

Susanne Moser, *Freedom and Recognition in the Work of Simone de Beauvoir*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008. pp. 220. ISBN 978-3-631-50925-8

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Susanne Moser's book provides a useful addition to the now quite extensive literature on the philosophical aspects of the work of Simone de Beauvoir. The book was originally published in German and, unfortunately, the English translation is stilted and awkward, making it demanding to read. However, it is a book worth reading, since it offers some interesting new insights into the development of Beauvoir's notions of freedom and recognition, as well as some original reflections on her relationship with Sartre and others.

The book is divided into two main sections. The first examines the development of Beauvoir's notion of freedom, which Moser compellingly argues is the lynchpin of her entire body of work. Moser's analysis focuses primarily on Beauvoir's early "moral" works, *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, but with the intent of showing also the centrality of freedom in *The Second Sex*.

Much of what Moser says about the development of Beauvoir's notion of freedom in these two moral works retraces ground covered in earlier treatments of this topic by Kristana Arp, Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, Margaret Simons, myself, and others. It is strange that Moser spends so little time discussing this previous scholarship, but she does add some interesting new insights to it, especially with regard to the Beauvoir-Sartre relationship. She argues that the main difference between the two thinkers is that, whereas Sartre identifies freedom with transcendence, for Beauvoir the will precedes transcendence and thus "it is will that turns 'natural freedom' into 'moral freedom'" (Moser 89).

Beauvoir's focus on will might seem to align her more with Kant than Sartre, Moser points out. But it would be a mistake to read Beauvoir as a Kantian, since she does not share his insistence on reason as constitutive of will. To the contrary, for Beauvoir, will "owes its meaning not to reason, as with Kant, but rather to passionate desire. [. . .] Beauvoir wants a human being made out of flesh and blood!" (Moser 92-3).

The second section of the book focuses on the notion of recognition and explores Beauvoir's evolving account of the dynamics of alterity, or otherness, through which recognition is denied. Here Moser skillfully traces Beauvoir's path from the very individualistic treatment of recognition and alterity in *She Came to Stay* to the more socially complex account of woman as Other in *The Second Sex*, where the conditions that enable transcendence are seen as social. She then moves on to the yet more socially grounded treatment of otherness in *The Coming of Age*. Most of this section is devoted to *The Second Sex*, discussing Beauvoir's use of Hegel, the question of embodiment, and various other themes.



Interestingly, Moser notes that when Beauvoir discusses "friendship" as the relationship of reciprocity in which each individual can finally "encounter another subject as a subject," she does so in the context of lesbian relationships (Moser.158). I would point out, however, that, in the final chapter of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir also describes a possibility for such full reciprocity in heterosexual erotic relations: her hope is that women may cease to be the Other without having to abandon their relationships with men.

Moser ends her book with a brief Conclusion in which she asserts that Beauvoir's work "can be seen as a pivot between modernity and post-modernity" (Moser.211) because it points to those irreconcilable contradictions and ambiguities of human existence that "bourgeois" modernity wished to deny. However, since postmodern feminism has for the most part dismissed Beauvoir as a naively modernist thinker, I wish Moser had developed this important claim more fully.

Moser's book sets out materials on the basis of which an argument about Beauvoir's "pivotal" role between modernity and post-modernity could well be constructed, but the actual construction of the argument is not undertaken here. Hopefully Moser will provide it for us in a future work.