

NOA Final Mock Test

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Subject: English Essay

Question : 01

"One is not born a woman,
but becomes one" - Simone de
Beauvoir.

Outline.

01: Introduction.

Thesis Statement: Simone de Beauvoir's claim that one is not born a woman but becomes one rejects biological determinism and presents womanhood as a social construct. Rooted in existentialist thought, it argues that gender identity is shaped through culture, institutions, and power relations.

02. Philosophical Foundations: Existentialism.

03. Biological Sex Vs Social Gender.

(a) Definition of biological sex

(b) Definition of Gender

(c) Misuse of biology to justify inequality.

(d) Social Interpretation of biological differences

(e) Myth of natural femininity

04. Social Institutions and the construction of womanhood.

(a) Role of family in early gender conditioning

(b) Education system and reinforcement of stereotypes

(c) Marriage and domesticity as gendered expectations.

(d) Economic dependence and unpaid labor

05. Patriarchy and Power Structures.

(a) Definition of patriarchy.

(b) Male dominance as a historical construct.

(c) Control over female sexuality.

(d) Patriarchy as a self-perpetuating system.

06. Women as "The Other."

(a) Concept of otherness in philosophy

(b) Man as subject, woman as object.

(c) Construction of female identity through male gaze

(d) Psychological alienation of women.

07. Conclusion.

The Essay.

"One is not born a woman, but becomes one", wrote Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949), a statement that fundamentally altered the way gender is understood in modern thought. At a time when women's social roles were widely justified through biology and tradition, de Beauvoir challenged the assumption that femininity is a natural or inevitable condition. Her words suggest that being a woman is not a biological fact but a social process, shaped over time through experience, expectations, and constraint. De Beauvoir's argument is deeply influenced by existentialist philosophy, particularly the idea that "existence precedes essence". According to this view, human beings are not born with fixed identities but create themselves through action and choice. However, she observes that women are historically denied this freedom. They are socialized into predefined roles that restrict their abilities to transcend circumstances, making womanhood a socially

imposed identity rather than an authentic self-expression. Simone de Beauvoir's claim that one is not born a woman, but becomes one rejects biological determinism and presents womanhood as a social construct. Rooted in existentialist thought, it argues that gender identity is shaped through culture, institutions, and power relations.

Simone de Beauvoir's understanding of womanhood is firmly grounded in existentialist philosophy, a school of thought that emphasizes human freedom, choices, and responsibility. Central to existentialist is the rejection of fixed human nature and predetermined essence. Existentialist argues that individuals are not born with an innate purpose; instead, they create meaning through lived experience. A key existentialist principle informing de Beauvoir's argument is Jean-Paul Sartre's assertion that "Existence precedes essence". Sartre contends that humans first exist and only later define themselves through actions and choices. De Beauvoir applies

this concept to gender, arguing that while men are encouraged to exercise freedom and self-definition, women are systematically denied this opportunity. Instead of being allowed to shape their identities, women are assigned predefined roles — mother, wife, caregiver — that limit existential freedom. De Beauvoir famously observes, "Humanity is male, and man defines woman not in herself but relative to him." This philosophical division explains why women are denied full subjectivity and treated as secondary beings.

A cornerstone of de Beauvoir's thesis is the distinction between biological sex and social gender. While biology may determine reproductive functions, it does not justify the vast social, economic, and political inequalities between men and women. Biological sex refers to the classification of human beings as male or female based on physical and physiological characteristics present at birth. From a biological standpoint, sex is associated primarily with reproductive functions. As biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling explains, biological

Sex is commonly defined by anatomy, chromosomes, and hormones," making it a matter of physical differentiation rather than social identity. Simone de Beauvoir challenges this reductionist view by arguing that biology alone cannot account for women's subordinate position in society. While acknowledging biological differences, she insists that these differences do not carry inherent social meaning. She famously writes, "Biology is not destiny", emphasizing that reproductive capacity does not predetermine a woman's social role or value.

Gender is a complex social construct that refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men, women, and other gender identities. Unlike biological sex, which is determined by physical characteristics, gender is shaped by cultural, social, and historical contexts. As de Beauvoir emphasized that the identity of being a woman is socially constructed rather than biologically predetermined. Judith Butler, a

seminal figure in gender theory, argues that gender is performative: it is not something one inherently is but something one does. Butler writes, "Gender is a kind of improvisation, an act which is repeated under social compulsion," highlighting that society's repeated expectations shape gendered behaviors. Gender is not just a neutral category; it is deeply tied to power structures. Feminist thinkers like bell hooks argue that gender intersects with race, class, and other social hierarchies, producing systemic inequalities. Hooks writes, "Feminism is for everybody," reminding us that understanding gender is crucial for challenging oppression and promoting equality.

Throughout history, biology has often been misused to rationalize social hierarchies, gender discrimination, and inequality. Men's supposed physical and intellectual superiority has been cited as natural justification of patriarchal dominance. As Simone de Beauvoir remarked, "The oppression of women is not the

consequence of natural law, but of history and society.", emphasizing that appeals to biology are socially constructed myths rather than facts.

Feminist theorists have consistently critiqued this misuse of biology. Judith Butler highlights that social norms are often framed as "biologically necessary", yet gender identity and roles are performative, not biologically fixed. Bell Hooks also emphasizes that appeals to biology are frequently employed to maintain patriarchal systems: "Most patriarchal societies misuse the idea of nature to justify dominations". These critiques show that biology itself is neutral; it is social interpretation that distorts it.

Biological differences between humans, such as strength, reproductive capacity, or hormonal variations, are often interpreted through a social lens that assigns meaning beyond mere biology. While biology provides a framework, society often overlays norms and expectations, creating roles and hierarchies. Historically, societies have exaggerated biological differences

to justify unequal treatment. For instance, women's reproductive capacity was cited as a reason to confine them to domestic roles, while men's physical strength was linked to leadership and labor. John Stuart Mill critiqued such reasoning in *The Subjection of Women*, arguing that social constraints, not biology, limited women's potential. Gender norms are enacted repeatedly through culture, media, law, and education, converting biological differences into socially enforced identities. Butler emphasizes that biology is only meaningful when interpreted through social norms. When society interprets biology to limit opportunity or justify hierarchy, it violates the principles. Bell hooks writes, "The misuse of perceived natural differences sustains oppression and limits freedom," highlighting the ethical danger of socializing biology rather than understanding it scientifically.

The myth of natural femininity is the idea that women are inherently suited to certain roles, behaviors, or qualities simply

because of their biology. This notion has been perpetuated across societies, often portraying women as nurturing, passive, or emotional by nature. Simone de Beauvoir critiqued this idea in *The Second Sex*, emphasizing that femininity is socially constructed rather than biologically predetermined. The myth of natural femininity intersects with power and control. Bell hooks emphasizes that patriarchal societies often weaponize this myth to maintain dominance, stating, "To claim that women are naturally passive or nurturing is to uphold structures that limit freedom and opportunity." By portraying femininity as innate, societies legitimize unequal treatment and restrict women's autonomy, masking cultural bias as "natural law". Philosophically, rejecting the myth of natural femininity aligns with existentialist thought, which emphasizes freedom, choice, and creation of self. De Beauvoir writes, "One is defined by society and can redefine oneself through action."

Social institutions play a central role in shaping what it means to become a woman. The family is often the first sight of gender conditioning, where girls learn obedience and domestic responsibility. From birth families treat boys and girls differently naming practices, clothing, toys and emotional expectations. Psychologist Eleanor Maccoby observed that children "actively learn gender roles through parental modeling and reinforcement." The division of labor within the family strengthens gender conditioning. when children observe women performing unpaid domestic work and men occupying authoritative or economic roles, they internalize these arrangements as natural. Feminist Sociologist Ann Oakley argued that housework is one of the earliest sites where gender inequality is normalized, noting that "domestic labor is a major mechanism through which women's subordination is reproduced." Thus family becomes a microcosm of wider patriarchal structures.

The education system is one of the most powerful institutions in shaping

gender identities and reinforcing social norms. While schools are often viewed as neutral spaces of learning, they actively participate in transmitting cultural values, including gender expectations. Textbooks and curricula play a significant role in reinforcing gender stereotypes. Educational materials frequently portray men as leaders, scientists and decision-makers while women appear in domestic or supportive roles. Feminist scholar Dale Spender observes that, "What is absent from the curriculum is as important as what is present," highlighting how women's historical contributions are marginalized. Such selective representation constructs a male-centered world view and limits students' understanding of women's potential.

Marriage and domesticity have historically been constructed as central to women's identity, transforming private life into a site of gendered obligation. Across societies, marriage is presented as a fulfillment of motherhood, while domestic labor is

framed as a natural extension of female biology. Feminist philosopher Carole Pateman argues that marriage operates as a political institution, stating that "The marriage contract is also a sexual contract", through which women's labor and sexuality are regulated. Within marriage, women are often expected to assume responsibility for unpaid domestic labor such as child care, cooking and emotional care. This division of labor is rarely questioned, as it is justified through cultural narratives of femininity and maternal instincts. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild described this phenomenon as "second shift", noting that women perform extensive unpaid labor even when engaged in paid work. Such expectations normalize inequality by presenting domestic responsibility as women's natural duty rather than socially imposed work.

Economic dependence and unpaid labor constitute one of the most enduring foundations of women's subordination in society. Although women's work is for withing in the

the household is essential for social and economic survival, it is systematically devalued because it falls outside the formal market. Unpaid domestic labor has historically been portrayed as a natural expression of femininity rather than productive work. Feminist economist Marilyn Waring critiques this invisibility arguing that "what we count determines what we value", and noting that national accounting systems exclude women's domestic labor from economic measurement.

At the heart of de Beauvoir's argument-, lies a critique of patriarchy - a system that privileges male authority and institutionalizes female subordination. It extends beyonds individual households, embedding itself in institutions, cultures and laws to maintain male dominance. Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics*, defines patriarchy as "a political institution that organized society around male supremacy and female subordination", highlighting that it is not a natural order but a socially

constructed system designed to preserve the power hierarchies. Philosophically, patriarchy can be analyzed through the lens of social power and inequality. Michel Foucault's theory on power and knowledge suggest that patriarchy perpetuates itself not just through physical control but by shaping societal beliefs about gender roles: "Power is everywhere; not because it embrace everything, but because it comes from everywhere."

In this sense, patriarchy is embedded in everyday practices, norms, and institutions.

Male dominance is not a timeless or natural phenomenon; rather, it has been constructed and maintained throughout history to serve social, political and economic interests. Simone de Beauvoir emphasizes this in *The Second Sex* noting that, "History is a long process of men (during) defining women as other". This illustrates that male dominance emerges not from biology, but from historical, cultural, and institutional processes designed to privilege men over

women. Economic factors have also played a crucial role in constructing male dominance. Control over land, trade, and labor historically allowed men to consolidate authority, while women's labor, particularly domestic work, was undervalued or unpaid. Silvia Federici emphasizes, "Women's unpaid reproductive labor is the foundation which capitalist and patriarchal systems are built." This demonstrates that male dominance is intertwined with material control and economic structures rather than innate superiority.

Control over female sexuality has been a central mechanism through which patriarchal societies maintain power and reinforce gender hierarchies. Women's bodies have historically been politicized, regulated, and surveilled to uphold male authority. De Beauvoir emphasizes this, stating, "The body of a woman is not merely her own; it is a social object, constantly defined and judged by others". Her insights highlights how societal norms transform private

biological realities into public instruments of controls. Historically, control over female sexuality has manifested in restriction on marriages, chastity, reproductive rights, and sexual behavior. Control of female sexuality is also linked to inheritance, family honor, and economic structures. Silvia Federici points out that regulating women's reproductive labor ensures the continuation of property and social hierarchies, stating "The control of women's bodies is central to the reproduction of patriarchal society".

One of de Beauvoir's most influential contribution is her concept of woman as "The Other". The concept of otherness is a central idea in philosophy and feminist theory, describing how a dominant group defines itself in relation to a subordinate group. It involves the process of marginalization where one group is positioned as the norm and the other as the Other. Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote in *The Second Sex*, "Representation of woman as

the Other is the pivot around which patriarchy revolves", emphasizing that women have historically been defined in opposition to men rather than as autonomous beings.

Otherness is not only a philosophical concept but also a social mechanism of exclusion. It creates boundaries, both symbolic and material, that limit the rights, agency, and recognition of the marginalized. The concept of otherness is also intersects with culture, language, and power. Michel Foucault argues that discourse shapes reality: What society says about a group reinforces its status as Other.

The conceptualization of man as subject and woman as object is a central theme in feminist philosophy, particularly in Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist critique of patriarchy, she writes, "He is the subject, he is the Absolute — she is the Other". This illustrates how men have historically been positioned as the standard, the defining center of social, political, and intellectual life, while women are only

defined in relation to men. Man, as subject, is granted autonomy and the ability to define his existence. Woman, as Object, is relegated to passivity, a being to be observed, or possessed. Historically, this subject-object dichotomy has been reinforced through social structures, religion, and law. The construction of female identity through male gaze is a concept that reveals how women's roles, behavior and self-perception are changed by the perspective and expectations of men. Laura Mulvey coined the term "male gaze" to describe how visual media represents women as objects for male pleasure. She writes, "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been structured around the masculine viewer". Historically art, literature and media have reinforced this gaze. Paintings, novels and films have frequently portrayed women as passive, decorative and sexually available to male spectatorship. The male gaze, therefore is not merely a theoretical concept but a tool for sustaining broader social and economic hierarchies.

In conclusion, Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that one is not born a woman becomes one challenges the idea of biological determinism, presenting womanhood as a product of social construction. Grounded in existentialist philosophy it posits that gender identity is formed and reinforced through cultural norms, institutional frameworks and power dynamics. Ultimately, understanding gender as a social construct rather than a biological destiny allows for the possibility of emancipation and equality. As Simone de Beauvoir reminds us,

— "The liberation of woman is not a gift from others; it is a conquest of her own." —
