

▪ Abstracts

(English)

Age/Aging

On Simone de Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age*

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▪ Debra Bergoffen

Coming of Age: The Dignity of Finitude

In *Coming of Age* Simone de Beauvoir links the miseries of old age to the aged's unique relationship to time. By reading Beauvoir's description of the lived time of the aged within the context of her *Ethics of Ambiguity* and *All Men are Mortal*, however, I find that the miseries of finitude experienced by the aged is a consequence of their misreading of finitude in what is considered the prime of life. This misreading is revealed, and an alternative existential reading of finitude emerges when the stories of the aged and the immortal "man" are juxtaposed, thereby providing criteria for what Beauvoir calls an authentic project and a politics of the appeal – a project and a politics which direct us to the ways in which the realities of contingency bind us to each other across the generations.

▪ Penelope Deutscher

The Age of Sex and the Sex of Age

Beauvoir's *La Vieillesse* stresses the differentiations between aging's significance for men, and for women. There are also some parallels between women's status as the other, and the alterity, as she presents it, of old age. The suggestion is made that in aging, men sometimes become (in the context of collective meanings for masculinity and femininity) feminized. Aging would neither hyper-feminize; nor masculinize women. Instead, some passages of *La Vieillesse* imply a liberation from the travails of sex difference as women have experienced them: thus where men would become feminine, some women would be "post-feminine". Given the argument concerning the mutual imbrication of age and sex, there can, seemingly, be no sex without its age differentiations. How, then, do the arguments concerning lived age difference and sexual difference intersect? What concepts of corporeal-subjective temporality are implied, and how do they impact on lived sex difference?

▪ Helen Fielding

The Poetry of Habit

For Simone de Beauvoir to be old is to be condemned neither to freedom nor to meaning, but rather to boredom. Since life resides in movement, our actions that are geared towards accomplishment are those that infuse our lives with purpose, curiosity, and a delight in life. For the aged, however, the world can become silent; devoid of claims and specific aims it is at risk of provoking indifference. For this reason habit can take on a sort of poetry since it merges past, present and future in a kind of eternity that the present moment now lacks with its limited futural horizon. In this paper, I will explore this phenomenological reconfiguration of the present raised in *The Coming of Age* through a consideration of the intensification and modification of the present through habit.

▪ Linda Fisher

The Other Without and the Other Within: The Alterity of Aging and the Aged

In *The Coming of Age* Beauvoir reprises her analysis of otherness in an examination of the alterity of old age. This alterity has a distinctive character: the elderly person as marginalised Other, who I am ineluctably becoming, entailing multiple modes of otherness to myself. In my paper I examine the otherness of old age in its relation to embodied temporality, metamorphosis, and identity. In so doing I analyse the difference at the root of this alterity and explore whether old age is a unique or even the best exemplar of such alterity.

▪ **Sonia Kruks**

Beauvoir's Old Age and Sartre's Critique: *The Material Mediations of Age as Lived Experience*

Simone de Beauvoir once described *Old Age* as a "counterpart" to *The Second Sex*. However, this paper argues that (their many similarities notwithstanding) significant theoretical differences also divide the two works. For before Beauvoir wrote *Old Age* Sartre had published the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), in which he attempted to synthesize phenomenology with a neo-Marxist account of how human praxis transforms the world into a set of materially constituted social constraints on freedom. This paper examines how in *Old Age* Beauvoir appropriates selected "materialist" elements of Sartre's *Critique*, including such notions as "exis," "seriality," and the "practico-inert." She creatively integrates these into her own work, in order to develop a dialectical account of old age as at once a materially constituted social reality and an individually lived experience.

▪ **Dorothea Olkowski**

Letting Go the Weight of the Past, Beauvoir and the Joy of Existence

Simone de Beauvoir asserts an ethics which accords the individual absolute value in laying the foundations of her own existence, but simultaneously recognizes that individuals are defined only by their relation to the world and other individuals, that they exist only in transcending themselves. In *The Coming of Age*, it is Beauvoir's considerable task to embed this philosophy in the context of the question of aging. That is, given the reality of the relationship between biological and social time of the aging individual, the shortness of her future and the weight of her past, how is it possible for the individual to live so as to affirm the joy of existence? This paper will argue that, for Beauvoir, old age is not merely an individual task, that no heroic individualistic efforts can supplant the failure of civilization to recast the relationship between human and human in a manner that makes it possible for the individual to be an active and useful citizen at every age. Such a possibility requires abandoning the atomistic and individualistic notion of what it is to be a human being. This essay will explore the alternatives in Beauvoir's accounts of aging.

▪ **Christina Schües**

Age and Future

Simone de Beauvoir assumes that the own age is the non-realizable because it is not an object of an inner experience. Rather, age presents us with finitude: the limits of our future and the enclosure in a historical epoch with its weight of the past. Does Beauvoir's pessimistic view about the existential experience of age depend upon the question of *realization* and her *particular* choice of a phenomenology of experiences? Is it true, as Beauvoir suggests, that old people have "a limited future and a frozen past"? In bringing out certain presuppositions of her phenomenological approach about time and by comparing her work with Scheler's thoughts on "the experience of the death direction" ("Erlebnis der Todesrichtung") in *Zur Ethik und Erkenntnislehre*, I like to show that her method of the focus on the lived experience, which includes the non-realizability of age, could not lead to any optimism and future concepts. What is the relation between thinking about the future *optimistically*, a particular time-structure, general social support and respect of the elderly, and the *realization* of the own age?

▪ **Silvia Stoller**

*The Child in Us, and We in the Other:
The Intersection of Time in Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty*

It is one of Beauvoir's key-demands in *The Coming of Age* that we should recognize ourselves in human beings of old age. Merleau-Ponty argues in *Phenomenology of Perception* that even in old age we are still in touch with our youth. Both opinions thematize aspects of temporality with respect to the aged. How do these views contribute to a philosophical understanding of old age and aging? While Beauvoir's view explicitly addresses ethical issues, Merleau-Ponty does so only in terms of an implicit ethics. However, both positions together can provide useful contributions for a gerontological ethics.

▪ **Gail Weiss**

*The Myth of Woman meets the Myth of Old Age:
An Alienating Encounter with the Aging Female Body*

This paper will offer a critical examination of several philosophical and literary depictions of old age that, I will argue, reinforce and deepen Beauvoir's insights about the unique phenomenological experience of the elderly body in *The Coming of Age*. In philosophy and literary descriptions, old age is repeatedly (though differentially) presented as a necessary, unavoidable part of human experience that most people are unprepared to grapple with until it is no longer possible to deny that one has oneself joined the ranks of the elderly. Beauvoir's discussion of the power of mythic conceptions of old age in *The Coming of Age*, I will suggest, extends in a very important and provocative way her earlier discussion of the deleterious effects of the myth of woman in *The Second Sex*. I will explore how the myth(s) of woman and the myth(s) of old age intersect in the lived experience of the elderly female body, rendering this experience distinctively alienating for many women today.