ANXIETY AROUSED BY THE DYING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY*

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This paper constructs an explication of the question, insofar as dying persons arouse a sense of anxiety among those around them what is the nature of this anxiety?

The warrant for asserting this anxiety aroused by the dying as a problematic issue, and the resource material on which the explication is based, is a passage from Simone de Beauvoir's autobiographical account of the hospitalization and death of her mother. Simone\(^1\) writes of her inability to understand her emotions as aroused by her mother's dying:

I realized that my mother's accident was affecting me far more than I had thought it would. I could not really see why. It had wrenched her out of the framework, the role, the set of images in which I had imprisoned her; I recognized her in this patient in bed, but I did not recognize either the pity or the kind of disturbance that she aroused in me. (1973:26)

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A phenomenology of this "kind of disturbance" can begin with Schutz's concept of recipe knowledge. Using this concept as a resource for interpretation, Simone's reference to "the framework, the role, the set of images in which I had imprisoned her" suggests that Madame de Beauvoir had become an invariant resource—a given—in the recipes of Simone's life. Simone no longer recognized her mother as a creating egoistic "I," but instead Madame de Beauvoir's givenness for her daughter was that of a mundane presence.

Not only has the physical situation of Simone's mother "wrenched her out of [this recipe] framework," but Madame de Beauvoir's subsequent actions force Simone to recognize that the old recipes, which depended on predictably interpretable actions, are no longer satisfactory. The following incident exemplifies Simone's recognition that her mother is no longer predictable:

The physiotherapist came to Maman's bed, turned down the sheet and took hold of her left leg: Maman had an open hospital nightdress on and she did not mind that her wrinkled belly, criss-crossed with tiny lines, and her bald pubis showed. 'I no longer have any sort of shame,' she observed in a surprised voice.

'You are perfectly right not to have any,' I said. But I turned away and gazed fixedly into the garden. The sight of my mother's nakedness had jarred me. No body existed less for me: none existed more. As a child I had loved it dearly; as an adolescent it had filled me with an uneasy repulsion: all this was perfectly in the ordinary course of things and it seemed reasonable to me that her body should retain its dual nature, that it should be both repugnant and holy—a taboo. But for all that, I was astonished at the violence of my distress. My mother's indifferent acquiescence made it worse: she was abandoning the exigencies and prohibitions that had oppressed her all her life long and I approved her doing so. (1973:24-25)

Simone writes that she approves of her mother's reformulation of the meaning she attributes to her body and thus to her life—this abandonment of the "exigencies and prohibitions that had oppressed her"—but she is also "astonished at the violence of