

Grad Colloquium II Abstracts

Re-reading Beauvoir in light of contemporary evolutionary biology

Orsolya Csaszar

As Abigail Klassen recently argued, in “Beauvoir, the Scandal of Science, and Skepticism as Method” (2013) – Simone de Beauvoir’s analysis of scientific facts ought to be read as **a positive skeptical program** employing doubt and suspension of belief in order to advance the inquiry of the natural sciences. In analyzing Beauvoir’s positive skeptical approach to science, Klassen questions whether or not Beauvoir’s existentialist ethics are compatible with the natural sciences. She provides an open-ended response to this question, concluding that **it seems straightforwardly wrong to assume that existentialism – when bundled into a positive skeptical methodology – is incompatible with natural science in general**. Klassen prescribes that the question requires further investigation. In this talk I will investigate the plausibility of Klassen’s conclusion in a narrower sense: **Is Beauvoir’s existentialist thesis compatible with a contemporary account of evolutionary biology?**

In the following talk, I’m going to focus on presenting a critical reading of Beauvoir’s skeptical account of evolutionary biology as found in Chapter 1 - “Biological Data” - of *The Second Sex* (originally in French 1949, second English translation 2009). The aims of my critical engagement with the text are (a) to present Beauvoir’s existentialist thesis (b) to present Beauvoir’s factual claims regarding biological sex, (c) to appeal to contemporary evolutionary biological accounts in order to present a revised version of Beauvoir’s factual claims, and, (d) to evaluate whether or not Beauvoir’s existentialist thesis also needs to be revised in light of these factual revisions. My overall goal is to demonstrate that Beauvoir’s existentialist thesis holds in light of an appeal to contemporary biological facts. In this sense, I agree with Beauvoir’s claim: indeed, a large constraint upon our opportunities to make free choices is the extent to which we are constrained by our biological reproductive functions.

On the Possibility of an Immanent Theory of Eternity

Brent Ables

If philosophy is as old as Parmenides, then the concept of eternity is as old as philosophy. What is, Parmenides wrote, must always be, all at once. It could not have come to be, for this would be to come from that which is not, and how could something come from nothing? Nor can that which is have a future in which it is going to be, since it is. Plato would add that becoming does have a certain existence in sensible form, but that material temporality is determined by its participation in that which is: the ideal, eternal realm of the Eidos. This relation between time and eternity would define both concepts in philosophy throughout the Middle Ages, where the realm of eternity was identified with God and the temporal world was left to us mortals.

My question is this: what place is there for a concept of eternity in a philosophical landscape where God is dead and Platonism, along with its perennial distinction between time and eternity, has been overthrown? For such is the landscape we find ourselves in, if we take Deleuze seriously. That we must nevertheless retain such a concept is evident from the fact that philosophers can't seem to stop talking about essences, natural kinds, logical truths, and possible worlds. And, of course, Deleuze himself uses the concept without thematizing it. Drawing from Deleuze's works, I will argue that to replace a Platonic or theological theory of eternity with an immanent theory of eternity, we must substitute for the Platonic notion of participation the Neo-Platonic notion of complication. For, as Deleuze says, eternity is nothing more than the complicated state of time itself.