Sovereign Masculinity and the Problem of Justification in Simone de Beauvoir’s Second Sex

ABSTRACT

On the underside of Beauvoir’s more well-studied account of femininity, she provides us, in The Second Sex, with an account of masculinity as an operation of justification. Beauvoir’s account hinges on the notion of a conversion, part of a necessary existential coming-to-adulthood in which the subject replaces the childish comfort of being with the intersubjective risk entailed in becoming. This conversion is distorted and reversed in the becoming of sovereign masculinity, which also entails a conversion, but this time the conversion operates as a denial of intersubjective risk and thus, of the human condition of plurality. I turn to Hannah Arendt to understand what is at stake in the turn away from plurality in the constitution of sovereign masculinity, drawing on her discussion of political sovereignty as the denial of the human condition of plurality. I link this Beauvoir/Arendtian analysis of sovereignty to contemporary political discussions of sovereignty (Hardt and Negri). Through this paper I hope to open a “New Direction in Feminist Phenomenology” which links discussions of political sovereignty to discussions of lived gender in its sovereign masculine manifestation, thus further articulating the stakes of a feminist political phenomenology.