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## Woman, Otherness, and A Call for Equality: Simone De Beauvoir And Maurice Merleau-Ponty

**Abstract:** This study examines Simone De Beauvoir's theory of women's status by centralizing her masterpiece, *The Second Sex*. Here, Beauvoir discusses women's situation in society existentially and phenomenologically. She concludes that woman problematically seems to be the second sex or the Other in social life. At the end of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir offers that if women were economically independent, their social conditions and status would be better. In addition, she suggests some helpful steps to change women's social life situation. Thus, Beauvoir continues, they could be equal to men and have their freedom. Although Beauvoir's theory maintains its influence with the demand for equality even today, it is argued that it may lose its impact as it holds mostly women responsible for social transformation. It is defended that each individual should embrace basic steps for effective societal transformations. In other words, everyone should accept responsibility for transformation from the beginning. If not, how is it possible to change people's ideas concerning the status of women? On that point, for a positive understanding of the existence of the Other, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of the lived body with its social dimensions is applied. It is seen that his theory can be proposed to every single individual to spread the idea of equality for social transformations. In Merleau-Ponty's existential and social theory, the relationships between others provide us with the awareness of equality between people and freedom in a relational field. Thus, his theory is introduced to approach the problematic status of women in Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. In this respect, it aims to highlight a theory that acknowledges the other as a valuable and meaningful existence by providing equality and freedom in intersubjective relations.

**Keywords:** Phenomenology, Existentialism, Simone De Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, The Lived Body, Women's Rights.

## Kadın, Ötekilik ve Eşitlik İçin Bir Çağrı:

## Simone De Beauvoir ve Maurice Merleau-Ponty

**Öz:** Bu çalışma, Simone De Beauvoir'ın kadınların statüsüne ilişkin teorisini, başyapıtı *İkinci Cins*'i merkeze alarak incelemektedir. Beauvoir burada, kadınların toplumdaki durumunu varoluşsal ve fenomenolojik olarak tartışmaktadır. Kadının toplumsal yaşamda sorunlu bir şekilde ikinci cinsiyet veya Öteki gibi görüldüğü sonucuna varmaktadır. *İkinci Cins*'in sonunda Beauvoir, kadınlar ekonomik olarak bağımsız olsalardı, toplumsal koşullarının ve statülerinin daha iyi olacağını ileri sürmektedir. Ayrıca, kadınların toplumsal yaşam durumunu değiştirmek için bazı yararlı adımlar önermektedir. Böylece, Beauvoir devam eder, erkeklerle eşit olabilirler ve özgürlüklerine sahip olabilirler. Beauvoir'ın teorisi, eşitlik talebiyle bugün bile etkisini sürdürse de, toplumsal dönüşümden çoğunlukla kadınları sorumlu tuttuğu için etkisini kaybedebileceği ileri sürülmektedir. Etkili toplumsal dönüşümler için her bireyin temel adımları benimsemesi gerektiği savunulmaktadır. Başka bir deyişle, herkes baştan itibaren dönüşüm sorumluluğunu kabul etmelidir. Aksi takdirde, insanların kadınların statüsüne ilişkin fikirlerini değiştirmek nasıl mümkün olabilir? Bu noktada, Öteki'nin varoluşuna dair olumlu bir anlayış için Maurice Merleau-Ponty'nin toplumsal boyutlarıyla yaşanan beden kuramı uygulanır. Kuramının toplumsal dönüşümler için eşitlik fikrini yaymak amacıyla her bir bireye önerilebileceği görülür. Merleau-Ponty'nin varoluşsal ve toplumsal kuramında, başkaları arasındaki ilişkiler bize ilişkisel bir alanda insanlar arasındaki eşitlik ve özgürlük bilincini sağlar. Böylece kuramı, Beauvoir'ın *İkinci Cins* adlı eserinde kadınların sorunlu statüsüne yaklaşmak için tanıtılır. Bu bağlamda, öznelarası ilişkilerde eşitlik ve özgürlük sağlayarak ötekini değerli ve anlamlı bir varoluş olarak kabul eden bir kuramı vurgulamayı amaçlar. **Anahtar Kelimeler:** Fenomenoloji, Varoluşçuluk, Simone de Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, Yaşayan Beden, Kadın Hakları.

### Introduction

The status and value of women in social life have been discussed numerous times in various disciplines throughout history, from ancient times to the present. Anthropological, archaeological, and sociological studies have sought to illuminate the status of women in various societies throughout history. Similarly, there have been some similar attempts in the history of philosophy. Feminist philosophy, in particular, makes remarkable contributions to this field.

Even today, in 21st-century postmodern societies, the challenges of being a woman in social life, the need to improve women's rights, and the fact that women can be a source of social transformation through education are still emphasized. When we examine the dominant discourses of societies, we see that such issues remain the most debated. Therefore, it is essential to consider the status of women in society and explore suggestions to enhance this status.

After reading Beauvoir's book, *The Second Sex*, it became clear that this problem persists between the past and the present, which led us to conduct this

study.<sup>1</sup> In this research, the issues related to women's status are examined using Simone de Beauvoir's account in *The Second Sex*. To develop a helpful approach to these problems, it is proposed to read Maurice Merleau-Ponty's existential and social ideas, which provide us with a sense of equality and relational freedom in social life.

In *The Second Sex*, feminist philosopher Beauvoir focuses on women's status and otherness. She examines the place and value of women in society by considering their historical representations, biological structures, and socio-economic conditions across various historical periods. In her analysis, she aims to highlight the adverse effects of society on the general perception of womanhood. She provides us with a robust background, utilizing her existentialist and phenomenological approaches to understand how women have been relegated to the status of the second sex throughout history. On that point, Beauvoir's ideas in *The Second Sex* are essential for grasping what it means to be a woman in society and the main consequences of this situation for women.

To Beauvoir, women are always defined according to men; thus, they represent the second and subordinate sex. In this regard, she describes how women are not free in society. This is, for Beauvoir, because of the woman's situation. As a solution, Beauvoir believes that if women were to achieve economic independence and their social conditions improved, they could be equal and free alongside men. Moving on from financial advice, she suggests that women should take some steps to change their general thoughts regarding social life.

However, assigning primary responsibility for societal transformation to women is not a powerful solution for us. In social life, each individual should embrace the idea of equality in their mind. In other words, the task of transformation should be valid for everyone. Thus, we may propose a more supportive theory that opens a way to think about equality and freedom for both

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<sup>1</sup> This work is produced from the master's thesis titled 'A Philosophical Study on Women's Status and Rights: Simone de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty'.

sexes. Here, one may utilize Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological insights to suggest a theory that includes the idea that equality derives from his body-subject argument. His thoughts may be offered to reapproach the problematic status of women in *The Second Sex*.

To achieve our goal, the paper is planned to have three main parts. In the first part, it is examined how Beauvoir's theory regarding the status of women in *The Second Sex* is presented. According to Beauvoir, the equality and freedom of women in front of men seem problematic. Therefore, she offers some suggestions for changing the status of women in social life through certain social transformations. When Beauvoir's suggestions are considered, it is possible to think that there is an expectation of leading to a social transformation by giving women more responsibility. At this point, it turns to Merleau-Ponty readings to approach this transformation differently.

In the second part, it first takes and describes Merleau-Ponty's basic ideas. To understand the lived body theory underlying the thesis, the importance of the body and its perception will be emphasized. Merleau-Ponty draws attention to the fact that the body is in a meaningful place, far beyond classical understandings. According to his theory, the body points to a natural and living body design that can be equally grasped in each subject. On the other hand, the social connection of the body with others points to what completes the meaning of the body. In other words, the other completes the subject. At this point, there is a possibility that fundamental rights such as equality and freedom can be re-evaluated on the axis of the living body. Thus, after framing Merleau-Ponty's central ideas for the study, these two theories are compared to reassess women's status in social life.

In the final part, it is considered that Beauvoir's theory in *The Second Sex*, together with Merleau-Ponty's ideas, align with the thesis. While doing this, it is first focused on what caught the attention in both theories: how the body is perceived. For Beauvoir, the body is coded with cultural meanings, such as those associated with female and male bodies, and is shaped by the historical process. However, in

Merleau-Ponty's theory, the body is a lived body that is far from being determined by female and male categories. Next, an attempt is made to understand the concept of 'the other' in their theories. While Beauvoir's theory relates to women as the second sex, Merleau-Ponty's theory takes on a more positive role as a complement to the self.

Merleau-Ponty's theory prepares the ground for us to approach fundamental rights, such as equality and freedom, in a more positive manner. At this point, it is intended to explore the potential consequences of rethinking Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in light of Merleau-Ponty's theory. Here, it is strived to understand how women can naturally be perceived as equal to and free in society with the male sex.

### **1. Women's Status in *The Second Sex***

There is a good principle that created order, light, and man, and a bad principle that created chaos, darkness, and woman (De Beauvoir, 1948: ix)

Beauvoir addresses the status of women as the primary concern in *The Second Sex*. When we think of social rules, Beauvoir thinks that men are at the centre, as opposed to women. Therefore, a woman's place is determined according to a man. From this, man is accepted as the essential sex and the subject, while woman is accepted as the non-essential sex and the Other.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, Beauvoir claims that man aims to put himself in the centre by othering women. While doing this, the man views women as mere objects and continues to exceed himself through his ambitions and projects. However, for Beauvoir, if we think of the woman as only an object, we are faced with a contradiction regarding existentialism. Although a woman wants to exceed herself with her choices as a human being, she faces the case of being othered by men. The woman becomes immanent with this othering, and her lousy story starts here. For Beauvoir, women are forced to live in a different situation from men, one that accepts women as the Other (De Beauvoir, 1948: 17).

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<sup>2</sup> In Simone de Beauvoir's thought, this term refers to both an ontological difference and a constitutive position in subject-object relations, gender hierarchies, and historical consciousness structures. In order to draw attention to the deep philosophical meaning of the word "other", Beauvoir's original conceptualization will be adhered to throughout the article.

To understand the conceptual framework in Beauvoir's work, *The Second Sex*, it would be helpful to examine these concepts more closely. In her interpretations of the concepts of transcendence, immanence, the subject, and the object, Beauvoir was greatly influenced by Sartre's theory. First, Sartre explains "being" in his theory as en-soi (being-in-itself) and pour-soi (being-for-itself). In *Being and Nothingness*, the pour-soi is defined as the conscious subject, while the en-soi refers to the material existence of a person. According to Sartre, the pour-soi is aware of its consciousness and aims to turn towards the future. Nevertheless, existentially speaking, the en-soi corresponds to immanent existence, since there is no purpose in the en-soi (Sartre, 1956: 84).

Influenced by Sartre's theory of "being", Beauvoir uses the concepts of "transcendental" and "immanent" as essential features to describe the status of genders in her theory. The transcendental refers to a person who is constantly driven to achieve something and thinks about their future. However, immanent refers to a woman who is not free and lives a passive existence. Women have limited circles, and these circles are dependent on men (Donovan, 2012: 133-135).

On the other hand, Sartre's concepts of "subject" and "object" influence Beauvoir's ideas. According to Sartre, the subject is usually an essential existence. The other sees the subject's existence as an object. In this case, the subject's existence appears as an object in the other's perspective. Therefore, the other's existence is considered problematic from the subject's perspective (Sartre, 1956: 413-415). Beauvoir utilizes Sartre's conceptualization to provide a concrete interpretation of the social positioning between men and women. The main gender in society referred to in *The Second Sex* is men. The subject is only men, and the Other is only women in society. Men have defined women as the second gender. In fact, in Beauvoir's early thoughts, the "other" is used in a different context. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, it is emphasized that the other is necessary for establishing relationships in social life because others are needed for the completion and construction of existential freedom. Although the Other is an indispensable and complementary

element in Beauvoir's early ideas and ethical theory, in *The Second Sex*, it serves as an intermediary concept to explain the othering of women in social life.

Beauvoir believes that the formative process of this situation regarding women begins in childhood. Children learn the difference between their sexual organs at a young age. Boys learn to be proud of their sexual organs because of society. Hence, girls grasp the importance of boys in society because society values boys more than girls. With the effect of society, girls learn that being a woman brings lots of shortcomings, in essence, because girls are forced to accept a limited environment for themselves. They act according to society's expectations, for example. Boys are always encouraged in every single field. In conclusion, boys tend to feel more confident than girls. After a while, the girls notice they are fighting their desires and society's demands. On that point, girls come to realize that they are not an essential sex in society (De Beauvoir, 1948: 293-352).

In their marriages, Beauvoir continues, women are responsible for the family's duties of reproduction and service. With economic contributions, man becomes the head of the family. The man represents the transcendental existence in the family, while the woman is immanent. This is because humans are free to do as they please in their lives. In contrast to men, when considering women's work at home, a cyclical pattern emerges regarding housework. It does not contribute to a woman's existence. The woman does the same things every day. In addition to housework, Beauvoir thinks of motherhood in terms of women (De Beauvoir, 1948: 451). For Beauvoir, a woman fulfills her destiny through motherhood in marriage and tends to concentrate on raising children. This event is also problematic for women because it prevents them from working and forces them to stay at home (De Beauvoir, 1948: 537).

In this sense, one may raise that question: Is there any enslavement between the sexes? To Beauvoir, each subject aims to prove themselves and views others as objects. Therefore, there has been no enslavement in terms of the relationships

between the sexes in history.<sup>3</sup> This is because the two sexes have never shared the world equally. The man's role seems to be that of a master, while the woman's role seems to be that of an enslaved person. Society exalts men as masters while placing women at the limits (De Beauvoir, 1948: 6-7). What is the reason for this? Why does the woman become the other? In this regard, Beauvoir inquires about the reasons for women's situation by considering biological differences, psychoanalytical explanations, and some ideas from historical materialism, history, and mythology. Here, some examples of her ideas will be given.

Firstly, she takes biological data. She expresses that biological differences with men cause some disadvantages for women. From birth, the development of boys is regular and straightforward. However, the developmental process is complicated and complex for girls. Let us consider the periods of adolescence, menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. The destiny of women becomes more challenging (De Beauvoir, 1948: 21). As another example, she draws on myths and tales to illustrate male domination in social life. In the myths, Beauvoir suggests that a woman's beauty is prioritized, while a man is considered influential, warrior-like, and intelligent. On the other hand, in tales, the woman represents a beautiful, injured, passive, or captive person. To Beauvoir, it can be interpreted that man always seems heroic, powerful, and active. In this regard, a woman always needs a man. Consequently, it can be assumed that women are often perceived as passive and weak by society. In most myths and tales, it is possible to find elements that portray women in a passive and weak image (De Beauvoir, 1948: 283).

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<sup>3</sup> One may think that Beauvoir is influenced by Hegel's master-slave dialectic. In Hegel's master-slave dialectic, when the two different consciousnesses face each other for the first time, they attempt to make their position acknowledged by their opponents. This situation requires a fight between these two sides. For Hegel, consciousness needs to overcome the other to prove itself. At the end of this fight, the relationship between the two sides is formed as that of a master and a slave. In other words, two consciousnesses emerge from this fight, one dependent and the other independent (Hegel, 1977: 116). Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, uses Hegel's dichotomy by establishing a relationship between the sexes. Yet, she does not believe in the idea that the two sexes shared the social life equally since the beginning.

After analysing the potential factors of a woman's otherness by leaning on such examples, she concludes that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (De Beauvoir, 1948: 293).<sup>4</sup> For Beauvoir, women and men are initially equal in terms of their potential. However, society destroys this situation. Equality with men disappears when a woman is positioned as the "Other" in social life. Beauvoir aims to illustrate the adverse effects of society on the formation of gender. She describes how women and men are formed by society. Consequently, this formation makes their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours different (De Beauvoir, 1948: 304-305). Women take a passive role in society and sacrifice themselves for society. In turn, for Beauvoir, besides the biological differences, we should consider what it is like being a woman in society (De Beauvoir, 1948: 585).

### **1.1 Why does women's status seem problematic?**

In *The Second Sex*, it can be seen that man always has their plans and projects, but women cannot do this because of the traditional roles in society. In this regard, women are not free. Women are often dependent on men due to men's dominant position in society. While man is the leading and free sex, woman is the second and dependent sex. If we consider their position in social life, society does not accept the Other as free. On the other hand, woman conforms to being the Other and the second sex in society by having less responsibility. In turn, it is possible to argue that a woman is not free due to the influence of society, and it is her own choice to accept this situation (De Beauvoir, 1948: 737-740).

At the beginning of her theory in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir points out a wish by women to attend to the "Mitsein" throughout the historical periods. She describes a woman's desire to be in Mitsein. However, it is difficult for them to make this wish come true. Thus, it is essential to comprehend the primary challenges women face

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<sup>4</sup> According to Sonia Kruks, the idea that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" in Beauvoir's account corresponds with Sartre's argument about one's existence (Kruks, 1987: 113). Sartre thinks one's existence comes first, rather than one's essence. For him, humans have an existence initially, and then they can get their essence. In Beauvoir's theory, like Sartre's idea, one cannot be born as a woman having an essence, but one becomes a woman in the socialization process.

when attempting to engage in humanistic Mitsein (De Beauvoir, 1948: 17). It is believed that Beauvoir is aware of this contradiction from the outset of her work and seeks solutions to these difficulties.

Considering the root of the concept of Mitsein in Beauvoir's thought, it can help us better understand the phenomenological approach in her theory. Beauvoir's conceptualization of Mitsein bears traces of Heidegger's theory. In Heidegger's thought, people are socially, physiologically, and biologically interconnected from the beginning. This togetherness is referred to as Mitsein in Heidegger's philosophy. Mitsein means being together with others, living and inanimate objects, and the whole world (Heidegger, 2006: 256). Anne Rodier states that Beauvoir is mainly influenced by Heidegger's idea of Mitsein (Rodier, 2007: 32). Beauvoir uses Mitsein for the first time in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*. In *Pyrrhus and Cinéas*, de Beauvoir thinks that people are always directed towards others and become aware of their existence through their relationships. In the *Introduction* of the *The Second Sex*, Mitsein is used in the same way. In addition, in-depth, it refers to women's desire to share the world and live in it with the other sex. However, in the following pages of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir implies that women distance themselves from this desire through their own reluctance.

Beauvoir thinks that women are reluctant to change their situation. Women accept that this world belongs to men and that they cannot do anything without them. Why does a woman easily conform to this idea? To Beauvoir, this is because a woman chooses to be less responsible (De Beauvoir, 1948: 697-698). In *The Second Sex*, she describes that women have some justifications for less responsibility in life. She continues by saying that there are three types of women constructed through these justifications. Those three kinds of women justify their situation as if they are happy. For example, women in love think they are happy in their relationships and social life situations. Or another example is narcissistic women who admire themselves. From this, they assume they are so glad and have psychological

independence (De Beauvoir 1948: 697-698). How can we think of women out of those justifications?

In this regard, she offers some steps for women to get societal freedom. Firstly, she emphasizes economic independence as the primary step toward freedom. For Beauvoir, if a woman performs her labour in life like a man, it describes her responsibility simultaneously. In this way, a woman feels a sense of satisfaction with her contribution to life, which leads to some necessary societal transformations. Secondly, from this, women can be intellectually capable of leading these changes. Lastly, women can work towards socialist transformations in social life. In this account, Beauvoir suggests that sex discrimination can be eliminated from society, allowing for equality to be achieved (De Beauvoir, 1948: 738-768). Ultimately, a woman can attend to social life with her existence, hopes, and projects (De Beauvoir, 1948: 782). Beauvoir believes that society and its institutions can encourage women to achieve economic independence.

For Beauvoir, if a woman insists on her decisions, then success could be motivating. Over time, this insistence can lead to profound changes in society. Ultimately, it can be said that Beauvoir believes it is crucial to change society's general perception of women's position in life. Beauvoir emphasizes the importance of existential freedom and the need for women to use it effectively in society. A woman is not free in social life, but can exceed herself and reach a transcendent status. Through her attempts, she can achieve existential freedom, and its practical implications can then be observed in society (De Beauvoir, 1948: 770-782).

In fact, when we consider Beauvoir's early thoughts about freedom, we become aware of some of the deep connections with her late ideas. She questions the aim of human behaviours in her essay *Pyrrhus and Cineas*. To Beauvoir, the objective of human behaviour is freedom, which is the basis of human values. Regardless of the situation, human beings have the freedom to exceed themselves consciously. On the other hand, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir claims that dependency between individuals is necessary to obtain freedom for all people. In

this respect, the Other is pictured as the condition of freedom in society. Yet, in *The Second Sex*, she expresses that only men are seen as the subjects, rather than women, in social life. In reality, there is no concrete freedom for women, primarily due to the situation of women in social life. Society limits women in many fields via traditions or social rules. As a consequence, women are not seen as free subjects.

When we consider her ideas in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, it becomes clear that Beauvoir has an ethical understanding rooted in existentialism and centered on the concept of the other. Beauvoir subjects the ethical formulation that remains open for discussion in Sartre's views in this text and points to the rising form of existential ethics. In the work, the existence and freedom of human beings are evaluated as both complementary to each other and a constitutive contribution. The final part of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, in particular, emphasizes this idea. On the other hand, freedom, shaped by historical conditions, becomes functional in relation to others by assuming the responsibility of others. As a result, freedom is described as an obligation towards others.

In Beauvoir's later thoughts, especially in *The Second Sex*, an interpretation of this framework from the perspective of women is addressed. In the *Introduction to The Second Sex*, Beauvoir points out that the book is based on the concept of "existential ethics." Therefore, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex* rise on the same foundations. How are women historically deprived of their freedom when they have a fundamental existential freedom? In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir tries to find an answer to this question. When reading the two analyses together, the project seems to be a continuity from the beginning.

In light of *The Second Sex*, it can be concluded that Beauvoir offers us some crucial insights into women's situation in society. Her examination is a comprehensive theory that incorporates sociological, historical, psychoanalytical, and mythic perspectives. Ultimately, she concludes that women are unequal to men in the process, and their freedom remains problematic in social life. Although she

suggests some solutions to this situation, she receives many comments on her theory.

### **1.2 Main Critiques of Beauvoir's Theory of Woman's Otherness**

When we analyse the interpretations of Beauvoir's theory of women's otherness in *The Second Sex*, it can be seen that she receives a lot of criticism for her theory. Of course, the aim is not to delve into all the interpretations here. It will only count those considered essential for the thesis. At that point, the analysis begins with Judith Butler's comment. She interprets Beauvoir's ideas in *The Second Sex* on the category of womanhood. Butler thinks that the category of womanhood in Beauvoir's account has a cultural character. Because womanhood is determined by society, Beauvoir separates sex as biological and constructed. Butler thinks that constructed sex refers to gender. From Beauvoir's standpoint, gender is changeable. It means that womanhood, as a category, is a variable and cultural phenomenon (Butler, 2012: 159).

On the other hand, a lot of feminist thinkers assess Beauvoir's theory as outdated and male-centered. Surely, we should take all these criticisms into account. However, importantly, we should not describe her theory merely as outdated. This is because, in reality, we are still struggling and putting our effort into changing some of the dynamics that affect women's status all around the world. Regarding this, it may be a prejudice against Beauvoir's philosophy because it overlooks her contributions (Rodier, 2007: 7).

According to Jean Bethke Elshtain (1981) and Roe Sybylla (1996), Beauvoir's theory is seriously male-centered as a narrative. According to Elshtain, although Beauvoir complains about women's situation throughout her work, she exalts only men as active, dominant, and transcendental. Thus, the theory seems to overlook only women (Elshtain, 1981: Part 6). To explain women's social situation, Beauvoir needs to consider social acceptances and rules. In other words, she also frames the general ideas on men's status. From this point on, she only describes what she concludes from her research.

Lastly, for some critics, Beauvoir's solutions seem like a dream when considering women's freedom. Although a woman's ability to plan for herself is the first step towards independence, there is an intense and discriminatory circle concerning women's situation in society. On the other hand, rejecting being an object is an essential step for women. In this way, a woman can challenge some of the ideas about her societal situation. In turn, if a woman refuses her situation, prejudiced people can accept a woman's existence as a subject after a while. Yet, this seems to be a woman's responsibility only (Donovan, 2012: 242).

A woman can decide her destiny and change her societal position. In this respect, Beauvoir's position seems right to follow. In the same vein, one can argue that women should have the freedom to exist in social life. Additionally, we need to change the general thoughts on womanhood in society crucially. However, we have a robust and dominant discourse that causes us to think that women are the second sex and the Other in Beauvoir's sense. If we think about society's point of view, it does not sincerely accept women as existentially free. For this reason, women are not free like men in social life. Even if we assume that women and men are equally free in law and politics, women can still face numerous societal challenges.

Today, many women suffer from cultural pressures in most parts of the world. Women fight rape, cultural dictations, and so on. There is a film called *Desert Flower*<sup>5</sup>, which tells the story of a woman. The main character in the movie comes from a tribe that lives a nomadic lifestyle in the desert. This woman is circumcised by her tribe at the age of three and is sold into marriage at 13. By escaping from her tribe, she changes her life. Throughout the movie, the difficulties that women face are highlighted. At the film's end, she becomes a famous black model through her efforts. If we also consider the cases of circumcision and early marriage, they are

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<sup>5</sup> The film can be seen in Hormann's *Desert Flower* (2009). In fact, it is adapted from an autobiographical book written by Sherry Hormann, Waris Dirie, and Cathleen Miller and published in 1998.

derived precisely from the social rules in her tribe. Yet, living without pressure is also a woman's right, just like a man's.

Although some women have achieved success in improving their situations, the number of women who have done so remains limited. There are examples of women who have successfully improved their situation, but their numbers are limited. This, of course, varies from culture to culture in different parts of the world. Can education alone be sufficient? Can the transformation of economic conditions and women's increased participation in life help alleviate the injustices women have faced throughout history, and address the fact that their freedom is being gradually overlooked? Or, together with the theoretical arrangements to be made in a legal sense, to what extent can the freedoms that will be granted to women be meaningful? How can women who want to share and live in the same world as others existentially affect women's status in social life on their own? As can be seen, when we take all these factors into account, the issue of changing women's status presents numerous points for discussion.

Why do we always expect solutions, mainly from women? Why do we try to change our minds as societies? How can it change people's minds concerning a woman's situation, in which she is accepted as the Other? Why do people mostly think of women's freedom instead of receiving all human beings as free? It is believed that Beauvoir's theory cannot adequately address our questions in this context. Thus, at that point, Merleau-Ponty's existential and social theory can be used to change people's ideas. Suppose we apply Merleau-Ponty's ideas to address Beauvoir's concerns about women's otherness and freedom. In that case, it may open up a way for us to change the general perception of women's situation and freedom.

## **2. A Different Point of View: The Lived Body and Its Social Implications**

French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) is generally associated with the philosophical movements called phenomenology and existentialism in contemporary thought. By moving on from Husserl's phenomenological approach, he focuses closely on our experience of the world by questioning our everyday assumptions. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty describes that the body and the mind are not separate presences, contrary to Cartesian thought (Reynolds, 2016). Our experience encompasses not only mental experiences but also bodily experiences.

For Merleau-Ponty, rather than relying on generally limited thoughts derived from general assumptions, acceptances, or prejudices, we must experience our perceptions to grasp the world. In this way, we can learn the principal conditions of objectivity. Here, it is possible to interpret that we must set aside our everyday assumptions and relearn how to examine our experiences more deeply. In other words, to see the world, we must break our common acceptance of it. Merleau-Ponty believes this is possible through bodily relationships with the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 25). It can be seen that Merleau-Ponty also points out the importance of the body in his account. Exalting the body means comprehensively reshaping our understanding of the world without adopting a generally misleading acceptance.

Merleau-Ponty uses the concept of the "lived body" to refer to the body's active structure as a being in the world, drawing on Husserl's influence. For Merleau-Ponty, the lived body is the basis for thought and consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 232). He defends the idea that the body is a different kind of existence from the world's objects. For this reason, there is a third category of being between physical things extended in space and consciousness given to itself introspectively. If we consider the general features of the body, for Merleau-Ponty, they are not related to one's own body. It is general and in the world. Thus, as beings in the world, we are parts of a whole system via our bodies. He describes the body's central role in taking us into the world. According to him, our bodies are the primary way of

knowing the world. In turn, we see the world via our bodily existence. This is the epistemological role of the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

To Merleau-Ponty, in addition to its epistemological role, the body also has a social role in the social relationships between others. With this social role, the body obtains a social dimension for him. Therefore, after explaining the importance of perception and the body in grasping the natural world, he turns his attention to the social dimension of the body argument:

We must therefore rediscover, after the natural world, the social world, not as an object or sum of objects, but as a permanent field or dimension of existence: I may well turn away from it, but not cease to be situated relatively to it. Like our relationship with the world, our relationship with society is deeper than any expressed perception or judgment. It is as false to place ourselves in society as an object among other objects as it is to place society within ourselves as an object of thought. In both cases, the mistake lies in treating the social as an object. We must return to the social with which we are in contact by the mere fact of existing and which we carry about inseparably with us before any objectification (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 421)

If we mention social relationships, this explicitly implies 'the other' in Merleau-Ponty's theory. As an existentialist philosopher, Merleau-Ponty considers others and their importance in his social theory. For Merleau-Ponty, the other first seems to be a problem in terms of subjectivity. Thus, for him, we must think about the other. In this regard, our experience of things may help us to grasp how there can be a perception of the other (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 437). By employing our bodies, we connect with others. In this way, for Merleau-Ponty, others revive our senses and shape our conscious life. Hence, the other is the condition of my conscious life as a subject. If so, how can the other be considered as the source of conscious life?

In "*The Child's Relations with Others*," he illustrates how the presence of others shapes self-consciousness and self-reflection. To Merleau-Ponty, conscious life begins as a communion with others, rather than as self-centeredness. This communion in Merleau-Ponty's work refers to a perceptual communion in which an infant cannot separate their own body from another body. After a while, the child becomes aware of being different from others. According to Merleau-Ponty,

awareness of oneself as a distinct being from others develops through bodily relations with others. Thanks to interactions with others, children can be aware of different perspectives after their first six months. In this respect, they can grasp their awareness of being another or an object for others. This concludes with self-recognition. With self-recognition, they also recognize the other's body as a different self (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 150). Thus, it can be said that perceiving bodies depend on the relationship with the other from childhood.

For Merleau-Ponty, distinguishing between the self and the other does not end (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 119). Since then, our connection with others has continued. Yet, the nature of the communion with others changes due to personal differences. The development of distinctiveness supports the possibility of new relations with all others. It can be interpreted that a subject, as a different body and self, finds themselves in a relational world. Also, one can grasp oneself existentially in this field. This goes to the notion of the "flesh" in *The Visible and The Invisible*.

The flesh refers to the corporeal field that unites and distinguishes all beings in the world. For Merleau-Ponty, all beings share one flesh in the world. In this respect, the flesh is a pregnancy of all possibilities (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 250). In Merleau-Ponty's world, the flesh is not a matter of the mind. The flesh is a general field covering all relations (with physical objects, the natural world, and others). In this field, for Merleau-Ponty, not only do bodies exist in communion with other bodies, but minds also merge (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 139).

According to Merleau-Ponty, the flesh is the ground of experience, thought, reflection, language, and abstractions (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 142). People share their bodies in a common field or a shared sensible flesh of the world. From this, each self belongs to a universal community as brothers and sisters belong to one another (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 137). Consequently, other bodies share the same flesh as me, and they perceive and become perceived like my body. With the others, for Merleau-Ponty, we are in an intercorporeal field, and this intercorporeality is

substantial for our selfhood. In turn, we (both sensing and being sensed) are relational beings that need others (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 141-142).

To him, our bodies are both the subject and the object. On that point, the other's body is a cultural object for me. I am also a cultural object for the other. When we encounter others, we realize that they have a body like mine. Although we are different, we share the same essence in being human bodies. The body is like a book, which is necessary for us to read and make sense of. In conclusion, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that, in the flesh of the world, we experience both our diversity and unity simultaneously (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 140-143).

In some cases, Merleau-Ponty suggests, one's perception of a cultural object conveys a sense of another person without providing much detail about who that person is. Here, Merleau-Ponty gives an example of seeing footprints in the sand. One senses another self without considering whether they are male or female, young or old, and so on. Thus, we open ourselves to the same flesh of the world altogether. Because our existence is in the same world, it is possible to interpret that there is a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between us, despite our many differences.

To him, because my body is a part of this relationship, it is an impersonal entity (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). On that point, Merleau-Ponty expresses that the other is already intertwined within the subject. Therefore, the subject and the other are opposite and opposite of each other, like being the different sides of the same medallion. From this, we can conclude that our alterity is already inherent to subjectivity. As intertwined subjects, we become aware of our differences and sameness.

According to Merleau-Ponty, our relations with others within the world do not destroy the freedom of our acts (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 516-518). Merleau-Ponty makes clear that my freedom is enmeshed with others in interpersonal relations. Not only is my existential situation ambiguous and limited due to my relationships with the world, but my freedom is also shaped. My liberty is assured if I accept and live the human situation (Barral, 1965: 310). On that point, he says:

I cannot fail to have freedom unless I seek to go beyond my natural and social situation by refusing to assume it at the beginning, instead of rejoining through it the natural and human world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 520).

In conclusion, the body is a natural subject and describes the existential dimensions of my being-in-the-world. For Merleau-Ponty, existentialism makes possible an understanding of the ambiguous structures of our being-in-the-world, including the interplay between subject and object, nature and culture, and the interplay between freedom and determinism. For this reason, to Merleau-Ponty, existentialism is defined by an openness to our situated and ambiguous experiences of the world (Reynolds, 2016). By considering our ambiguity regarding social relationships, Merleau-Ponty conceives of freedom as limited and relational.

Here, the real problem of freedom lies in understanding precisely how our liberty is ambiguous and how it is, or is not, powerful in the face of external forces. Merleau-Ponty's solution is challenging to grasp because it includes contradictions. We may be passive, active, or entirely determined by external factors. We see our ambiguous nature at the same time. However, Merleau-Ponty suggests that we can never separate the contributions of socialization, our environment, the entirety of the past, and the current moment (Wilkerson, 2017: 228). In addition, although he thinks we are both primordially social and separate from each other, we are also the same in one sense. Regarding freedom, he appears unwilling to resolve this contradiction. How must we understand this ambiguous or contradictory state? He does not answer us (Wilkerson, 2017: 231).

Thus far, it has been engaged with Merleau-Ponty's theory of the lived body, its perception of the world, and social dimensions by considering the meaning of the other. As we have seen, his theory generally relies on his lived body argument. He clearly points out the importance of relationships with others. Accordingly, he concludes that we cannot be free due to our ambiguous existential natures and complex relationships with others. In turn, freedom can be found in intersubjective fields derived from bodily relations. How does his theory of the body resonate with

feminist thought about women? At that point, the answer to this question will be explored by considering the project as a whole.

### 2.1 Feminist Critiques of Merleau-Ponty's Body Argument

Merleau-Ponty's thoughts are criticized in various ways, although they are appreciated for their emphasis on the perception of the lived body. When the interpretations of his work are considered from the standpoint of feminist philosophy, Merleau-Ponty is accused of eliminating women's sexuality and maternity generally. With his theory of the body, Merleau-Ponty appears to overlook the importance of emphasizing sexed and differentiated bodies (Toadvine, 2016). The most influential critique comes from Luce Irigaray. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray argues that Merleau-Ponty usurps maternal and unique embodiment, thereby erasing sexual difference in his flesh theory (Irigaray, 1993). Similarly, Elizabeth Grosz argues that his inattentive approach to gender differences is problematic. She argues that, although Merleau-Ponty's work provides a robust theory to rethink the body in relation to the mind-body duality, he fails to grasp the differences between the sexes (Grosz, 1994: 109).

On the other hand, Moira Gatens (1996), Gail Weiss (1999), Iris Marion Young (2005), and Luna Dolezal (2015) assert that Merleau-Ponty's theory in *Phenomenology of Perception* is androcentric in essence. According to them, Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of the body are implicitly those of a male body. The active, task-oriented, grasping, manipulative, working character of the body's being-in-the-world is framed around man.

For instance, in her essay *Throwing Like a Girl*, Iris Marion Young takes the idea of "one becomes a woman" from *The Second Sex* and investigates how this is played out throughout the structure of the body-subject clarified by Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Young believes that to grasp the extent to which women's embodiment creates a distinct mode of being-in-the-world, it is crucial to

identify the moments where the relationship between the subject and the world is revealed (Young, 2005).

To Young, women and men are different in terms of using their bodies, and this is because of society. Thus, “throwing like a girl” refers to the indicator of women’s embodied experience and how women learn to live in their bodies as women. By moving on from Merleau-Ponty, Young reinforces Beauvoir’s account that not only are women’s bodies objectified, but women repeat this objectification in their lives. In this regard, Young aims to understand how women “learn to live out [their] existence in accordance with the definition that patriarchal culture assigns to [them]” (Young 2005: 42).

Taking the critiques into account, one may of course discuss the sexless point of his theory. However, this study aims to frame a theory that provides an egalitarian perspective on the value of the body. Regarding this, Merleau-Ponty's theory offers a powerful basis for our aims within the study. Merleau-Ponty's thoughts can be used as a tool to discuss how the body's meaning is shaped through social constructions. Through his impersonal body theory, we can assume equality without noticing any sex differences. Consequently, Merleau-Ponty's existential and social theory can be considered a supporter of equality by moving away from the body. The next part of the paper aims to demonstrate how Merleau-Ponty's theory can be presented as an alternative perspective on Beauvoir's issues regarding women's status and otherness.

### **3. Rereading *The Second Sex* with Merleau-Ponty's Theory**

If we return and consider Beauvoir's suggestions in general, it can be seen that the responsibility of freedom derived from equality primarily belongs to women. To some extent, Beauvoir may be right in assigning this responsibility to women. Again, if we want to change some general perceptions about womanhood in society, we must change our minds collectively. For this reason, it is more plausible to call for a comprehensive theory that views women as equal to men in society. To

do this, it is suggested that Merleau-Ponty's ideas are an alternative reading of the problem of women's status and otherness in Beauvoir's theory.

As we have seen, for Beauvoir, woman is the other sex compared to man throughout history. The woman, the Other, is not the essential sex. Examining the characteristics of this status as otherness in depth, it is negative, according to Beauvoir. On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty describes how individual life has its foundations in a bodily structure that is shaped by a structural world and shared with others. The meaning of life can be shared with others because their bodies are structured in the same way as ours, opening them to a shared world (Low, 1994: 180).

In fact, in her early writings, Beauvoir is influenced by Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. For Merleau-Ponty, the body expresses our existence as living beings in the world. Our existence becomes meaningful via our bodies. In that way, we have the world with our bodily existence. Beauvoir expresses that she is impressed with the importance of the body from Merleau-Ponty's perspective.

Afterwards, not surprisingly, Beauvoir takes women's bodies as a situation in her *The Second Sex*. She thinks the body has been a place of cultural interpretation throughout history. The body is situated and defined in social life, and it is also a situation that encompasses all interpretations (past or ongoing) of it. Consequently, the body can be viewed as a field of possibilities. In turn, the body is not merely an object (as accepted in traditional philosophy) but a situation formed via interpretations of it. Therefore, a woman's body is described as a cultural situation.

With her words:

As Merleau Ponty justly puts it, man is not a natural species; he's a historical idea. The woman is not a complete reality but rather a becoming, and it is in her becoming that she should be compared with a man; that is to say, her possibilities should be defined. What gives rise to much of the debate is the tendency to reduce her to what she has been, to what she is today, in raising the question of her capabilities, for the fact is that capabilities are manifested only when they are realized - but the fact is also that when we have to do with a being whose nature is transcendent action, we can never close the books (De Beauvoir, 1948: 46).

Therefore, one could say that Merleau-Ponty influences Beauvoir in her conceptualization of situated existence in social life. Beauvoir takes his concept of the lived body and expands it for an explanation of women's situated existence in society. She concludes that this situated existence appears problematic when considering existential freedom on a profound level. Turning to Merleau-Ponty, we are confronted with a broad discussion of the lived body from both phenomenological and existential perspectives.

It can be clearly stated that the body establishes the relationship between the self and the other by mediating between culture and nature. In this respect, Merleau-Ponty describes the sociability of the body as an intercorporeality. Because intercorporeality provides us with a rich experience field, we can individually attribute ourselves to it. In turn, for him, the other is not to be found in front of me but beside me, in reciprocity with me. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty thinks of the relationships between us as Heidegger does, as a relation of community or as being together with the other. This is because we are all open to the world, which has a natural and cultural character (Dastur, 2011).

Recognizing the other in Merleau-Ponty's theory means that the other is a being who can sense, experience, and suffer in the same way as oneself. Here, there is an overlapping of ego borders, empathy, and an identification of the other. Merleau-Ponty believes that morality has its foundation in recognizing human beings as such (Low, 1994: 181). From this, it can be inferred that Merleau-Ponty's theory of the other can offer us equality in an intersubjective field. In general, women do not seem to enjoy the same level of freedom as men in society, primarily due to their social situation.

Beauvoir describes this using the basic examples of general thoughts, social rules, and societal discourses. According to her, if women want to change this situation, they should use their words and actions in the same way men do to address the issue of inequality. Beauvoir first emphasizes the importance of work.

For Beauvoir, women can escape the economic dependency on men. Nevertheless, Beauvoir recognizes that equality may not be achieved in this manner early on. But if a woman can be decisive and active, she can change this situation. It can be seen that she places a strong emphasis on existential freedom. This is because, existentially, having freedom is a way of utilizing it effectively in society. In this respect, as human beings, women should also be free existentially, like men. In essence, what is requested in her theory is equality with men.

For Merleau-Ponty, freedom is not being free in our actions. Since freedom reveals itself at the junction of the subject, being, and the others. Thus, it can be seen in a dialectic or mutual platform. So, a subject's freedom is possible through its interaction with others. In this case, it is possible to think that freedom is shared between the subjects and comes from reflexivity. This reflexivity is in the intersubjective field. Merleau-Ponty here offers a way that is not subject-centered but rather the intertwining of subjectivity in embodied interaction within a shared world. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty's theory of the other can also provide a way to grasp freedom within the relational field.

It is necessary to signify that all women deserve to live as freely as men, everywhere and at all times. This is the demand for equality. With their own story, hopes, and ambiguities as human beings, they should live their own lives with their own decisions and projects. It can be accepted that Beauvoir's thesis is that women are not free in the role of traditional women. Even if women's roles are different according to different societies, man is always the superior sex because of our cultural backgrounds.

However, it can be thought that we no longer should change our minds on womanhood. To save women from social pressures worldwide, it is crucial to provide equality in social life in people's minds. In this respect, the most critical step is to give up on seeing women as the second and the other sex. In this sense, existential phenomenology, as an essential approach to human existence and relationships, can be used to shift perspectives. This is because it opens a door for

concrete interaction with the other without including any acceptance, assumption, or prejudice.

As we have seen in Merleau-Ponty's thoughts, the phenomenological method provides us with a way to think of bodily differences simultaneously with their sameness. We, as human beings, live in the same environment, in the same flesh of the world, with mutual relationships with one another. At that point, we first interact with each other as a body. Thus, we grasp the other as being the same as us. Considering this sameness between women and men, we are all the same as human beings. We can learn that we are the same in our complexity, feelings, actions, relationships, and decisions. From this, we can recognize that we are intertwined in the same world through our interactions. On those grounds, we cannot see any difference between us. Even if we seem different from each other, we know that we are human beings, in essence, having the same aim of attaining *Mitsein*. In this regard, we do not consider any sex difference, whether between a woman and a man. This perspective is impersonal, yet it brings us closer to equality in this way.

If we remember Beauvoir's theory, women have been emphasized according to their differences from men throughout history. Utilizing this approach in social life, women became the Other, the second sex. Unfortunately, society puts women in a negative situation over time as the non-essential sex. Yet, to change minds throughout humanity, men and women may see their sameness in social relationships. As part of a whole system, they can grasp the meaning of life in their mutual interconnection. A door can be opened on this path for permanent equality in social life.

On the other hand, if women could be considered equal to men in this relational world, freedom could be accessible to all human beings. Since we, even with our alterity, meet the other in our mutual intersubjective field. With our limited and situated freedom, which comes from relationships, we can be aware of our capabilities, whether to start something or end it. In the same intersubjective field, freedom becomes possible for all of us. We naturally feel a sense of freedom in our

relational field through interaction. If we, as human beings, create meaning in life, this meaning could be understood best in our relationships with others. Freedom may also be felt in our intersubjective world, like any other meaningful thing. By this, we can see that, as a society, freedom is also for women who are part of this intersubjective world.

Consequently, even if Merleau-Ponty's theory appears sexless in terms of feminism, we can utilize his existential and social theory to shift perspectives on womanhood. Seeing sexlessness is an important starting point for us. We have bodies that provide us with the experience of the other in the flesh of the world and an intersubjective field. In this phenomenological experience, we all grasp the concepts of equality and freedom without considering sex differences. Therefore, we can draw on Merleau-Ponty's existential and social ideas to address the issues of women's otherness and freedom in Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.

### **Conclusion**

When the status of women in today's societies and the problems associated with this are deeply considered, it becomes necessary to change social perceptions and understandings of women's status. To transform these understandings, discussions and research are conducted in various fields, including sociology, social studies, law, education, and economics. How the responsibility will be shared in these transformations remains quite controversial. This study is based on the importance of a philosophical and existential approach in this transformation. Theoretically, it moves from Beauvoir's analysis of the status of women in *The Second Sex*. Then, it focuses on Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on the importance of the body to find a more egalitarian perspective.

*The Second Sex* explains how women's status is shaped in a problematic way. Beauvoir aims to examine how the social status of women has historically been shaped and how it can be transformed. However, the solutions she suggests are seen as burdening more women with responsibility. To improve their status in society

and live their lives more freely, women should be at the forefront of transforming society. Of course, Beauvoir receives many criticisms regarding her theory. When these criticisms are considered, it becomes apparent that she does not offer philosophical suggestions for improving women's status. Most of the criticisms examine Beauvoir's theory in terms of structure and concept, but they do not address the ameliorative approaches to the status of women.

At this point, it is believed that Merleau-Ponty's theory can be used to develop an understanding that will enable us to produce a solution theory for the problematic status of women in society that Beauvoir points out in her work *The Second Sex*, and to change social perceptions. For this reason, it is necessary to present an introduction to Merleau-Ponty's theory and begin to explain his ideas, which are informed by the basic concepts and approaches of existentialism and phenomenology.

In Merleau-Ponty's theory, it is crucial to understand the lived body and its perception. The role of the body is very valuable when we interpret it in social life. The lived body, which exists in a world of relation with the other, actually needs the other, who exists as an equal, to complete its own self. At this point, Merleau-Ponty's theory presents us with the equality and freedom that naturally arise from the living body in relation to the other.

When we examine the criticisms made of Merleau-Ponty's theory, feminists have addressed it from various perspectives. However, Merleau-Ponty's theory is highly valuable in understanding the culturally shaped social perceptions of the body. Based on the thesis, the final section proposes reevaluating Beauvoir's theory in light of Merleau-Ponty's theory and considering the status of women in society from a different perspective.

According to the readings, Merleau-Ponty's theory has a complementary effect on Beauvoir. Although their approaches to existential and phenomenological concepts seem similar, Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty contain fundamental differences. For example, the subject of the body and its status are not handled very

well in Beauvoir. Although Beauvoir encountered some of Merleau-Ponty's ideas during her period, she refrained from incorporating them into her theory. Perhaps the theories of Sartre and Hegel provide Beauvoir with more solid foundations and notions for discussing the status of women in society.

Additionally, the concept of the other differs between the two thinkers. While in Beauvoir's theory the Other directly corresponds to women, in Merleau-Ponty's theory, the other is read as the other body that completes me. In this respect, Merleau-Ponty's approach seems more moderate and egalitarian. This provides us with a basis to read the problem situation presented in *The Second Sex* from a different perspective. From Merleau-Ponty's point of view, if we first take the subject as intertwined with others, we can see the subject as intertwined and impersonal, sexless, and equal.

The findings of this study provide an opportunity to consider how women and men can be approached in social life with a more egalitarian perspective. It is believed that Merleau-Ponty's perspective can be idealized philosophically, and societal differences can be approached from an equality perspective.

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