

Feminist Writings
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The Second Sex - Part 1

So, hello and welcome to NPTEL course entitled 'Feminist Writing.' Where we begin with a new text today and it is going to be Simone de Beauvoir's book 'The Second Sex' which is one of the foundational books in Feminism as we know it today. So it is one of those books in 20th century which laid the template for much of feminist writings, much of feminist movements which were to follow subsequently.

And it is a book which is profoundly political but also personal and it talks about female experience and it is one of the really key texts which talk about the entanglement between textuality and experientiality. It talks about the discursive formation of women; what is the woman in a cultural context, how is it culturally constructed through different discursive mechanisms.

And of course, it brings back attention to the entire experientiality of the woman. So, it is one of those really interesting arguments which is one of the cornerstones of this kind of study and one can't really think about a feminist work and course without 'Second Sex' by Simone de Beauvoir.

So the very name, 'Second Sex' as you probably know is quite provocative. So it talks about the woman becomes the embodiment of sexuality; the woman becomes sexualized in terms of identity, the woman becomes sexualized marker and the woman becomes the body as opposed to which the male is always rational, bodiless and of course asexual in quality because the male inhabits the public space while the viscerality of the body, the viscerality of identity need to be effaced away.

So we will talk about, I mean Beauvoir will talk about how the bodily underpinnings, the corporeal underpinnings of womanhood is constantly is hinted at, constantly emphasized in any argument about woman whereas the corporeal underpinnings of masculinity or manhood is sometimes strategically effaced away; man becomes almost a universal condition, a universal idea and this whole idea, this whole notion of the idea as opposed to corporeality is something that Beauvoir unpacks quite provocatively in this particular book.

The reason why this book is so important, not just for feminist writings but also for any study of power hierarchy, domination, etc. it talks about how the other is created, how the other is produced through different discursive mechanisms which includes language, stress, of course culture, it's a very lauded term - religion and of course the whole idea of masculinity and femininity.

And we can see how this is kind of a model study, how the Other is created, Beauvoir brought out remarkably well, perfectly well. If you map it onto, let's say colonialism or post-colonialism, if you map it onto the racial question of how the other race is created, the racial Other is created, etc. So these questions become really key in this particular book.

So what we will do in this lecture and lectures to come is we will look at the introduction to 'The Second Sex' by Simone de Beauvoir for as long as we can because I think the introduction sums up the book quite coherently and it talks about what she expands later on in this book.

Since looking at the entire book which will not be practically possible for the purpose of this course, for the scope of this course, it is interesting, it is important for us to take a look at the introduction and all comprehensive details in terms of what Beauvoir sets out to do, in terms of the arguments that she is proposing and in terms of how the arguments are resonant in the world we live in today.

So this is 'The Second Sex' by Simone de Beauvoir on the screen translated and edited by H. M. Parsley. So we'll begin with the introduction. Okay. So this is the introduction to Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex' and you'll find that how the tone of the introduction is interesting because it keeps switching between the personal and the political; it keeps switching between the experiential and the textual and you begin to figure out, very quickly, that the two are not really opposites in Beauvoir's study.

It's not really the personal versus the political, it is not really the experiential versus the textual but it's the same thing, really. So she talks about how these things, these categories should be straddled; these categories should be co-inhabited in any understanding of femininity and masculinity and gender in general.

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INTRODUCTION

For a long time I have hesitated to write a book on woman. The subject is irritating, especially to women; and it is not new. Enough ink has been spilled in quarrelling over feminism, and perhaps we should say no more about it. It is still talked about, however, for the voluminous nonsense uttered during the last century seems to have done little to illuminate the problem. After all, is there a problem? And if so, what is it? Are there women, really? Most assuredly the theory of the eternal feminine still has its adherents who will whisper in your ear: 'Even in Russia women still are *women*'; and other erudite persons – sometimes the very same – say with a sigh: 'Woman is losing her way, woman is lost.' One wonders if women still exist, if they will always exist, whether or not it is desirable that they should, what place they occupy in the world, what their place should be. 'What has become of women?' was asked recently in an ephemeral magazine.

But first we must ask: what is a woman? '*Tota mulier in utero*', says the proverb, 'woman is a womb'. But in speaking of certain women, one declares that they are not women, although they are equipped with



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So, in the very beginning takes a slightly flippant tone but obviously we recognize quite quickly that the flippancy is deliberate because it begins to ask very dark questions. It talks about the different conflicting ideas of women; it talks about how the woman question becomes a troubling question, sometimes an irritating question. It hints at the markers of essentialism which is something which will keep coming back throughout this introduction; it talks about how the possibility of emancipation is thwarted by women themselves, etc.

And it talks about some of the pseudo scholarship that tries to pass off as emancipatory feminist scholarship. So that is the foundation that Beauvoir is setting out in the very introduction of this book. Now she asks some really fundamental and key questions which she begins to expand and unpack, as she moves on.

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But first we must ask: what is a woman? '*Tota mulier in utero*', says one, 'woman is a womb'. But in speaking of certain women, connoisseurs declare that they are not women, although they are equipped with a uterus like the rest. All agree in recognizing the fact that females exist in the human species; today as always they make up about one half of humanity. And yet we are told that femininity is in danger; we are exhorted to be women, remain women, become women. It would appear, then, that every female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity. Is this attribute something secreted by the ovaries? Or is it a Platonic essence, a product of the philosophic imagination? Is a rustling petticoat enough to bring it down to earth? Although some women try zealously to incarnate this essence, it is hardly patentable. It is frequently described in vague and dazzling terms that seem to have been borrowed from the vocabulary of the seers, and indeed in the times of St. Thomas it was considered an essence as certainly defined as the somniferous quality of the poppy.



"But first we must ask: what is a woman? '*Tota mulier in utero*', says one, 'woman is a womb'." So, in the very beginning she talks about how the entire idea of the woman is reduced to the womb, the sexuality, the sexual body or the sexualized body and so the idea of underpinning, the entire idea of womanhood into viscerality, into the body, into corporeality is something that Beauvoir keeps talking about as she moves on.

And she will contrast it with how conveniently the male, the man, seems to have no body at all. The man becomes rationality, the man becomes idea, the man becomes a very intellectual phenomenon who inhabits the public space, etc. as opposed to the woman who is all body or womb.

So, that underpinning, that essentialism is something that Beauvoir is pointing out very clearly and in the very beginning of this introduction. So woman is the womb, that is one of the key responses to this very fundamental question "what is a woman?"

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So Beauvoir, over here, talks about how there are some different kinds of notions about the woman which are ephemeral in quality; which are overessentialized in quality; which overessentializes the sexual body, the corporeal body and also, it can also be reified into imagination, it can be romanticized in imagination and either way it takes away the reality of the woman experience, the reality, the experientiality of the woman experience where you reduce it to the body or you make it a platonic idea or you make it a romantic idea, an ideal idea. Alright.

So either way, you're reifying it in different terms. Now if you take this and if you remember what we did towards the end of Donna Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto' where, at the end she declares, quite provocatively, that she'd much rather be a cyborg than a goddess.

That whole idea of being a cyborg or preferring to be a cyborg is something that is a very political preference of course, because a goddess comes within the entire apparatus of reification which is phallogocentric in quality; the goddess is conjured in male imagination, the goddess is conferred by male imagination whereas a cyborg is something which offers you more ownership into an incomplete essence. So in that sense, Haraway could be seen as some kind of a sequel to what Beauvoir seems to be suggesting away very covertly.

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Now this is what I meant when I said, in the beginning when we started off this essay, that this work can be equally applied, can be equally relevant to any understanding of race studies, to any understanding of colonial studies, to any understanding of any kind of discrimination studies because what it does at the very fundamental structural level, it talks about the production of the Other; how is the Other produced, what is the necessity of producing the Other.

So, the Other becomes a political necessity, a form of political production which is used to sort of contrast with the aspired identity or the authentic identity so the Other becomes the opposite, the complete reversal of the aspired identity.

And now, of course, in human history there are certain categories which have been consistently attacked, consistently discriminated so the woman, the Jew, the Negro, the black; they have been completely, consistently discriminated throughout human history.

Now, what Beauvoir says over here, quite clearly, is that unfortunately for the patriarchal imagination, the biological and social sciences no longer admit whether there is some essential difference between the man and the woman, in terms of psychology; there is some

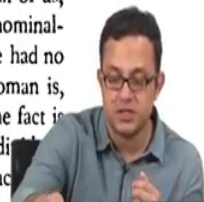
essential difference between the Negro and the white man; there is some essential difference between the Jew and the non-Jew. So we can't really make those demarcations based on biology any more. That is something which is lost ground so conceptualism has lost ground, that's what she means.

"Science regards any characteristic as a reaction dependent in part upon a situation." So instead of an essential condition, science move towards a more situational condition so it depends on the context, depends on the culture, depends on the situation which produces certain identities. That becomes more important than the essence. There is no essential difference between the Jew and the non-Jew, between the Negro and the non-Negro, between the woman and the man according to modern science. "If today femininity no longer exists, then it never existed.

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INTRODUCTION

But does the word *woman*, then, have no specific content? This is stoutly affirmed by those who hold to the philosophy of the enlightenment, of rationalism, of nominalism; women, to them, are merely the human beings arbitrarily designated by the word *woman*. Many American women particularly are prepared to think that there is no longer any place for woman as such; if a backward individual still takes herself for a woman, her friends advise her to be psychoanalysed and thus get rid of this obsession. In regard to a work, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, which in other respects has its irritating features, Dorothy Parker has written: 'I cannot be just to books which treat of woman as woman . . . My idea is that all of us, men as well as women, should be regarded as human beings.' But nominalism is a rather inadequate doctrine, and the anti-feminists have had no trouble in showing that women simply *are not* men. Surely woman is, like man, a human being; but such a declaration is abstract. The fact is that every concrete human being is always a singular, separate individual. To decline to accept such notions as the eternal feminine, the black



But does the word woman, then, have no specific content?" Now, she is obviously moving into the category of the woman. Woman as a cultural construct, woman as a rhetoric, woman as a coinage, woman as a term, as a construct so that's something which we'll see later when we read Judith Butler's 'Gender Trouble' which talks about gender as a performance when you can become a woman, when you can become a man for a certain performance, for a certain sanction and sometimes subversive performances.

Okay. "This is stoutly affirmed by those who hold to the philosophy of the enlightenment, of rationalism, of nominalism; women, to them, are merely the human beings arbitrarily designated by the word woman." So, the entire idea of phallogocentric classification,

phallogocentric being a combination of phallogocentric and logocentric which is male logic essentially, we find that that has been invested heavily or rather that has invested itself heavily into the entire idea of enlightenment, the entire production of enlightenment theories and the entire production of enlightenment philosophies, etc.

Now, the woman question; the philosophers of enlightenment, they keep telling us that woman to them are merely the human beings arbitrarily designed by the word woman. So the word woman is conferred on these individuals, it is conferred on these human beings and as a result of which certain classifications have been produced immediately.

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[says quote] " 'I cannot be just to books which treated woman as woman ... My idea is that all of us, men as well as women, should be regarded as human beings.' [says unquote to suggest that the quote is over.] But nominalism is a rather inadequate doctrine, and the antifeminists have had no trouble in showing that women simply are not men."

This is one of the primary arguments, one of the primary thesis in this particular book - identification through negation. Women as being not men. So the whole idea is premised or produced through a lack. The fact that you are not a man, that becomes your marker of identity or identification. That is something that Beauvoir sort of unpacks quite strongly and quite robustly in this particular introduction. So women simply are not men.

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So she talks about, and this is something which later on Gayatri Spivak would take and make into something mappable onto race ethnicities; Spivak would use it for strategic essentialism, how we should essentialize, sometimes strategically, in terms of resisting hegemonic discourses, in terms of resisting hegemonic identity formations because if you essentialize with a sense of agency, so agentic essentialization or strategic essentialism, that would sometimes be helpful in terms of producing and protecting an identity to be consumed and invaded by more hegemonic identities.

So Beauvoir says something similar over here. She is saying that it is important for us to understand that the Jews aren't identity, the blacks aren't identity, the woman aren't identities, just say that everyone is an individual and blur away all distinctions which can often be used, which can often be counterproductive, can often be unrealistic rather than being emancipatory, rather than being liberatory, it can sometimes be a flight from reality and that is something which is obviously undesirable in feminist discourses.

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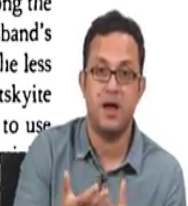


"Some years ago a well-known woman writer refused to permit her portrait to appear in a series of photographs especially devoted to women writers; she wished to be counted among the men." So Beauvoir gives an anecdotal example over here and that's something which will keep running throughout this book. It is a very interesting combination of anecdotal examples and theoretical and textual study or discursive study.

So, she talks about an unnamed writer, a woman writer, who refused to be photographed for a woman magazine, for a gallery of woman writers and she insisted rather that she should be photographed with the males, with everyone else, as it were.

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"But in order to gain this privilege she made use of her husband's influence!" and that's the irony of it. To gain the influence, to gain the privilege of being photographed with the men that is why she move away from the woman question, this particular named writer had to take result, had to take help from her husband in terms of using his influence.

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So again, the aspirations towards becoming a man, to move away from being considered to be a woman and that, according to Beauvoir, is quite problematic in quality because that can very easily give away to male appropriations, give away to male negations to any kind of feminine identity, to any kind of female identity, any kind of feminist identity, for that matter.

"The attitude of defiance of many American women proves that they are haunted by a sense of their femininity." So femininity becomes a dirty word as it were. So women want to get rid of femininity; they wanted to move away from femininity and be considered as one of the men, as one of the human beings as it were, but to Haraway, that to Beauvoir is very problematic as we keep seeing.

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and occupations are manifestly different. Perhaps these differences are superficial, perhaps they are destined to disappear. What is certain is that they do most obviously exist."

Now what Beauvoir is saying over here is that we need to calibrate, recognize the differences. We need to recognize the difference between a man and a woman, we need to recognize the difference between the way a man looks, the way a man dresses, the way a man walks and the way a woman walks; that difference, the recognition of the differences, the awareness of differences is helpful, is interesting and is important.

Because if we level away all these differences that can very easily be co-opted into one big main narrative of appropriation and aspiration that would take away any essence of or any agency of womanhood, an agency of femininity, etc. and that's certainly undesirable according to Beauvoir's imagination, according to Beauvoir's feminist discourse.

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If her functioning as a female is not enough to define woman, if we decline also to explain her through 'the eternal feminine', and if nevertheless we admit, provisionally, that women do exist, then we must face the question: what is a woman?

To state the question is, to me, to suggest, at once, a preliminary answer. The fact that I ask it is in itself significant. A man would



"If her functioning as a female is not enough to define woman, if we decline also to explain her through 'the eternal feminine', and if nevertheless we admit, provisionally, that women do exist, then we must face the question "what is a woman?" So the fundamental question comes back, "what is a woman?"

"To state the question is, to me, to suggest, at once, a preliminary answer. The fact that I ask it is in itself significant." So the very question that you are asking this question, the very notion that you are asking this question, the very idea of asking this question that is important because that tells us something politically.

The fact that you're asking this question about "what is a woman?" and Beauvoir would say, very quickly, that would you ask the same about a man, would you ever ask what is a man? Of course you wouldn't because a man becomes a universal category. We speak about a man and human beings together, in the same sense, in the same vocabulary.

So we talk about mankind as a word which represents eternal humanity. So the question "what is a man? " becomes a bit of a reductionist question, it becomes a paradoxical question and it's a question about nothing really whereas a question about a woman, triggers many responses. It triggers a debate, it triggers conflicts and all kinds of responses. So that is what she says over here, quite clearly, Beauvoir.

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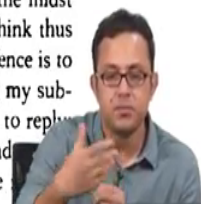
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14

INTRODUCTION

set out to write a book on the peculiar situation of the human male. But if I wish to define myself, I must first of all say: 'I am a woman'; on this truth must be based all further discussion. A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man. The terms *masculine* and *feminine* are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of *man* to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. In the midst of an abstract discussion it is vexing to hear a man say: 'You think thus and so because you are a woman'; but I know that my only defence is to reply: 'I think thus and so because it is true,' thereby removing my subjective self from the argument. It would be out of the question to reply: 'And you think the contrary because you are a man', for it is understood that the fact of being a man is no peculiarity. A man is in the



"The fact that I ask it is in itself significant. A man would never set out to write a book on the peculiar situation of the human male." So there will be no book about the human male or the masculine condition as it were because that becomes more of a universal category which is accepted and internalized and consumed by all of us at infinitum.

"But if I wish to define myself," and Beauvoir is speaking of her from a past subject position "But if I wish to define myself, I must first of all say: 'I am a woman'; on this truth must be based all further discussion. A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man.

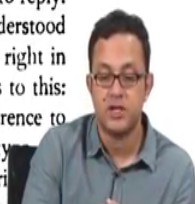
The terms masculine and feminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity."

So, she is using electrical or electoral metaphors over here when she says that if you imagine there to be a positive, negative and neutral charges, the man represents not just positive but also the neutral so the man is humanity, man is human beings, etc. while woman is a negative pole which is defined by a lack, defined by an absence, defined by an aspiration or an incompleteness towards becoming a male so a woman represents only the negative defined by limiting criteria without reciprocity.

So the limitations, a woman is defined by a limitation, woman is defined by a lack, by a sense of incompleteness and that incompleteness, that lack becomes a permanent marker of Beauvoir's study. And that's something that she's obviously contesting and arguing and unpacking.

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... a man to come in, a man not of an eye. I am a woman, on this truth must be based all further discussion. A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man. The terms *masculine* and *feminine* are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of *man* to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. In the midst of an abstract discussion it is vexing to hear a man say: 'You think thus and so because you are a woman'; but I know that my only defence is to reply: 'I think thus and so because it is true,' thereby removing my subjective self from the argument. It would be out of the question to reply: 'And you think the contrary because you are a man', for it is understood that the fact of being a man is no peculiarity. A man is in the right in being a man; it is the woman who is in the wrong. It amounts to this: just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique was defined, so there is an absolute human type, masculine. Woman has ovaries, a uterus; these peculiarities imprint



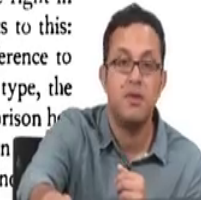
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So this is a key thing over here. Woman as a peculiarity, man as a universality and that's the equation that Beauvoir is unpacking, very robustly. When talked about a man or a man's aspirations, man's prerogative, man's privileges, those, often times or more often than not, appear as universal categories whereas if we talk about a woman's peculiarities, the peculiarities itself, they cover the privileges, the prerogative, the prominence; they are all condensed into this idea of peculiarity.

So the idea of peculiarity and universality belonged to man is something that Beauvoir very clearly demarcating and saying that this is a means by which we operate, not just discursively but also linguistically; this is the way language operates; this is the way language is designed, religion is designed, culture is designed, everything is designed according to these categories whereas what belongs to the man becomes the universal condition and what is ascribed to woman becomes a peculiar condition so this peculiarity and universality equation is something which Beauvoir is clearly mapping out and studying and expanding and exploring for us.

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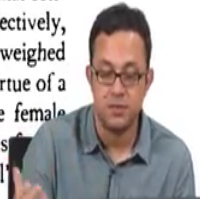
She is using mathematical and geometrical analogy over here when she says the ancients, this is the ancient Greeks or Romans or the Indians, where there was an absolute vertical in relation to which there were other obliques. So there was a vertical thing, a 90° degree angle or whatever, according to which all the other angles are defined and demarcated so that could be easily mapped onto the idea of the masculine and the feminine.

Because that is the absolute vertical being the male, male reason, male rationality, male prerogatives, male privileges, etc. which become universal phenomena, which becomes universal categories very quickly and by default whereas the woman question, they become peculiarities, they become angularities in relation to the verticality.

So this idea of angularity versus verticality, the relationship between peculiarity versus universality is something that Beauvoir is clearly mapping out. So the absolute human type happens to be the masculine human type, by default.

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and so because you are a woman; but I know that my only defence is to reply: 'I think thus and so because it is true,' thereby removing my subjective self from the argument. It would be out of the question to reply: 'And you think the contrary because you are a man', for it is understood that the fact of being a man is no peculiarity. A man is in the right in being a man; it is the woman who is in the wrong. It amounts to this: just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique was defined, so there is an absolute human type, the masculine. Woman has ovaries, a uterus; these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature. It is often said that she thinks with her glands. Man superbly ignores the fact that his anatomy also includes glands, such as the testicles, and that they secrete hormones. He thinks of his body as a direct and normal connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively, whereas he regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighed down by everything peculiar to it. 'The female is a female by virtue of a certain *lack* of qualities,' said Aristotle; 'we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness.' And St. Thomas Aquinas pronounced woman to be an 'imperfect man', an 'incidental



"Woman has ovaries, a uterus: these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature. It is often said that she thinks with her glands." So this is the viscerality that is ascribed to a woman; that she has an ovary, she has a uterus, she thinks with her glands so she's not outside of her prison house of her body as it were, she's not outside the prison house of secretions as it were.

Now, what is conveniently forgotten and this is what Beauvoir very quickly say that male to have glands, male to secrete glands, male to have organs which secrete away chemicals from inside the male body but the body of the man is very conveniently effaced away and what we have instead is an idea of rationality which belongs to male, which belongs to the man, which is owned by a man. The question of agency becomes quite clear quite immediately with these categories of description.

So it is often said that she thinks with her glands so the woman thinks with her glands; so this is why the word hysteria, for instance, is believed, was believed for a long time to be the malady that comes from the uterus, the malady that comes from the womb so it can only happen to women. Only women can be hysteric in quality because they have the uterus, the womb which secretes certain things which make them womanly and insane and mad and all kinds of things which is clubbed to hysteria.

Now what was conveniently forgotten was the fact that male too became hysterics in different situations and it is only the First World War which brought male hysteria into the public space

with the form of shell shock and trauma and the rest of it. And then of course different words had to be invented to define male hysteria. So we have PTSD, much later through the Vietnam War. In the first war we had shell shock.

So, what is obviously clear over here is the fact that hysteria was supposed to be a female malady because the females are supposed to have a body which is supposed to have secretive glands which would then create problems in the body which would over determine the way she thinks. And the whole idea of over determination is important over here. The woman is determined by the body; the woman is imprisoned by the body.

Now, what she says quite clearly, Beauvoir, is that "Man superbly ignores the fact that his anatomy also includes glands" so this is what I meant in the beginning when I said that there is an idea that men don't have body, men are all rationality, men are all ideas, men are all brains and the whole idea of effacing the body becomes a very political strategy whereas the body becomes something to be shamed.

For the body becomes something to be sexualized, when the body becomes something to be reified and objectified because it belongs to the woman but because the man doesn't happen to have a body, the body disappears and the man is all about the ideas and the brain and the imagination and the intellect and all the rest of it which inhabit the public space.

"Man superbly ignores the fact that his anatomy also includes glands, such as the testicles, and that they secrete hormones." So Beauvoir says quite clearly that even men have testicles, men have glands which secrete hormones just as much as women do but for some reason in public discourse, in public understanding, a normal understanding, "normal" normative understanding

The secretion of men, the secretion of males is just very conveniently effaced away and what we have is a complete recurrent understanding of the woman having the body, of the woman having possession of body or controlling the body or the body controlling the woman rather her true secretions which then make her bizarre or hysteric or problematic in quality whereas a man, as Beauvoir says quite clearly.

"He thinks of his body as a direct and normal connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively, whereas he regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison,

weighed down by everything peculiar to it." So again the whole idea of peculiarity v/s universality, it keeps coming back.

The male, the man, very conveniently effaces his own body and he thinks of his own body as a direct and normal connection with the world, as being at one with the world so there is no difference between the male body and the world outside. So it becomes one from extended and continuous and seamless embodiment.

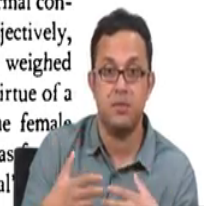
Whereas for the woman, the embodiment is very visible, the embodiment is very localized. So if you use embodiment study metaphors, the woman's body is localized and it is reified to a large extent whereas the male embodiment is extended, it is not reified, it is not localized at all. And in the extended quality of male embodiment lies his aspirations or lies the whole idea of universality.

It is this universal phenomenon, there is no need to pay attention separately to the male body because the man's body is just a universal phenomenon whereas a woman's body is full of interruptions, a woman's body is an imprisonment, a woman's body is a hindrance, a lack, a problem. So that is the equation that Beauvoir is very clearly unpacking over here.

And then she keeps quoting some of the ancient philosophers, who are obviously all males, and how they looked at the woman question and how they looked at the woman's body in this kind of a relation, this kind of a perspective. And this is Aristotle as quoted by Beauvoir.

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"The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities," this is Aristotle so the female is defined by a lack. And "we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness." So the whole idea of female is a defect, is a dysfunctional category. It is an incomplete man, according to Aristotle and the whole idea of female, the female is only a female because she lacks certain things which obviously belong to the men, which obviously belong to the males who belong to the universal category of existence.

So the woman because of incompleteness, because of interruptions, because of defectiveness, the woman becomes interrupted in quality and the woman becomes afflicted in quality. So the whole idea of affliction, interruption, incompleteness, defectiveness; these become part of the peculiarity package of the female as opposed to the universality package of the male who is rational and perfect and seamless and continuous, at one with the environment around him.

Next we have St. Thomas. "And St Thomas for his part pronounced woman to be an 'imperfect man', an 'incidental' being" it is almost like accidental, an incidental being; not something which is normative or normal in quality. So its incidental quality or peculiar quality of woman is one thing which keeps coming out even in ancient philosophies and philosophers.

"This is symbolized in Genesis where Eve is depicted as made from what Bossuet called 'a supernumerary bone' of Adam." So Eve is made of Adam's ribs for that matter so is just a part of Adam. So when we talk about making something out of someone's rib so that obviously denotes woman to be a very metonymic representation of man, a fragment of man, as it were.

So Eve is created out of a rib borne of Adam so Adam being the whole body, Adam being the universal body and Eve becoming a part of the body, a fragment of the body. So even in the book of Genesis, you will find this kind of a discourse of male universality as opposed to female peculiarity is manifestly present.

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Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. Michelet writes: 'Woman, the relative being . . .' And Benda is most positive in his *Rapport d'Uriel*: 'The body of man makes sense in itself quite apart from that of woman, whereas the latter seems wanting in significance in itself . . . Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man.' And she is simply what man degrades, the



"Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him;" so woman becomes only in relation to a man. So man becomes the universal phenomenon and woman becomes the peculiar phenomenon in relation to man. So, if you go back to the mathematical, the geometrical analogy that Beauvoir offered, is that man is the right angle, man is the vertical angle in relation to which, all the other angles define themselves; in relation to which all the other angles situate themselves.

The woman becomes situational, a priori of man, a priori of the universality of man. So this idea of relationality, this idea of peculiarity belongs to woman and this just makes them different from man in the sense of incompleteness or imperfection. Okay.

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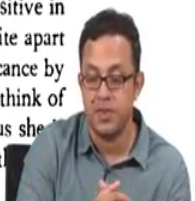
So man is self-sufficient, man is universal, man is all encompassing whereas woman becomes in relation, *apropos* to man; only in relation to man and apart from that she doesn't have any existence of her own.

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INTRODUCTION

as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other.¹

The category of the *Other* is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality – that of the Self and the Other. This duality was not originally attached to the division of the sexes; it was not dependent upon any empirical facts. It is revealed in such works as that of Granet on Chinese thought and those of Dumézil on the East Indies and Rome. The feminine element was at first no more involved in such pairs as Varuna-Mitra, Uranus-Zeus, Sun-Moon, and Day-Night than it was in the contrasts between Good and Evil, lucky and unlucky auspices, right and left, God and Lucifer. Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought.

Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without



"And she is simply what man decrees;" what man confers on her, what man authorizes. So woman is only that which man authorizes and produce out of the authorization. "thus she is called 'the sex', by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less."

So this is what I meant in the beginning when I said that Beauvoir suggests that women becomes sexualized beings; they have sexualized bodies, they have a sexualized corporeal quality because they are whole body 1 and that, obviously from male imagination, from male perspective becomes embodiment of sexuality, absolute sexuality; no more, no less.

"She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her;" so it is always the woman who is compared to the man. So the man becomes the right angle, the vertical angle, as I mentioned in Beauvoir's geometric analogy with reference to which a woman defines herself.

".. she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other.'" So this is the question we will stop with today, the question of Other because, as I mentioned in the beginning, the way Beauvoir unpacks the production of other, the way Beauvoir examines the production of Other is something which can be mapped onto even other discourse formations, even other hierarchy formations such as race for instance, such as discrimination for instance.

So the way the other is produced, apripo of the imagined right, apripo of the imagined perfect is something which is historically true for almost any episode, any narrative of

exploitation, any narrative of domination, any narrative of hierarchization. So he is the subject, he is the absolute so the man is the absolute, the universal as opposed to which the woman is the Other, the angular, the peculiar.

So, in the next lecture we move on to see how Beauvoir talks about the Other question in terms of how the Other is produced, how is its political production produced and how it is a necessary political production for the man to imagine himself as universal, as the seamless, as the continuous, as the right, as the absolute subject compared to which everything else becomes relative in quality. So I end this lecture today and I will continue with this in the lectures to come. Thank you for your attention.