

De Beauvoir's Potpourri: A Feminist Philosophical Interrogation

Bolaji, O. AKANNI

Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan

bolajiakanni2006@yahoo.com

Abstract

*Existentialism questions the conditions of human freedom, responsibility, and meaning, whereas feminism aims to undermine gendered inequalities and challenge sociopolitical institutions that uphold women's subordination. Simone Beauvoir holds a unique place at the nexus of these traditions, proposing a novel synthesis that uses the existential grammar of choice, embodiment, and situated freedom to theorise women's oppression. Even though her work, *The Second Sex*, has been the subject of a great deal of current scholarship, most of it either isolates her existential philosophical beliefs or highlights her feminist political ideas. The methodological innovation of "potpourri" combines political critique, ethical inquiry, phenomenological contemplation, and literary narrative. This paper critically analyses how Beauvoir uses existential ideas to reveal the social and moral causes that place women in the role of the Other. This synthesis presents a radical feminist epistemology that acknowledges lived experience as a place of philosophical inquiry and opposes patriarchal conceptions of gender. Beauvoir's potpourri is reinterpreted as a strong analytical framework that informs decolonial feminist theory, feminist phenomenology, and care ethics. This paper argues that Beauvoir's writings illuminate gender, freedom, and ethical agency in both historical and modern contexts, demonstrating a transformational philosophical position that cuts across rigorous academic bounds.*

Keywords: *Existentialism, Feminism, Gender parity, Potpourri, Women.*

Introduction

The belief that women are inferior, separate from men, slaves, a result of sin, and flawed had already reached its peak before the 19th century. This was partly due to the theological and philosophical doctrines of the Western world, which established a sexual hierarchy that was controlled by men. This hierarchy placed women in the category of slaves, a group of individuals who were susceptible to exploitation and extreme scrutiny. In his book *Politics*, Aristotle, one of the most well-known thinkers in Western philosophy, considered women to be inferior to men. He argued

that while men were rulers, women were subjects and, by definition, slaves who could be owned by someone else.

In St. Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, the cynical view of women as an embodiment of evil, sin, and wickedness is reinforced: as regards individual nature, woman is defective and Misbegotten (Aquinas, 2010). It was these kinds of constructs about the female sex that would later provoke Simone Beauvoir's iconoclastic reaction to patriarchy. Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, written in the mid-20th century and published in 1949, remains one of the foundational texts of modern feminism. To understand its historical and social context, we must examine Europe, particularly France, in the first half of the 20th century.

A remarkable event took place in October 1946, which tremendously shaped Beauvoir's treatise on feminism. A tag was found in a hospital nursery in Paris on the bassinet of two newborns, a girl and a boy. On the bassinet of the girl, it was announced. It is a girl, and the boy's bassinet was tagged "I am a boy." Here, there was the manifestation of a distinction between a female 'object' and a male 'subject' that could shape destinies. This incident happened at a time when Beauvoir had been enfranchised for a year, French women were denied legal abortion and birth control (until 1967), and women were barred from holding elective political positions until the late 1960s. Beauvoir submits that even the queens were neither male nor female: they were sovereigns.

Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* was published during this period in an act of Promethean audacity, a theft of Olympian fire from which there was no going back against patriarchalism. As Beauvoir herself acknowledged, it is not the last word on the problem of women ... which has always been the problem of men, but it marks a place in history where enlightenment begins. Since then, there has been a sustained proliferation of the responsibilities of women in social, academic, and cultural circles. Whilst Simone Beauvoir may not be solely responsible for this seismic shift in attitudes and laws that have offered women opportunities, a plethora of young women who insist on equality in their places of work, entitlements, pleasure, and autonomy owe a lot to Beauvoir. In this paper, I introduce the concept of Beauvoir's "*potpourri*" as a coinage to describe the doctrinal undertaking that connects her feminist and existentialist concepts. The paper establishes harmony between the methods explored by Simone Beauvoir's feminist writings and those of existentialists such as Heidegger, Husserl, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Jean-Paul Sartre, among others. The term "potpourri," which I have coined analytically

rather than using Beauvoir's, emphasises the plurality and diversity found throughout her literary and philosophical writings. Beauvoir's portrayal of a variety of subjects, settings, and people might be interpreted via this conceptual lens as reflecting her larger commitments to feminism and existentialism.

The paper is structured into four sections. First, it analyses feminism and its historical waves. Next, it delves into Beauvoir's existentialist ideas. The third section examines Beauvoir's concept of the *Potpourri*, which integrates her feminist and existential thoughts. Lastly, it critically evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of Beauvoir's *Potpourri*.

Conceptualising Feminism

Feminism could be described as a diverse and evolving intellectual and political tradition concerned with analysing and transforming the conditions that produce gendered inequality. Instead of being a single, cohesive theory, it is made up of several schools of thought that have different approaches and points of emphasis but are all concerned with criticising the subjugation of women under patriarchal societal institutions (Jaggar, 1983; Tong & Fernandes, 2024). As a result, feminism may be viewed as both a theoretical framework and a political movement dedicated to challenging and overturning systems of dominance that give men an advantage over women in a variety of contexts.

Fundamentally, feminism is commonly described as supporting and believing in the social, political, and economic equality of men and women (Tong & Fernandes, 2024). Feminist theorists, however, have broadened this concept, contending that feminism is about changing deeply ingrained power structures rather than just equality in a formal sense. For example, Bell Hooks (2000) describes feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression,” which moves the focus away from gender parity and toward a more comprehensive critique of interlocking systems of dominance.

Differentiating between sex and gender is a key analytical distinction in feminist theory. While gender is seen as a socially constructed category that defines roles, behaviours, and expectations based on perceived sexual differences, sex refers to the biological distinctions between males and females (Mikkola, 2007). According to feminist academics, gendered hierarchies are socially constructed and maintained by political, cultural, and economic institutions rather than being innate or biologically predestined. These systems consistently prioritise masculinity over femininity, maintaining women's subservient position in society (Jaggar, 1983).

Furthermore, feminist theory questions how women have historically been treated as passive subjects in political and philosophical debate. Rather, it acknowledges women as active agents whose life experiences are a valid source of critical thinking and knowledge. In her famous statement that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," Beauvoir (2011) highlights the social processes that shape and control femininity. Feminist epistemology, which highlights the value of situated knowledge and lived experience in comprehending gendered realities, has expanded on this viewpoint. The understanding that women's oppression is structurally rooted and requires critical examination at both theoretical and practical levels unites liberal, radical, Marxist, existentialist, and postcolonial feminist traditions despite their differences (Tong & Fernandes, 2024). Therefore, feminism is best understood as a multifaceted and dynamic field of study that aims to both diagnose gender inequality and envision more equitable social arrangements based on human flourishing, freedom, and dignity. Feminism, whether as a philosophy, social movement, or political movement, focuses on women's experiences and highlights the numerous forms of oppression women face in society (Mobolanle, 2009).]

In the nineteenth century, the term "feminism" gained formal intellectual and political significance as a movement focused on the expansion of women's rights and the goal of civic and sexual equality. One of the first liberal philosophical justifications of gender equality is found in *The Subjection of Women* by John Stuart Mill (1869), who contends that the social and legal subjugation of women is incompatible with the values of justice and individual liberty. His writings contributed to the development of feminism as a systematic intellectual and political critique of gendered exclusion and patriarchal rule. Beyond its liberal roots, feminism has grown into a wide-ranging social and political movement focused on examining and changing the lived realities of women in many historical and cultural contexts. Feminist academics have constantly highlighted that feminism is an interpretive framework that articulates, represents, and theorises women's experiences, in addition to being a fight for legal equality. Feminist theory, according to Moi (1999), critically examines how gendered identities are created and portrayed in literary and cultural discourse, especially in ways that have historically suppressed women's voices. Accordingly, feminism can be viewed as an interpretive and analytical endeavour that examines how women are portrayed in literature, philosophy, and social discourse, among other kinds of cultural expression (Moi, 2002).

Therefore, the recovery and reinterpretation of women's voices, experiences, and epistemic contributions that have historically been suppressed or misrepresented within patriarchal knowledge systems is part of feminist literary and cultural theory, which goes beyond political agitation. As a result, feminism emerges as a complex intellectual tradition that critically investigates the construction, representation, and reproduction of gender in social and cultural texts in addition to promoting gender equality. This dual emphasis on representation and lived experience highlights feminism's larger dedication to upending systems of exclusion and rethinking more inclusive methods of knowledge production (Tong & Fernandes, 2024). According to Barbara Berg (2009), it encompasses numerous phases of women's emancipation, including freedom from sex-determined roles, freedom from society's oppressive restrictions, and the freedom to express belief in sexual equality combined with a commitment to transform society. Despite these diverse definitions of feminism above, their common feature is women and recognition. It depicts that women are to be recognised among people, women should not be subdued, and they should be allowed to exhibit their intellectual potential just like their male counterparts.

The Feminist Waves

Feminism has evolved into three distinct waves. The first wave began in July 1848 when Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott organised a convention at Seneca Falls, in New York. The attendees signed the Declaration of Sentiments, which affirmed women's equality with men and passed a dozen resolutions demanding various specific rights. One of the primary goals of this movement was to gain equal rights for women, including the right to vote (Freedman, 2007). The main focus of this wave was securing legal rights for women, such as the right to vote, freedom of choice, and property rights. This movement was deeply rooted in traditional American principles of equality and freedom of choice. Women agitated against the social and economic barriers they faced. They had little formal education and were not allowed to control their properties and earnings (Goldin, 2006). Therefore, the first wave of feminism advocated for the equality of the sexes and equal distribution of rights. The earliest form of feminism was centred on equal rights for both men and women, particularly equal standing as citizens in public life and equal legal status within the home. These ideas were a response to the French Revolution and the American War of Independence, both of which promoted the values of liberty and equality (Ustun & Soren, 2022). Feminists in France advocated for equal chances for all by embracing the Revolution's values of liberty, equality, and

fraternity. On the other side, women activists in America urged that the ideas of the American Declaration of Independence be extended to women, including providing them with rights to citizenship and property (Ustun & Soren, 2022).

The second wave of feminism emerged in the mid-20th century (roughly the 1960s–1980s), building on earlier suffrage struggles, and it focused on challenging entrenched social and cultural inequalities affecting women. It addressed issues such as reproductive rights, workplace discrimination, sexuality, and rigid gender roles (Freedman, 2007; Tong & Fernandes, 2024; Gamble, 2004). The original stimulus for the second wave came from civil rights and socialist movements that emerged in the 1960s in Europe, Australia, and North and Central America. During this time, the women's liberation movement, which originated in the United States, combined liberal and rights-based concerns for equality between women and men and demanded the right of women to construct their identity and sexuality (Freedman, 2007). These mandates were articulated in the seven demands of the movement established between 1970 and 1978, including equal pay, equal education and equal work opportunities, financial and legal independence, free 24-hour nurseries, free contraception and abortion demand, a woman's right to define her sexuality and an end to discrimination against lesbians, and, more importantly, freedom from sexual coercion and violence (Freedman, 2007). Although one of the thrusts of this movement was pressing for the establishment of equality, unlike the First-wave feminists, it was concerned not just with political rights but also with areas such as family, work, and sexuality. Thus, the second-wave feminists called for a reevaluation of traditional gender roles in society and an end to sexist discrimination.

Third-wave feminism is generally understood as a response to and critique of perceived limitations within first- and second-wave feminist movements, particularly their tendency to universalise women's experiences and insufficiently account for differences of race, class, sexuality, and cultural location. Rather than simply affirming earlier feminist positions, third-wave feminists build upon them while adopting a more pluralistic and intersectional approach to gender analysis (Heywood & Drake, 1997; Tong & Fernandes, 2024). This wave is characterised by its emphasis on diversity, identity politics, and the destabilisation of fixed categories of "woman," gender roles, and sexuality. Third-wave feminists also embraced a more expressive and culturally engaged politics, often favouring individual agency, sexual autonomy, and the redefinition of femininity in ways that

resist traditional norms. This included an openness to exploring sexuality and reclaiming forms of identity previously excluded or marginalised within earlier feminist frameworks (Heywood & Drake, 1997; Gamble, 2004). In this sense, third-wave feminism is frequently described as more heterogeneous, intersectional, and culturally responsive than its predecessors, reflecting a broader commitment to inclusivity across gendered, racial, and sexual identities.

The Concept of Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophy concerned with man's existence. It begins with the individual and rejects any objective, rationalistic, and system-building approach to resolving the challenges of life's absurdities in which man is entangled (Oyeshile, 2005). Existentialism, according to Jean-Paul Sartre, is a doctrine that makes human life possible. He declares that every truth and action implies a human setting and subjectivity (Sartre, 2007). The most common existentialist belief is that existence precedes essence. It is only when you exist that you can know the essence of your living. Thus, existentialist philosophy emphasises individual freedom, responsibility, and the subjective character of human existence. Human beings are not born with a fixed nature or predetermined identity but instead define themselves through lived choices and actions (Sartre, 2007; Kaufmann, 1975). In this sense, an individual's "essence" or selfhood is not given in advance but is continuously produced through the process of becoming, grounded in concrete decisions and lived experience.

Existentialists further argue that abstract systems, whether metaphysical, religious, or purely rational, are insufficient for capturing the complexity of individual existence. Human reality, they contend, is irreducibly situated and subjective, and therefore must be understood through the lens of lived experience rather than universal abstractions (Sartre, 2007; Heidegger, 1962). This emphasis on situated freedom underscores the existential claim that individuals are radically responsible for the meanings they construct in their lives, even within the constraints of social and historical conditions. Existentialists warn that inadequate and flawed thinking may develop when individuals forget their own existence (Tkach, 2011). Existentialist themes are often traced back to early Greek philosophical traditions, particularly the Socratic and Sophistic periods, where attention was already given to questions of human self-understanding, ethical responsibility, and lived experience.

In Socratic philosophy, for instance, the emphasis on “the examined life” reflects a concern with self-reflection, moral accountability, and the cultivation of authentic existence through continuous questioning of one’s beliefs and actions (Plato, *Apology*). Similarly, Sophistic thought foregrounded human subjectivity and the situatedness of truth, particularly through Protagoras’ claim that “man is the measure of all things,” which anticipates later existentialist concerns with relativism, perception, and the absence of absolute foundations for meaning (Kerferd, 1981). These early philosophical concerns were later developed in a more systematic form by modern existentialist thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre, who each, in different ways, deepened the analysis of human existence, freedom, anxiety, and authenticity. Kierkegaard’s focus on subjective truth and individual faith, Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysical certainties and moral absolutes, Heidegger’s analysis of *Dasein* as being-in-the-world, and Sartre’s articulation of radical freedom collectively expanded existentialism into a coherent philosophical tradition concerned with lived human experience (Blackham, 2012; Sartre, 2022).

Rather than opposing earlier philosophical traditions, existentialist thinkers often understood their work as a critical continuation and transformation of debates about reason, subjectivity, and human nature. In this regard, existentialism engages with and reworks earlier philosophical concerns, including those found in Cartesian rationalism. For example, Blaise Pascal’s critique of excessive rationalism and his emphasis on the limitations of human reason and the importance of lived, affective experience anticipate key existentialist insights about the insufficiency of purely cognitive accounts of human existence (Pascal, 2005). Existentialism, therefore, develops as a sustained philosophical inquiry into the conditions of human freedom, meaning, and situated existence rather than a complete rupture from earlier traditions. Pascal regarded human beings as an intrinsic paradox, characterised by a tension between reason and embodiment, greatness and misery. In his *Pensées*, he famously portrays the human condition as both “the glory and the scum of the universe,” emphasising the fragility of human reason and the limits of intellectual certainty (Pascal, 2005). He further argues that humans are suspended between competing dimensions of existence, including rationality and finitude, such that human life cannot be fully comprehended through reason alone (Pascal, 2005). Pascal suggests that human identity is marked by incompleteness and dependence, particularly on culture, habit, and belief systems that shape lived existence. In this sense, self-understanding is mediated through practices, customs, and religious

orientation rather than purely abstract rationality (Blackham, 2012). Pascal stated, "Custom is our nature." He concluded that we must take a position on ourselves in our way of life, expressing both our greatness and our pain, avoiding both hubris and despair, as Jesus did by humbly realising that he was both God and Man (Pascal 2005).

In Nietzsche's philosophical writings, particularly in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *The Will to Power*, the figure of the *Übermensch* (often translated as "Overman" or "Superman") is presented as an ideal type who transcends conventional moral frameworks rooted in religious and metaphysical traditions. Nietzsche critiques Christian morality for promoting what he describes as "slave morality," characterised by passivity, resentment, and the suppression of life-affirming instincts. In contrast, the *Übermensch* affirms life through the exercise of the *will to power*, understood as the creative capacity to impose meaning, revalue values, and shape existence according to self-determined principles (Nietzsche, 1968). In this sense, value is not discovered as an external moral truth but actively produced through human creative agency. In contrast to Nietzsche's critique of inherited moral systems, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel offers a systematic account of human history and consciousness grounded in rational development. For Hegel, human existence unfolds dialectically through the progressive realisation of freedom within historical and social institutions. He argues that reason is immanent in history, and that human development is the gradual unfolding of the "Absolute Spirit" (*Geist*) toward self-conscious freedom within ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) (Hegel, 1991). Within this framework, individual subjectivity is not isolated or purely self-creating but is instead formed through participation in rational social structures such as family, civil society, and the state.

Søren Kierkegaard's existential critique emerges as a response to this Hegelian systematisation of human existence. Kierkegaard challenges the claim that human life can be fully captured within an objective, rational system, arguing instead that existence is fundamentally subjective, fragmented, and marked by existential anxiety. He insists that truth is not merely an abstract philosophical proposition but a matter of "subjective inwardness," requiring passionate commitment and personal decision, particularly in relation to faith (Kierkegaard, 1985). In opposition to Hegel's systematic rationalism, Kierkegaard emphasises the "leap of faith," highlighting the irreducible absurdity of existence and the necessity of personal, non-rational commitment in religious life (Kierkegaard, 1985; Blackham, 2012).

Existentialist philosophy is often associated with a critical stance toward forms of traditional and systematising philosophy that prioritise abstract universals over concrete lived experience. Thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre challenge what they perceive as overly detached or purely rational accounts of human existence, arguing instead that philosophical inquiry must begin from the standpoint of the existing individual situated in a specific historical and existential context (Kierkegaard, 1985; Heidegger, 1962; Sartre, 2007). In this sense, existentialism shifts philosophical attention toward questions of embodiment, choice, anxiety, and lived experience, rather than purely abstract metaphysical explanation. Within this framework, existentialists emphasise that human beings are not fully defined by pre-given essences or universal rational categories, but are instead continually engaged in the process of becoming through their actions and decisions. Sartre (2007), for instance, argues that individuals are “condemned to be free,” meaning that they must assume responsibility for their choices without recourse to predetermined moral or metaphysical guarantees. This foregrounding of situated freedom reflects the existentialist insistence that philosophy must remain closely connected to the realities of human existence.

A further dimension of existentialist thought concerns the problem of meaning in a world that is not transparently ordered by rational or divine purpose. Albert Camus, in particular, describes the human condition as one marked by the “absurd,” a tension between the human desire for meaning and the apparent indifference of the universe (Camus, 1955). From this perspective, existentialism does not simply deny meaning, but instead highlights the absence of ultimate, externally guaranteed explanations for existence. Consequently, individuals are confronted with the task of responding to this condition by choosing how to live, create meaning, and assume responsibility within an uncertain and finite world (Camus, 1955; Sartre, 2007).

Beauvoir’s “Potpourri”: A Blend of Feminism and Existentialism

The metaphor of “potpourri” in this article is used to describe Simone Beauvoir’s distinctive methodological and philosophical synthesis in *The Second Sex*. Rather than relying on a single theoretical framework, Beauvoir’s analysis operates as an assemblage of existentialism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, and phenomenology, which are woven together to produce a multidimensional account of women’s oppression. The term “potpourri” highlights the heterogeneity of voices, methods, and conceptual tools that shape her feminist existential project. This allows me to

present Beauvoir's work fluidly between lived experience, structural analysis, and ontological reflection in her examination of gendered existence.

Beauvoir's intellectual development was significantly shaped by her engagement with French existentialism, particularly the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and other contemporaries in mid-twentieth-century Parisian intellectual circles. From existentialism, she adopts the central idea that human beings are not defined by fixed essences but are constituted through freedom, choice, and situated existence (Beauvoir, 1949). This framework enables her to argue that womanhood is not a natural or biological destiny but a socially constructed condition produced through historical and cultural processes. However, Beauvoir does not rely on existentialism alone. Marxist theory informs her understanding of women's economic dependency and material subordination, particularly her analysis of women's labour and exclusion from productive social relations. Psychoanalysis contributes to her examination of how femininity is internalised through early childhood socialisation and familial structures, while phenomenology allows her to explore embodied experience and the lived reality of becoming a woman in a gendered world (Moi, 1999; Tong & Fernandes, 2024). These influences collectively shape her argument that women's oppression is not only ideological but also material, psychological, and existential.

Central to Beauvoir's philosophy is her claim that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 2011). This statement does not suggest that biology is irrelevant, but rather that biological sex does not determine social destiny. Instead, femininity is produced through social conditioning, cultural expectations, and institutional practices that shape how female bodies are interpreted and lived. From early childhood, girls are gradually socialised into roles that emphasise passivity, dependence, and relational identity, rather than autonomous agency (Beauvoir, 2011). In this way, gender is understood as a process of becoming rather than a fixed ontological category. Beauvoir further argues that woman is constructed as "the Other" in relation to man, who is positioned as the normative subject. This asymmetrical relationship means that masculinity is associated with transcendence, agency, and subjectivity, while femininity is associated with immanence, passivity, and alterity (Beauvoir, 2011). Importantly, this dynamic is not natural or inevitable but historically produced through social structures, including marriage, family systems, and cultural representations that reinforce male dominance. Within this framework, marriage functions as a key institution through

which women's subjectivity is shaped and often constrained. Beauvoir critiques marriage as a structure that frequently reduces women's autonomy by positioning them within relational roles that prioritise domesticity and dependency. Although presented as a pathway to social legitimacy, marriage often reproduces gender hierarchy by embedding women within systems of care and obligation that limit their existential freedom (Beauvoir, 2011).

Overall, Beauvoir's "potpourri" method reveals that gender cannot be understood through a single explanatory lens. Instead, it emerges at the intersection of economic structures, psychological formation, cultural narratives, and existential freedom. Her feminist existentialism, therefore, offers a layered critique of women's oppression while simultaneously providing a philosophical account of how freedom might be reclaimed through consciousness, agency, and resistance to socially imposed identities.

Beauvoir's Existentialist Approach to the Oppression of Women

In the words of Beauvoir, men often express their identity and superiority by acquiring private property. However, she believes that women's subservient status as the "other" begins before property relations are addressed. As a result, it is vital to understand why property interactions occur in the ways they do. From an existentialist perspective, Beauvoir provides an alternate explanation for sexism, explaining why women did not demand property rights (Beauvoir, 2011). This, she claims, is not due to some feminine nature, but rather to the woman's condition, which is fundamentally different from that of the man. The woman must give birth and endure the physiological disruption, deformity, and misery that come with passive reproduction, as an object exploited by natural forces rather than a maker or creator imposing her design on the world. Historically, Beauvoir says that it is a man who competes, kills, sacrifices his life, and dares. These duties can be accomplished by a woman, but her circumstances prevent her from fully participating. The superiority is given not to the sex, but to the gender that kills; it is the risk of death that allows man to mature, become a subject, and finally become an autonomous human being.

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir examined the social and cultural formations of gender, concluding that men have traditionally defined and dominated women. Beauvoir's existentialist philosophy is fundamental to her feminist viewpoint since she believes that women are developed via socialisation and cultural standards rather than by birth. Beauvoir was heavily influenced by Sartre an existentialism,

particularly his perspective on sexuality. According to Beauvoir, personal connections are the most intense sources of conflict between the self and the other, a belief shared by Sartre. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre does not offer a systematic or explicit theory of sexual intimacy as a distinct thematic concern. However, his broader existential analysis of being-for-others (*être-pour-autrui*) provides a framework within which intimate relations, including erotic and sexual encounters, can be interpreted. Sartre's account of the "Look" (*le regard*) and the struggle for recognition between 'Self' and 'Other' highlights how interpersonal relations are structured by tension, objectification, and the desire to assert subjectivity in the presence of another consciousness (Sartre, 2022).

Within this framework, later interpreters have argued that Sartre's analysis implicitly extends to intimate and sexual relations insofar as these encounters intensify the dynamics of objectification and reciprocity between subjects. As Nye (2013) notes, Sartre's account of embodied intersubjectivity allows for readings in which sexual relations are understood as sites where the tension between freedom and objectification becomes particularly pronounced, even though Sartre himself does not develop a sustained theory of sexuality. Thus, rather than explicitly theorising sexual intimacy, Sartre provides conceptual tools for understanding how relations with others, including intimate relations, are shaped by existential conflict, mutual objectification, and the struggle to affirm one's freedom in the presence of another subject (Sartre, 2022; Nye, 2013).

Beauvoir and Sartre shared the belief that physical desire does not merely result from a simple physiological reaction. Rather, desire comes first, followed by its physical manifestation. Sex is not just a subjective pleasure or a physical function, but a deeply political act. Sexuality lies at the heart of philosophy because it is where people most intimately interact, addressing the distance and struggle that separates them from others. Beauvoir argues that women's subjectivity is at risk in the process (Beauvoir, 1979).

Reconsidering Existential Ethics of Gendered Relations

In order to provide light on Beauvoir's criticism of gendered relations and embodied subjectivity, this section explores her interaction with Sartrean existentialism, namely the ideas of authenticity and bad faith. The human propensity to deny one's freedom by assuming fixed identities or social positions as though they were natural or predetermined rather than chosen is referred to in existentialist philosophy as "bad faith" (Sartre, 2003). In contrast, authenticity is acknowledging and accepting

one's radical freedom and responsibility as a placed subject. Beauvoir analyses gender relations using this existential paradigm, especially in *The Second Sex*, where she demonstrates how women are frequently positioned within systems that promote bad faith. Rather than acknowledging that passivity, dependence, and relationship identity are socially constructed roles, women are often socialised to embrace these characteristics as inherently feminine. Insofar as it restricts women's ability to comprehend themselves as independent people, this internalisation of gender norms is an existential denial of freedom (Beauvoir, 2011). Sexual experience becomes a privileged place where the conflict between subjectivity and objectification is enacted in Beauvoir's analysis of erotic relations. She contends, drawing on existential phenomenology, that romantic relationships frequently perpetuate power imbalances in which the female body is positioned as immanence and an object for the Other, while the masculine subject is linked to transcendence and agency.

However, Beauvoir maintains that genuine erotic encounters are achievable when both partners simultaneously perceive each other as embodied subjects and free consciousnesses, rather than reducing sexual relations to dominance alone (Beauvoir, 2011). In this sense, Beauvoir's narrative might be interpreted as a critical expansion of Sartre's intersubjectivity theory. Beauvoir adds a normative dimension by arguing that ethical relationships necessitate mutual recognition of freedom without objectification, whereas Sartre highlights the conflictual nature of the look and the struggle for recognition between subjects (Moi, 1999). Therefore, the integration of desire, embodiment, and freedom within reciprocal relationships constitutes authenticity in intimate relationships rather than the rejection of embodiment. According to this viewpoint, ill faith in gender interactions is structurally formed through social institutions like marriage, sexuality norms, and cultural narratives of femininity rather than being restricted to individual psychological denial. These institutions limit women's transcendence and perpetuate uneven forms of subjectivity by encouraging them to see themselves as "the Other." (Beauvoir, 2011).

Beauvoir's existential feminism has been criticised for some reasons. Her approach, according to some feminist scholars, runs the potential of universalising a male-centric model of subjectivity in which the adoption of masculine-coded transcendence is tacitly characterised as emancipation (Butler, 1986). Some argue that Beauvoir's analysis presents "woman" as a relatively uniform concept by failing to adequately address racial, socioeconomic, and sexual distinctions

(Crenshaw, 1989). Because it articulates gender as a historically constructed situation rather than a natural essence, Beauvoir's work continues to be fundamental to feminist theory despite these criticisms.

Beauvoir's existential feminism should be seen as a critical reworking of existential categories toward an ethics of gendered liberation rather than as a straightforward "improvement" on Sartre. Her description of authenticity opens up a philosophical space for reconsidering freedom as relational, bodily, and socially mediated while also challenging the ways in which social standards cause existential "poor faith" in women's lives.

Conclusion

Simone Beauvoir's existential feminism has been critically analysed in this article using the conceptual framework of "potpourri," which is a methodological synthesis of existentialism, phenomenology, Marxism, and psychoanalysis. The research has demonstrated that Beauvoir's explanation of gender operates through a layered and multidisciplinary method that combines problems of freedom, embodiment, social structure, and lived experience rather than considering her philosophy as a single-system dogma. A re-reading of *The Second Sex* as a sophisticated philosophical work that simultaneously theorises women's oppression as existential, social, and material has been made possible by this interpretative lens.

The central argument of the paper is that Beauvoir's feminist existentialism offers a critical explanation of gendered subjectivity by showing how patriarchal structures that restrict women's transcendence and uphold unequal power relations produce them as "the Other." Beauvoir expands existential philosophy into a feminist ethical critique that questions the normalisation of gender norms and reveals the societal construction of femininity by addressing Sartrean ideas like freedom, embodiment, and bad faith. The study also made the case that Beauvoir's framework offers opportunities to reconsider authenticity, agency, and liberation in relational and embodied terms in addition to describing oppression.

This study is important because it reinterprets Beauvoir using a methodological metaphor that emphasises the constructive conflict between many philosophical traditions in her writings. The paper shows that Beauvoir's feminist existentialism resists being reduced to a single theoretical lineage and instead serves as a dynamic location of intellectual convergence by conceptualising her approach as a

"potpourri." By providing a more nuanced interpretation of Beauvoir that emphasises methodological plurality, this advances feminist scholarship and enhances current discussions in feminist theory, existential ethics, and gender studies.

In the conclusion, the study confirms that Beauvoir's ideas are still relevant to modern feminist discourse, especially when it comes to issues of identity, freedom, and the sociopolitical production of gendered subjectivity.

References

- Aquinas, Thomas. 2010. *Summa theologiae: Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican province*. Mobile Reference.
- Beauvoir, Simone. 1949 [1952]. *The second sex*, H. M. Parshley (trans.), New York: Knopf.
- Berg, Barbara J. 2009. *Sexism in America: Alive, well, and ruining our future*. Lawrence Hill
- Blackham, H. J. 2012. *Six existentialist thinkers*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203046678>
- Butler, Judith. 1986. Sex and gender in Simone de Beauvoir. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2930225>
- Cashdollar, Stanford. 1973. Aristotle's Politics of Morals. *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 11(2), 145-160. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/hph.2008.0771>.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé .1989. Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine. University of Chicago Legal Forum.139–168
- de Beauvoir, Simone. 1974. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Books.
- De Beauvoir, Simone. 2011. *The second sex* (C. Borde & S. Malovany-Chevallier, Trans.). Vintage (Original work published 1949).
- Falque, Emmanuel. 2019. "Blaise Pascal and the Anxiety of Faith." *Louvain Studies* 42, (2): 151-174.

- Freedman, Estelle. 2007. *No turning back: The history of feminism and the future of women*. Ballantine Books.
- Gamble, Sarah. Ed. 2004. *The Routledge companion to feminism and postfeminism*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203011010>.
- Goldin, Claudia. 2006. "The quiet revolution that transformed women's employment, education, and family." *American economic review* 96 (2):1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1257/000282806777212350>
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, Allen W. Wood, and Hugh Barr Nisbet. 1991. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Vol. 23. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511808012>
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. Being and time. 1927. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper.
- Hekman, Susan. 2010. *The material of knowledge: Feminist disclosures*. Indiana University Press.
- Heywood, Leslie, and Jennifer Drake, (eds). 1997. *Third wave agenda: Being feminist, doing feminism*. U of Minnesota Press.
- Hooks, Bell. 2000. *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. Pluto Press. <https://doi.org/10.1037/12288-000>
- Jaggar, Alison M. 1983. *Feminist politics and human nature (Philosophy and Society)*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
- Kaufmann, Walter, ed. 1975. *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre: Basic Writings of Existentialism by Kaufmann, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger, and Others*. Penguin.
- Kerferd, George Briscoe. 1981. *The sophistic movement*. Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1985. *Fear and trembling*. Penguin UK.
- Mikkola, Mari. 2007. Gender Sceptics and Feminist Politics", *Res Publica*, 13: 361–380.

- Mill, John Stuart. "1869. The subjection of women." *On liberty and other writings* (2008): 117-218. <https://doi.org/10.1037/12288-000>
- Mobolanle Ebunoluwa, Sotunsa. 2009. "Feminism: The quest for an African variant." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 3(1):227-234.
- Moi, Toril. 1999. *What is a woman? And other essays*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Moi, Toril. 2002. *Sexual/textual politics: Feminist literary theory*. Psychology Press.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203426036>
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "1968. The Will to Power as Art." *The Will to Power* (1888): 419-57.
- Nye, Andrea. 2013. *Feminist theory and the philosophies of man*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315889207>
- Oyeshile, Olatunji A. 2005. *Reconciling the self with the other: an existentialist perspective on the management of ethnic conflicts in Africa*. Hope publications.
- Pascal, Blaise 2005 *Pensées*. Translated by Roger Ariew. Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, Sarah Richmond, and Richard Moran. 2022. *Being and nothingness: An essay in phenomenological ontology*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429434013>
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 2003. *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*. Vintage.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 2007. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. Yale University Press, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300242539>
- Simons, Margaret A., Jessica Benjamin, and Simone de Beauvoir. 1979. "Simone de Beauvoir: an interview." *Feminist Studies* 5(2): 330-345.
- Tkach, David. 2011. *Leo Strauss's Critique of Martin Heidegger*. University of Ottawa (Canada).

- Tong, Rosemarie, and Tina Fernandes Botts. 2024. *Feminist thought: A more comprehensive introduction*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429495243-6>
- Üstün, Kutay, and Abdullah Süren. 2022."Feminism, Historical Origins of Feminism and Basic Concepts." *Dünya İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi* .2: 151-169.