

Simone de Beauvoir’s Philosophical Sexism: Implications for the Philosophy of Posterity

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Abstract

In reflecting on the broad theme of the conference, WOMEN IN HISTORY, some of us with a background in philosophy readily identify philosophical sexism—the thought concerning the unfair treatment of people, especially women, because of their sex—with the women historical struggle for equality with men. Adopting this approach reminds us of Simone de Beauvoir, whose revolutionary work, *The Second Sex*, perhaps the greatest contribution to gender philosophy and a quondam literature in feminism and women studies, is the classical gender literature of all times. This literature provides the platform to reflect on the historical account of women, in terms of what is perceived as their unfair, unjust, oppressed, passive and alienated situation in society. It considers also the historical relegation of women to the passive acceptance of roles foisted on them by society. Beauvoir adopted the existentialist phenomenological methodology in considering the women condition, with the objective of reforming it for posterity. The philosophy of posterity—the thought concerning the quality of life bequeathable to the future generation of humanity—therefore, was one of the inspirations to Beauvoir’s project. The operating norm of posterity would be, “equality of the sexes.” But philosophy of posterity has its own problems. Considering Derek Parfit’s paradox, for instance, different species of people may be occupying the world in future if conventions and traditions of today are dismantled to provide for such new norm and women’s freedom; people who, but for that provision would not have originally existed, would exist; people who may not even appreciate such historical efforts made on their behalf and, who would not reciprocate the same gesture in any way. It raises the question whether Beauvoir’s project, with its Heideggerian principle of “letting things be” as a definition of freedom, is necessary at all. Perhaps, more radically, it seems to threaten certain basic traditional tenets of human existence, such as the Confucian tenet of “rectification of names,” where one answers to the role implication of his social position. Even so, Beauvoir’s project remains an invaluable contribution to humanity.

Introduction

In reflecting on the broad theme of the conference, WOMEN IN HISTORY, restructured as TRAITS OF WOMEN IN POWER: A VIEW FROM HISTORY (demanding specifically an articulation of the myriad aspects that enable women rise to leadership positions of eminence and authority in Europe or America), some of us with a background in the discipline of philosophy readily identify philosophical sexism—the thought concerning “the unfair treatment of people, especially women, because of their sex” (Hornby, 2000: p.1080)—as one of the appropriate approaches to the discourse. This reflection strongly brings to mind the historical struggle of women for freedom from what they perceive as the aggressive, male-dominating, unfair, oppressive, exploitative, alienating, patriarchal value system prevalent in our societies. It brings to the front burner the intrigues of such struggle, and the necessity to

re-evaluate its problems and prospects. An aspect of that necessity is, especially animated in our ever-pressing obligation to posterity. We are concerned about the legacies of such struggle, and how it shapes the life and development of our future society.

Given this approach Simone de Beauvoir's revolutionary *magnum opus*, *The Second Sex* (1949; 1953)—perhaps the greatest contribution to gender philosophy and a quondam literature in feminism and woman studies—forms the most apposite basis of our reflection. Beauvoir's feminist representations (her personality and lived experiences, her other works, *et cetera*) provide us with a formidable platform to reflect on this historical account of women's struggle for mutual equality with men in the society. Using existentialist phenomenological methodology, Beauvoir proceeded to rid women's condition of the cultural and traditional biases; to disclose the true nature of the woman; the true nature of the problem of patriarchy, with respect to the unfair treatment of women; the true involvements of a sincere feminist struggle; and the true prospects of the liberated woman.

Every activity; every struggle, arguably, has target objective(s), which is usually futuristic in temporal terms. The women's struggle here is not an exception. Indeed, its objective of securing freedom for women has always been a *futural* target activity. Consequently, it is on this same account of temporality that we can, today, reflect on the history of the women's struggle itself; it is on the same note that we can attempt a reflection on its legacies for posterity. In what follows, we should first concern ourselves presently with a reflection on Beauvoir's bequeathable values to posterity, given her radical feminist struggle. The leading questions here, to mention a few, are: Is there really such a phenomenon as philosophical sexism in our society as conceived by de Beauvoir? Is the male gender not also oppressed and exploited by social (cultural and traditional roles) institutions like marriage, given the demands of "provision" compulsorily foisted on him? Is the question of gender equality not already treated by the arduous responsibilities attached to social roles of both sexes? In other words, have social roles for both sexes not counterbalanced inequalities already? What value has the historical struggle of women for equality, especially as championed by de Beauvoir's philosophical sexism, added to posterity? Has posterity been affected in any significant way by the philosophy of equality of the sexes? Has posterity appreciated this struggle, as intended by the activists, like de Beauvoir?

In philosophy of posterity, just like any area of discourse, there are basic debates. There are the questions of the moral status of the future people; the meaning and implications of the moral responsibility of the forebears; the possible definition of the needs of posterity, the duty/right debacle; the question of reciprocity, *et cetera*. Depending on the position of the debater, some of these questions attempt to object against or truncate any posterity-bound project. Derek Parfit formulated a paradox on philosophy of posterity which seems to object to Beauvoir's project of women's liberation. According to this paradox, "different people will be born from those who would have originally been born if we" (i.e. the feminists) "had not intervened" (in their struggles and agitations) "in the environment" (in our case, the value system) (Partridge, 2001: p.379; Parfit, 1984: pp.349-380; D'Amato, 1990: p.1). If this is the case, therefore, can we in any meaningful sense be said to have really "improved the lives" of particular future persons, who but for our provisions; our interventions, would not have

existed (Schwartz, 1978: p.4; Parfit, 1984)? Is the feminist consciousness in its reaction to a seeming philosophical sexism not inadvertently playing into Parfit's paradox of contingency, which may render the entire struggle futile?

This paper argues that while Beauvoir's project may be amenable to Parfit's paradox, causing the birth of a different species of human beings in the future; species that may not have been born if such historical struggle for women's liberation had not been initiated and advanced by Beauvoir; species that may not even appreciate the struggle and eventual change in the state of affairs, the objectives and vision of the project cannot be totally futile or discredited since it is directed at societal development (the birth of such different species of people itself being a variant of such development).

The paper further posits that while Beauvoir's existentialist description of the liberated woman has energy; while it appropriates the existential traits of the woman and prescribes for the woman to exist more authentically as a free being—a being capable of independent projects in work and creativity, such appropriation and clarion prescription for authentic existence is not exclusively for women. It is, indeed, for the entire human reality (both men and women). The women's struggle, it must be observed, is structurally connected to men's authentic existence too, if the focus is broadened to encapsulate a comprehensive societal development.

Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophical Sexism

Before we delineate Beauvoir's philosophical sexism, especially as presented in *The Second Sex*, it is necessary to reflect briefly on her biography first in order to gain an insight into her being; her trajectory of thought and what she stood to represent.

Consequently, Simone-Ernestine-Lucie-Marie Bertrand de Beauvoir was born in 1908, into a conservative aristocratic family, where she was a precocious and intellectually curious person from the beginning (Mussett, 2010). Her intellectual astuteness made her suffer a crisis of faith at some point in her life, having also been a deeply religious child from the beginning as a result of her education and her mother's training (Ibid.). She denied the existence of God; denied religion, and remained an atheist until death. She lived for the rest of her life, an intellectual life, shunning marriage, and critiquing the rigidity of societal attitude towards women.

Beauvoir was an erudite scholar whose rigorous intellectual sojourn eventually crossed paths with that of other perspicacious scholars of her time like Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Albert Camus, *et cetera*. It was on one of such occasions that she met and later, fell in love with Sartre. According to her, she found in Sartre an intellect worthy (and in some ways superior) to her own. For the rest of their lives, they were to remain "essential" lovers, while allowing for "contingent" love affairs whenever each desired. Although never marrying (despite Sartre's proposal in 1931), having children together, or even living in the same home, Sartre and Beauvoir remained intellectual and romantic partners until Sartre's death in 1980 (Ibid).

Given the unique liberal intimate arrangements between Beauvoir and Sartre, she had other intimate liaisons with both men and women (Ibid.). One of such “triangular” romantic relationships involved one of her student-lovers, Olga Kosakiewicz (a female) (Ibid.) and forms the basis of one of her works, *L’Invitée (She Came to Stay)* (1943). “This novel, written from 1935 to 1937 (and read by Sartre in manuscript form as he began writing *Being and Nothingness*), successfully gained her public recognition” (Ibid.). Apart from this novel, Beauvoir had many other reputable works that engaged in both individual and social revolutionary discourses. In no particular order, she had: *Le Sang des Autres (The Blood of Others)*, 1943; *Pyrrhus et Cineas*, 1943; *Tous Les Hommes sont Mortels (All Men are Mortal)*, 1946; *Pour une Morale de l’Ambiguïté (The Ethics of Ambiguity)*, 1947; and of course her *magnum opus*, *Le Deuxième Sexe (The Second Sex)*, 1949, to mention just a few.

Beauvoir’s many literary successes and high profile unique relationship with Sartre earned her a fame rarely experienced by any philosopher during a lifetime (Ibid.). “For the rest of her life, she lived under close scrutiny of the public eye. She was often unfairly considered to be a mere disciple of Sartrean philosophy despite the fact that many of her ideas were original and went in directions radically different from Sartre’s works” (Ibid.). She lived for seventy eight years and died in 1986. At death, although she was not considered a philosopher in her own right, she was honoured as a crucial figure in the struggle for women’s rights, and as an eminent writer (Bergoffen, 2010). In 2008, an international conference was set up to celebrate the centennial of Beauvoir’s birth by Julia Kristeva. That marked one of the more visible signs of Beauvoir’s growing influence and status (Ibid.).

Simone de Beauvoir was a philosopher who made enduring contributions to the fields of ethics, politics, existentialism, phenomenology and feminist theory. She was an activist and a public intellectual of significance. She lived freely and ascended the Olympian height of leadership, where she became the first philosopher to subject the sexed/gendered human body to phenomenological investigation (Ibid.), and pursued, amidst socio-political constraints of that time, a feminist agenda aimed at revolutionizing societal perception of women and women’s attitude to life in Europe, America and even beyond; liberating women from the perceived “patriarchal clutches”. She was an overt critic of the woman’s situation (once, she was officially reprimanded in Rouen, France, for this) (Ibid.). She advanced the concept of human freedom as a basic trait that can enable and empower women to rise to leadership position in any society.

Beauvoir’s philosophical sexism is an account of her experiences as a woman and the general social conditions of women. She tried to grapple with the strange predicaments that being a woman creates for the female human being. The dilemmas she analyzed continued to obsess and sometimes torment modern women, such as the conflicts between meaningful work and maternity, the temptations of dependence, the painful artifices that conventional femininity requires (Goldberg, 2010). In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir recounts the specific ways in which the natural and social sciences coupled with the European literary, social, political and religious traditions created a mystified world where impossible and conflicting ideals of femininity produce an ideology of women’s “natural” inferiority to justify patriarchal domination (Bergoffen, 2010).

To deconstruct this, Beauvoir took to Heideggerian existential phenomenological analytic to examine the human species as a sexed/gendered human reality, with the objective of establishing a fundamental platform for equality of the sexes. She examined the ways women experience their lived bodies to determine how these experiences affect the everyday attitude; to assess the meaning of the lived female body and explore the ways these meaning affect their place in the world. She proceeds by putting in abeyance all previous presuppositions about women; presumptions that tend to justify the natural inferiority of women (like the assumption that women are the weaker sex); that hold that throughout recorded history, humanity was to be understood as male, with women situated as the “inessential Others”; predispositions that established men as Subjects, capable of transcendent freedom through work and creativity, but the “Others” as incapable, and hence unequal beings with the Subjects (fit only to service the masculine ego of the society, in sex, tending the domestic chores, child care, etc). She asked, rather, critical questions concerning the true being of women (like questions concerning their mental prowess), proceeding to validate her experience until she emerged with strong insights (fundamental insights now treated as such conventional wisdom that it barely seems like an insight at all) which ultimately reveal that “one is not born but rather becomes a woman” (Beauvoir, 1949: p.267).

This revelation throws up a clear distinction between the concepts of ‘sex’ and ‘gender’, wherefore, while sex is a biologically natural mode of differentiation of male and female human species, gender (as in womanhood, manhood, masculinity, or femininity) is gradually acquired through historical social and cultural machinations as their roles (Butler, 1986: 35-49). Beauvoir discovered that the biologically natural sexual differences between men and women were erroneously used as grounds to define social roles, creating inequality with it where man is subject and woman is object. She exposes the various ways in which patriarchal structures used sexual difference to deprive women of their “can do” bodies or ability-to-be and to-be-not (Bergoffen, 2010). This asymmetry, Beauvoir argued, frustrates women's dreams, deforms their psyches, and alienates them from themselves, while also dooming attempts to form reciprocal, loving relationships with men (Goldberg, 2010).

Beauvoir resolves not to see this ideology as natural as it was presented. Rather, she held that the ideology was the result of patterns of culture and socialization that emerged from the material circumstances of human history; patterns subject to transformation (Ibid.). She held that while men and women are socially equal, they are, indeed, biologically different. She did not deny basic biological and even erotic differences between men and women, nor dream of an androgynous culture (Ibid). However, she insisted also that while it would not be just and moral to exploit women because of their sexual difference, it would also be un-phenomenological to ignore that difference. “Equality”, she opined, “is not a synonym for sameness” (cf. Bergoffen, 2010).

Beauvoir also observed that, unfortunately, women themselves are not entirely innocent in this subjugation. They contribute to it through various attitudes or acts of bad faith. They evade the responsibility associated with transcendent freedom; the responsibility that men encounter boldly (a feat which earns them the authoritative position of Subjects). They, rather, seek respite and happiness in the promises of prefabricated values and beliefs—

in socially constructed roles of patriarchal norms; roles that designate them as a wife, a mother, a prostitute—in service of men, who are expected to gratify them accordingly and “profiting from this male-oriented society” (Gerassi, 1976)).

But this is not what is essential to womanhood. This is the portrait of woman only as society conceives and makes her to be—a tool of service; an object of use. The woman, Beauvoir argued, is a complete human being, just like the man. She is a free being, just as her male counterpart. She is capable of independent transcendence in creativity and work. As a free agent she can be said to exist only through the opportunities of her personal choices, living her own life, and bearing the responsibilities of her decisions. She, therefore, needs to be allowed the opportunities of this freedom, just like men. All social pre-designations that hinder this opportunity must be removed to enable woman to ascend her natural existential being; to enable and empower her to leadership. To the extent that this freedom is extended, women should be able to decide whether or not they want to marry; if, when and how they want to use their uterus; when they are pregnant, whether they want to keep it or not; they should be able to decide, at anytime, concerning kitchen responsibilities, children, and other domestic chores, *et cetera*. If a woman aspires to any office of leadership, she must be allowed to compete openly with her male counterparts on merit. If she wins, she should be accorded the necessary support to lead, just as her male counterpart would have been supported. For all these to be realized, women must be allowed equal access to quality education, just as men. They must be allowed access to economic management, and, indeed, every life-transforming tool of quality existence, just as engaged by men. Let it be that she freely chooses not to chart the possibilities of her own existence, than the society preventing her; let it be that, just like other lazy men, she does not aspire to authentic existence, than the society preventing her. Then, she freely chooses to suffer the consequences of inauthenticity, just like other inauthentic men. When this is done, the woman would be a co-creator, a co-worker; co-editor, co-legislator of reality, sharing responsibilities equally with her choice-man, creating her own life and earning the dignity of human existence that goes with human life. When this is so, the woman can aspire to leadership in the society.

As a committed existentialist, Beauvoir saw the freedom to create one's own life, to define one's own values and choose one's own projects, as essential to human dignity. Denied such freedom, women are reduced to slavery or vassalage, even if they do not know it (Goldberg, 2010).

Beauvoir's analysis, therefore, seeks to put behind the long history of positions that hold that the lived body's sex was accidental to its lived relations (like Plato held). It enthroned, rather, a new philosophy—a philosophy of existence; a liberatory tool that attends to the unfair, inhuman ways in which women are treated in the society. This tool of liberation is to rescue women from the patriarchal incarcerations of the society. Beauvoir is careful to acknowledge that this liberation cannot be accomplished only through mob protests or public debates or the like; it cannot be achieved through physical transformations of cosmetic surgeries undertaken by women to assert themselves in one form or another. Women who transform themselves through surgery are seeking power through a process which ultimately disempowers them (Smith, 2009). Such liberation is to be accomplished through the

empowerment of each woman's mental state to "free" living. Such empowerment involves society's allowance of the woman equal opportunity of quality education, like her male counterpart; the allowance of her opportunity to make independent thought and free choices regarding issues of pregnancy, abortion, marriage, child care, etc; the legitimization of abortion; allowance of women to contest positions of leadership with their male counterparts on merit; in short, the removal of all social roles and patriarchal factors that hinder women's free existence in the society. When this is done, when women are free, they can aspire to leadership. For, it is only free thinking people (women) that aspire to leadership. It is when society is thus populated with free individuals, men and women alike, that it develops most authentically.

Implications of Beauvoir's Philosophical Sexism to Posterity: Objections and Counter Objections

Posterity means "all succeeding generations of people". Philosophy of posterity, simply put, is the thought concerning the future generations of people. Usually this thought or concern emphasizes the obligation of the present generation to posterity. It examines the relations between the behaviour, values and policies enunciated by present generation of people and the condition of human life in the future. It attempts to evaluate such futural human condition with respect to the actions, behaviours, laws and policies of their forebears. Philosophy of posterity concerns itself with ethical and legal issues of bequeathable values. It asks the questions: how will my present actions affect my future generations? What legacy am I enacting in the course of my actions? What would future generations expect of me? How can I change the present condition of existence in favour of future generations? How can we ameliorate the human condition of future generations? More generally, how can the present generation act on behalf of future generation of people?

The foregoing and many more questions, insofar as they concern obligations to posterity, revolve around and express care (from a constructive, rational, benevolent standpoint of normal human disposition). They are formulated and answered in the affirmative. We must, however, not lose sight of the possibility of deplorable human dispositions, such as irrationality and malevolence that result in carelessness and destruction. To this disposition, the questions would be formulated and answered in the negative. Be that as it may, it should be sufficient to state that this is only an observation, taking cognisance of the possible radical thoughts surrounding issues of this nature. For us here, we are concerned with the affirmative questions, as do majority of the human race. For as Stephen Bickham rightly observes: were someone to suggest seriously that we have no ethical obligations to future generations and mean by this that we need take no care for what living conditions on the planet will be in a hundred years, for instance, we should regard that individual as lacking one of the most basic of human ethical sensibilities. Of course we have some serious responsibility for the future generations (Bickham, 2011). Also Laslett points out, "no little portion of political life rests upon" the premise that we have moral duties toward the yet-unborn. These are evident in the speeches of ministers, the propaganda of parties, the actions

of planners, the demands of administrators, unhesitatingly assuming that men ordinarily recognize the rights of generations yet to come...” (1971, p.78). This assumption is well founded in behaviour. We do in fact respond quite spontaneously to an appeal on behalf of the future (Ibid.).

As stated earlier, there are heated debatable issues in philosophy of posterity. While some of these questions have been attended to since John Rawls (Partridge, 1976) and are still being attended to as the debates progress, we are not interested in dabbling into all of them here. Our interest here revolves primarily around the brilliant and remarkable contribution of Derek Parfit to the discourse, especially as it relates to Simone de Beauvoir’s philosophical sexism.

It is quite obvious that Beauvoir’s project was meant for neither her nor her generation of women alone. It was a project meant, especially for posterity. She tried to satisfy her yearning for change of societal status quo concerning patriarchal mistreatment of women so that posterity can be filled with liberated, independent, “equal-Subject” women. While she may have only hoped that society would grant her wish at her lifetime, she was more convinced that if her project were appreciated; if the type of struggle she advocated endured, women of the future would live to experience better lives of equality with the men than women of her time. Beauvoir personally confirmed this position in 1976—twenty five years after *The Second Sex* was written—in an interview conducted by John Gerassi. When asked about her optimism concerning the actualization of the changes she had been struggling for, she held that she never really expected that in her lifetime, but perhaps much later in future. She was, however, convinced that women will definitely triumph in the long run (Gerassi, 1976).

However, against such future projection in decisions, values, and policies; against the alteration of the status quo (of Beauvoir’s persuasion) for posterity, Derek Parfit raises the objection of contingency. This objection is most famously expressed in the form of *Parfit’s Paradox*, a more nuanced version of the Non-identity Problem, which questions the identity (their individual genetic makeup, the timing of their births, their overall numbers, their consciousness, *et cetera*) of the supposed future generation of people believed to possess right claims on the present generation. The essence of the contingency argument is “...that posterity’s individual and collective identities are contingent upon the actions we take and the policies we adopt. No significant policy choice made by the present generation can be said to “harm” posterity, since those who will be affected by that policy choice will not even exist unless that policy is pursued. If, under this reasoning, posterity can be neither benefited nor harmed by present policies, then those policies cannot be amenable to moral judgment in terms of their effects on them” (Davidson, 2010).

Put simply, Parfit’s paradox holds that different species of people will be caused to occupy the world in future if conventions, customs and traditions or the status quo are modified for their sake (basically, their improved lives). If different species of individuals are caused to be born; people who but for our intervention and provisions would not have been born, can we really say in any meaningful sense that we have contributed to “improve their

lives”? In other words, when the provisions of equality of the sexes is achieved in future, as desired and advanced by Beauvoir and other feminists, can they (or we) say in any meaningful sense that they have contributed to the improvement of those lives? Would such posterity that experiences this mode of existence (as it is already partially so today) appreciate the struggle as a benefit; for, their existence is already contingent on the forebode actions (as Parfit would have us believe)? Posterity would only roll by, a normal life, as if it had always been so. It would appear, therefore, that it takes one who has had a previous experience of a changed status to appreciate (or disappreciate) the change that has taken place as a benefit (or harm). This new species of people may only learn about the change in books, which may often times be read as novels.

In a quick corroboration of the above position and Parfit’s paradox, today (sixty years after *The Second Sex* and all the struggles advanced by it), Francine du Plessix Gray (representing the current generation; a member of the different species of people contingent on the forebode feminist actions) holds that, away from the era when Beauvoir wrote her book; when a minority of women were employed, her arguments for female participation in the work force is already regarded as outmoded (Gray, 2010). This means that today it is taken for granted that women ever felt cheated for not being given the opportunity to work. Gray also complains about the “paranoid hostility” which Beauvoir advanced toward the institution of marriage and motherhood. She perceives this as “extreme and occasionally hilarious”. She observed that Beauvoir approached the female reproductive system with “the same ferocious disdain”, using derogatory phrases like “the servitude of maternity,” “woman’s absurd fertility,” the “exhausting servitude”, *et cetera*. To Gray, all these were so because Beauvoir saw heterosexual love as “mortal danger”. This means that some other people may not see it that way (like Gray, perhaps) and, to these people such love is a fulfilling one. They must be allowed to choose it too.

Today, Beauvoir is rather castigated for seeing a girl’s first menstruation, which “many of us welcomed with excitement and pride” as “disgusting and fearful (Ibid).” It “inspires horror” and “signifies illness, suffering and death.” “Beauvoir”, Gray opines, “does not appear to have spent much time with children or teenagers: for a first menses, in her view, leads the girl to being “disgusted by her too-carnal body, by menstrual blood, by adults’ sexual practices, by the male she is destined for” (Ibid). All these and many more, Gray declares, are upsetting and alarming. If anything, they signify misguided brilliance. Gray observes significantly that the only stage of a woman’s life Beauvoir seems to have good things to say about is widowhood, which, in her view, most women bear quite cheerfully. Upon losing their spouses, Beauvoir tells us, women, “now lucid and wary...often attain a delicious cynicism.” In old age, they maintain “a stoic defiance or sceptical irony” (Ibid).

The foregoing observations made against Beauvoir’s project for posterity by Gray typifies the disappreciation of provisions made by forebears on behalf of posterity and corroborates and affirms Parfit’s paradox of contingency. For the fickle minded, inauthentic person, this sort of consciousness raised against an effort of goodwill is dampening enough to dis-incentivize creativity and work, especially on behalf of posterity. But the unfaltering,

authentic individual is not easily swayed by it. The authentic person aspires to independent creativity and work that empowers the successful manipulation of his factual historicities. He is never swayed by the impression of the impersonal public. He does not act so he could be praised. He acts because he is deeply convinced of his actions. He remains focused on his visions until he achieves his mission. Beauvoir was an authentic scholar. Today, even if some people have reasons to disappreciate her project, it is not the totality of humanity that feels or reasons that way. Some people also appreciate that project. Most importantly, she did not embark on that project so she would impress people. She acted according to her personal conviction. Indeed, the project that eventually culminated into a world standard of struggle started as an inquiry into her personal, private being. Beauvoir started by trying to answer the question: who am I? Whether or not people appreciated her efforts, as articulated in her book as well as her activities, she had since accomplished her major objective of answering the existential question about her being, discovering her true nature, emancipating herself from patriarchal strongholds and rising to leadership. As such she had gratified herself. She might have only hoped that other women, through the instrumentality of her rigorous insights and work, would be empowered to self-discovery, self-emancipation and rise to leadership.

For the objection created by Parfit's paradox, a different species of people will be born in the future; people whom we cannot truly say we have benefited (or harmed) because their existence, in the first place, is contingent upon our forebode actions, policies and values if and only if we evaluate that existence of theirs relative to ours in the subject/object epistemic differential parlance. In other words, we can only say in any meaningful sense that posterity involves specific individuals or a community of people different from ours if we treat ourselves (their forebears) as subjects and they as our objects of study. Such subject/object dichotomy in epistemological inquiry arises as a result of the seeming distance set by the empirical categories of objects of knowledge relative to their subjects; the material differentiation of time-relations between the future and the present. But this method of inquiry is fraught with limitations, one of which is the inability for a total comprehension of reality. It presents a partial, monistic, physical account of reality. But reality is not only empirical; it is also rational; not only material, but also ideal; not just ontic, but especially ontological. A more comprehensive understanding of reality, therefore, proceeds phenomenologically ontologically. By this, there is the interpenetration of the subject and object of knowledge in one consciousness. Such interpenetration, while aware of the empirical categories, brackets the material differences created by biases, presuppositions, predispositions, *et cetera*; allowing the "thing" in question to show its true self so as to enable the grasping of its ultimate essence. At that level, there is no distance or time variation between the object and subject of knowledge. They are both present in consciousness. Hence, the inquirer can cogitatively relate with posterity and proceed to legislate for it as his utmost concern, bearing all responsibility of such choice (benefit or harm) immediately at the present moment. This method of understanding of reality is only given to the authentic inquirer.

An authentic inquirer about posterity, in essence, does not see any difference between him at present and future generation of people. He projects into them and accesses them without the constraints of material time and distance. To him, posterity is here, at present,

with him. They are not different people to him. He can relate with them because of his capacity for interpenetration. Hence, he can legislate for present reality on their behalf. He could go ahead to legislate without recourse to the impressions of the impersonal public; because he is deeply convinced of his vision. He could then eventually emerge with world reconstructive deeds, placing posterity in a more vantage position of existence. This is what and how Beauvoir's vision can be described to mitigate Parfit's paradox of contingency. In other words, Beauvoir's project could be said, in every meaningful sense, to contribute to the benefit of posterity; improving the lives of women and aiding world development regardless of whether or not a different generation of people is born; regardless of whether or not she is being appreciated.

Another way we can refute Parfit's paradox of contingency is that, if the existence of posterity is always contingent on our present actions, then that is just the natural order of life and, there is nothing we can do about it. In other words, there is no such thing as paradox of contingency as a problem of obligations to posterity. This is because we are ontologically condemned to projects. Every action that gives meaning to our existence is either a project executed or a project-in-progress. Man is always projecting (whether into the future or past) about his actions. In relation to our actions, we say, "I want to...", or "I am...", or "I shall, will ..., or I did..." act in this or that way. These are all futural or progressive terms that describe our intentions in relation to our actions. Hence, the projected products of all his actions are always contingent upon his present decisions.

Apart from Parfit's problem of contingency, a related objection to philosophy of posterity is the problem of non-identity. The non-identity objection, in its simplest form, asserts that no one can possess rights unless they exist; they must have a present identity. But since future generations, by definition, do not yet exist, they cannot possibly rights; therefore no duties are presently owed to them (Davidson, 2010). This objection is a variant of the subject/object epistemological orientation explained above. Consistent with our argument, therefore, we assert that posterity exists, even in the present moment, and deserves our obligation because we can intuit that existence ontologically. In other words, posterity is co-extensive with our own being. Our ontological power of projection grants us the capacity for knowledge of a past and a future grounded in the present, all in one consciousness.

The next question on philosophy of posterity borders on reciprocal benefits accruable to forebears while acting on behalf of posterity. Given the relationship between duty and right, if posterity has right claims against their forebears (the reason why Beauvoir and the rest of the feminists acted at all), how can the forebears (Beauvoir and other feminists) be rewarded by acting on their behalf? The argument is that our relationship with future persons is one-way traffic, non-reciprocal, and non-feedback type. By the time posterity appears on the scene, the past generation is gone. Hence, future persons will be unable to reward or punish their forbears, as the case may be, for the provisions they made for their lives (Ibid). Suppose then that the provision is either wrong or right, how can the forebears be praised or blamed by posterity if when they arrive on the scene the forebears are gone already? Due to

the apparent lack of opportunity for reciprocal gratitude by posterity to their forebears, it has been contended that the latter are better off not acting on behalf of the former.

This contention may seem attractive when posterity is contemplated within the context of the subject/object dichotomy, with all its attendant categories of differentiation. It disappears in the ontological realm of interpenetration, in projection and transcendence. In this realm too, the authentic moral agent does not “expect” gratification from the beneficiaries of his acts of consciousness because that was not the original motivation. Rather, the existent individual is usually propelled, in conscious acts, by inward dynamism, as an obligation imposed by consciousness. The fulfilment of the obligation imposed by consciousness produces intellectual satisfaction for the agent, which in itself is a virtue. Here, virtue becomes its own reward, and it would not require the goodwill of posterity to confer it on the agents who, in this case, are the forebears.

Furthermore, the Kantian and Confucian principles of morality advocate duty for its own sake—acting without the expectation of reward—as the authentic mode of existence of a human being (cf. Unah, 1996: pp.161-169). In Confucianism, one acts out of human-heartedness or kind-heartedness, not out of reward. Undue concern with the profit motive for human actions, invariably, corrupts the righteousness of the act. Righteousness is a categorical imperative. To act for nothing, i.e. to act without a profit motive, is to act out of righteousness. One who acts out of righteousness acts out of obligation, not for reward. In mental acts, reward is intricately wound up with the act, not with the presumed disposition of the actor.

Thus, the objections against the philosophy of posterity, with respect to Beauvoir’s feminist programme merely serve to support the project and lend credence to world-constructive activity possible with any posterity oriented projects. Consequently, the charge that philosophical sexism would not benefit the forebears such as Simone de Beauvoir from the point of view of posterity is otiose. As to the other charge that posterity may not acknowledge the provisions made for them by their forebears, since they already live accordingly, is unsound because by carrying on the way the ancestors had provided; by living out the projections of the forebears, they satisfy the conditions of the ancestral thought. It is therefore inconsequential whether they acknowledge their forebears or not. What is important is that the projects of their forebears have been accomplished, and their quality of existence is the evidence of that accomplishment.

Conclusion

Since the publication of *The Second Sex* over 60 years ago, women have done just what Beauvoir hoped for—emerging from the home into the workplace in unprecedented numbers (Smith, 2009). It is undeniable that women's lives have improved, in the West at least, since Beauvoir declared that the average Western male's ideal was "a woman who freely submits to

his domination, who does not accept his ideas without some discussion, but who yields to his reasoning" (Ibid).

However, as women's lives improve; as they assert their equality with men, and as society can be said to develop more rapidly due to the new norm (equality of the sexes), new waves of social problems are also emerging—insecurity of the family, national and global terrorism, *et cetera*. There are widespread cases of divorce or separation of the family unit, especially in the West, and across the globe; the phenomenon of child abuse, domestic assaults, single parenthood, same sex interaction and marriages, *et cetera*. There are also, today, widespread cases of terrorist activities in various countries and regions of the world including the United States of America, the United Kingdom (especially with the August 2011 riots), and even Nigeria. Some of these problems arise, fundamentally, from the culture of intolerance created and promoted by the inability to cope with the new norm.

The United States of America and the United Kingdom are known, for instance, for their positive position on individualism and liberalism, and by extension, unalloyed support of Beauvoir's project. But there are also known internal social difficulties arising basically from a misinterpretation of the new norm of equality of the sexes. Individualism and liberalism are expanded to the extreme and freedom becomes license, creating a situation described by Mr. David Cameron, the British Prime Minister, as the complete lack of responsibility in parts of the current society where people are made to feel that the society owes them. During the recent UK riots, the Prime Minister expressed surprise that children made up most of the looting culprits. He openly declared that "there was something wrong with society when you see children as young as 12 or 13 looting and laughing" (internet). In his resolution to "fight back" and restore peace, he admitted that violence had taken over the country, and people were living in fear; ... there was a culture of fear existing on the streets (ibid).

In Nigeria, the recent insurrection by members of the *Boko Haram* fundamentalist sect could be said to be a fall out from and a reaction against the new norm of freedom of the sexes. The Boko Haram group primarily rises against all forms of Western educational values (equality of the sexes inclusive). The point here is that the new norm is perceived as a Western value and its rapid spread across the globe, through cultural interaction, political decisions and "Western educational system", is creating tension and uproar in several non-Western traditional communities. In the Eastern-Islamic tradition (the core of the Boko Haram value system), for instance, women are not treated as equals with men. So it rubs out hard on such tradition when women, through the instrumentality of Western education, begin to stand up to men, measure up to them, and try to rise to positions of leadership. The Islamic fundamentalists try to rise against such value system and educative process through no other means known to them than terrorism.

From the foregoing, it is evident that while Beauvoir's project and, indeed, the activities of feminism is a commendable effort; while it has improved the lives of women and empowered them to rise to the task of leadership along with men; there is ample room for

male liberation as well. It is basically because of the failure of society to effectively liberate the male that apprehensions are high about female emancipation. Beauvoir's project of "equality of the sexes" indeed has a bearing on the masculine gender. For, the so-called masculine roles are also societal, cultural or traditional creations. Man is also trained, right from childhood to puberty and adolescence, to undertake certain roles that ought to define his personality as such. He, therefore, needs liberation too. This male liberation would necessarily involve his education to accept the equality of the woman and his emancipation from the duty post of social roles in good faith. It is when this is achieved that both sexes would truly be free and equal and Beauvoir's project would have successfully aided comprehensive societal development.

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