

Reading Questions
Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

There are two English translations of *The Second Sex*. The first page number refers to the newer translation by Borde and Malovany-Chevallier, the second to the older, Parshley translation. The quotations in the questions below are from the new translation.

1. “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (283/267). What does Beauvoir mean? How does she demonstrate this in *The Second Sex*?
2. In Beauvoir’s analysis, will the gaining of rights and equal access to work end the subordination of women? Why or why not?
3. According to Beauvoir, women “still dream through men’s dreams” (162/143). Why does she think it important to analyze these dreams and “myths?” What role do they play in reproducing the subordination of women?
4. What is the point of her discussion of the “cult of the self” she diagnoses in the culture of young girls (349-352/337-340)?
5. In marriage, “woman is destined to maintain the species and care for the home, which is to say, to immanence” (443/429-430). Ponder. What is “immanence,” and how does it contrast with the “transcendence” men’s activities achieve as she describes it in the previous sentence?
6. Beauvoir’s verdict on love and its consequences is striking: for women, love is “a mortal danger,” “a curse,” a “sterile hell” that is offered to them as “ultimate salvation” (708/669). What do you make of this?
7. What would have to happen for all this to change?
8. “The man who sets the woman up as an *Other* will thus find in her a deep complicity” (10/xxvii). Why is this the case, according to Beauvoir? Why don’t women resist their oppression more effectively?
9. How does Beauvoir describe the existential situation of men that leads them to set up women as “other?” What does she mean when she says that since men don’t “like difficulty” and are “afraid of danger?” What is the difficulty and the danger here? Why, then, is “woman is the perfect intermediary between nature that is foreign to man and the peer who is too identical to him” (160/140-141)? Try to put the whole two-paragraph argument on pp. 159-160/139-140 in your own words.