

# De Beauvoir: New Perspectives for the 21st Century

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## De Beauvoir: New Perspectives for the 21st Century

International Conference

**JUNE 2-4, 2021**  
 Leuven, institute of philosophy

In recent years we have witnessed a renewed interest in the oeuvre of Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986). In the wake of a new English translation of *The Second Sex* and the publication of critical editions of her diaries and essays, De Beauvoir scholarship has focused on her literary and philosophical achievements. Yet, it has remained somewhat understudied how her political commitments have shaped her writing as well as her public interventions: existentialism, Marxism, anti-colonialism and, finally feminism. This conference, starting from Beauvoir’s social and political engagement, asks to what extent De Beauvoir provides important tools for diagnosing the present and offering a prognosis for the future. Her life and work are approached as a toolkit (Foucault), offering both a conceptual apparatus as well as practical examples of acts of solidarity and resistance.

In this endeavour, when the call for racial justice grows in global prominence because of the world-wide Black Lives Matter movement, it’s time to reflect on Beauvoir’s critical observations of anti-black racism in post-war U.S.A. (*L’Amérique au jour le jour* (1948)) and her public engagement with and in Algeria’s struggle for independence (“Préface”, *Djamila Boupacha* (1962)). Furthermore, living in a time of a pandemic crisis that brings out already existing inequalities, we might be struck by the timelines of De Beauvoir’s incessant critique of utilitarian thinking, which motivates both her earliest fiction (*Les bouches inutiles* (1944)) and her later work of social critique (*La vieillesse* (1970)). At the same time, we have to attend to the socio-historical developments that distinguish her era from ours. Critically assessing her legacy, we might ask if the existentialist concepts of responsibility and freedom can counter the neoliberal invocation of these terms in perpetuating the fiction of a self-sufficient agent; or, what Marxism and Beauvoir’s qualified appraisal of the Soviet Union and China might teach us in an era deprived of social utopia’s, of which the third way that most social-democratic parties opted for in the nineties is symptomatic; or what her support for the anti-colonial struggle offers us in thinking about solidarity with formerly colonized subjects suffering from exploitation and processes of othering, both in the decolonial states and in the former colonial powers; or what we can learn from her participation in the women’s movement when facing the alt-right and a renewed naturalization of gender roles.

This conference aims to bring together De Beauvoir scholars who draw on insights from fields such as critical phenomenology, post-colonial and feminist studies, (French) social theory, intellectual history and literary studies.

### KEYNOTE LECTURES

- > **Qrescent Mali Mason**  
Haverford
- > **Jennifer McWeeny**  
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

### ORGANIZERS

- > Ashika Singh (KU Leuven)
- > Julia Jansen (KU Leuven)
- > Karen Vintges (UvA)
- > Liesbeth Schoonheim (KU Leuven)

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[Call for Papers](#)

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### Scientific Committee

- > Sophie Withaecx (Maastricht)
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- > Kathleen Gyssels (UA)
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Last update: 07 Mar 2022

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