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THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF CONTEMPORARY EXISTENTIALISM

Edited by Kevin Aho, Megan Altman, and Hans Pedersen

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BEAUVOIR ON NON-MONOGAMY IN LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

Ellie Anderson

Introduction

In recent decades, interest in non-monogamous intimate relationships has grown rapidly. Polyamory, relationship anarchy, consensual, or ethical non-monogamy, and more have become popular in academic and public discourse. These practices destabilize the privileging of heterosexual nuclear families and the assumption that romantic coupledom is the ultimate form of love. Non-monogamous approaches flout cultural norms of exclusivity by avowing that intimacy is compatible with multiple dyadic and/or multi-party relationships. Although forms of non-monogamy differ in key respects, advocates for them tend to emphasize honesty, equality, and careful communication of expectations as core values (Klesse 2006). Philosopher Alexis Shotwell (2017: 279) defines non-monogamy as 'consensually and with mutual interest negotiating desire for more than one relationship.' Although monogamy literally means 'one spouse,' and thus names a form of marriage, it colloquially refers to a general structure of intimate relationships: namely, coupledom, usually involving sexual and romantic exclusivity. In contrast, as Shotwell states, non-monogamy involves actively negotiating the desire for more than one relationship, though it may not always mean having multiple intimate relationships at a given time.

In the emphasis on actively negotiating desires for multiple relationships, non-monogamous practices have much in common with existential commitments. In particular, Shotwell's definition of polyamory is strikingly similar to the view of loving relationships one finds in the writings of Simone de Beauvoir, who throughout her life articulated the dangers of heterosexual marriage and the possibilities of a more expansive view of intimate relationships. Yet, while Beauvoir is an obvious touchstone for feminist theory, including feminist critiques of marriage, her work has not been a frequent point of reference in discourse on non-monogamy (Barker 2014 is an exception). This is perhaps surprising, since crucial to Beauvoir's diagnosis of women's condition is her view that monogamy disadvantages women. What's more, she reflects on the benefits and challenges of non-monogamy, which she practised throughout her entire adult life, in her writings—including her philosophical and feminist writings, memoirs and diaries, and fiction. Finally, Beauvoir herself views loving relationships as crucial to human existence: in fact, they are the basis of justice.

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At the same time, Beauvoir's personal practices of non-monogamy have understandably been the target of censure. Beauvoir slept with many of her students, sometimes encouraging them to pursue sexual relationships with her long-time partner Jean-Paul Sartre. She and Sartre routinely lied to their relata about their relationships, with Beauvoir offering often rosy pictures of her intimate pursuits in her memoirs that belie the deceptions revealed in her posthumously published letters and diaries. Perhaps, then, Beauvoir might be viewed as too problematic a figure to be helpful for understanding non-monogamy. If so, it would be no wonder that she is not treated as a foundational theorist of polyamory, especially given that it still faces significant scepticism and vilification in mainstream society.

I will argue here that Beauvoir's approach to love, as conveyed in her nonfictional writings, exemplifies an existential commitment to non-monogamy that is worth taking seriously. Given the complexities and often problematic nature of her own personal relationships, I am not advocating Beauvoir herself as a model for ethical non-monogamy. Rather, I aim to show that the conceptual framework she presents in her theoretical writings, diaries, and memoirs offers a coherent philosophy of non-monogamous love—although she did not always live up to this framework herself. For Beauvoir, loving more than one person at a time is possible and often desirable. Committing to another means inventing a fidelity to them that is distinct from intimate exclusivity. This fidelity, on Beauvoir's view, is dyadic in nature, even when one has ongoing relationships with multiple partners.

In this article, I draw out the key features of Beauvoir's philosophy of non-monogamous love. Her reflections on the topic are scattered throughout her *oeuvre*, spanning both passing references and extended treatments in her memoirs, novels, diaries, philosophical essays, magazine articles, and *The Second Sex*. While there is much rich material about love in her fiction (e.g. Kean 2018), for purposes of scope I focus here on her nonfiction, schematically drawing together key themes. After drawing attention to Beauvoir's early reflections on non-monogamy in her student diaries, I turn to her critique of marriage. I note that this critique extends to most monogamous relationships, but that Beauvoir still leaves room for the possibility of authentic monogamous love. I then turn to her own view of love, where love is an act of valuing that fosters reciprocal recognition of ambiguity. I show that Beauvoir treats love as a dyadic bond, while avowing that one may have multiple dyadic relationships at a time. I address her approach to intimacy, hierarchical polyamory, and her own complicated relationship with the value of honesty in love.

Seeking Non-Monogamy: From Beauvoir's Early Diary Entries to her Pact with Sartre

In September 1929, a 21-year-old Simone de Beauvoir found herself in love with three men: her confident cousin and childhood love Jacques, the dashing philosophy student René Maheu, and Maheu's eager intellectual friend Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre shared a romantic visit with Beauvoir in Meyrignac in August 1929, with Maheu visiting her a few days after Sartre's departure on September 1. Both during and between these visits, Beauvoir was deliriously happy. She writes, 'I am completely understood, loved, and supported' (Beauvoir 2019: 280). She feels confident in loving the three men each in their own way, although she 'doesn't know how to reconcile' these loves (Beauvoir 2019: 280). Conscious of needing to choose between the three men down the line given the realities of bourgeois society, she realizes that, for the moment, her heart can be committed to all three at once.

Beauvoir's diary entries on her loving relationships in adolescence and young adulthood illuminate nascent themes that she develops in her existential philosophy of non-monogamous

love. In one passage written between Sartre's and Maheu's summer 1929 visits, she reflects on her love for Jacques and Sartre. She states,

> I love each of them as if he were the only one. I will take from each all that he has for me; and I will give him all that I can give him. Who can reproach me for it?
> (Beauvoir 2019: 281)

Here, we see her treating love as a way of valuing the singularity of each relationship without comparison. This economy of generosity, albeit unconventional, she believes to be morally above reproach.

Of course, Beauvoir's musings from early September 1929 were not the prelude to a polyamorous arrangement with Maheu, Jacques, and Sartre. Although Beauvoir shared romantic back-to-back visits with each in Meyrignac, she was conscious of having to choose between them, knowing each wanted her for himself. She had long envisioned marrying Jacques and was still considering this at the time of these visits (see, for instance, Beauvoir 2008: 791). Maheu, who was already married, continually encouraged Beauvoir to marry Jacques. In retrospect, her choice looks easy: Beauvoir found her intellectual match in Sartre and a companion for the kind of lifestyle she sought. She writes of finding in him not only a passion in heart and body, but also 'the incomparable friend of my thought' (Beauvoir 2019: 280). Plus, Jacques announced his betrothal to another woman in October 1929 (Beauvoir 2008: 808).

However, as Kate Kirkpatrick points out in her 2019 biography *Becoming Beauvoir*, Beauvoir's diary entries from this time reveal that Beauvoir's famous October 1929 decision to pursue an open relationship with Sartre was not her first experience of what we would now call polyamory (Kirkpatrick 2019: 103). For decades, the dominant view among Beauvoir scholars had been that Sartre more or less convinced Beauvoir to be non-monogamous, and that she accepted an open relationship as a necessary evil even though she would have preferred monogamy and perhaps marriage (Kirkpatrick 2019: 12). Although these views have sometimes been coloured by stigma around non-monogamous relationships, especially before the recent rise in public discourse about them, Beauvoir herself contributed to this interpretation in the way she described the early days of their relationship in her memoir *The Prime of Life*. Here, she centres Sartre's preference for non-monogamy while saying nothing of her own existing interest in it. Beauvoir (1992: 23–24) writes that 'Sartre was not inclined to be monogamous by nature,' being too interested as a young man in the 'tempting variety' of women. It was he, she writes, who made the case *to her* for an open relationship, saying that they have a 'necessary' love, but that it would be good for them additionally to have contingent love affairs (Beauvoir 1992: 24). She agreed, and they consented to their famous 'two-year lease' at Sartre's suggestion: they would pursue an intimate relationship for two years, then live apart for a few years, and re-join each other once again, renewing their love without letting it devolve into 'mere duty or habit' (Beauvoir 1992: 24). While they were never monogamous in principle, they agreed to devote themselves to one another completely during the first two years, leaving no room to 'actually tak[e] advantage...of those "freedoms" which in theory we had the right to enjoy' (Beauvoir 1992: 24). After this period, they regularly had other lovers: some short-term, some multi-year, or even multi-decade.

Though Beauvoir presents it as Sartre's idea, many of the themes within her description of this pact evince commitments that she avows as her own in other writings both before and after her famous conversation with Sartre as she describes it in *The Prime of Life*. The pact offers a vision of fidelity that is not tied to marriage, traditional romance, or sexual exclusivity,

echoing the passion for exploring the range of affective existence and commitment to freedom evident in her early diaries. What's more, because these diaries show that Beauvoir experienced the joy of multiple relationships before her conversation with Sartre, we cannot understand their pact as merely Sartre's successful attempt to convince, let alone coerce, Beauvoir into non-monogamy.

Beauvoir's Critique of Monogamous Marriage

Beauvoir was critical of the bourgeois ideals of monogamous love and marriage from adolescence, even well before her joyful summer 1929 experience of simultaneously loving Maheu, Jacques, and Sartre. In her August 1926 diary, 18-year-old Beauvoir (2006: 77) muses on the 'several things that I hate about love.' The primary thing she hates is 'the abandonment of all of oneself' (Beauvoir 2006: 77), because such abandonment means forgoing one's freedom in favour of sacrificing oneself to the other. Those familiar with Beauvoir's accounts of love in later writings, especially the 'Woman in Love' chapter of *The Second Sex*, may be struck by the similarities between Beauvoir's account of devotion and this adolescent entry. She also worries here that marriage dangerously commits individuals to lifelong contracts without honouring the self's process of becoming (Beauvoir 2006: 78).

In her more developed work, Beauvoir takes aim at the norm of marriage following the standard social mould of bourgeois monogamy prevalent in France at her time of writing. Marriage presents itself as the only socially sanctioned option for lovers, leading many to adopt its structure unreflectively. For Beauvoir, by contrast, lovers should negotiate norms for their relationships that meet their own individual needs, as she and Sartre did in their well-known 'pact.' Plus, marriage tends to slot lovers into pre-existing social roles, encouraging bad faith as individuals are circumstantially forced to transform the intimate experience of love into the performance of public roles. By virtue of its role as a public social institution, marriage is at odds with the '*singular* recognition of the other' achieved in love (Beauvoir 2011: 458). By fitting individuals into the roles of 'husband' or 'wife' (at Beauvoir's time of writing), marriage makes it difficult if not impossible to treat the beloved as unique, because it implicitly compares them to other possible individuals who could fill such roles. In so doing, it additionally treats the beloved as static, failing to respect that selves change in an ongoing process of becoming (Beauvoir 2006: 78).

What's more, monogamous marriage tends towards inauthentic love by virtue of sanctioning the desire to possess the other's freedom. Beauvoir worries that it licenses what she perceives as the two primary threats to love: devotion and jealousy. For Beauvoir, devotion is an inauthentic way of loving another characterized by self-sacrifice. Devotion abdicates freedom by taking the other to be one's ultimate end and acting *for* them (Beauvoir 2004b: 118–19). Devoting oneself to a loved one leads to becoming an 'identity parasite' (Morgan 1986: 126). Beauvoir thinks devotion is especially tempting for women in patriarchal societies, which gives them few opportunities to live out their own freedom through projects in the world; as a result, many women devote themselves to male partners and/or their children.

Although it appears to abdicate freedom, devotion paradoxically seeks to control the other's freedom by parasitically living it out. As a result, devotion denies both one's own *and* the other's freedom in perpetual oscillation (Beauvoir 2004b: 118). Monogamous relationships romanticize devotion by upholding a single beloved that is one's 'other half,' such that one's lover becomes one's source of identity, significance, and legitimacy in life (Morgan 1986: 130; see also Cleary 2015: 130–39). Monogamy also promotes jealousy, since jealousy is justified

as a natural and even romantic reaction to feeling that one's oneness with the beloved is threatened. Yet this sense of oneness is illusory; jealousy reveals that one sees one's lover as one's property (see Anderson 2021).

Beauvoir, then, is critical of monogamy in the social organization of marriage. However, does this critique extend to (a) monogamy generally, and (b) marriage in all of its possible forms? That is, do monogamy and marriage themselves license devotion and jealousy, or only *tend* towards these inauthentic forms of love under current social conditions in which monogamous marriage is taken for granted? After all, an existential account of authenticity recognizes that, to some extent, we are always tempted towards inauthenticity. As Beauvoir (2015a: 144–45) argues in *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* there is no recipe for ethical life: no one form guarantees freedom. The only way to judge whether a form is just is if it enables people to actively take up freedom. Do monogamy and marriage necessarily prevent this, or might it be possible to freely take up a pact of monogamy—and even marriage?

Beauvoir is equivocal on this point. In numerous passages, her critique of marriage seems to be an unambiguous, even ontological, condemnation. She jokes in *The Second Sex* that marriage itself is so incompatible with love that 'at the very least divine intervention is necessary' in order to keep love alive within it (Beauvoir 2011: 455). The public nature of marriage is fundamentally in tension with the private character of erotic intimacy (Beauvoir 2011: 67). She says that 'marriage, whatever its form—monogamy, polygamy, polyandry—is itself nothing but a secular incident that does not create a mystical link' between the partners (Beauvoir 2011: 77). As for monogamy outside of marriage, in writing of their pact in *The Prime of Life*, Beauvoir suggests that she and Sartre could not 'deliberately consent' (Beauvoir 1992: 24, trans. modified) to remain ignorant of all of the encounters they could have with other people and the emotions that would arise from them. To commit to monogamy would artificially restrict both their own and the other's freedom by committing them to a lifelong rejection of such other experiences.

Yet she also occasionally writes positively about the possibilities of authentic monogamy and marriage. In *The Second Sex*, she writes that men might accept women as equal partners rather than expecting the woeful asymmetry of heterosexual marriage at her time of writing. She thinks this will likely involve both partners working outside the home so that the wife is 'self-sufficient' (Beauvoir 2011: 733). If this is the case, and 'the man is scrupulously well-intentioned, lovers and spouses can attain perfect equality in undemanding generosity' (Beauvoir 2011: 733). This passage, then, suggests that she thinks an authentically loving marriage can be achieved.

It may remain in question, however, whether this conclusion is consistent with other aspects of Beauvoir's critique. One might say that monogamy is inauthentic because it restricts freedom: namely, one's freedom to pursue multiple relationships at once. Yet there are two problems with concluding from her account here that monogamy is necessarily inauthentic because it restricts one's freedom to explore other relationships. For one, Beauvoir's existentialism recognizes that humans have limited time and resources to devote to various projects: we must always choose, and choosing involves closing off possibilities. Thus, from an existential perspective, it seems that one could state that monogamy, when freely chosen rather than consented to out of an uncritical respect for established social norms or fear of being left alone, is merely one of many valid ways to choose authentically for oneself.

Additionally, part of Beauvoir's problem with monogamy is its failure to account for the changing nature of the self over time. But this arguably only holds for lifelong monogamous commitments, such as marriage. If one makes a short-term commitment that one freely renews over time, this would seem to be no more inauthentic than a renewable commitment to non-monogamy. Moreover, on a practical level, Beauvoir's own pact with Sartre shows that one may be monogamous in practice while committing to the value of non-monogamy. In the same way that one can be single and living an authentic life, one may find oneself in just one relationship at a time while open to other relationships in principle. Beauvoir's account of agreeing to the 'two-year lease' with Sartre is suggestive on this point. Recall that, though they agreed not to prevent one another from pursuing other relationships, they treated it as self-evident that they would not pursue other relationships for the initial period of their 'pact' (Beauvoir 1992: 24). While she does not elaborate on this point, the idea of giving themselves completely to their relationship initially sounds like what polyamorists describe as 'new relationship energy' (NRE), or the experience of infatuation early in relationships that incentivizes lovers to spend maximal time and emotional resources on one lover. While remaining committed to the principle of non-monogamy, Beauvoir and Sartre recognized that establishing their relationship involved practising monogamy for a time.

Beauvoir's Existential Philosophy of Non-Monogamous Love

I have argued elsewhere for reading Beauvoir as a phenomenologist of love who treats love as an affective mode of valuing a) the loved one and b) one's relationship with them (Anderson 2021). From a non-monogamous perspective, Beauvoir views love as a way of valuing the singularity of the beloved while avowing that one may value multiple beloveds without comparing them to one another or licensing jealousy. She also treats love as a way of valuing the singularity of 'each' loving relationship, in which the relationships are dyadic. That is, loving more than one does not only involve treating each beloved as unique, but also treating each relationship established with each beloved as unique. The two-values interpretation is in the background of my argument here, though I will not thematize it here; I will focus on how Beauvoir's philosophy of love comes out of her theory of reciprocal recognition, why this leads her to viewing intimate relationships as fundamentally dyadic, and how this pertains to non-monogamy and honesty.

Reciprocal Recognition of Lovers' Situated Freedom

Beauvoir's approach to love is rooted in the belief, adopted from G.W.F. Hegel, that human relations are initially conflictual. She follows Hegel in (a) viewing both individual and group relations in this fashion, and (b) suggesting that this initial character of conflict may resolve into reciprocal recognition if the parties recognize each other's freedom (Beauvoir 2015a: 76, 2011: 6–8). Beauvoir contrasts this view with an alternative social ontology stemming from Martin Heidegger, which treats humans as initially *with* one another in a non-conflictual harmony. For Beauvoir, the source of conflict between people is that we experience ourselves as subjects and others as objects. This tempts us to believe that we are pure subjects and they are pure objects. In actuality, however, others are subjects for themselves and we are objects for them: thus, there is a reciprocity between my subject-relation to others and their subject-relation to me. Both self and other are characterized by the condition of 'ambiguity': that is, the dual human condition of freedom and facticity. For Beauvoir, humans are both subject and object. Rooted in our situations, we also transcend them.

When we authentically recognize this character of ambiguity in both ourselves and others, we establish an ethical relation of reciprocity and begin to value others. This valuing is an ongoing feeling-act that deepens with greater intimacy over time, moving from a bare

recognition of the other as freedom to an enriched sense of who they are and how we co-create a world together. Beauvoirian reciprocity is an embodied mutual recognition that unfolds over time and is incompatible with oppression (Anderson 2019; see also Parker 2015). Beauvoir (2004a: 249) considers reciprocity to be the foundation of ethical human relationships, since reciprocity honours the ambiguity of both self and other.

For Beauvoir (2015b: 77, 2011: 416, 706), love has a 'privileged role' among human relations because it is the primary site of overcoming conflict through reciprocity. Reciprocal recognition is often experienced erotically, as sexual encounters allow one to experience both self and other as body-object and consciousness-subject simultaneously (Beauvoir 2011: 415–16; see Bergoffen 1997; Anderson 2019). However, erotic love is not placed above other forms of intimacy: she notes, 'love may be platonic as well as sexual' (Beauvoir 2015b: 78), since what distinguishes it is that it reveals 'the presence of the beloved' in both their uniqueness and contingency. That is, love discloses the other in their ambiguity. Reciprocally, love enables us to experience our own ambiguity: she writes, 'it is love given and love received that will be the most powerful aid in bringing about this paradoxical synthesis' of being both 'a minute particle of humanity and as an irreplaceable being' (Beauvoir 2015b: 77). Experiencing ourselves as both situated and free is central to the human experience, and disclosed most clearly in the experience of loving. Authentic love, for Beauvoir (2011: 706, trans. modified), is based 'on the reciprocal recognition of two freedoms.'

Reciprocal recognition requires a radical willingness to leave the other free. Even as love involves building a shared world between lovers, one must continually accept that the other is free to live an independent life by pursuing their own aims. Beauvoir (2006: 76–77) writes in her early diary, 'It will be necessary to have a never-ending faith in the value of the one whom you love and know only with this faith because he is different from oneself; one must love him in this very difference.' This is only possible when lovers are equal. Rather than losing oneself in the other, Beauvoir (2006: 78) longs for a love in which lovers 'simply walk side by side, helping each other a little.' She continues this theme in her mature writings, where she emphasizes that love 'presupposes friendship' (Beauvoir 2015b: 78). Inauthentic love, such as the form sanctioned by monogamous marriage, denies one side or the other of the human condition, failing to achieve reciprocal recognition (Beauvoir 2015b: 77–78).

Following this recognition of the beloved as unique—as a situated freedom in the world—Beauvoir thinks loving another person requires resisting the temptation to reduce them to a type or set of qualities. Love discloses the other *as other*, recognizing the other as a freedom that cannot be fully known by the self. This means that one see the beloved as 'overwhelmingly and incomparably apart' (Beauvoir 2015b: 78) from others, rather than as an object of comparison with them. In discussing jealousies emerging between loved ones, Beauvoir (1992: 192) states, 'The moment anyone begins making calculations or comparisons, they cease to live for the moment.' This suggests that comparison is not only a problem because it reduces the other to their situatedness and overlooks their freedom, but also because it has a tendency to foreclose partners' ability to revel in the presence of each other's company. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir (2011: 67) writes that eroticism 'cannot be integrated into the social sphere, because there is in eroticism a revolt of the instant against time, of the individual against the universal.' Erotic love sets up a private domain shared only between two, and which does not need to be intelligible to those outside of it. This privacy fosters lovers' desire 'to be irreplaceable for each other' (Beauvoir 2011: 467), and that this irreplaceability must not be a result of duty or ongoing commitment but rather be spontaneous.

The Primacy of Dyads

As described above, Beauvoir articulates a picture of love as a reciprocal recognition between individuals who, in each other's presence, transcend social roles and bask in their own private world. One might be struck by how similar this sounds to a classic picture of romantic love, including the bourgeois love-marriage ideal that Beauvoir condemns. Her claims about irreplaceability and reciprocal equality sound mononormative at first blush, given Beauvoir's vaunting of the 'couple' who stands outside other social relations when lost in love.

However, Beauvoir pairs this emphasis on dyadic reciprocity with the idea that we may have many loving relationships at one time. She does not conclude that reciprocal recognition is achieved in marriage: in fact, she thinks marriage tends to kill it, for reasons specified above. Nor does she think that one need have a monogamous relationship in order for reciprocity to be possible. Indeed, monogamous relationships often fall prey to devotion and jealousy, as outlined above, both of which are failures to achieve reciprocal recognition.

Beauvoir's descriptions of 'the family' that she and Sartre established offer some clues as to how Beauvoir squares her belief in the primacy of dyadic intimate relationships with non-monogamy. 'The family' was their name for what today might be called a 'polycule,' or a connected network of non-monogamous relationships. In *The Prime of Life*, she writes that each member of the family had a nuanced relationship with each other member, 'and we were all careful to respect their singularity. I usually saw Bost with Sartre, but besides this exception, duos were the general rule' (Beauvoir 1992: 401, trans. modified). Meeting in the Café de Flore, the family would split up into dyads, even sitting at separate tables, so they could speak one on one. Beauvoir writes that, although 'people found these customs preposterous,' they made perfect sense to those within the family. Savouring 'the taste of *tête-à-tête*,' conversation is best when it achieves 'exclusive intimacy' (Beauvoir 1992: 401): that is, when it takes place between only two. She writes that conversation with more than one other person at a time usually devolves into the mundane, as opposed to 'true communication' (Beauvoir 1992: 401, trans. modified). Relationships are dyadic because of the nature of intimate communication.

One may very well have multiple dyadic intimate relationships, however, including with people who, in turn, have their own relationships. This is what happened in 'the family.' Its members had relationships with varying degrees of intimacy, but Beauvoir considered it important not to let comparison enter the mix by introducing an element of a 'third.' Beauvoir (1992: 192) writes of Sartre's relationship with Olga Kosakiewicz that, 'As often happens, it was the intervention of a third party that caused trouble': in this case, it was mutual friend Marc Zuorro, whose interest in Olga made Sartre jealous. Sartre came to believe Olga preferred Marco to him, and, in reflecting upon this, Beauvoir (1992: 192) suggests that the heart of the issue is the introduction of comparison into a dyadic relationship. She also notes that these jealousies were not sexually motivated, but rather had a platonic character. For Beauvoir, the difficult emotions that non-monogamy can engender should not be swept under the rug through sexual libertinism or considered insurmountable through recourse to human nature's supposedly monogamous desires. Instead, we must grapple with eroticism's hostility to group dynamics by freeing lovers for their own singularity, resisting comparison and jealousy not by repressing them but by shifting the focus back on dyadic reciprocity.

Advocates of polyamory might criticize Beauvoir for underestimating the power of group bonds. One might say that her acceptance of Hegelian recognition and view of reciprocity tacitly imports the ideal of coupledom into her philosophy of love. While Beauvoir places no cap on how many dyadic relationships one might have at a time, she does propose a difference in kind between dyadic and group relationships, privileging the former thanks to their

potential for intimate reciprocal recognition. Given her pessimistic view that the introduction of a 'third' into a relationship fosters comparison and jealousy, she would likely be sceptical of multi-party intimacies.

A further question is whether Beauvoir advocates hierarchical polyamory. That is, does one need to put one (or more) dyadic relationship *above* others? This is a case in which Beauvoir's life tells a certain story, but it is not entirely clear to what extent this maps on to her philosophical views. In her personal life, Beauvoir and Sartre practised hierarchical polyamory by having a primary partnership, treating their relationship as superseding other relationships. Even as Beauvoir and Sartre did not put specific limits on their other relationships with other partners, their main commitment was to each other. As noted above, her memoir *The Prime of Life* recounts that she and Sartre agreed that they had a necessary love, while their love for others was contingent. However, it is unclear to what extent this necessary/contingent distinction was simply a matter of personal lifestyle, or perhaps a language she borrowed from Sartre, as opposed to expressing Beauvoir's own philosophy of love. The privileging of dyadic relationships that one finds in Beauvoir is not necessarily limited to a theory of primary partnership in a traditional open relationship structure, even though she did practise hierarchical polyamory in her personal life.

The Question of Honesty

The clearest sense in which Beauvoir and Sartre practised hierarchical polyamory was their policy of honesty. This is also the element of their love lives most at odds with Beauvoir's espoused values, since it led to paternalistic treatment and deceptive behaviour towards other lovers. Starting with their two-year lease, Beauvoir and Sartre agreed to tell each other everything. They shared details of every aspect of their lives with one another in constant conversation and, when they were apart, detailed letters. Although they later softened this policy, speaking openly about their sexual and romantic experiences with other people remained the norm for them. For Sartre and Beauvoir, being honest with one another was a way of avoiding bad faith: subjecting each other's experiences to each other's 'gaze' by recounting them gave the lovers a more impartial sense of their own actions (Beauvoir 1992: 24, translation modified). We may conclude this approach to honesty was what indicated the primacy of their bond over their bonds with others—rather than, say, marriage or sex. Beauvoir (1998: 208) felt far more sexually passionate about Nelson Algren than she ever did about Sartre; she cohabited with Claude Lanzmann for years, while she and Sartre never lived together for any extended period. And, after flirting with the possibility of marriage early in their relationship, mainly so that they could find teaching positions in the same city, Beauvoir and Sartre left behind this possibility for themselves—though Sartre, at least, came close to marrying Dolores Vanetti and Lena Zonina.

This policy of honesty did not extend to their other relationships. Both Beauvoir and Sartre, especially Sartre, frequently lied to their other partners. They lied about who they were sleeping with, when they were returning from vacation—and who they were on vacation *with*—and even about the depth of their own relationship. As Hazel Rowley (2005: 84) puts it in her dual biography of the couple, 'Sartre took the view that there were some people one simply had to lie to.' Sartre seems to have been motivated by the desire to avoid women partners' jealousy: multiple of his long-term partners, including Dolores Vanetti and Wanda Kosaciewicz, were known to be quite jealous (Rowley 2005: 144, 162, 221, 312, 338). While many of Beauvoir's lies were acts of complicity with Sartre's deceptions, she also lied to loved ones about her own relationships. For instance, core member of the 'family' Olga Kosaciewicz

never knew that Beauvoir had a sexual relationship with Olga's partner Jacques-Laurent Bost, let alone that this relationship lasted years. And her failure to tell Nelson Algren that she'd decided to cut their tour of Latin America off early so she could return to Paris to be with Sartre caused a huge amount of friction in her relationship with Algren, who wanted to marry her (Kirkpatrick 2019: 243).

Through the practice of lying to other people but telling each other all, Beauvoir and Sartre revealed the primacy of their relationship. Sartre told Beauvoir, 'You are not only my life but also the honesty of my life' (Rowley 2005: 112). He worried in this letter that Beauvoir would begin suspecting that his routine lying to other lovers would make her question whether he was honest to her. But he claims that he is totally honest with her, and that this is part of his 'very self' (Rowley 2005: 112). Much later in life, he told Olivier Todd that he copes with his women partners' jealousy as follows: 'I lie to them…It is easier, and more decent.' Todd followed up by asking if he ever lied to Beauvoir. Sartre said, '*Particularly* to the Beaver' (Rowley 2005: 338). This approach to honesty at best reveals a sound principle of non-monogamous love that two imperfect individuals failed to live up to during their lifetime; at worst, it puts into question the viability of their very approach to love. For Beauvoir's part, she came to question the value of honesty in her subsequent work, coming to disentangle it from telling each other everything and seeing it as compatible with discretion (Beauvoir 1992: 25).

Conclusion

In 1950, Beauvoir (2015b: 76) wrote, 'until now, our society has never known a love that was not founded on inequality.' Equal love for Beauvoir is not a bourgeois love-marriage, but rather a comradeship between equals recognizing their singular situated freedoms. Equality is necessary for authentic loving relationships. This, she believes, has been impossible under conditions of rampant gender inequality. Thus, one might conclude that *no* authentic loving relationship is possible in an unequal society—after all, Beauvoir doesn't exempt lesbian relationships in *The Second Sex*. And, as much as she offered a rosy picture of her and Sartre's relationships in many of her writings, she struggled with jealousy, participated in deception, and was ignorant of power imbalances in her relationships with younger women.

At the same time, Beauvoir's philosophy of love from her early to mature writings compellingly identifies problems with monogamous marriage and offers compelling reasons for treating non-monogamy seriously. Equality in loving relationships is a goal worth striving for even under non-ideal conditions, on her view. While her argument that the nature of intimacy renders dyadic relationships different in kind, as well as more valuable, than group bonds puts her at odds with some theoretical approaches to polyamory, it presents a valuable foil for such theories, against which an approach to the value of multi-party relationships might be articulated. More needs to be said about how Beauvoir's unique account of freedom informs her view here—for instance, her view is a far cry from certain strands of non-monogamy, such as relationship anarchy and libertarian approaches. It is also distinct from the notion of 'polyfidelity' in polyamorous circles, which involves restricting sexual and/or emotional interaction to a delimited set of partners. Broadly speaking, however, polyamory rejects the widely held social expectation that love involves sexual and emotional fidelity to one other person. Instead, polyamorists suggest that satisfying and ethical relationships may be found with multiple people. This is not only compatible with Beauvoir's philosophy of love, but also may be enriched by the rich existential account of reciprocal recognition we find in her work.

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PART 5

Death and Freedom