

Beauvoir for the Masses: Exploring Applications of Her Philosophy in French Social Revolutions of the 1960's

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My project examines the feminism and existentialism of Simone de Beauvoir as they intersect with the ideas of the French social movements of the 1960's, using the movement of May '68 as a primary example. Beauvoir's ideas were politically in tune with the leftist philosophy of the students and workers who organized widespread demonstrations throughout the spring of 1968 and brought the French economy to a standstill in May of that year. But I argue that her existentialist philosophy, foregrounding the necessity of each individual to create a self and to reject accepted social paradigms, reflects the demands made by the students who wished to re-make the university and society. And, importantly, her conception of feminism – which grew from her existentialist ideas – explores the way in which the struggles of a singular person can represent those of an entire group, thus mirroring arguments of the Mouvement du 22 mars, with their emblematic phrase expressing their sense of oppression, "Nous sommes tous des juifs allemands" ("We are all German Jews."). The importance of the May '68 movement and its intersection with Beauvoir's ideas relative to feminism and philosophy point toward a greater understanding of the complexity of French identity.

Information about the Author:

Reillie Acks is a French, mathematics, and economics major who is also currently studying in Christ College. She has always been interested in feminist theory, an interest which began to materialize her sophomore year in a Christ College class that allowed her to do a group research project on strip clubs. She then had the opportunity to work on this project which was initially a research paper for a French history class she took last fall.

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