

# SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

*Simone de Beauvoir is one of the leading figures within the strand of thought known as socialist feminism. As the term implies, this approach seeks to highlight the problems inherent within patriarchy and capitalism*

## Biography

- Born 1908 France
  - ↳ Dad is a banker, mom a banker's daughter and devout Catholic
- In 1917, meets Elizabeth Le Coin
  - ↳ a cynical outspoken girl who profoundly influences Simone's attitudes toward families, mothers, women's use of freedom, and toward death.
- The family struggled to maintain their status after losing much wealth in years following World War I
- 1922 (age 14) started to question her faith – she saw many tragedies around her – and became an atheist.
- 1929, she meets intellectual Jean-Paul Sartre
  - ↳ their lifelong “open” relationship is all-encompassing, described as intimate, intense, intellectual, moral, open, permissive, sometimes disturbing, but fundamentally and mutually supportive
- World War II – she is in the French Resistance.
- 1947, travels to the United States. She held multiple teaching positions; writes books
- Her personal life is publicly known and not all conclusive
  - ↳ 1951, Simone and journalist Claude Lanzmann begin to live together (for 7 years)
    - ↳ at age 16 he joined the French Resistance. Later he will make the Holocaust documentary ‘Shoah’
    - ↳ Lanzmann disagreed, sometimes angrily, with attempts to understand the why of Hitler, stating that the evil of Hitler cannot or should not be explained and that to do so is immoral and an obscenity
  - ↳ Bisexual, she was accused of having seduced a 17 year old female student in her charge in 1943, will never teach again.
- She becomes politically active:
  - ↳ pro-abortion rights, anti-Vietnam war, anti-sexism, pro-Women's rights/independence
- By 1985, her health deteriorates, mostly as a result of years of heavy drinking
- Died 1986 France



## Philosophy (major ideas)

She was a “equality” feminist

↳ Difference: feminism is therefore associated with the view that women are superior to men, whereas equality feminists adopt the objective of gender equality

Every person is originally free

↳ Woman is the “other”; she lives in a world in which men have compelled her to be the second sex.  
↳ Despite the historical and cultural conditions under which women have been oppressed, they must assume their human dignity as free and independent persons.

As human beings, we live in tragically ambiguous conditions, but we must assume responsibility for the direction of our lives

She is committed to a socialist form of government/politics

On being an atheist: "Faith allows an evasion of those difficulties which the atheist confronts honestly. And to crown all, the believer derives a sense of great superiority from this very cowardice itself."

Ethics requires a definitive commitment through action; morality and politics are interrelated