

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

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As the title suggests, du Plessis' "Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialist Ethics as a Prophylactic for Ideology Obsession and Ideology Addiction: An Uplifting Philosophy for Philosophical Practice" proposes that de Beauvoir's sketch of an existentialist ethics has much to contribute to philosophical (therapeutic) practice. In particular, du Plessis argues that applying de Beauvoir's concept of 'ambiguity' within Cohen's (2013) Logic-Based Therapy can act as an antidote to ideology obsession and what he refers to as ideology addiction. The topic is timely, of course, the theoretical and philosophical breadth impressive, and the attempt at synthesizing this breadth laudable.

Du Plessis mentions that, "[d]ue to the breadth of this article many of the ideas were not explored in-depth or comprehensively" (2023, p. 13). I have very a limited acquaintance with the scholarly discourse on psychotherapy, in general, and philosophical practice, in particular, and will thus focus my comments on a few philosophical aspects of the article which, in my view, would benefit not from added depth but greater precision, if it is to achieve its stated aim of providing "a contribution to the broader literature on existential philosophy and philosophical practice" (2023, p. 12).

I wholeheartedly agree that "de Beauvoir's existentialist ethics could serve as a prophylactic for ideological obsession," as du Plessis states (p. 2). However, my sense is that a more careful analysis of the potential relationship between her philosophical notion of the acceptance of 'ambiguity', and thereby rejection of the "absolute", and Cohen's psychological notion of the "fallacy of existential perfection" is required to make this argument convincing.

In my view, to accept and perhaps even embrace what de Beauvoir terms the 'ambiguity' constitutive of the human condition is much more than a rejection of the "cardinal fallacy that Cohen calls existential perfectionism – which involves demanding perfection and that bad things must not happen in the world and when the world fails to live up to one's idealized image of it one perceives the world to be all bad" (du Plessis, 2023, p. 6). It is precisely the ambiguity between being-in-itself and being-for-itself (Sartre). Equating 'ambiguity' with 'imperfection' and 'fallenness' is somewhat problematic, just as the conclusion du Plessis draws in the following passage is:

"Thus, by acknowledging the inherent ambiguity or 'fallenness' of our condition we may thus accept that the suffering and misery in the world are not an aberration that must be 'fixed.' Once we accept the imperfection and ambiguity of our existence, the desire for a future utopia may seem less appealing" (du Plessis, 2023, p. 6).

Although, I assume that du Plessis is referring here to a kind of acceptance that the human condition inherently involves suffering and despair, the problematic alignment of ambiguity with imperfection and fallenness (and the wording of the passage cited above) opens the door to a fatalistic reading that would run counter to de Beauvoir's proposal.

Consider for instance, de Beauvoir's (1976) assertion that freedom is the foundation of ethics and that, "freedom wills itself genuinely only by willing itself as an indefinite movement through the freedom of others" (p. 90).

Rather than accepting that "suffering and misery in the world are not an aberration that must be 'fixed'" (du Plessis, 2023, p. 6), de Beauvoir's suggest that we constantly work toward the freedom of others and the joy of existence being asserted by everyone:

"However, it must not be forgotten that there is a concrete bond between freedom and existence; to will man free is to will there to be being, it is to will the disclosure of being in the joy of existence; in order for the idea of liberation to have a concrete meaning, the joy of existence must be asserted in each one, at every instant; the movement toward freedom assumes its real, flesh and blood figure in the world by thickening into pleasure, into happiness... If we do not love life on our own account and through others, it is futile to seek to justify it in any way." (1976, pp. 135-136)

In general, integrating de Beauvoir's discussion of joy and freedom and relating it directly to the "uplifting philosophy" and "guiding virtue" mentioned by du Plessis, would strengthen the proposal considerably.

Lastly, making connections with the scholarly literature surrounding existential positive psychology and existential psychotherapy (e.g., Bretherton, 2015; Robbins, 2021; Wong, 2012; Yalom, 1980) might be worth exploring.

A few minor comments:

Strengthening the conceptual connection between Sartre's notion of bad faith and ideology obsession, as well as between the passage on Sartre and de Beauvoir would be helpful.

The article would benefit from careful copy-edit readthrough.

p. 2: should "ubiquity" be "ambiguity"?

p. 3: The author's statement that according to Kant all cognition is conceptual is misleading at best and at worst simply wrong, depending on what 'cognition' and 'conceptual' refer to here. Rectifying the situation would require a discussion of Kant's 'lawful concepts'; 'understanding,' which is "adequately" conceptual; and the role Kant ascribes to the sensibility of perception and imagination. However, since this is a sidenote, I would suggest simply removing it.

p. 4: "ambiguity is an undeniable feature of our being-in-the-world (Dasein):" I understand not wanting to mention Heidegger, but this is his terminology and should either be attributed to him or worded differently, I think.

p. 5: "De Beauvoir's suggestion and ethics could be seen as an alternative to the philosophy of the 'absurd and despair' often associated with existentialism..." Not only *could* it be seen as such, but de Beauvoir explicitly states that it is:

““Ambiguity is not absurdity: To declare that existence is absurd is to deny that it can ever be given meaning; to say that it is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won. Absurdity challenges every ethics; but also the finished rationalization of the real would leave no room for ethics; it is because man's condition is ambiguous that he seeks, through failure and outrageousness, to save his existence. Thus, to say that action has to be lived in its truth, that is in the consciousness of the antinomies which it involves, does not mean that one has to renounce it.” (1976, p. 129)

p. 5: I assume autocorrect jumped into action here: “George Hegel” should be either “Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel” or “G.W.F. Hegel”

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