

# **Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialist Ethics as an Antidote for Ideology Addiction**

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**Abstract:** Central to philosophical practice is the application of philosophers' work by philosophical practitioners to inspire, educate, and guide their clients. For example, in Logic-Based Therapy (LBT) philosophical practitioners help their clients to find an uplifting philosophy that promotes guiding virtues that counteract unrealistic and often self-defeating conclusions derived from irrational premises. I will present the argument that Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist ethics can be applied as an uplifting philosophy as per LBT methodology, and therefore has utility for philosophical practice. Additionally, I will propose that Beauvoir's existentialist ethics, as an uplifting philosophy, may act as an antidote for ideological obsession and ideology addiction. I will also suggest that LBT may be a suitable intervention when challenging the unrealistic conclusions derived from illogical premises in practical reasoning that contribute to ideological obsession, because it can contest irrational beliefs in a way that could mitigate the fragmentation anxiety that often arise when individuals relinquish maladaptive self-object organizations.

**Keywords:** Simone de Beauvoir, Existentialism, Ideological Obsession, Ideology Addiction, Self-deception, Fragmentation Anxiety, Philosophical Practice

Central to philosophical practice is the application of philosophers' work by philosophical practitioners to inspire, educate, and guide their clients. For example, in Logic-Based Therapy (LBT), a philosophical practice methodology developed by American philosopher Elliot Cohen, philosophical practitioners help their clients to find an uplifting philosophy that promotes guiding virtues that counteracts "self-defeating, unrealistic conclusions [derived] from irrational premises in practical reasoning" (Cohen, 2013, ix) and thus provides "a rational framework for confronting problems of living" (Cohen 2013, xix).

Like other cognitive-behavioral approaches (for example, Albert Ellis' Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy), LBT focusses on the refutation of logical fallacies (it identifies eleven common 'cardinal fallacies'), but it departs from these approaches by additionally including the practice of *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (PWL). Inspired by the work of the French scholar Pierre Hadot (1995) PWL views philosophy in its fullest sense as profoundly transformational. PWL and LBT both aim to

transform the practitioner's way of perceiving the world, and mode of being, to enable a freer and happier existence.<sup>i</sup>

In LBT, each of the eleven cardinal fallacies has an associated guiding virtue that counteracts the given fallacy. This then points the way for choosing a philosophical perspective or *uplifting philosophy* for promoting that guiding virtue. In this article, I will explore the existentialist ethics of Simone de Beauvoir and present the argument that it can act as an uplifting philosophy, as per LBT methodology, and therefore has utility for philosophical practice. I will present my discussion of Beauvoir's existentialist ethics in the context of ideological obsession, and an extreme form of it that I refer to as 'ideology addiction.' I will propose that Beauvoir's existentialist ethics, as an uplifting philosophy, could serve as an antidote for ideological obsession and ideology addiction. I will also suggest that LBT may be a suitable intervention when challenging the unrealistic conclusions derived from illogical premises in practical reasoning that contribute to ideological obsession, because it can contest irrational beliefs in a way that could mitigate the fragmentation anxiety that often arise when individuals relinquish maladaptive self-object organizations.

In the next section, I explore the notion of ideology addiction. The term 'ideology' has many definitions and for the purpose of this article and for my articulation of ideology addiction I will apply the definition used by Karl Popper (1994, 17) in his book *The Myth of the Framework*. He defines ideology as "any non-scientific theory, or creed, or view of the world which proves attractive, and which interests people, including scientists." Moreover, ideology can be understood as a *pharmakon*, a word that is ancient Greek meant both 'cure' and 'poison.' Ideology as a *pharmakon* can provide a sense of purpose, meaning, and direction to individuals and communities, offering a framework for understanding the world and a basis for action, and can also be a source of dogmatism, intolerance, and violence, leading to the oppression and suffering of those who do not adhere to its beliefs. The focus of this article is when ideology as a *pharmakon* becomes a poison.

## Theory of Ideology Addiction

In previous publications I proposed a 'theory of ideology addiction' where I argued that the exposure and adherence to an ideology can be mood-altering or psychoactive, and consequently potentially addictive – in particular, the 'intoxication' (*Rausch*) when being transmogrified into a utopian fantasy world (Du Plessis, 2018, 2019).<sup>ii</sup> I now additionally suggest that ideology addiction, understood as an extreme form of ideological obsession and zealotry, could plausibly be classified as a type of mental health disorder. The notion that the exposure and adherence to an ideology is mood-altering or potentially addictive is not a novel idea, but by conceptualizing extreme ideological obsession by the term 'ideology addiction' I propose that it warrants consideration if it should indeed be classified as a behavioral addiction and mental health disorder, and potentially a new entity in future psychiatric nosology. As with all addictions and mental health disorders, an adequate diagnosis informs correct treatment and prevention.

The question of 'what is a mental disorder?' is central to the philosophy of psychiatry, and it is beyond the scope of this article to enter into a discussion around this complex issue, but it is important to note that there always exists the real possibility of erroneously classifying various kinds of social deviance or behavioral variation as 'disorder', when they are better conceptualized using

other categories, such as 'non-pathological individual differences', or 'lifestyle choice.' So, the issue of whether the phenomena I conceptualize as ideology addiction is best classified as mental health disorder and should be considered a new entity in psychiatric nosology or more suited for other categories, warrants further research and debate. For the purpose of the article, I will apply the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, (5<sup>th</sup> ed., American Psychiatric Association, 2013, 20) criteria of a mental health disorder which "is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or development processes underlying mental functioning" and propose that what I define as ideology addiction fits this criterion.

The psychoactive properties and addictive potential of ideology were already noted by Friedrich Nietzsche in the 1880s, when he diagnosed modernity as being fundamentally narcotized. Nietzsche's philosophical discourse provides a comprehensive critique of the fundamental values inherent in modern Western society. Nietzsche puts forward an alternative set of values that supersede the pervasive nihilism characterizing European history. This nihilism has its roots in Platonism which according to him was the most tragic form of nihilism. This nihilistic idea was further entrenched by Christianity. In *Twilight of the Idols* (1889/1990) he points out that ideology as a *pharmakon* can anesthetize whole cultures and induce mass narcosis, when he referred to Christianity, alongside alcohol, as "two great European narcotics" (1990, 72) that has produced in modernity what Nietzsche repeatedly refers to as a "sleep." Jason Ciaccio (2018, 121) notes that

Nietzsche does not simply correlate Christianity and alcohol; he looks to understand the former in terms of the latter. Divested of its transcendent aspirations, the effect of Christianity begins to look entirely similar to that of alcoholism, and Nietzsche often evaluates them in identical terms. They produce a common physiological effect: a dulling of pain and deadening of affect...Christianity anaesthetizes, and its physiological depression is the same as that of alcohol. Both are palliatives...both tend towards quiescence and resignation, or in other words: nihilism."

Nietzsche's enduring enmity toward Christianity was in part an attempt to overcome the anesthesia of metaphysics. The 'ascetic priest,' a figure Nietzsche sketches in detail in the third essay of *The Genealogy of Morals*, is heavily implicated in Christian narcosis, who "comes to prominence only in the presence of a waning of life, a physiological disturbance in need of medication. The sufferer, unable to act out against an external cause of suffering, experiences a discomfort in need of narcotic relief," and "by locating the cause of suffering inwardly, as guilt and sin, the ascetic priest enables the sufferer to release tension" by identifying and therefore acting out "against the putative cause of suffering: one's self" (Ciaccio, 2018, 121). As a peddler of metaphysical narcotics, the ascetic priest provides a means of self-narcosis to alleviate the discomfort of those not capable of coping with suffering and offers, what Nietzsche (2000, 570) refers to as, "a repose of deepest sleep."

It must be noted that Nietzsche was not critical of religion *per se*, but only of certain types. Similarly, in relation to 'intoxication,' he makes a distinction between that "which promotes narcosis, the banalizing and dulling effects of contemporary life, and that which promotes intoxication [*Rausch*], a state of the creation of values, style, and self" (Ciaccio, 2018, 123) - which Nietzsche, as a cultural physician, prescribes for rousing from the narcotic slumber of modernity's quiescence. For

example, in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886/1989, 91) he highlights that religion as a *pharmakon* can either cure or poison:

Religion, as a fundamental conviction that the world is admirable and inestimable, as the driving force behind any metaphysical construction of a world for oneself, has hitherto belonged to the basic requirements of a strong and robust soul: it is only since man has been afflicted with acute miseries and spiritual and physical plagues that he has been in need of anesthetics and narcotics in the form of religious beliefs.

One could argue with Nietzsche's (1882/1972, 181) declaration that "God is dead" in *The Gay Science* also heralded that Western society lost its principal metaphysical narcotic and "repose of deepest sleep" - and that it was not a statement, but a warning that "when we unchained the earth from its sun" what "water is there for us to clean ourselves?" and "[w]hat festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent?" - a warning that we will now seek out, and invent perhaps even more terrifying narcotics (ideologies, techno-utopias and psychoactive substances) that provide a "repose of deepest sleep."

## **Narcissists in Wonderland**

I will now explore ideology addiction from a psychodynamic perspective. It must be noted that this will be a speculative, tentative, and partial account as it could be expounded from a variety of epistemological lenses, and it is beyond the scope of this article to adequately articulate a topic of this complexity. My thesis is informed by the premise that an individual in the grip of an ideology addiction will exhibit similar psychodynamics to other addicted populations (Du Plessis, 2018). Ideology addiction, like substance use disorders, could be understood as the result of a narcissistic disturbance of self-experience and deficits in self capabilities, and may provide a misguided solution to narcissistic injury and shame (Du Plessis, 2018, 2019, 2023). In the following discussion I will propose that ideological obsession can be a way to meet archaic narcissistic needs, and a choice of ideology may be influenced by these needs. In short, I will argue that the 'activism' of the ideologically obsessed may not principally be motivated by the 'holy duty' of the ideology but may indeed be fundamentally a narcissistic project - a covert solution to narcissistic injury and shame.

According to Heinz Kohut, (as cited in Ulman and Paul, 2006) "the self should be conceptualized as a lifelong arc linking two polar sets of experiences: on one side, a pole of ambitions related to the original grandiosity as it was affirmed by the mirroring self-object...on the other side, a pole of idealizations, the person's realized goals" (p. 30). Informed by Kohut's bipolar model of the self, Harry Ulman and Leonard Paul view addiction as a psychological end result of developmental arrest in the bipolarity of the formation of the self. According to Kohut (as cited in Ulman & Paul, 2006, 396) an "individual may be subject to specific outcomes resulting from a disturbance" in either the pole of grandiosity or the pole of omnipotence. Owing to the specific accompanying mood disorder of each of the possible disturbances of the poles of the self, individuals will be attracted to certain psychoactive substances, which can be understood as an attempt at rectifying a specific deficit in self and coping style - and this may also be relevant for the choice of ideology.

More specifically, from a self psychology perspective, narcissistic injury can lead to a porous or scant psychic structure that is in constant threat of psychic fragmentation or annihilation. The individual with narcissistic injury often has a chronic, archaic 'hunger' for self-object experiences that provide psychological homeostasis and is characterized by a continuing search for satisfaction of unmet self-object needs (Kohut, 1971, 1977; Du Plessis, 2023). Ideology, as a *pharmakon*, can be understood as a self-object experience that provides a much-needed psychic structure for such individuals and transports them into a transmogrified fantasy world, where they are under the influence of "intoxicating fantasies" (Ulman & Paul, 2000, 396). The ideology acts as structural prosthesis and 'satisfaction' of a chronic and archaic 'hunger' for self-object experiences and the ideologically obsessed is characterized by a continuing search for satisfaction of unmet self-object needs.

In the context of radical political ideologies, I will argue that there is archaic narcissistic 'hunger' for self-object experiences (idealization, mirroring) at play as a causal factor in determining an individual's choice of political orientation. For example, although 'radical left' political ideologies (for example, communism) and 'radical right' political ideologies (for example, fascism) presents themselves conceptually as two opposing ideological positions, the psychological dynamics that motivate both adherents are similar. At the root lies a form of archaic narcissism and a yearning for a utopian fantasy, and what distinguishes the ideologues of the radical left from the radical right is the type of narcissistic transference (mirroring or idealization) each applies to soothe their unstable inner worlds. In the same way that drugs of choice play a particular psychodynamic function as argued by the self-medication hypothesis (Du Plessis, 2018, 2023).

To elucidate the above hypothesis, I will apply a typological perspective, and propose a simple heuristic. There are many typological perspectives that can be applied in the context of psychoactive substances, and the most basic is the typology of stimulants (uppers) and depressants (downers). I propose that there may be a correlation between the type of disturbance of self-experience and choice of either stimulants or depressants, and choice of a type of ideology and that the psychoactive properties of an ideology can correlate with those two classes of psychoactive substances.

Rodger Scruton (2016) states in his book *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands* that "the public ideology of communism is one of *equality and emancipation*, while that of fascism emphasizes *distinction and triumph*" (p. 201). Using Scruton's, perhaps oversimplified, distinction, I propose that 'radical left ideologies,' like communism, could be understood as a pathological 'depressant-like ideology' of "equality and emancipation" and radical right ideologies, like fascism, as a pathological 'stimulant-like ideology' of "distinction and triumph." Moreover, disturbances in Kohut's (1971, 1977) poles of the self could be correlated with the choice of psychoactive substance, for example, the pole of grandiosity with depressants and the pole of omnipotence with stimulants. Therefore, radical left depressant-like ideologies of "equality and emancipation" may act as a source for narcissistic transference of mirroring. Radical right stimulant-like ideologies of "distinction and triumph" may act as a source for narcissistic transference of idealization. Thus, failures in early attachments may unconsciously drive a choice of ideology, as a misguided 'solution' to shame.

In short, the above discussion highlights the subterranean dynamics of the ideologically obsessed but may also have some explanatory value for the choice of political and religious ideology of so-called moderate 'true believers.' Echoing a similar sentiment, the longshoreman-philosopher Eric Hoffer, in his book *The True Believer*, poignantly highlights the often-veiled motivation of true believers and reminds us to be wary of those who profess to be selfless in their political or religious activism. He states that the

burning conviction that we have a *holy duty* toward others is often a way of attaching our drowning selves to a passing raft. What looks like giving a hand is often a holding on for dear life. Take away our holy duties and you leave our lives puny and meaningless. There is no doubt that in exchanging a self-centered for a selfless life we gain enormously in self-esteem. The *vanity of the selfless*, even those who practice utmost humility, *is boundless*. (Hoffer, 1951, 23) (italics mine)

In conclusion, the zealotry and activism of the ideology addict is fundamentally a narcissistic project, a misguided attempt at self-repair and satisfaction of archaic narcissistic needs - and not principally motivated by the selfless 'holy duty' of the ideology. Instead, the ideologically possessed is a "narcissist in wonderland" under the influence of "intoxicating fantasies" (Ulman & Paul, 2000, 396).

I will now discuss how Beauvoir's existentialist ethics, when understood as an uplifting philosophy as per LBT methodology, can act as an antidote for ideological obsession and ideology addiction.

## **De Beauvoir's Existentialist Ethics**

Beauvoir was a French existentialist philosopher, writer, social theorist, and feminist activist. She was a contemporary of her countryman and existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and had a significant influence on the development of existentialism.

Beauvoir wrote several philosophically oriented essays and novels. In this article, I will focus on one of her more well-known essays *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948). This work first appeared in four installments in *Les Temps Modernes*, a French journal, founded by Beauvoir, Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The first and third installments appeared in the same issues that carried portions of Merleau-Ponty's *Humanism and Terror* (1947). In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, she outlines an existentialist ethics and insists that only phenomenology can provide the foundation for an ethics that we can wholeheartedly embrace. It can be argued that for Beauvoir this foundational phenomenology is Merleau-Ponty's (1945), not Sartre's. Beauvoir points out that Sartre (1958) chiefly stresses the opposition of the two states of being: being-for-itself (*pour-soi*) and the being-in-itself (*en-soi*) and the absolute freedom of the for-itself, in contrast to Merleau-Ponty who argues that the subject is never a pure for-itself.

*The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948) is informed by Sartre's existential-phenomenological analysis in *Being and Nothingness* (1958). A brief discussion of Sartre's analysis follows, which apart from contextualizing Beauvoir's thinking, explores the notion of self-deception or 'bad faith' (*mauvaise foi*), a psychological phenomenon that is often fundamental in ideological obsession. I will contrast my

discussion of Sartre with that of Sigmund Freud's (1915/1957, 1923/1961) depth-psychology, as Sartre's analysis and his theory of bad faith is a reaction against Freud's psychic determinism, as well as a critique of Freud's depth-psychological account of self-deception.

Any ethical project requires that one identifies and fairly assesses one's motivations. Therefore, any ethical theory must be congruent with the structure of human motivation. Ethics, therefore, demands insight into how self-deception about motivation is possible.

## Bad Faith

Philosophers are seldom famous in their own lifetime. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80) was an exception. In the Liberation period after World War Two, he was a celebrity and public intellectual par excellence. For example, thousands attended his public lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism*, towards the end of 1945. In this lecture he gave the eager public a more accessible version of his book, *Being and Nothingness* (1943), where he presents the notion of *mauvaise foi*, translated as 'bad faith.' Sartre's theory of bad faith can be understood as a critique of Sigmund Freud's depth-psychological account of self-deception. Sartre's (1943, 570) theory of mind and his own methodology, existential psychoanalysis, attempts to remain faithful to Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, simply put, that all psychic acts are coextensive with consciousness.

In the philosophical literature, and according to the traditional model, self-deception requires an individual to hold contradictory beliefs, and must intentionally believe something which s/he knows to be false. The traditional model raised two paradoxes, the so-called static paradox, *i.e.*, "How can an individual hold contradictory beliefs simultaneously?" and the dynamic or strategic paradox, *i.e.*, "How can an individual deceive herself without her intentions being rendered ineffective?" (Mele, 2001).

Yet, for those that ascribe to a depth-psychological perspective, the problem of self-deception is not so elusive. Simply put, from a depth-psychological perspective individuals can hide their own motivations from themselves (Lockie, 2003). Freud (1915/1957, 1923/1961) provides an account of self-deception in his discussion of illusion, repression, and delusion. He uses the words *Selbstbetrug* and *Selbsttäuschung* interchangeably when referring to self-deception. *Selbstbetrug* is usually translated as 'self-deceit', or 'deception', while *Selbsttäuschung* is usually translated as 'self-deceit' or 'delusion.' Central to Freud's theory of mind, and his therapeutic methodology of psychoanalysis, is the premise that we can be motivated by unconscious drives or impulses of which we are not aware – which push for satisfaction, even at the expense of our conscious beliefs and wishes. The aim of psychoanalysis is to bring awareness to these 'hidden' drives. According to Freud, these concealed motivations are not merely 'descriptively unconscious,' instead, they are 'dynamically unconscious,' which highlights that the individual is actively (through the use of defence mechanisms) trying to keep motivations out of awareness. Moreover, the unconscious is not accessible to our awareness and is composed of non-conceptual and symbolic elements that cannot be communicated through language.

It must be noted that this notion predates Freud, for instance, *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* by Eduard von Hartmann was published in 1869. And prior to that, Arthur Schopenhauer

(1819/1969) in *The World as Will and Representation*, argued for a conceptual and aconceptual divide of the mind. Similarly, Nietzsche (1881/1982, 76) proposed that “[a]ll our so-called consciousness is a more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable, but felt text.”

In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre (1958) argues that Freud does not provide a sufficient justification for self-deception by making a distinction between conscious and unconscious mental processes. His main critique of Freud’s depth-psychological approach, and in particular his account of self-deception, can be summed up as: Freud is charged with splitting the subject into meta-psychological parts (Conscious, Preconscious, Unconscious, or Id, Ego, Superego) and provides a misguided mechanistic explanation of how there can be a ‘liar’ and a ‘lied to’ duality within a single consciousness, which simply transfers the problem where it remains unsolved, thus consisting in a pseudo-explanation (which today might be called a ‘homuncular fallacy’). Sartre claims that in the act of repression, there is awareness of the drive that is being repressed as well as an awareness of the actions that aim to satisfy it – and simply put, these are both rational activities. According to Sartre the Freudian ‘censor’ must first register the drive or impulse before preventing it from becoming conscious. Sartre (1958, 52-53) argues that

[i]t is not sufficient that [the censor] discern the condemned drives; it must also apprehend them as to be repressed, which implies in it at the very least an awareness of its activity. In a word, how could the censor discern the impulses needing to be repressed without being conscious of discerning them? ... [a]ll knowing is consciousness of knowing.

Sartre (1958) provides a phenomenological account, in *Being and Nothingness*, of self-deception or bad faith through an example of a woman who for the first time has consented to go out with a man. The woman is aware of the man’s sexual interest in her, and the potential consequences of that, but because of her ambivalence, she pretends that nothing is being asked of her. Why is this woman in bad faith? For Sartre, she is in bad faith or self-deceived because she conceals something from herself at the same instant she brings it to conscious awareness - and is actively denying her own freedom

## Ambiguity

A central theme in Beauvoir’s (1948) *The Ethics of Ambiguity* is her articulation of ambiguity. The term ambiguity is derived from the Latin *ambiguitas*, meaning doubt, uncertainty, or paradox. She states that “[t]o attain his truth, man must not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of his being but, on the contrary, accept the task of realizing it.” (Beauvoir, 1948, 13). She posits that human existence is an ambiguous admixture of the interplay of inner freedom, which provides the capacity to transcend the circumstances presented by the world, and the inexorable weight of the world, which imposes itself on us in a manner outside of our control and not of our own choosing. Consequently, the ethical life, according to her argument, necessitates the acceptance and embracing of this ontological ambiguity, rather than an attempt to evade or escape it.

Typically, in Western philosophy, the notion of ambiguity is seen as undesirable epistemologically and ethically, as it relates to the Cartesian project of achieving indubitable



certainty. Consequently, Cartesian philosophy aims to eliminate ambiguity. Yet, for Beauvoir, ambiguity is an undeniable feature of our human existence, and something to be embraced, not denounced. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir argues that both the reduction of consciousness to material bodies and the reduction of the material world to objects of consciousness are unacceptable, and that both these forms of reductionism are an inadequate foundation for ethics. Discussing the philosophers who committed both forms of reductionism, she comments that “the ethics which they have proposed to their disciples has always pursued the same goal. It has been a matter of eliminating the ambiguity by making oneself pure inwardness or pure externality, by escaping from the sensible world or by being engulfed in it, by yielding to eternity or enclosing oneself in the pure moment” (Beauvoir, 1948, 35).

Simply put, the central feature of ambiguity is that on the one hand, we are an agent or a choosing subject, and on the other hand, an object of both others' perceptions and one's own, that is thrown into a world of forces that are beyond our control. It must be noted that she is not strictly Cartesian, instead, she views the mind-body interaction as 'situated' or 'embodied,' and not mind acting on the body. For Beauvoir (1948, 22) this ambiguity or tension is not to be regarded as a flaw that should be eliminated - instead, she advises that if “we do not succeed in fleeing it, let us therefore try to look the truth in the face. Let us try to assume our fundamental ambiguity. It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our life that we must draw our strength to live and our reason for acting.”

Beauvoir's suggestion and ethics is presented as an alternative to the philosophy of the 'absurd and despair' often associated with existentialism – and that man is not a 'useless passion' as maintained by Sartre. Instead, our dilemma or 'failure' is what necessitates ethics. Beauvoir notes, “without failure, no ethics” (1948, 10) and that only existentialism gives “a real role to evil” (1948, 34). She notes that for some philosophers, like Plato and Spinoza, wrongdoing or evil is explained as a fundamental error or abnormality, as no one is willfully bad, and with adequate knowledge one can avoid this aberration. Thus, according to Beauvoir, these philosophers approached this 'dilemma' through denial as they have sought to either reduce humans to mind/inwardness/eternity or to affirm instead, the sensible world/externality/transitoriness – and both are misguided reductions. Moreover, optimistic forms of humanism view the natural world and human beings as whole and perfect in themselves, and thus fail to give an adequate account for evil.

One way to deal with the problem of evil and suffering is to suggest another world or future utopian destination where there is less or no evil or suffering. For example, G. W. F. Hegel (1830/2007) tells us, simply put, that if ethical law became natural law, we would inhabit some utopian state. Hegel and other 'true world' philosophers (for example, Plato, Schopenhauer, Marx) hold the assumption that there is a destination that to reach it is to enter (or re-enter) a state of bliss, a paradise, a heaven, or utopia. Nietzsche referred to this other-worldly destination as a 'true world,' and true-world ideologies (for example, Christianity) gives meaning to our lives by representing it as a journey towards an arrival which will more than make up for the discomfort of our present lives. For Nietzsche, secular true-world ideologies like Marxism, or 'socialism,' as he called it, is a perpetuation of the idea of God by other means, which he called God's 'shadow' (Young, 2014). This may help explain why even more 'moderate' true-world ideologies is often evangelically promoted with a religious fervor.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and in the ‘shadow’ of God, secular true-world ideologies led to large-scale destruction in the forms of communism and fascism. Although communism and fascism represent opposites on the political spectrum, they have more commonalities than differences – viz. collectivism, historicism, and utopianism, and to think otherwise, according to English philosopher Roger Scruton, (2016, p. 201) “is to betray the most superficial understanding of modern history.” Scruton (2016, 200-201) asserts that “[c]ommunism, like fascism, involved the attempt to create a mass popular movement and a state bound together under the rule of a single party, in which there [would] be total cohesion around a common goal ... Both aimed to achieve a new kind of social order, unmediated by institutions, displaying an immediate and fraternal cohesiveness.” Both these true-world ideologies promoted a collectivist utopic society. Both involved a particular conception of social relations cohering around a common goal, guided by a prior historicist vision. Both, typical of collectivist and utopic ideologies, identified a ‘other’ as the ‘hindrance’ to their utopia – and thus can justify unspeakable horrors in their ‘holy duty’ to remove the ‘hinderance’ to the actualization of their collective utopia.

In his book *The Poverty of Historicism*, Austrian-British philosopher Karl Popper (2002) criticized historicist attempts to foretell the future, arguing that social experiments based on such theories were doomed to failure, because human history is strongly influenced by the growth of knowledge, and we cannot predict the future growth of scientific knowledge. Moreover, Popper noted we should be wary of the professed ‘selflessness’ of proponents of collectivist ideologies:

Collectivism is not opposed to egoism, nor is it identical to altruism or unselfishness. A collectivist can be a group egoist. He can selfishly defend the interest of his own group, in contradistinction to all other groups. Collective egoism or group egoism (e.g., national egoism or class egoism) is a very common thing. That such a thing exists shows clearly enough that collectivism as such is not opposed to selfishness’ (Popper et al. 2008, 65).

Collectivist and utopic ideologies, based on perfectionistic ideals, typically breed what Nietzsche called *ressentiment*. Nietzsche argues that men of *ressentiment* are “cellar rats full of revenge and hatred,” concealing “a whole, vibrating realm of subterranean revenge” (quoted in Leiter, 2002, 203). It is not hard to see why collectivist utopias, predicated on perfectionistic views of human nature and social relations, can lead to *ressentiment*, since utopia can never be actualized - and often there is an ‘other’ that hinders the actualization of the utopia, onto whom collective *ressentiment* is projected. Additionally, I would add that not only do utopian ideologies breed *ressentiment*, but also seems to act like a powerful magnet for those “cellar rats full of revenge and hatred” as it provides an intoxicating psychological brew of *a priori* meaning, sense of belonging, self-aggrandization, and abdication of personal responsibility through victimhood and blame – moreover, it offers an alluring worldview that resonates with the mechanistic and partisan worldview typically observed with Cluster B personality disorders, in particular Borderline Personality Disorder, that splits others and the world into all good or all bad, and experiences all social relations through the lens of victim/perpetrator/savoir. As Nietzsche (1973, 670) notes, “Revenge upon life itself—this is the most voluptuous form of intoxication for such indigent souls!”

Beauvoir's existentialist ethics, from a Nietzschean perspective, strongly rejects this "revenge upon life itself" and proposes a way of being that is diametrically opposed to these absolutist and perfectionistic utopias. For example, Beauvoir criticizes Hegel's idea of an 'Absolute Subject,' which for her symbolizes a longing for individuals to escape their freedom by immersing it in an external, abstract absolute. Hegel's 'Absolute' justifies the sacrifice of individuals in pursuit of perfection, a notion that Beauvoir sees as annihilative rather than preserving of individual human lives. Thus, Beauvoir champions a philosophy valuing individual freedom as the only ethical approach. She contrasts this with true-world philosophies that prioritize universality and thus cannot be regarded as authentically ethical systems. She contends that existentialism, in acknowledging the plurality and particularity of human beings and their unique circumstances and pursuits, stands against these absolute philosophies and ideologies.

By describing consciousness as ambiguous, Beauvoir identifies our ambiguity with the idea of failure. The inherent human quest for meaning fails to find the full revelation of the world's meaning and be the originator of that meaning. Such limitations in our existential quest are foundational to Beauvoir's ethical considerations. For her ethical systems and absolutes, like those offered by true-world philosophies, that claim to give final answers to our ethical dilemmas and provide objective and authoritarian justifications for our actions, offer dangerous consolations for our inherent incapability to be the ultimate source of the world's meaning. Such notions enable a circumvention of personal responsibility for shaping the circumstances of our lives, facilitating an escape from the disquietude of existential ambiguity. Utopian visions of heaven, paradise or classless society foster a mentality that emphasizes ends as justification for means, promoting the sacrifice of the present for an anticipated future. Such utopic thinking has underpinned historical horrors like inquisitions, genocides, gulags, and Auschwitz. By unduly prioritizing the future, these concepts distort our relationship with time, others, and our own selves.

Beauvoir posits that human freedom must be engaged in pursuits originating from a spontaneous act of choosing, with ends and objectives that are never viewed as independent absolutes. Rather, genuine freedom necessitates a deliberate assumption of it through moment-by-moment selected projects. The significance of human actions is derived not from an exterior and absolutist authority, such as a deity, ideology, or institution, but from the deliberate act of choosing them. Beauvoir's view of freedom demands a proactive acceptance of one's choices, along with their consequences and responsibilities. Ethical conduct arises only through this acknowledgement and not through an evasion into static absolutist goals or utopic fantasy. Beauvoir's ethics paves the way for an existentialist conversion that allows for a life of authenticity without being dependent on an exterior authority or ideology.

I propose that a refusal to accept the inherent ambiguity of the human condition, the demand for perfection and desire to escape freedom by submersing it in an external absolute are often fundamental in ideological obsession and zealotry. These attitudes are often supported by the cardinal fallacies Cohen calls (1) *existential perfectionism* – interpreted as a demand that the world must absolutely and unconditionally conform to some state of ideality, perfection, or near perfection, and (2) *bandwagon thinking* – interpreted as blind, inauthentic, and parrot-like conformity (Cohen, 2013).

To counteract the existential perfectionism and bandwagon thinking of the ideologically possessed, I suggest that Beauvoir's existentialist ethics can serve as a uplifting philosophy, within the context of LBT methodology, which can act as an antidote to ideological obsession and ideology addiction through promotion of the guiding virtues of (1) *metaphysical security* - the ability to accept imperfections in realities inherent in everyday life, and (2) *authenticity* - autonomously living according to one's own creative choices as opposed to loosing oneself on a bandwagon of conformity.

In conclusion, Beauvoir's existentialist ethics provides a way of being that is diametrically opposed to absolutist and perfectionistic utopian ideologies, a life of living in 'bad faith,' and exchanging our freedom for a 'tyranny of shoulds,' (borrowing a phrase from the German psychoanalyst Karen Horney), instead it allows us to live *authentically* at the crossroads of freedom and facticity.

## **Fragmentation Anxiety and Logic-Based Therapy**

It was noted in my discussion of Beauvoir's existentialist ethics how any ethics demands insight into how self-deception about motivation is possible, and I did so in the context of Freud's and Sartre's accounts of self-deception. In the next section, I will return to the notion of self-deception and will highlight how self-deception can be seen as a protective mechanism against fragmentation anxiety which can occur in the ideologically obsessed or 'true believer' when their irrational belief systems are confronted. I suggest that LBT may be a suitable intervention when challenging the unrealistic conclusions derived from illogical premises in practical reasoning that contribute to ideological obsession, because it can contest irrational beliefs in a way that could mitigate the fragmentation anxiety that often arise when individuals relinquish maladaptive self-object organizations.

In pointing out the role that self-deception plays for the ideologically obsessed Scruton notes that what is "[m]ost important is the way in which ideology of the kind I discuss [in *Fools, Frauds, and Firebrands*] insulates itself against criticism, regards non-believers as a threat, and refuses to examine evidence coming from outside the closed circle of gratifying ideas" (personal communication, 5 August 2018). For the ideologically possessed or ideology addict self-deception can be understood as a protective mechanism against 'narcissistic mortification' and psychic fragmentation or annihilation. When ideology serves the dynamic function of a 'psychic prostheses' for a feeble and unstable self, the ideologue must rely on self-deception to maintain his/her ideological worldview.

According to Kohut (1977), fragmentation anxiety may emerge at crucial moments of psychic change, when an existing maladaptive self-object organization is about to be given up. For the ideologue, irrational systems of belief may be tenaciously retained because a threat to the coherence of the ideology is experienced as a direct attack on his/her sense of self and identity and conjures up powerful archaic fears of psychic fragmentation and annihilation. It must be noted that the fear of fragmentation is a universal human phenomenon, experienced unconsciously as a constant threat (Kohut, 1971, 1977). This fear is rooted in the need for a coherent and integrated sense of self, which is developed through self-object functions provided by caregivers during early childhood. As individuals develop, they form self-object systems with a wide range of human phenomena, including linguistic, cultural, imagistic, and behavioral routines and organizations. These systems serve to maintain a sense of coherence and continuity in the self, thereby reducing the threat of fragmentation.

When these systems are threatened, such as by confrontation with competing belief systems, the resulting disintegration anxiety can be intense.

Therefore, to maintain psychic homeostasis the ideologically obsessed must do everything in their power to rebuff any 'attacks of reality,' and eliminate the threat, or face a profoundly disturbing and frightening emotional experience. Therefore, as Scruton points out, the ideologue must insulate themselves against criticism, and will often perform extreme mental gymnastics to counteract evidence that contradicts their beliefs. Consequently, addressing the self-deception and flawed logic (for example, practical reasoning that is based on existential perfectionism and bandwagon thinking) that supports ideological obsession would require an intervention that would also need to mitigate the dread of fragmentation anxiety.

Consequently, LBT may be a suitable intervention when challenging the unrealistic conclusions derived from illogical premises in practical reasoning that contribute to ideological obsession, because it can contest irrational beliefs in a way that could mitigate the fragmentation anxiety that often arise when individuals relinquish maladaptive self-object organizations. The reason being that by identifying guiding virtues and finding an uplifting philosophy it can help individuals slowly change maladaptive beliefs for more adaptive beliefs without a significant threat to the stability of the self. When one considers the self-object functions provided by an ideology and the role it plays in maintaining homeostasis in the self, it is clear that more is needed than merely dismantling the flawed logic of an individual's belief system. The application of uplifting philosophies and guiding virtues, as suggested by LBT, can provide new ways to form self-object systems beyond that of the ideology. In short, the individual needs other sources of self-object experiences to replace those provided by the ideology, otherwise, it may lead to excessive fragmentation anxiety. Thus, an uplifting philosophy, like Beauvoir's existentialist ethics, can provide an antidote to ideological obsession and ideology addiction by offering an alternate and more adaptive source for self-object experiences.

The preceding discussion may explain why the research indicates that counternarratives (an intervention often used to prevent violent political activism) often do more harm than good when employed to counteract political radicalization (Ferguson, 2016; Rosand & Winterbotham, 2019). LBT may therefore provide an alternative and potentially more effective intervention to the typically employed as it could mitigate fragmentation anxiety when confronting the beliefs of the radicalized ideologue.

## **Conclusion**

In this article I presented the argument that Beauvoir's existentialist ethics, as an uplifting philosophy, has utility for philosophical practice, and can act as an antidote for ideological obsession and ideology addiction. Beauvoir's existentialist ethics represents a secular stance that negates the assertion of an unequivocal origin and validation for human thoughts and deeds. Beauvoir's ethics paves the way for an existentialist conversion that allows for a life of authenticity without being dependent on an absolutist external authority or ideology.

I also suggested that LBT may be a suitable intervention when challenging the irrational beliefs of the ideologically obsessed in a way that could mitigate the fragmentation anxiety that often arise when individuals relinquish maladaptive self-object organizations.

The article has several limitations and did not attempt to show how Beauvoir's ethics can be applied within the methodology of LBT. This can be addressed in a future article. Moreover, this article is exploratory and speculative, in particular my theory of ideology addiction, and whether it should be considered a mental health disorder. Moreover, due to the breadth of this article, many of the ideas discussed were not explored in-depth or comprehensively.

Overall, the article's examination of Beauvoir's existential ethics represents a contribution to the broader literature on existential philosophy and philosophical practice. Additionally, it contributes to the emerging literature that explores the value of philosophy in addiction recovery (see Du Plessis, 2022). Finally, it may provide some useful commentary on the political polarization and ideological obsession that seems to be particularly prevalent at present.

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<sup>i</sup> In a previous publication (Du Plessis, 2022) I explored the notion of *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (PWL) as a recovery pathway for individuals in addiction recovery. My hypothesis is that PWL can be a compelling, and legitimate recovery pathway for individuals in addiction recovery, as one of many recovery pathways. Considering that there is an ostensibly low efficacy rate for the treatment of addiction, articulating the value of PWL as a recovery pathway provides a conceptual and methodological framework for the development of novel philosophically-based addiction treatment and recovery-oriented programs—thus expanding the treatment and recovery options available for those seeking recovery from addiction.

<sup>ii</sup> A similar idea articulated as 'political addiction,' was discussed by Drew Westen (2007) in his book *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*. In this book, Westen argues that people's political beliefs and behaviors are heavily influenced by emotional factors, and that some individuals may become addicted to the emotional highs and lows of political engagement. And more recently the correlation between addiction and ideological obsession was also noted by Jocelyn Bélanger (2021, 4) when he stated that "[r]adicalization is an addiction to an ideology; it is an obsession to a belief system stoked by the loss of personal significance that triggers a set of sociocognitive mechanisms leaving individuals prone to engaging in ideological violence."

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