Being and Freedom: Ahmed, Irigaray and Beauvoir on Subjectivity Lack and Liberation
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Introduction

Sara Ahmed argues that Edmund Husserl (the founder of the phenomenological movement) finds barely perceived or unperceived objects, as the “background” of perception, to be interconnected with objects understood to be familiar. She states, “Husserl’s approach to the background as what is ‘unseen’ in its ‘thereness’ or ‘familiarity’ is extremely useful, even if he puts the familiar to one side. It allows us to consider how the familiar takes shape by being unnoticed” (Ahmed 2007). The familiar relates to the background in two ways: first, the familiar fades into the background because it goes unnoticed, unlike objects in the foreground. Second, the familiar is also in the foreground as an object of repeated exposure. The flow of perception tends to adhere to unfamiliar objects; as one continues to perceive unfamiliar objects, it eventually becomes familiar and becomes unnoticed. Phenomenological inquiry would continue to notice the familiar object so that the process of becoming-familiar can be disclosed. Ahmed suggests that “wonder” encapsulates this process of (re)analyzing familiar objects.

Ahmed defines wonder as follows: “To wonder is to remember the forgetting and to see the repetition of form as the ‘taking form’ of the familiar” (Ahmed 2007). Familiar things that are partially perceived in the background are essentially “forgotten.” When one perceives an unfamiliar object, it becomes the center of the foreground. As one repeatedly perceives the unfamiliar object, the object becomes familiar. When an object is familiar, the history of that object is disclosed. For one’s freedom to be valid, the disclosure of the unfamiliar other has disappeared in the discourse of truth. By identifying the other as a lack of being within the dominant logic, Irigaray is not advocating to invent the existing logic by upholding woman as a subject and man as an object. As she writes, “The issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the subject or the object, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are capable of affecting language’s metaphysical plane and disrupting its theoretical foundation.” Inverted the so-called logic of truth, women and men are the same phallocratic order of object and subject, and the production of truth must be abolished by eliminating both the subject’s and the object’s priority of discourse. Though the other only exists as a lack within the logic of truth, she is still capable of affecting language’s metaphysical plane and disrupting its theoretical production. In this, the definitive duality of subject and object is threatened.

Conclusion

This Sex Which is Not One

References


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“If it came to be that each man did what he must, existence would be saved in each one without there being any need of dreaming of a paradise where all would be reconciled in death.” (Beauvoir 1949)