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## Toward Genuine Erotic Liberty: An Analysis of de Beauvoir's views on Prostitution and Hetaerism

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In this paper, I provide a contemporary feminist critique of Simone de Beauvoir's views on prostitution and hetaerism. A close reading of the chapter on "Prostitutes and Hetairas" in *The Second Sex* shows that de Beauvoir divided this chapter into two sections, producing two effects. First, she gives a mostly descriptive study of the situation faced by common prostitutes. Next, she analyzes the condition of hetairas (hetaeras), by drawing a contrast between the worst- and best-case scenarios of making a living out of one's body and/or feminine charm. She ultimately rejects this institution in all its forms, a position that I find to be in contrast with some classic libertarian positions, such as that of Gayle Rubin. Finally, I argue, along with de Beauvoir, that the demand for prostitution is a form of bad faith. Ideally, this form of female slavery must be abolished if we hope to achieve genuine reciprocity between the sexes.

At the outset, de Beauvoir's writing style in *The Second Sex* is esoteric. Her normative conclusions are irregularly placed throughout the text and it is not always clear at which point one is reading her own views or those of her interlocutors; which is why precursory readings usually leave readers with the impression that de Beauvoir's magnum opus is mostly descriptive. Given that her analysis of women who "try to secure male support by sexual means" can be found in other chapters of *The Second Sex*, my evaluation of her views on prostitution in this paper includes her commentaries on courtesans and mistresses in the last two chapters, namely, "The Independent Woman" and "Conclusion."

### On the common prostitute

De Beauvoir acutely draws attention to what are now standard radical critiques of prostitution. Akin to what Emma Goldman earlier pointed out in *The Traffic in Women*, de Beauvoir recognized that prostitution, like the institution of marriage, "follows humanity from ancient to modern times like a dark shadow over the [human] family." Prostitutes constitute the caste of women whom men "feel no obligation to respect," for which reason, men could sexually have their way with them for a small price. According to de Beauvoir, the prostitute is a scapegoat because proponents of the institution insist that the existence of this female underclass protects "honest