

Review of: "Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialist Ethics as a Prophylactic for Ideology Obsession and Ideology Addiction: An Uplifting Philosophy for Philosophical Practice"

Sanford Drob¹

¹ Fielding Graduate University

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This article covers very interesting ground and makes a number of very good points, but I believe it needs tightening and closer focus. It may be that there is more than one article here. Some of the ideas, including the notion that extreme obsessive ideology might be classified as a DSM diagnosis require further thought and elaboration. One concern that was not developed in the paper is that such classification could become a psychiatric tool for political oppression as it was in the old Soviet Union. Also, it seems to me that such a diagnosis would potentially be applicable to virtually all who are committed to a fundamentalist version of any religion. While my own view is that religion that sees divinity in the "open economy of thought, experience, and discourse" is more mature and philosophically tenable than adherence to any form of fundamentalism (and I tend to think of fundamentalism as a form of "idol worship"), I think that there are dangers in labeling fundamentalism "pathological," even if in many cases, it arises out of the narcissistic deficiencies the author describes. I am reminded here of the outcome of the French Revolution.

While the paper promises to be about Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist ethics, this focus tends to get lost in the latter half of the paper. It is unclear whether this paper is addressed to those with a background in logic based therapy or is intended for a wider audience. If the latter, then some more background on LBT would be helpful.

I thought that the discussion of bad faith was very interesting, particularly in light of today's politics, which seems to be rife with it.

Another issue that could perhaps benefit from clarification is how to distinguish "an uplifting philosophy" as per Cohen's therapy from an obsessive ideology that is pathological. I think that this is an important question in light of the idea, found, for example in Yalom's work on existential psychotherapy, that commitment to a cause is an important avenue to achieve life meaning and personal fulfillment.

There are several ideas in the paper that touch upon well-established ideas in the history of psychology, and I think that the paper would benefit from recognizing this. For example, Cohen's notion that individuals in treatment reach unrealistic and self-defeating conclusions based on irrational premises in practical reasoning is very reminiscent of the basic thrust of Albert Ellis' rational-emotive therapy and cognitive therapy in general. Footnote #1 makes it clear to me how Cohen goes beyond Ellis by introducing the notion of a "guiding virtue," but as a reader, who is unfamiliar with Cohen's work (and like virtually all psychologists very familiar with Ellis). I think that elaboration here would be very useful in the text itself.

Another example: Cohen's description of existential perfectionism is very close to (Ellis)'s idea of the "tyranny of the shoulds."

Further, the notion that ethics and psychology must provide an important real to evil is a fundamental idea in Jung.

I wonder if "practicing unconditional life acceptance" might not be too passive an idea in the face of the worlds' injustices, even if it does lead to a kind of "metaphysical security."

I found the idea of classifying different forms of extreme ideologies in terms of individual psychodynamics interesting, but I thought greater elaboration was necessary particularly in connection with Kohut's self-psychology. This is a part of the paper that perhaps could be broken off and turned into a separate work. If so, I think a direct reading and reference to Kohut would be helpful and would contribute to clarifying the connection between "failures in early attachments" and the extremes in ideology. As it stands now this is an interesting idea that is not, in my view, adequately developed.

The claim that the ideology addict is fundamentally, engaged in a narcissistic project may be true, but this does not rule out the possibility that they are *also* motivated by the ideals of their ideology. I think that in working with patients who have ideological commitments it is a serious mistake to psychologize those commitments without also respecting the "guiding virtue" aspects of their commitments. I am thinking here for example of individuals who are obsessively, committed to climate, change policy, racial justice, and gun control. I am sure that the author (and Cohen) are also clear on this but it should be more clearly articulated in the paper.

The term "deracilization" is unclear. Deradicalization?

The final two paragraphs in which the author assesses his own essay and describes its limitations are accurate but to my mind unnecessary in a paper submitted for publication.

Overall, this is a fascinating read but the paper can be improved significantly by addressing the points above. It is generally well-written but there are a few points where it lacks clarity. One example: "De Beauvoir's method, as Sartre writes in his book *Being and Nothingness*, can be understood as an existential-phenomenological exploration of human existence." It is unclear if Sartre here writing about or simply reflecting de Beauvoir's method?