



Love in Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986)

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According to Beauvoir, the best kind of love is authentic love. "Authentic love," she proposes in *The Second Sex* (first published in French in 1949), "must be founded on reciprocal recognition of two freedoms; each lover would then experience himself as himself and as the other: neither would abdicate his transcendence, they would not mutilate themselves; together they would both reveal values and ends in the world" (706). This is her core definition that underpins all forms of loving. It requires generosity, modesty, equality, and above all, it must be a "free exchange" (732). For Beauvoir, freedom is central: we must be free from social, economic, and legal oppression in order to be free to create authentically meaningful relationships.

However, one of the main problems with loving relationships is that throughout most of history, women have been subordinate to men, as men's vassals. Women's situation has inhibited their capacity for free choice and so practically, they have had fewer possibilities available to them than men. Thus, dependency has been a ubiquitous condition for women. For Beauvoir, this is undesirable because it is an escape from standing forth in the world as a self-governing subject. The existential rub lies in the fact that individuals are responsible for their actions and therefore women have been complicit in their subordinate situation. Beauvoir called for men to end the oppression and for women to stop accepting it. Only when women are free from oppression and dependence and free to pursue the same opportunities as men will authentic loving relationships be possible.

Primary Sources:

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