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Elaine Stavro, *Emancipatory Thinking: Simone de Beauvoir and Contemporary Thought*. Montreal & Kingston, London and Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018. xiv + 350 pp. References and index. \$120.00 C.A.D. (cl). ISBN 9-78-0773553545; \$39.95 C.A.D. (pb). ISBN 9-78-0773553552.

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Since the publication of an edited collection of Simone de Beauvoir's politically focused texts in English translation in 2012, *Simone de Beauvoir: Political Writings*,^[1] there has been a swell of interest around the feminist philosopher's political activism and how her theoretical modes of enquiry might help us to think through contemporary societal concerns. Elaine Stavro's *Emancipatory Thinking: Simone de Beauvoir and Contemporary Thought* sits amongst this recent body of work,^[2] bringing a new and important perspective to the subject. As Stavro contests from the outset, and pursues throughout this comprehensive volume, "Beauvoir's problematic of embodied agency and her radical humanism are worth recuperating, specifically in our anti-humanist times" (p. 23). Drawing upon her philosophic texts such as *The Second Sex* ^[3] and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*,^[4] as well as Beauvoir's fiction and essays such as "Must We Burn Sade?"^[5] and *Djamila Boupacha*,^[6] Stavro traces the importance of Beauvoir's theory of intersubjectivity, underscoring the elaboration of her phenomenologically informed concept of situation in order to stress the emancipatory potential of self/Other relations while remaining highly attentive to the differing modes of being in the world in both individual and collective ways. The anti-humanist times to which Stavro refers explicitly in her introduction, citing the election of the Trump administration and the reality of Brexit, already feel far away (despite less than two years since publication) for a reader currently living in a Trumppocalyptic world where women's and other minorities' rights are being increasingly restricted, and Black and trans communities are under constant threat. Yet Stavro's strength, as the book unfolds, lies in her ability to argue convincingly and optimistically for the continued relevance of Beauvoir's thought as a method to seek out new forms of freedom.

Divided into seven chapters, *Emancipatory Thinking* puts Beauvoir into dialogue not only with her contemporaries but also with those whose theoretical standpoints have been sketched long after Beauvoir's earthly departure. Whether such theories are indebted or antithetical to Beauvoir's theoretical legacy, Stavro carefully maps them out by showing how Beauvoirian thought can contribute, in a meaningful way, to diverse forms of contemporary radical emancipatory thinking. Emulating Beauvoir's own *bricolage* style of writing, Stavro pieces together a rich collage drawing on a multitude of different theoretical, political, and social contexts to present Beauvoir's vision of a truly embodied subjectivity reciprocally reverberating

within a world from and to which it both receives and provides definition. The outline of these different contexts, however, is perhaps one of the few weaknesses of Stavro's impressive volume. While such meticulous contextualization and explanation of various strands of feminist, Marxist, and phenomenological thinking (to cite but a few) is undoubtedly welcome, especially for a reader who chooses to dip in and out of the chapters independently, their reiteration can become cumbersome repetitive for readers who are in for the long haul.

In chapter one, Stavro positions Beauvoir at the intersection of feminism and epistemology. Although Beauvoir herself never engaged directly with epistemological discourse, as Stavro outlines, the philosopher was acutely aware of how an individual's gender identity could shape the production of knowledge, resulting in asymmetrical relations of epistemic privilege in which women become marginalized by androcentric worldviews. Stavro explores, in detail, Beauvoir's concept of situation in this chapter, underscoring the central argument that the way in which we assimilate, produce and disseminate knowledge is inflected by the way we experience the world as socially situated subjects. Stavro locates Beauvoir somewhere between standpoint theory feminism and postmodern feminism, arguing that in line with the former, women's systemic oppression must be foregrounded in order to catalyze change, and, like the latter, that exposing sources of oppression is in itself not sufficient, but must be accompanied by a radical destabilization of existing identities.

The sex/gender distinction forms the focus of the second chapter. Here, Stavro traces the splintered trajectory of the various factions of post '68 French feminist thought, highlighting, in particular, how differentialist feminists (Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray) have ignored Beauvoir's concept of embodiment, charging her with positing a universalist notion of women, which, as Stavro explains, does an extreme disservice to Beauvoir's complex thinking about the "non-essentialist historically sensitive sexed body that appreciates anatomical differences as well as cultural and social ones" (p. 71). Stavro also examines Beauvoir via a social constructivist lens arguing that Beauvoir, too, has a theory of performativity. However, unlike Judith Butler who posits biology as a socially constructed category, for Beauvoir our grasp on the world is not simply socially or historically contingent, rather the body's motility and physiology play a part in organizing corporeal lived experience. Stavro also highlights the paucity of Butler's consideration of the intersubjective, namely, how our gender performances involve others and how our performances are influenced by them in turn. According to Stavro, "Beauvoir assumes that in performing one's gender, one takes up past/present patterns of sexist behaviour, images, and symbols to reconfigure new relations" (p. 84). Finally, towards the end of this chapter, Stavro puts Beauvoir into dialogue with the new materialists (such as Rosi Braidotti, William Connolly, and Jane Bennett) and their focus on the duality of human and non-human assemblages in the construction of agentic power. Although Stavro does not go so far as to label Beauvoir as a new materialist, she does signal Beauvoir's appraisal of the body "as a bio-social fact" (p. 112). [7]

Stavro's third chapter, titled "Beauvoir Reconfigures Social Subjectivity in the Wake of Psychoanalysis," explores Beauvoir's (albeit wary) engagement with psychoanalysis in order to think through the ways in which gender relations have been cast. Beauvoir's rejection of the unconscious and her hostility towards Freudian doctrine is widely known, yet, as Stavro contends, Beauvoir does share affinities in her thinking, specifically with object relations theory, in her assessment that we are intersubjectively constituted beings. Stavro's interweaving of Beauvoir's fiction is especially strong in this chapter, showcasing, in particular, how female

characters from *The Mandarins*, *The Blood of Others* and *The Woman Destroyed* [8] illustrate the subject's capacity for change by engaging in collective projects.

In the next chapter, the focus moves firmly into the political sphere where Stavro explores Beauvoir's relationship to Marxism, historically situating her thinking in relation to the communist and non-communist-left politics with which Beauvoir was confronted, specifically after the Second World War. Beauvoir's engagement with Marxism is tempered by her existential perspective, as Stavro states, "her novel interweaving of existential phenomenology and Marxism offers an ontological supplement that is appreciative of the human potential to initiate, to begin anew in spite of restrictive social circumstances of capitalism" (p. 196). Stavro also uses space in this chapter to right a frequent wrong concerning the way in which Beauvoir is often categorized as an apologist for the Soviet Union alongside Sartre, which elides the distinctiveness of Beauvoir's own political thinking. Stavro's recourse to the *Ethics of Ambiguity* illuminates Beauvoir's questioning of Marxist theory by delineating how women's lives cannot be fully apprehended via an understanding of class relations. Rather, the forms of oppression to which they are subject are also determined via their physiology and sexuality, as well as race and ethnicity. In relation to Beauvoir's *Old Age*, [9] Stavro highlights how attention to the experiential modes of embodiment, namely emotions, broadens Marxist class perspectives.

While the focus of the previous chapter is theoretically driven, chapter five examines Beauvoir's politics in action. Stavro argues that scholarship tends to overlook the link between Beauvoir's activism and her philosophy, yet as a phenomenological existentialist the importance of lived experience and "engag[ing] in existing struggles" (p. 240), are central to Beauvoir's ethics. By discussing Beauvoir's active involvement both internationally (in publicizing new revolutionary movements) and locally (in fighting for causes such as the unfair treatment of unmarried mothers and supporting the student protests of '68), Stavro outlines how Beauvoir contributes to the formation of a radical public sphere through her categorical rejection of hegemonic structures of power.

The sixth chapter deals primarily with Beauvoir's position as a public intellectual and considers the problematic of whether and how an intellectual can speak for a marginalized Other without counterproductively exacerbating the latter's disempowerment. Exploring Beauvoir's involvement in the Djamilia Boupacha case--the Algerian FLN activist who was detained, tortured, and raped by French soldiers in order to extract information from her--Stavro considers debates around "the universal/specific intellectual, identity/post-identity politics, the use of recognitional (affirmative) versus transformatory strategies, and, finally, the role of affective/emotional experiences" (p. 267). Though cognizant of her complicated position as a French citizen within this network of relations, Beauvoir's ethicality drives her pursuit of freedom which involves maintaining the integrality of the Other's subjective being; as Stavro writes, "as situated beings, one must be apprised of one's values and how one's actions contribute to projects of collective freedom" (p. 281). Lastly in this chapter, Stavro underscores the importance of emotion in emancipatory struggles for Beauvoir, distinguishing her from Jürgen Habermas's more rationalistic interpretation of the public intellectual. As Stavro aptly puts it, Beauvoir "harnessed emotion in her work as a critical intellectual" (p. 280), highlighting how her phenomenologically informed perspective allows her to count on the responses elicited from embodied selves in order to mobilize emotions to appeal for social equality and liberty.

Stavro's seventh and final chapter, "Fictions of Politics: Affect, Idea, and Engagement," examines the recent turn to literature within political theory, illuminating how Beauvoir's exploration of emotion and affect articulated through literature serves to engender responsiveness and respect. Unlike Deleuzian affect theorists more occupied by non-human autonomous affects, Beauvoir, according to Stavro, "is interested in embodied affects that are entwined with emotion and history and further human freedom" (p. 316). Stavro outlines interesting synergies here between Beauvoir and Martha Nussbaum in terms of their appreciation of literature as a source of democratic agency. Thereafter, through a more detailed study of Beauvoir's fictional text, *The Blood of Others*, Stavro explores the capacity of Beauvoir's literary work to nurture empathy through embodied affect as well as exemplify emancipatory projects.

To sum up, *Emancipatory Thinking* deftly weaves together the multiple and nuanced layers of Beauvoir's conceptualization of freedom and her theoretical and practical methods for enacting democratic change in the world. Stavro's careful and sustained examination of Beauvoir's conceptual elaboration of situation, embodiment, and intersubjectivity serves to underline the acknowledgment of the concrete, lived realities of individual beings and the concomitant ethical responsibility that such knowledge engenders in the pursuit of emancipatory projects. Inserting Beauvoirian thought into contemporary contexts underscores its perennial vigor and tantalizingly inspires the reader to think about how Beauvoir herself may have engaged in fresh debates in current revolutionary moments. Stavro's text is a true asset to Beauvoirian studies and, more importantly, an eye-opener for political theorists who have naïvely overlooked Beauvoir's radical emancipatory potential.

NOTES

[1] Simone de Beauvoir, *Political Writings*, eds. Margaret A. Simons and Marybeth Timmermann (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

[2] Other recent notable titles which examine Beauvoir as a political thinker include: Sonia Kruks, *Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Ambiguity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Lori Jo Marso, *Politics with Beauvoir: Freedom in the Encounter* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Nathalie Nya, *Simone de Beauvoir and the Colonial Experience: Freedom, Violence, and Identity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019).

[3] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1953).

[4] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1948).

[5] Simone de Beauvoir, "Must We Burn Sade?" trans. Kim Allen Glead, Marilyn Gaddis Rose, and Virginia Preston, in Margaret A. Simons and Marybeth Timmermann, eds., *Political Writings* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2012), pp. 44–101.

[6] Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi, *Djamila Boupacha: The Story of the Torture of a Young Algerian Girl That Shocked Liberal French Opinion*, trans. Peter Green (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

[7] In a similar vein, Sonia Kruks puts Beauvoir into dialogue with the new materialists and in following Stavro's line of enquiry also argues against their disregard for the human quality of freedom and responsibility. See Sonia Kruks, "For a Modest Human Exceptionalism: Simone de Beauvoir and the 'New Materialisms'," *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 30.2 (2019): 252-274.

[8] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Mandarins*, trans. L.M. Friedman (London: Fontana Collins, 1956); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others*, trans. Yvonne Moyse and Roger Senhouse (New York: Penguin, 1948); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Woman Destroyed*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987).

[9] Simone de Beauvoir, *Old Age*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (New York: Penguin, 1977).

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