. While studying philosophy there, Beauvoir met students from that school, including Jean-Paul Sartre and Paul Nizan.

Beauvoir was an existentialist, believing that there is no natural, essential, or true self; no one has a predetermined purpose. Instead, humans create their own identities and values through the actions they undertake. This means that we exist first and then we construct our identities. We have no essence, but this is discovered through our actions, projects, and even what is done to us and affects us. In fact, she is created her selfe. « The days are only bridges thrown between two presences; my reason for being is his face nothing matters, books are all the same to me—there is him, and this desire. I am happy. I know more clearly than ever all the strength that such a love demands, the lack of security, the threats. I feel like a definitive promise, like marriage carries with it, of rest, of sweetness, of joy without fear, but I feel that this is much more beautiful and that it has no importance to suffer on the evenings when one is weak, that I would not give my place for the gold of the world. I am delighted with myself,

and I love him. » (Simone d. B., 2008)

2.2 intellectual and creative life:

In 1929, De Beauvoir met Jean-Paul Sartre, with whom she shared her life and who would greatly influence her attitudes and thinking. In 1943, she began writing with the novel "The Guest", followed by "The Blood of Others" in 1944, and " Beautiful Images" in 1966, "The Woman destroyed" in 1967, etc.

In The "Mandarins" in 1954, Beauvoir reflects the struggles of the French intellectual facing the reality of post-war Europe and, as in the rest of his novels. She attempts to elucidate the problem of relationships with others through a psychological approach. In her autobiographical books — "Memoirs of a Dutiful Young Woman" (1958), "The Prime of Life" (1960), "The Force of Circumstances" (1963), and "A very easy death" (1964) she analyzes the events of her own life, disregarding any moralizing intention.

She also writes essays on existentialist philosophy, such as Pyrrhus and Cinéas (1944) and For a Morality of Ambiguity (1947), essays of popular politics, such as Right-Wing Thought Today (1955), an analysis of the process of decomposition of the bourgeoisie through its ideologues. But The "Guest" and "The Age of Reason" present characters who are doubles of Sartre and Beauvoir. The two authors share a setting, the eve of the war, then characters in whose lives, to the favor an incident or the emergence of others, doubt has been inscribed. [...] These common concerns do not produce two similar novels, but a mesh of divergences and parallels. (Poisson, 2002)

Both works present the staging of biographical experience, although it seems more detached in Sartre than in Beauvoir. The authors strive to depict the banality of everyday life from a romantic perspective. Some of the characters in the models were familiar to the couple.

The Second Sex (1949), a study on the current condition of women based on their historical process, and Old Age(1970). In The Second Sex Beauvoir discusses the treatment of women in the present society as well as throughout all of history. She asks, What is woman? She argues that man is considered the default, while woman is considered the "Other": "Thus, humanity is male, and man defines woman not herself, but as relative to him. Beauvoir describes the relationship of ovum to sperm in various creatures (fish, insects, mammals), leading up to the human being. She describes women's subordination to the species in terms of reproduction, compares the physiology of men and women, concluding that values cannot be based on physiology and that the facts of biology must be viewed in light of the

ontological, economic, social, and physiological context. (Beauvoir S. d., The second sex, 2011)

After JP Sartre's death, she wrote a controversial chronicle of their final years together: The Farewell Ceremony (1981). A constant in his work is the concern to shed light on the writer's attitude to his moral and political commitment.

In A soft death, she recounts with infinite tenderness the last days of her mother, who was suffering from cancer. This story, a cry of revolt against death, can be analyzed as a true plea in favor of palliative care. In this sense, Beauvoir was ahead of a fight that remains entirely relevant today.

She finally reveals her fragility in The Woman destroyed (1967) and Old Age (1970) by revealing her anxiety about aging and solitude. By painting a subtle portrait of a woman prey to existential doubts, she bears witness to her profound humanity.

In 1949, The Second Sex, a philosophical and feminist essay, became the reference for modern feminism and revealed her as a great theoretician of the women's liberation movement. Outraged at seeing women treated as erotic objects, she described a society where women were kept in a state of inferiority and advocated "equality in difference" and the emancipation of women.

Her analysis of the female condition through myths, civilizations, religions, anatomy and traditions caused a scandal, especially the chapter where she spoke of motherhood and abortion, which was considered homicide at the time. As for marriage, she considered it a bourgeois institution as repugnant as prostitution when the woman was under the domination of her husband and could not escape. In this context de Beauvoir said: « Oh! I see my life clearly now: not action, teaching, or anything else. But a passionate, desperate search. No love will erase that. If I marry, I will have to take my philosophy with me. That is the essential thing, so much so that to possess it I will almost agree not to marry. » (Simone d. B., 2008)

3. Beauvoir's concept of freedom and ethics of ambiguity

3.1 Freedom and commitment

Beauvoir believes that we can think about ourselves freely. The conditions that restrict us are what allow us to desire and choose. But we cannot think about ourselves without thinking

about others, because our freedom is always dependent on their freedoms. We only have the right to be free on the day when all people are free.

Being free necessarily means having a developed sense of our identity, being able to set goals and move toward them, and constantly ensuring our progress. In addition, freedom requires the practice of certain virtues, such as perseverance. In this way de Beauvoir's existentialist ethics brings with it, or contains, a character ethics, understood in this context as a classification of virtues and vices, and an account of the basis of this classification. A virtue is a disposition to behave in a way that contributes to the enchancement of freedom; a vice, by contrast, is a disposition to behave in a way which diminishes the prospects of achieving freedom. (Mahon, 1997)

Beauvoir asserts that if freedom is hindered and not achieved by injustice, then one cannot remain silent. Rather, one must resist, because what harms others inevitably harms me. This is the responsibility I must bear. In this context, Beauvoir gives an example of colonialism, saying: « ...that is the reason why living through the Algerian war was like experiencing a personal tragedy. When one lives in an unjust world there is no use hoping by some means to purify oneself of that injustice; the only solution would be to change the whole world, and I don't have the power. » (de, 1994)

For a human being to be liberated, he must overcome the adverse conditions and circumstances that hinder their progress. Beauvoir believes that if colonized peoples remain subject to colonial policy, the repression and torture will continue. Their freedom is important because it preserves our intentions in their work. As Beauvoir says: « What my reflection reveals to me is that every project leaves room for a new question [...]. Our freedoms support each other like the stones of a vault that no pillar would support. Humanity is entirely suspended in a void that it creates itself by its reflection on its plenitude. » (Beauvoir S. d., Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté, 1983)

Beauvoir here conceptualizes freedom as a transcendence linked to doubt and risk. To be free means to be radically contingent, where we find ourselves surrounded by a set of values and meanings brought to the world by others. But I am free to endorse, reject, or modify them if necessary for my own freedom, because the meaning of the world is shaped by human choices. « ...however, I cannot sustain it without the help of others. My values will find their place in the world only if others embrace them; only if I persuade others to adopt my values as their own. » (Simone B.)

Freedom, according to Beauvoir, is a fundamental theme. It is closely linked to action, because it is not enough to simply feel or dream about it according to dreamy slogans and rhetoric; it must be implemented in reality. Therefore, the idea of commitment in existential philosophy compels the writer or intellectual to work tirelessly to liberate others. Liberation work cannot target a specific gender or race. Rather, all human beings are defended without racism or discrimination.

We should cite here Beauvoir's actions, through which she demonstrated her commitment to a noble goal of liberation; her fight against racism and prejudice against blacks in the U SA last century. She has supported for the Algerian revolution during the French colonial period. Also she has been intervening to resolve the conflict between Palestinians and Zionists in Palestine, and she has defended women in particular around the world...etc.

Deviating from the principle of "others are hell", Beauvoir emphasized the reciprocal relationship between self and other that determines the objective - moral - condition of freedom in all aspects of human experience. According to Beauvoir, the individual is known only through his relationship to the world and to other individuals. Where he exists only by transcending himself.

This relationship justifies the moral aspect that gives value to recognizing the existence of the other who shares my humanity. How can I be free then when there are those who persecute, torture, and kill...? Can we feel our humanity while the Palestinian people are being tortured, imprisoned, killed, and their children treated with cruelty and destruction? Indeed, the most heinous crimes occurring in the world are committed against a weak and powerless people who are defending their land and wanting to live freely in their country, Palestine, without brutal and unjust colonialism (The Palestinian resistance is now viewed negatively and accused of terrorism, even though it is rightfully resisting on behalf of the innocent.)

This is the attitude of the true intellectual who cannot be happy unless he sees with his own eyes his brothers in humanity happy. Beauvoir said: « I ask for health, knowledge, well-being, leisure for men, so that their freedom is not consumed fighting illness, ignorance, and poverty. » (Beauvoir d. S., Pyrrhus et Cinéas, 1986)

As for violence, Beauvoir sees it as an undeniable reality. So violence is not excluded for Beauvoir. Since she maintains that we can never reach the other in the depths of their

freedom, she cannot call violence evil. She does not, however, condone it. Nor does she envision a future without conflict.

The fact that we are differently situated and engage in the work of transcendence from different social, historical, and economic positions ensures that some of us will always constitute an obstacle to the freedom of others. "We are," Beauvoir writes, "condemned to violence." Beauvoir may agree to some extent with Habermas, who makes violence a legitimate means only in special cases. That is, whether we like it or not, violence exists in spite of us and cannot be removed from existence.

"A sujet against morality does so against a person who commits violence and commits violence. This is a certain thing of nature, but it is necessary to do this to tell the person that he assumes the obligations and applies moral exigences." (Habermas, 1981)

Beauvoir, however, sees violence as an expression of failure that is part of nature. However, rejecting any struggle means rejecting transcendence. Therefore, there will be no freedom of choice, and we will be merely a reality, no different from things in a conflict-free utopia. Beauvoir believes that violence has its justifications linked to social existence. The task that remains before us is: How can we succeed in our project without violence destroying it?

If virtue is a tendency to act that reflects positively on freedom, then vice is a tendency to act that reflects negatively on freedom, that is, it reduces the chances of achieving freedom. For this reason, Beauvoir suggests that in order to realize our projects, we must focus on the freedom of others. This, of course, requires courage.

3.2 Ethics of ambiguity

Beauvoir believes that human existence contains an ambiguity of inner freedom. If the world imposes its weight on us in a way that is beyond our choice, then in order to live ethically, we must assume this ambiguity instead of trying to escape from it.« [...] at every moment, on every occasion, the truth emerges: the truth of life and death, of my solitude and my connection to the world, of my freedom and my servitude, of the insignificance and the sovereign importance of each man and of all men.

There was Stalingrad and Buchenwald and neither of them erases the other. Since we do not succeed in fleeing it, our fundamental ambiguity. It is in the knowledge of the authentic conditions of our life that we must draw the strength to live and the reasons to act. » (Beauvoir S. d., Pour une morale de l'ambiguité, 1983)

In Sartrean terms, it poses a problem in which every existent wants to deny its contradictory

essence as nothing through the desire to be in the strict and objective sense, a project doomed to failure and bad faith. In many ways Beauvoir's task is to describe the ontological transformation that the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre alluded to in his book (Being and Nothingness).

For Beauvoir, the ontological transformation allows us to live authentically at the crossroads of freedom and realism. This requires that we engage freely in projects that emerge from spontaneous choice. In addition, the goals and objectives of our actions must not be defined as absolute, apart from what we choose. In this sense, Beauvoir sets limits to freedom. All human beings have experienced this tragic ambiguity in their circumstances. However, there are those who tried to hide them, and some philosophers sought to reduce the mind to matter, or to reabsorb matter into the mind, or to mix them into one matter. (Beauvoir, Pour une morale de l'Ambiguité)

However, Beauvoir's ethics of ambiguity does not meet the criteria of moral subjectivity; Rather, it proposes final and universal criteria by which one can determine whether a choice or action is moral. Moreover, Beauvoir's ethics does not depend solely on individual opinion; Rather, her concept of self is a concept based on relationship and exchange.

It is human existence which makes values in the world on the basis of which it will be able to judge the enterprise in which it will be engaged. Here is a summary of de Beauvoir's argument so far: - The human condition is one of ambiguity. - We must reject all standards of perfection for human beings. - We must not take our moral standards from God. (Mahon, 1997) As Beauvoir also says That God has become just an abstract idea and she has deleted it. (Beauvoir d. S., Les Mandarins, 1992) Because the idea of God is considered an obstacle by atheist existentialists, and freedom cannot be achieved in His existence, according to their belief.

Beauvoir cites artists and writers as models of morality, as their work expresses the passion that ethical life carries. Through them we can learn ways to help us overcome political and material difficulties. Beauvoir said: « Man can act, he must act: he exists only by transcending himself. He acts in risk, in failure. » (Beauvoir d. S., Pyrrhus et Cinéas)

In this context, we find one of the thinkers (Card) argues that "the basic features of evil tend to be evident in the case of atrocities, making them easier to identify and appreciate." She

emphasizes two basic features of atrocities: their commission and their suffering. Thus, she offers the following definition of evil: "Evil is harm that is reasonably foreseeable (or appreciable), intentionally inflicted (or tolerated, aggravated, or maintained), and which deprives, or seriously risks being deprived, others of the essentials needed to make life possible, acceptable, or decent (or to make death decent)." (Card, 2002)

4. Conclusion

If Beauvoir was a writer excellency, she also leaned toward philosophical thought through her association with Sartre, but also through her study of German idealist philosophy, Marxist philosophy, and German existentialism.

She was also influenced by phenomenology. So her thinking was inevitably philosophical. Applying the idea of commitment, she contributed significantly to the struggle to defend the freedoms of others.

Here, we can mention Julia Kristeva who had evaluated Simone de Beauvoir's struggle in the feminist movement, and her individual and subjectivist projects that give value to the feminist self, in its distinction, difference and liberation. She believes that Beauvoir emphasizes feminine genius and the ability to create. And she recognizes that Beauvoir has truly represented the experience of individuality because she did not despise the self in women, but rather she transcended herself. However, by rethinking Beauvoir's thought, it seems that she contradicted herself because when she was defending equality by excluding the problem of difference, she put women in the collective form. Where every woman was considered an individual human being. Therefore, in her book "The Second Sex," she focused on the feminine situation in its entirety.

More than her concern for the human being or the individual's fortunes, she believed that transforming this human condition was capable of achieving individual independence and feminist creativity. Kristeva thus criticized Beauvoir for perhaps rushing to defend feminist individuation because of the sexual and economic conditions which were obstacles to women's liberation. Therefore, by focusing on situations while neglecting individual initiative, which is the fundamental bet, freedom remains excluded. Kristeva gives examples of brilliant women, such as the philosopher Hannah Arendt, the writer Colette, and the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, who did not wait for the feminine condition to mature in order to achieve their freedom, but rather went beyond it to achieve freedom beyond the condition. How then can women's being and individuality be achieved through the feminist

position?

Bibliography:

Beauvoir, de Simone

- (2008) Cahiers de jeunesse 1929-1930. Gallimard.Paris
- (1994) Hard times, Force of circunstance. Tr, Peter Green. Dacapo Press. New York
- (1992) Les Mandarins, Gallimard.Paris
- (1983) Pour une morale de L'Ambiguité. Gallimard.Paris
- (1986)Pyrrhus et Cinéas, Gallimard.Paris
- (2011)The second sex, Tr, Constance Borde, Sheila Malovany- Chevalier. Random house. New York

-Card,Claudia(2002) The Atrocity Paradigm, a theory of evil. Oxford University. UK

-Habermas,Yourgen(1981) Theorie de l'agir communicationnel.TI: Rationnalité de l'agir et rationnalisation de la société. Tr, Jean Marc Ferry. Fayard. Paris

-Mahon,Joseph(1997) Existentialism,Feminism and Simone de Beauvoir. Macmillan Press LTD. London

-O'BrienWendyLester Embree(2013) The Existential Phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir. Springer Nature. New York

- Poisson Catherine(2002) Sartre et Beauvoir, du je au nous. Rocopi. New York

-Rétif,Françoise(1998) Simone de Beauvoir, l'Autre en miroir. L'Harmattan. Paris