Simone de Beauvoir

DIARY OF A PHILOSOPHY STUDENT:
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Nothing is more cowardly than to violate a secret when nobody is there to defend it. I have always suffered horribly from every indiscretion, but if someone, anyone, reads these pages, I will never forgive him. He will thus be doing a bad and ugly deed.

Please respect this warning despite its ridiculous solemnity.

Second notebook (Stopped December 1926)

Everything that happens to me is so important!
(J. Rivièrè)

You say that you do not want to give me pain and suffering, but it is that which I expect from you and that is my role.
(Claude)

What good are they, these complications of the heart? If a single life that moves the other men comes out of them, we will be justified.
(Ramuz)

"Second Notebook" appears at the top of the manuscript in Beauvoir's hand. The first notebook for this diary is apparently lost.
I suffer, the other suffers, and there is no traveled land.
between her and me, no word and no hand.
Claude\textsuperscript{6}

The opposite opinion of all imposes itself on sensitive hearts.
But Philippe takes delight in impossible things.
Claude\textsuperscript{6}

a) He whom I enclose with my name is weeping in this dungeon. I am
ever busy building this wall all around; and as this wall goes up into the
sky day by day I lose sight of my true being in its dark shadow.

b) If it is not my portion to meet thee in this my life then let me ever
feel that I have missed thy sight—let me not forget for a moment, let me
carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams and in my wakeful hours.
Tagore\textsuperscript{7}

And besides, not even you could understand
for I am far from you and you are far from me.
Jammes\textsuperscript{8}

Am I loved? Do I love?
Did I love? I don't know.
I know that I am never weary
Of feeling tenderness for myself.
Maupassant\textsuperscript{9}

The value of human beings is measured by their capacity to suffer
voluntarily.
L. Bloy\textsuperscript{10}

All beloved beings
Are vases of venom that we drink with our eyes closed.
Baudelaire\textsuperscript{11}

Friday, August 6

What sudden disgust at all intellectual and sentimental elegance before the
invalids from Lourdes! What are our moral sorrows next to this physical
distress? I was ashamed of all of it, and only a life that was a complete gift
of oneself, a total self-abnegation, seemed possible to me. I believe that I
was wrong. I was ashamed of living, but since life has been given to me, it is
my duty to live it, and in the best possible way. This magnificent saying by
Ramuz is the moral justification for what I momentarily believed to be futile
and egoism. Yes, I must cultivate these nuances of my self [moi moi] and
out of respect for the treasure deposited in myself and for others. Too easy,
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here I have enough freedom and solitude to be able to get a grip on myself again after some sacrificed hours. Above all, I am not alone, I am certain that I am not alone.

What a difference there is between the moral sorrow that comes from the fear of losing acquired or hoped-for happiness [bonheur], and the one that is above happiness, which is made of scorn, of the refusal of all joy [joie]. I was right, happiness is a decidedly dangerous thing because one lets oneself be absorbed by it. Little by little one comes to consider it as a goal, the center of existence, by neglecting the rest. Alissa, Alissa, I admire your courage! Without saying "no" like you, would that I knew and accepted that there are much greater things, and would that I became attached to them first. All the same, what sweetness...

* * *

The enormous burden on me of these things that I cannot manage to give.*

Claudel†

To accept solitude
It is to resign oneself to living;†
(Mauriac)‡

August 7

Profound moments of pure bitterness! It escapes me now that I want to reason it out, this so intense life of this morning. To think that there is no way I can remember it, and when I possess it, it seems to me to be the only truth! It is the soul facing the real, alas! and this is why these moments of lucidity are those of great suffering, and of suffering that one senses is useless because it is outside of daily life. Péguy says, "That's what hell is," useless suffering; and that is why my distress sought ways to use it: illusion! A work? I am not strong enough, and besides the deepest part of oneself is not revealed there. A love? On this plane souls cannot reach one another, in the pains that result from it, in daily sorrows probably, and even very deeply so, but how can an affinity [sympathie] be established between that which is my pure and incommunicable self and another being since even my present self

no longer even understands it? I would say, as I now tell myself, "I felt hurt." And then? Oh! Mauriac's expression is so true in one sense, also speaking metaphorically: the essential solitude of beings, and even of moments of a being.

Because of that, the soul seeks refuge in life, not outer life... but the other type of life in short. Since in this second mode I had achieved [atteint] a great intimacy, I believed that I had found absolute life. This morning I really saw that I had been wrong to recognize the taste of former tears. How I hated then all that had deceived me, and the best because it had deceived me even more. To think that a look, a smile, even less, suffice to make one forget such intense moments; when life is so great and noble, to think that the impulses [mouvements] of my soul depend on such little things. And so now I am wondering again if the difference that I am establishing is not artificial, but it is difficult to judge the first state sanely when I am in the second of these two states; strange splitting of the personality, not in succession, but in depth—in sum, one life that plays itself out on the plane of the absolute, another on that of the relative—in the one, being appears in its unity, its nudity and its sterility (Paul Valéry); in the other it grasps itself only as a thousand exterior elements: action, passion. To consider it coldly, speculatively, the first state appears absurd, but to live it! It seems on the contrary that all that one gives to the other is wasted. It is not on the intellectual plane that this conflict breaks out, and it is with my intelligence that I want to settle it. If I were to speak of it to someone else—someone capable of not taking me for a madwoman—what I would want to talk about could be imagined [se représenter] only intellectually. Thus, only personal experience is valid, and the experience of others is not mine.

The slight—and even the great—anxieties are really insignificant next to this distressing problem. It is all the same a consolation to tell oneself that at all costs, there is at least something absolutely impenetrable about this, since people do not want to respect the secret of the rest of myself. However, I suffer intensely from feeling even the most superficial part of myself endlessly violated; I much pity the affection that pretends to express itself in this way. You are right, Barres, to say that a feeling or a thought bruised by unfamiliar [étrangères] hands loses its worth—regardless of the dearness of this hand.†

I am trying to delude myself here. If I were to put my life in order on this paper, would it be more useful? The elapsed minute is really lost. If I had the mummies for all these dead "selves" [ses morts] what good would it really do? And besides, I have already felt this; it is impossible. I can allow

* This quotation is on the facing verso, next to the words "August 7" and to the sentence "It's the soul facing the real alas!"
† This quotation is written on the facing verso, across from "and then? oh! Mauriac's expression, so true."
myself only an analysis, an intellectual view; and what remains of feeling [sentiment], of certainty, of life? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Moreover, I am too modest even to write about my private difficulties; I fear mistreating them with words, more particularly that it is absolutely useless since reflection and meditation have nothing to do with pure sentiment. Why then? To give me the daily certainty that I am living, to affirm more strongly to myself the existence of this being in me that I alone know. This is also a certain discipline of thought, on days when I have the courage to think.

Curious thing to rediscover the taste of last year’s emotions with my soul of today. My intellectual raptures! I would be incapable of resuscitating them. Philosophy is so indifferent to me! My brain can no longer be roused to action. I hear far more imperious voices.*

August 9

Could I have already during this year explored my entire soul, and is there no longer anything in me that interests me? Such indifference, such great disgust, is such latitude natural or the proof that I am incurably mediocre? It is in solitude that being shows its worth.

* * *

But yesterday I felt full of intoxication
Is it a vain hope that my heart does caress?
A vain hope, sweet and false companion
Oh not isn’t this right? isn’t no right?
Verlaine

This inner brother whom you are not yet
Régnier

I. [T]he word with well-defined outlines, the brutal word, which stores up the stable, common, and consequently impersonal element in the impressions of humanity, suppresses, or at least masks the delicate and fugitive impressions of our individual consciousness; (. . .) This suppression of the immediate consciousness is nowhere so striking as in the case of our feelings. A violent love or a deep melancholy invades our soul: there are a thousand diverse elements that dissolve into and permeate one another without any precise outlines, without the least tendency to externalize themselves in relation to one another; hence their originality. We distort them as soon as we distinguish a numerical multiplicity in their confused mass: what will it be, then, when we set them out, isolated from one another, in this (. . .) medium that may be called either time or space, (. . .)? A moment ago each of them was borrowing an indelible color from its surroundings: now we have it colorless, and ready to receive a name. (. . .) Hence, we are now standing in the presence of our own shadow: we believe that we have analyzed our feeling, while we have really replaced it by a juxtaposition of inert states that can be translated into words, and each of which constitutes the common element, the consequently impersonal residue, of the impressions felt in a given case by an entire society. (. . .) Now, if a bold novel, tearing aside the cleverly woven web of our conventional self, shows us under this appearance of logic a fundamental absurdity, under this juxtaposition of simple states an infinite permutation of a thousand different impressions that have already ceased to be the instant they are named, we commend him for having known us better than we knew ourselves. This is not the case, however, and by the very fact that he spreads out our feeling in a homogeneous time, and expresses its elements in words, he in his turn is only offering us its shadow: but he has arranged this shadow in such a way as to make us suspect the extraordinary and illogical nature of the object that projects it; he has made us reflect by giving outward expression to something of that contradiction, that interpenetration, which constitutes the very essence of the elements expressed.

[Bergson]*

II. [O]ur perceptions, sensations, emotions and ideas present themselves under two aspects: the one clear and precise, but impersonal; the other confused, infinitely mobile, and inexpressible, because language cannot grasp it without determining its mobility or adapting it into its common-place form without making it into public property.

[Bergson]*

III. A second self is formed that obscures the first, a self whose existence is made up of distinct moments and whose moments are separated from one another and easily expressed in words.

[Bergson]*

IV. The opinions to which we most strongly adhere are those of which we should find it most difficult to give an account in words, and the very reasons by which we justify them are not those that have determined [determined] us to adopt them. In a certain sense we have adopted them without any reason, for what makes them valuable in our eyes is that they match the color of all our other ideas, and that from the very first

*From "Philosophy" through "voices" is highlighted by two vertical lines drawn adjacent to this passage, in the margin of the manuscript. Throughout these footnotes, the term "highlighted" means that Beauvoir drew horizontal or vertical lines near passages in her diary for emphasis.

†This long quotation from Bergson is written on the verso pages facing the entries for August 12 and 13.
we have seen in them something of ourselves. Hence they do not take in our minds that common-looking form that they will assume as soon as we try to give expression to them in words; and, although they bear the same name in other minds, they are no longer at all the same thing. (...) an idea that is truly ours fills our entire self. Not all our ideas, however, are thus incorporated in the mass of our states of consciousness. Many float on the surface, like dead leaves on the water of a pond. (...) Hence we must not be surprised if only those ideas that least belong to us can be adequately expressed in words.

[Bergson]

V. Within the fundamental self is formed a parasitic self that continually encroaches upon the other. Many live like this, and die without having known true freedom. (...) We most often perceive by refraction through space, that our states of consciousness solidify into words, and that our living and concrete self thus gets covered with an outer crust of clean-cut psychological states, which are clearly delineated, separated from one another and consequently fixed.

[Bergson]

VI. [?] There are two different “selves,” one of which is, as it were, the external projection of the other, its spatial and, so to speak, social representation. We reach the former by deep reflection, which leads us to grasp our inner states as living beings, constantly in the process of forming, as states not amenable to measure, which penetrate one another and of which the succession in duration has nothing in common with a juxtaposition in homogeneous space. But the moments at which we again thus grasp ourselves are rare, and that is why we are rarely free. Most of the time we live outside ourselves, hardly perceiving anything of ourselves [sauter mot] but our own colorless ghost, a shadow that pure duration projects into homogeneous space. Hence our existence unfolds in space rather than in time; we live for the external world rather than for ourselves; we speak rather than think; we “are acted” rather than act. To act freely is to recover possession of self, and to get back into pure duration.

[Bergson]

VII. In place of an inner life whose successive phases, each unique of its kind, are incommeasurable with language, we get a self that can be artificially reconstructed ...

[Bergson]

VIII. What makes hope such an intense pleasure is the fact that the future, which we dispose of to our liking, appears to us at the same time under a multitude of equally possible attractive forms. Even if the most desired of these is realized, it will be necessary to sacrifice the others, and we shall have lost a great deal. The idea of the future, pregnant with infinite possibilities [possibles], is thus more fruitful than the future itself, and this is why we find more charm in hope than in possession, in dreams than in reality.

[Bergson]

IX. [?] In cases of extreme joy, our perceptions and memories become tinged with an indefinable quality, comparable to a heat or a light, so new that at certain moments, as we take stock of our self, we feel almost an astonishment at being.

[Bergson]

X. [W]e might ask ourselves whether nature is beautiful otherwise than through the fortunate meeting of certain processes of our art, and whether, in a certain sense, art does not precede nature.

[Bergson]

XI. Art aims at imprinting feelings within us rather than expressing them; it suggests them to us, and willingly dispenses with the imitation of nature when it finds some more efficacious means.

[Bergson]

August 12

There was moral fatigue, there was physical exhaustion caused by the excessive heat. What joy today to find myself once again lucid and with a great gentleness deep within myself. I will not refuse it. Perhaps it is not an illness, and then if I am mistaken, what does it matter? It is so cowardly to hold oneself back endlessly out of fear of suffering if one moves forward too much. I will suffer; that is all. I will be strong enough. Besides I have such confidence! Evidently when I reason things out, when I reflect with tranquility, I have doubts, but there are minutes ... It is strange, these two beings in me: one so level-headed, capable of judgment and all in all quite self-possessed, the other the exact opposite, ridiculous and whom I prefer so much to the first!

To think also that in certain respects I am so complicated and all the same different from many others, and that in this respect it is so much the same for everything.
The differences between the intellectually known thing and the one that you feel. The past sometimes becomes so present that it is almost hallucinatory. A little more and I would stretch out my hand to touch the object that I am thinking of, and the memory is even more poignant than the reality itself was, probably because mixed with its sweetness is the regret that it is a lost moment. Then, because you have the time to examine and to savor slowly each incident, and especially because this entirely inner resurrection is not troubled by anything from the outside. They are sufficient for me, these memories from the year gone by, without any hope for the future, without any dream, that which was is enough for me. That could have not been! But it was.

I cannot believe that this will no longer be. Alas! there are so many other things that I would have wanted to prolong. In my notes from that year, there is above all this anxiety [angoisse] of knowing that the lived minute is going to disappear forever. I have known the remorse of no longer crying over their disappearance; and yet, it was from knowing that I would not be crying today that I used to cry then. Life is a perpetual renewal. That is what I cannot get used to, and I am very wrong because I believe myself to be diminished. I am losing confidence in myself, whereas, in reality I am evolving very normally. At the same time, I am wearing myself out in continuing with what no longer is, instead of walking courageously towards the new. It is because I have felt the value of old emotions. First, much of this value came from their very novelty, and then, if I abandon myself frantically to the current impulses [mouvements actuels] of my soul, who is to say that I will not find just as great a richness? I remember one of Cocteau’s pages on masterpieces and his aesthetics of the tightrope. That could be carried over perfectly into moral life.

Of course, it would not be about forgetting, or even about keeping dead memories, but one must resolve to keep alive in oneself only that which is useful. It seems that there is more generosity in remaining faithful to everything—guilty faithfulness. One must not love the self of yesterday more than the self of tomorrow. I know that it seems to be a renunciation to continue to walk, only with more riches in one’s arms, but stopping would be futile.

Yes, I attained moments of greater exultation, a more complete inner plenitude, but there is a sort of law of rhythm in it. The important thing is that in reality the general level be upraised, and to attain this average, it was indeed necessary to surpass it. Enthusiasm, wonder, they are all very good, but what counts is to continue the effort, once begun, in periods of drought. This does not preclude seeking to awaken a new passion [êlan], to climb even higher, but one must not regret the first passion [clan primitif], which might be inferior overall to the current state. Thus, good-bye forever, my beautiful year with which a new stage of my existence started. I am precisely conserving the treasure that you brought me, but to you, who were something quite different from this treasure, and even more beautiful, good-bye.

Do not take pleasure—serve. The first thing was more logical. Why prefer the second? I remember after one evening last year, a discouragement that I could not justify. I was irritated because, out of great intellectual stupidity, I wanted my emotions to agree with my ideas (I was so filled with wonder at having ideas!). It is the same problem today, and it is more serious. Simple question of aesthetics? Certainly, it is by my taste (an instant analogous to the one that draws me toward the beautiful, despite all reasoning) that I feel moved toward devotion more than toward egoism; but isn’t there anything else? Personally, yes. First, there is a liking for beings. For this I do not need a foundation; it is a necessity for me to love them and work for them just as it is to think. But why attach any value to this liking, which is what I do when, regarding others, I scorn the sensualist? Superior form of life—personal taste. Is it truly a sufficient ethic? If I had to teach it, I dare say not, but it is quite sufficient for me.

Certainly, I am very individualistic, but is this incompatible with the devotion and disinterested love of others? It seems to me that there is one part of me that is made to be given away, another that is made to be kept and cultivated. The second part is valid in itself and guarantees the value of the other.

I have given up making this vacation the fruitful period that I promised myself during the year. I must rest, and I have felt that this is more than a cowardly pretext. And then I am devoured by too great an impatience.

August 13

Beautiful moment of glorified life. If I were an artist I would paint this hour "where already the shadows are descending higher..." No longer an analysis, but a rich and magnificent synthesis, the physical joy of being and of being eighteen, the intoxication of this sun and of this dazzling sky already announcing the contemplative night and warm affections. I almost regretted it. But what made the unique beauty of these moments [instants]? Was it not in fact the painful hours that I felt underlying this intense happiness?
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Recompense, encouragement, But I am not dreaming of a life made only of such minutes.

I also slightly regretted not more intently savoring the sweetness of the country. I know too well the joys that it can bring me; it is even a too-often-read book and one that no longer moves me. Other years I realized union with nature, I asked its secret of every hour and every corner of the meadows. I would only be able to repeat these emotions. My goodness! Mon Dieu! I have sought them, loved them. I really put my soul in all these landscapes! But for that reason, my too familiar pleasure is exhausted. And then, I do not have a mind [esprit] that is open enough. Finally, I do not live each moment for itself. It is when I was not familiar with him that I applied this precept from Gide; precisely because of what it revealed to me, I surpassed it; and I care about achieving unity in my life, no longer about lazily letting myself be guided by circumstances.

Gide! He probably does a lot of harm as everybody maintains, and Massis’s article has in fact convinced me. But me, I owe everything to him! Can’t a doctrine that is bad in itself contain some excellent directions? There are questions to which you could give a thousand different answers, and whatever you respond, if you lead me to seek an answer that suits me, I will be very grateful to you. L’enfant prodigue [The Return of the Prodigal] especially and Les nourritures terrestres [Fruits of the Earth]. I don’t know, but this immorality itself seems to me to be more moral than a certain indifference. And as for influence, there are poisons that are also beneficial remedies. Besides, I would prefer the risk of poisoning myself to that of having the certainty of dying of starvation, even more so because there are antidotes.

It is, I dare say, doing nothing that gives me this great desire to work. I stave it off by making plans. First, I want to take energetic care [m’occuper] of the Équipes Sociales. I know that there will undoubtedly be a lot of disappointments, but what joy if one succeeds in doing a little good. I would like to speak with them about moral philosophy or give them the taste for good literature. At any rate, develop in these girls a critical mind. Intellectual pleasures are so beautiful when one knows how to tie intelligence to life. More than a pleasure, a support, a transfiguration of existence. Mauriac’s expression about the people who wander in the crowded streets struck me.

Without ever a verse singing in their memory.

It is much like that; to know that another has felt like you; to know one’s emotion better, thanks to him, to idealize it. There are even writers (Clau-