



Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Ambiguity (Studies in Feminist Philosophy)

Sonia Kruks

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Simone de Beauvoir and the Politics of Ambiguity is the first full-length study of Beauvoir's political thinking. Best known as the author of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir also wrote an array of other political and philosophical texts that together, constitute an original contribution to political theory and philosophy. Sonia Kruks here locates Beauvoir in her own intellectual and political context and demonstrates her continuing significance. Beauvoir still speaks, in a unique voice, to many pressing questions concerning politics: the values and dangers of liberal humanism; how oppressed groups become complicit in their own oppression; how social identities are perpetuated; the limits to rationalism; and the place of emotions, such as the desire for revenge, in politics. In discussing such matters Kruks puts Beauvoir's ideas into conversation with those of many contemporary thinkers, including feminist and race theorists, as well as with historical figures in the liberal, Hegelian, and Marxist traditions.

Beauvoir's political thinking emerges from her fundamental insights into the ambiguity of human existence. Combining phenomenological descriptions with structural analyses, she focuses on the tensions of human action as both free and constrained. To be human is to be a paradoxical being, at once capable of free choice and yet, because embodied, vulnerable to injury from others. Politics is thus a domain of complexly interwoven, multiple, human interactions that is rife with ambiguity, and where freedom and violence too often closely intertwine. Beauvoir accordingly argues that failure is a necessary part of political action. However, she also insists that, while acknowledging this, we should assume responsibility for the outcomes of what we do.

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